Including Community in School Education: Gujarat Scenario

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Abstract

Over the years, the National Policies on Education, Education Commissions and Committees have consistently emphasized on the community participation in school development. The decentralized participation through community involvement can ensure a more appropriate educational system. The importance of school-community linkage is implemented through Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) & prior to this; programmes like Lok Jumbish and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) have also intervened. The community is expected to play a major role in micro planning, especially in the development of village/ward education and improvement of the schools with an expectation to facilitate issues like enrollment, retention and quality education. There is considerable emphasis to involve the local self-government for school development activities through setting up the School Management Committee (SMC). The paper attempts to reflect the key issues regarding community participation in education and its role in school development with a focus on Gujarat.

Key Words: Community Participation, Elementary Education, SMC, Decentralisation, School Development

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1. Introduction

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are given power after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act implemented during 1992. However the PRIs came into existence in Gujarat from April 1963 under the Gujarat Panchayat Act, 1961. To incorporate the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, this act was amended in April 1993 (Ganapathy 2002). There is decentralization of power and responsibility at village level. Association of local bodies with management of school education in the country has started during the last quarter of the 19th century. The approaches to development through participation have been undergoing change since last few decades. In the '90s, there was a shift from 'participatory development' to 'capacity building'. During earlier decades, the NGOs had stressed on the people's participation; however, since the '90s, the concept has been increasingly adopted by the government and other development agencies. The participation of community members in any developmental programme is essential for its sustainable growth. To ensure community participation in education, the government is extending a supportive atmosphere through decentralisation of power and by encouraging community participation (Kumaran 2006). The school-community linkage helps for better school management with higher retention, enrollment and quality education. The education system is decentralized to encourage better participation of the community at the level of elementary education in rural areas (Arvind, 2009). The development in the education scenario largely depends upon the innovative approach with an effective implementation strategy.

Community participation involves mobilisation of additional resources for school, accountability towards school; improving efficiency; taking part in decision making; demanding teacher accountability (ASER 2011). Inadequate or absence of participation of communities from the education activities might have its effects on the availability of the resources, inclusion of the underprivileged and the accountability of the school towards the community and society. Freire's

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empowerment education model can be applicable to school-community linkage, which advocates that education is not impersonal and takes place in connection to the people and their lives (Sharma 2006). Freire had emphasized that people should be involved and active in their educational experience which may lead to critical awareness of identifying the root causes of subjugation and helps to take social action in their communities (Freire 1985; Bergsma 2004).

There is a consistent growth in literacy rate in India during the last decades. However, the gap between the literacy rate in urban and rural areas is steadily declining in every Census. In Census 2011, this gap is found to be 16.3 points. The literacy rate among urban population is 84.9 percent, while it is 68.9 percent of the rural population. It is observed that the literacy rate has improved at a faster rate in rural as compared to urban areas, thereby reducing the gap in rural-urban literacy rate (Table 1). However, as per World Bank statistics, half of the ten year old rural children could not read at a basic level and half of them are dropped out by the age of fourteen (The Economist, 2008).As compared to the global scenario, the literacy rate still remains to be low in India, particularly in rural areas. A positive development in female literacy rate is reported in the 2011 census, which means that an increasing number of females have become literate, compared to males during the decade 2001-2011 (Yadav, 2013).

Table 1
Literacy Rate in Rural and Urban areas in India

Census Year	Rural	Urban	Total	Gaps (Rural-Urban)
1981	35.17	69.06	43.57	33.89
1991	44.01	73.08	52.21	29.07
2001	58.73	79.92	64.83	21.19
2011	68.91	84.97	74.04	16.06

Source: Census of different years

As per the literacy rate in 2011 Census, the state of Kerela continues to top the list with 93.91 percent literacy rate, whereas literacy rate of Bihar lies below the national average with 63.82 percent. Despite the present scenario Bihar has performed well in 2011 census compared to literacy rate in 2001. States like Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and UTs like Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh were degraded from their previous rank in 2001; whereas Tripura, Sikkim, Manipur, Nagaland and UT s like Dadra & Nagar Haveli, NCT of Delhi, Puducherry and Lakshadweep have shown higher rankings in the 2011 census than before (Census, 2011).

Rural education is affected by the hierarchical system, economic conditions, religious practices and beliefs, lack of awareness about the benefits of education, the lack of political will, poor infrastructure, wide gaps in teacher pupil ratio and untrained or under trained teachers. Many of the current problems in our rural schools include inadequate infrastructure like unavailability of toilets or reliable electricity, adequate playing area etc. Teachers of rural schools in villages and small towns receive low income, so there is a possibility that teachers give less attention to the children. There are no proper transport facilities, so children are reluctant to come to school. There is no access to quality education (Roy, 2012). More than one third of schools are single teacher schools, many of them are in rural areas. This means that if the teacher is ill or absent, the school is closed. The greatest challenge for rural schools is to find ways to encourage children who are genuinely able and interested in academics. In India, condition of many rural schools is still very poor. There are schools in the rural areas which are still inaccessible for the students residing in certain habitations. There have been some notable successes in recent years in rural education. For instance introduction of some new field like computers and public speaking, initiation of special schools in rural Bihar where Skype is introduced and students and teachers log on to attendance via biometric fingerprint machine. Online lessons are delivered by trained teachers who were selected from all over the state. These are some of the examples and have been replicated in other states also. However the infrastructure available in different schools is not very inclusive.

The present paper aims to study the challenges of education in India and the role of community with SSA intervention. The next section provides some insight into the community participation in different states followed by a section on the situation in Gujarat. This section has presented some empirical findings & observation based on the study conducted in the selected districts. The paper on the whole attempts to critically examine the community involvement in different activities of school education.

2. Challenges of Elementary Education in India

National rural health management programme, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and such other activities & programme ensure rural development (Hooja, 2012). Rural areas deserve special mention regarding the education status in India on account of various problems like underdeveloped transportation facilities for the children in rural areas that compel the children walking in difficult situation to reach the schools. Basic facilities like safe drinking water are found to be missing in many schools in rural areas. The infrastructure provided in urban schools is advanced as compared to the provisions in rural schools. Computer education has not been given adequate attention in villages. Group classes are taken by using video conferencing and audio conferencing in some of the urban schools, whereas no such facilities are provided for students in rural schools. Adequate school infrastructure in rural areas is missing, including non-availability of furniture, toilet facility, sanitation, playground for the children. Lack of facilities affect the involvement of children in sports, co-curricular activities and competitions & this trend is commonly observed in the rural schools. Further, the children in rural areas continue to be deprived of quality education owing to factors like lack of competent and committed teachers, lack of teaching-learning materials, and lack of interest of their parents towards teaching.

Right to education is the primary right of every citizen of India, irrespective of their socio-economic status, caste and gender background (GoI, 1986). The main focus

should be to increase the rate of literacy through provision of quality education in both rural and urban areas. More than 40 percent of India's population is illiterate and cannot read or write. Schools in rural areas used to be insufficient, but with SSA initiatives the government is gearing up to set up more schools within the habitation of less than 1 KM and 3 KMs for primary and upper primary schools respectively. The conditions of rural education in India, is improving steadily and the government is also providing full support with many initiatives. The fee waiving and incentives encourage every child to get enrolled. Schools can ensure every child receiving a quality education which may prepare them to participate in the competitive global environment. Educational initiatives by state and central government aim to provide free standard education to all children irrespective of their background. The foundation in elementary education can support and prepare children for secondary and higher education. The new initiatives can guide and support teachers in educational development through implementation of new teaching methodologies and further promote all schools for the stress free educational environment.

3. Role of Community in School Education

Involvement of community is essential precondition for achieving the objective of Universalisation of Elementary Education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan intervention aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education to all children in 6 to 14 years age group and bridge social, regional and gender gaps. There is emphasis on useful and relevant education, leading to the improvement of human capabilities of all the children through community owned and community managed school system. This is an initiative to improve quality of education through decentralized and context specific planning through a process based, time bound implementation strategy. The need of the local community for educational development of the learners is taken into consideration. There is an adequate emphasis on the involvement of the local people and other stakeholders in the process of planning and implementation. Local educational needs and the need of the learners are given

importance to the involvement of both schooling system and community participation. People's involvement and participation at grass root level is essential for successful management.

The National Policy of Education, 1986 has also emphasized on the involvement of the community in educational management. It states that local communities through appropriate bodies will be assigned a major role in the school management. Community involvement establishes a close linkage between school and community and help in improving quality education. The revised policy in education in 1992 had called for community participation in educational planning and management.The SMC involves the teachers, parents/guardians and members of the community. The SMC is constituted with representation of male and female members without any discrimination. The SMC manages most of the administrative and academic activities in the school. It includes the financial management, monitoring of the ongoing civil work, attendance regularity of children and teachers, availability of basic amenities for children, preparation of school development plan and execution of the plan in the school etc. In practice, SMCs have complete financial power over the annual grants, Teaching Learning Material (TLM), School Development Grant (SDG), and School Maintenance Grant (SMG) which amount to approximately 6% of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) budget. Presently Teaching Learning Material or TLM Grant has been withdrawn to encourage the teachers to make use of the locally available resources. The SMCs are expected to follow the norms laid down in the SSA framework to utilise these grants as per the needs and requirements of the school. These community level structures play a key role in micro-planning, especially in the development of Village/Ward Education Plan and School Improvement Plans.

3.1 Roles & Structure of SMDC

School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) has number of

responsibilities including, planning, collection of data for DISE, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and taking remedial actions on all the components of the scheme. The members are responsible for infrastructural as well as academic activities in the school. The committee also keep track on the expenditure incurred for school. In addition to these responsibilities, SMDC members actively take part in the programmes like 'Shala Pravesh Utsav' i.e. is the enrolment drive in schools initiated by the Government of Gujarat. It aims to encourage the enrolment of an eligible child, especially the girl child to the school. The school staff go door to door and felicitate an eligible child with 'kumkum' (vermilion) & sweet. The child is brought to the school in decorated camel or bullock cart, tractor or other vehicle in the shape of a chariot. Gunotsav Abhiyan is another initiative that encourages a sense of ownership, accountability & sensibility for qualitative improvement in primary education.

As per SSA norms the School Management Committee (SMC) should be constituted in every school, other than an unaided school, within six months of the opening date & the committee should be reconstituted every two years. The composition should have representation of seventy five percent amongst parents or guardians of children, fifty percent of committee members shall be women. Proportionate representation is expected to be given to the parents or guardians of the children belonging to disadvantaged group and weaker section. The remaining twenty five percent of the committee shall be from the elected members of the local authority, from amongst teachers from the school, local educationists with one third representation of the members. The   SMC has an elected Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from among the parent members. The Head teacher of the school or in the absence of a head teacher, the senior most teacher of the school is considered to be the ex-officio Member-Convener of the Committee. The School Management Committee is expected to meet at least once a month. The minutes and decisions of the meetings should be recorded and made available to the public as per the requirement (MHRD, 2011).

The SSA framework has been amended in July 2006 to ensure the central role of Panchayats in the supervision and monitoring of the Elementary Education and SSA programme. The SSA has the provision for training of SMC members. The Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWP &B) is prepared by a participatory planning process through the SMC members, and they take into account the local needs and specificity. Community Based Organisations, i.e. the School Management Committees (SMCs) and other Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have a significant role in the local governance and functioning of schools (Jayal et al, 2006). Panchayati Raj and the community development frameworks were adopted to create education governance institutions below the state level. Almost all state policies include SMCs; however, there are considerable variations in actual practices, posing challenges in school governance. School functioning has improved significantly in the areas where communities have been working actively (Ramachandran, 2001; Govinda and Diwan, 2003; Govinda, 2007). Participation of the local community in school management has increased to a great extent, however, lakhs of children are still out-of school; and there is poor interface between Panchayati Raj Institutions and the SMC at school level. Coordination between Panchayati Raj Institutions and various bodies of educational administration at district, block and habitation levels has also been a major concern (Tyagi, 2012). Some states have legitimised the constitution of such bodies and there are two options for state governments with respect to local governance (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). The first option adopts a technical, administrative approach, which involved top down transformation through the changing of rules and regulations with or without corresponding legislation. The second option is a socio - political approach, i.e. involved in building institutional structures from below through the direct and active participation of people at the grassroots level. The government and its varied mechanisms have made education too dependent on over-centralized bureaucracies resulting in the systemic exclusion of teachers, parents, and community from taking part in the vision and creation of workable, effective and appropriate educational opportunities and infrastructure at the local level (Sadgopal, 2004, 2008). The agricultural families are

believed to be less educated than non-agricultural families. Teachers should also know how to convince such families and bring out the students from age old practices. Introducing school gardens to impart knowledge of farming and the use of fertilizers can allure many of the agricultural families.

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), an exclusive school initiative for girls from rural and disadvantaged groups from educationally backward blocks (EBBs), aim to bridge gender and social gaps in education. These schools are operational in 24 states, where rural female literacy is below the national average and the gender gap in literacy is more than the national average. The Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP), working in the field of women's empowerment through education, aims to promote skill-development and entrepreneurial skills to make women self-reliant. Likewise, the 'Pehchaan' project is a model that attempts to ensure that out-of-school girls (9-14 years) are provided with educational opportunities and brought at par with the other children of their age in schools. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) also provides funds for intense community mobilization.

4. Community Participation across Indian States

Community participation in elementary education level is meant for better changes in school governance and decision making through involvement of parents, teachers and other community members. Local governance in education has taken different shapes in different states. The earlier DPEP and the current SSA framework have strengthened the process of decentralization in education. Since then community participation in the administration of schools in the villages has improved significantly in many states. Different states have taken up their own policies to increase people's participation in the governance of education like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh etc. (Kumar, 2013). Almost all states of India have developed manuals, handbooks, and training materials for SMC

members. In addition some states have manuals for better community participation like Gujarat has a module on gender awareness and girls' education, Uttaranchal has a manual for financial Guidelines to SMCs, handbook on the role of SMC to educate children with special needs and Madhya Pradesh has a training module for PTAs. In Rajasthan, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand there are guidelines for community mobilization with training module for community leaders. Some campaigns for better community participation have been reported from some of the states. For instance the 'Mother Sammelan', 'Meena Week' and 'International Women's day to promote the girl child in Himachal Pradesh; Haat- Bazaar an awareness campaigns about the government scheme for women and children in tribal areas of Gujarat; Literacy campaign for illiterate mothers in Gujarat; Special enrolment drive and Jati Mahasabha in tribal pockets of Orissa; Enrolment drive for out of school children in West Bengal; Mukhyamantri Shiksha Sambal Maha Abhiyan, a campaign to improve the education system in Rajasthan; Bal Melas in Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Delhi; Maa Beti Mela in Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat; Puppet shows in Kerela and West Bengal; Street plays in Kerela, Bihar, WB, Delhi; School Chalo Abhiyan in Uttaranchal and Melas on various occasion in Haryana, Melas in MP, Gujarat and Kerela are some of the initiatives for wider community involvement.

Limited awareness among the SMC members and their negligible participation improving the education scenario was observed in the tribal areas of East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (Rao, 2009). Most parents are reported to be unaware of the existence of a Village Education Committees (VEC); therefore there is negligible public participation in improving education (Banerjee et al, 2006). An effective involvement among the stakeholders can be developed for the promotion of smart schools in India (Nirmala & Selvi, 2012). The school committees could involve the local community for working towards several important issues like increasing enrolment and improving retention. The notion of community participation in elementary education would continue to play a key role in the local level & make people aware of the benefits of schooling.

5. Gujarat Scenario with Field Reflections

Since last one decade the importance of decentralization has been seriously considered with a focus on school-community linkage. Some regional studies have identified the issues pertaining to infrastructure and trained human resources. The problems in the educational system are multidimensional, however, the issue of educational inequality, teacher performance in imparting quality education seems to have challenged both the government and people at large (Paltasingh, 2012; Vidyasagar, 2007). The policy of decentralization visualizes an important role for local governments in planning, implementing and monitoring of educational programmes and projects. The PRIs at the district, block and village level may be assigned specific roles and functions in development in the state. Stakeholder-communities at local levels are to be given adequate space and decision making opportunities for effective participation of communities and associations (Vidyasagar, 2007). For an effective basic education, school committees, parents and local communities need to become active stakeholders. Community participation has contributed in maintaining the transparency and facilitating the school activities in diverse ways. One needs to critically examine the role of SMC in school management that can help in identifying the best approaches for productive and sustainable partnership between the schools and the community. This section highlights the situation of community involvement with education in the selected districts of Gujarat. The literacy rate in Gujarat has improved to 79.31% in 2011 as compared to 69.14% in 2001. As per Census 2011 the male literacy stands at 87.23%, while female literacy is at 70.73% (Table 2). The decreasing gap in the literacy rate in each decade is comprehended in most of the states of India including Gujarat .

Table 2
Literacy Rate in Rural and Urban Gujarat and declining gaps

Census Year	1981		1991		2001		2011	
Population Group	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	66.36	39.42	73.13	48.64	79.66	57.80	87.23	70.73
Rural	58.75	29.49	66.84	38.65	74.11	47.84	83.10	62.41
Urban	82.40	61.78	84.56	67.70	88.34	74.50	92.44	82.08
Gap	23.65	32.29	17.72	29.05	14.23	26.66	9.34	19.67

Source: Census of different years

5.1 Methodology

This section provides information based on an empirical study conducted in selected districts of Gujarat. The community participation is studied in different schools based on the information collected from two districts of Gujarat i.e. Amreli and Jamnagar. The study is based on the survey conducted in these two districts following a random sampling method. Forty schools each from Amreli and Jamnagar district i.e. total 80 schools are covered in the study. The data were collected during April, 2012 to September, 2012. Both Primary Schools (PS) and Upper Primary Schools (UPS) were visited in each district covering total 10 blocks and 40 habitations (Table 3). Interview schedule & questionnaires were used for data collection from schools. Focused group discussions (FGDs) were carried out among the community members, teachers, parents and students.

Various aspects like school infrastructure, availability of basic amenities, regularity of students and teachers, type and usage of kitchen shed, serving and cooking utensils for the MDM, water facility, safety & hygiene, involvement of the various community members and supervision of the programme in the visited districts were covered.

Table-3
Sample Table

Sr. No	Name of Districts	No. of Blocks Covered with Name	No. of Clusters Covered	No. of schools Covered	No. of Habitations Covered
1	Amreli	05 (Amreli, Liliya, Lathi, Jafarabad, Rajula)	23	40	40
2	Jamnagar	05 (Jamnagar, Jamkhambhaliya, Jamkalyanpur, Lalpur, Dhrol)	16	40	40
	Total	10	39	80	80

Note: The sample table specifies the details & coverage of selected units for data collection

5.2 Findings & Discussion

Decentralised planning and decision-making has been initiated by encouraging the SMC to safeguard local participation in school related activities. Parent's involvement is also ensured through the committee for their children's education. In order to mobilize the community to promote education, to assist in the development of educational facilities and to supervise the functioning of schools, the Village Education Committee (VEC) or School Management Committee (SMC) has been set up at village or school level in most of the states. However, their roles and functions are not defined clearly. The nomenclature, size, tenure as well as its pattern for the community level structure varies across states. Involvement of community members in school functioning has been institutionalized under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009   by the Government of India. Under the RTE, School Management Committees (SMCs) are required to be constituted in every government run elementary school in the country. However, the extent of participation is diverse in different contexts (Rao, 2009; Paltasingh, 2012a).

In majority of the schools in Amreli and Jamnagar district the Village Education Register (VER) was found to be either missing or not updated. The VER provides gender wise, social category-wise and age group-wise data of children in a village.

The various school records need to be updated periodically for better involvement and commitment from community members. In many visited schools in these districts, both the principal and the teachers were found to be unaware of the exact meaning of drop out child and do not know that how to fill the Data Capture Form (DCF) about the school. Knowledge of the school development plan, awareness about Right to Education (RTE) Act, DISE data capture format and VER was found to be insufficient among the members of SMC. However, in Jamnagar the awareness of the RTE Act, among the SMC members was found to be relatively better in comparison to Amreli.

The state government should arrange any exclusive training program to provide conceptual & operational clarity on such important issues. It was observed that though the SMC meetings used to take place at certain intervals, these meetings were attended by only few SMC members. The SMC meeting and the training need to be attended by all the SMC members. Details regarding the various school grants should be shared with all the members of the SMC. Similarly, suggestions for the utilization of these grants should be obtained from all the SMC members for their better participation in the school management.

Infrastructure and facilities, especially the availability of toilet units, drinking water, classrooms and furniture for the students were found to be inadequate and poorly maintained in most of the schools in both the districts due to various reasons. Some of the visited schools in both the districts did not have sufficient number of classrooms to cater to the number of children enrolled in these schools. Unavailability of playgrounds and drinking water facility for children in some schools in both the districts was found. All these basic facilities are vital for the smooth functioning of the school, therefore due attention should be given to make the provision accessible to the children (Paltasingh, 2012). All these require sincere efforts of the SMC and school staff. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Management Committee (KMC) had been found to be constituted in KGBVs visited

in both the districts; however these were not operational. Most of the teachers in such schools had not received gender training despite the fact that the objective of the KGBV is to facilitate girls' education. It is recommended that all the teachers as well as the staff of the KGBVs should be oriented towards gender sensitivity through training and capacity building. The academic standard of children of KGBVs can be further improved and can be compared with the regular school children. Students of KGBVs were found to be good in extra-curricular activities. Some of the children had developed expertise in preparing handicrafts, TLMs etc. with the help of their teachers. However, there is scope for better involvement of the community members for the KGBVs to achieve their target (Paltasingh, 2012a). The awareness level of the SMC members about different activities of the school exhibited variation. In Amreli district an average awareness among the SMCs was reported regarding the funds used for civil works, availability of grants, roles and responsibilities of the community.

Poor management of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) in some of the schools had affected either the quality or quantity of the MDM (Paltasingh, 2013). In both the visited districts the health checkups were found to be irregular in the visited schools, but the local Public Health Centres (PHC) conducted the checkups only on a yearly basis. However, no proper health record was found in most of the visited schools. Provision for weighing the food grain was found to be missing in majority of the schools. Therefore the quantity of food served to the children could be questioned. In addition, there was no mechanism to cross verify the quantity of food grain used for MDM preparation on behalf of either the SMC or the school staff. All these pointed towards the need of strict monitoring of MDM by the SMC members. Daily updating of the MDM register with reference to the utilization of stocks was found to be missing in most of the visited schools. The involvement of teachers, parents and other SMC members can help in improving the quality of the food. Some schools were found to be providing vegetables and Dal on regular basis. However, a very small quantity of vegetable and Dal (cooked pulses) was found to be used in MDM preparation and

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that too on an average once in a week. There is a need for more transparency regarding the financial matter related to MDM. The SMC can play a significant role regarding supervision and the financial issues related to the MDM. In many schools there was found to be a difference between the children who have opted for MDM as per the MDM record and the children who were actually having MDM as per the head count (Paltasingh, 2012 b). An involvement of school staff or other community members on a regular basis is urgently needed to tackle the serious issues like discrepancy in number of children who opted for MDM and a number of children who actually had the MDM.

Participatory structures and practices have been found to be useful in advancing social and educational gains (Govinda and Diwan, 2003). Community participation has been identified as an effective approach to improve access and quality in education. Adequate infrastructure is the primary need to promote education. Technologies are another medium through which education can be set to a speedy progress, especially in the rural areas. For instance, in some of the rural schools, children used LCD projector in their learning process. Issues of equity, quality and access in education system remain the main areas of concern which can be adequately handled by an effective involvement of SMCs, parents, school staff and other stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

The SMCs should focus on the overall school development and progress without diluting the focus on quality education. The SMC needs to monitor records of attendance and achievement, various grants and its expenditure. Meetings of SMCs need to be conducted on a regular basis and should include discussion about school infrastructure, basic facilities for the children, participation of children, retention in education, funding and expenditure. The SMCs need resources to build capacity and awareness among its members. The school development plans should be shared in

the Gram Sabha (village council meetings). There has been remarkable progress in increasing access to pre-school and elementary education in rural and urban areas, particularly over the past one decade. However issues pertaining to irregular attendance of children and teachers, gaps in provision and the issue of how to ensure quality education for all, need to be addressed with seriousness. Some of these challenges are being tackled and there are positive signs that the emphasis on major Government programs such as SSA is shifting from universal enrolment to universal retention and quality. There is also increasing attention being given to the governance of schools with the formation of SMC and introducing more transparent processes for managing school resources. However, there is scope of greater and sincere involvement and participation of the community for better management of school activities. The continuation of strong central support for policy, strategy, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation combined with a more decentralized approach with a focus on educational development especially in rural areas require special attention.

Effective involvement of parents, SMC and school can meet educational requirements productively. The school-community linkage encourages a sense of ownership and democratic participation in school management, further facilitating school development with quality education. The major emphasis should be focused on empowering the local community who can decide on improving the school as an institution, disseminating education of the local children. Decentralization of power at the local level should strengthen community involvement. Unequal access to learning opportunities can be bridged through effective governance and community participation. Serious efforts towards strengthening the link between school and the community are the need of the contemporary schooling system.

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