

# Community Participation in School Prospects and Challenges

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## Abstract

*The present paper has been written with the objective of providing the prospects and challenges of community participation in school. The entire paper is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the introduction, concept and definition of community, participation and community participation in school. The second part deals with Indian perspective of community participation in school, where the historical background, success story of SSA, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Right To Education (RTE) has been discussed. In the third part, issues and challenges related to community participation in school have been discussed, followed by a conclusion.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is not an activity to be carried out in isolation. It is an activity to be done in collaboration. Without community participation, education cannot achieve its goals. Community participation can contribute to promoting education (UNICEF, 1992). Community participation not only increases ownership but also empowers the communities to take important decisions concerning the future of

their children. It has been proven that when parents get involved in the education of their children, the latter get motivated and perform better. Education policies give a significant place to 'community participation', which is also considered to be a tool to improve the functioning of school. All members of the community should give special regard to giving education to all children, as a part of their social responsibility. And for this, it is important to make a

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strategy to involve the stakeholders. There is also a need to take initiatives to improve the infrastructure, educational services and educational quality.

As we know that education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities and society. But no one can take 100 per cent responsibility for educating children. It is, therefore, important to develop partnerships between schools, parents and communities. Active involvement of the community is very helpful in identifying the educational issues related to the community and formulating effective strategies to overcome them, which significantly hamper the process of education.

If we see globally, most of the educationists and researchers from all over the world discuss that community participation plays a very important role in promoting education in terms of quality and quantity. They recognise community participation as one of the major key to improve the quality of education.

Before discussing the ways of community participation in school, it is important to discuss what the word community is referred to in terms of education.

### **WHAT IS COMMUNITY?**

A community is a social unit of any size that shares common values like social, religious, occupational and geographical characteristics.

If we see the etymological meaning of community, we will find that the word 'Community' is derived from the Latin word 'communis' which means things held in common.

### **WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?**

Participation is a process through which all the members of a community or organisation are involved and influence the decisions related to educational activities that will affect them.

The term 'participation' can be defined in various ways. Shaeffer (1994) points out seven possible definitions of the term participation:

- Involvement through the mere use of a service (such as enrolling children in the school or through primary health care of the children).
- Involvement through the contribution of money, materials, and labour.
- Involvement through 'attendance' (e.g., at parents' meetings at school)
- Involvement through consultation on a particular issue related to the children.
- Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors.
- Participation as implementers of delegated powers.
- Participation 'in real decision making at every stage', including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning,

implementation, and evaluation. (Uemura, 1999).

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL**

Community participation has been highly beneficial to increasing enrolment. It is believed that through oversight and active contribution, it can also bring about a change in the retention and achievement. The community will require substantial improvement in its own capacity to contribute to school efficiency. Children not only learn from parents and families but also from the world outside their families. Schools are institutions that equip the children with important skills to contribute to the betterment of society. Since each group like parents, family, school, society, etc., plays a different role in contributing to children's education, therefore, it is important to collaborate with all the groups of people so that education takes place most efficiently and effectively.

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

If we go into the genesis, it has been recorded that it is the community which has taken care of the education system instead of State. The organic bond between community and school has been recommended by Kothari Commission (1964–66). In addition to this, the NPE (1986) and POA (1992), while emphasising the role of community in the educational

enterprise, have recommended that both should work in tandem in order to give education to the children according to their local needs.

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee has proposed a broad framework for managing education. One of the important features of this framework is the provision for village education committees (VECs). The committee was expected to have the power to check attendance registers and report on regularity of students, teachers' attendance and the overall functioning of the school. Significantly, there are a large number of projects which have focused on exploring the possibilities of community participation in the education system. In this context, DPEP (District Primary Education Programme), Bihar Education Project, Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish projects in Rajasthan, Mahila Samakhya Project and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project included a strong component of community participation. (Niranjanaradhya, 2014).

In Kerala, Parents' Teachers' Associations (PTAs) and Mothers' Teachers' Associations (MTAs) played a very important role in achieving literacy and universal enrolment. It also helped in decreasing the dropout rates. As of 2007, the net enrolment in elementary education was almost 100 per cent in Kerala and was almost balanced among different sexes, social groups and regions.

### **SUCCESS STORY OF SSA IN TERMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is one of the most successful decentralisation programmes initiated by the Indian State. It was launched in 2001, with the 'time bound' objective of universalising quality elementary education for all in the age group of 6–14 years by 2010. The programme is implemented by the Central Government in collaboration with the State, and is often quoted as an exemplar illustration of effective decentralisation. While the Central Government has provided only a framework (as opposed to guidelines), the structure and content of the programme is developed by the respective State Government. But what makes SSA a truly decentralised program is its very crux—community mobilisation is the pivot of the SSA programme. Community participation, according to the SSA, includes the organisation of committees like the Village Education Committee (VEC), School Management Committee (SMC) and Parents' Teachers' Association (PTA). The SSA has been designed such that without community participation, the twin objectives of the SSA of providing quality and gathering quantity would collapse.

To guarantee the achievement of SSA objectives, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has outlined the key purposes for community mobilisation. Often many

people misunderstand that the only purpose of community mobilisation is to ensure accountability; and that the vigilance of the community will guarantee that there is no misallocation or misuse of funds. However, the purpose of community mobilisation is beyond ensuring transparency.

By tying the community's interests with the schools, SSA seeks to 'kill two birds with one stone': Through community participation, the social inequalities that often obstruct the path to full literacy are sought to be wiped out. Community mobilisation thus plays a prominent role in bridging gender and social gap, for creating access and enrolment (it includes micro planning and school mapping), ensure equity in school facilities (ensure gender sensitive infrastructure), ensuring complete transparency and in monitoring the quality of education (which includes keeping check of students' progress, improving the quality of school facilities, etc.)

SSA advocates for community mobilisation since it ensures community ownership and management of the school system. It was widely believed that this sharing of responsibilities and devolution of powers would create a sense of honour and incentivise communities to participate in micro planning and school mapping initiatives. Micro-planning and school mapping initiatives essentially refer to identifying the households

that should participate in the SSA scheme, recognising the habitations that lack access to schools and mobilising parents and students to enrol themselves into PTAs and schools, respectively.

More specifically, the SSA framework recommends conducting regular enrolment drives, providing formal schooling facilities in the centres of religious instruction like *Maktabs* and *Madrasas*, and setting up of special models of Alternate Schools exclusively for girls like, *Bal Vidyalayas*, etc. This approach of tackling grass-root level problems was an explicit attempt by the Government to reduce 'information costs' with the involvement of the local community; not only is there a movement towards holistic development of the education system but also towards the practice of an economically viable solution.

### **SUCCESS STORY OF RMSA IN TERMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Under RMSA programme, 5,49,949 community members have been imparted training since the inception of the programme including minority members from School Management and Development Committee (SMDC). Total 3188.445 lakh community members have been approved by the RMSA Project Approval Board PAB for imparting the training till December 2011.

Apart from the above, sensitisation programmes are organised in the States and UTs which allow school management and development

committee members to attend training programmes for three days at ₹200 per head. Almost all the States and UTs have been approved for the same concerning the issues related to the functioning of schools, teachers' performance, students' achievement, community mobilisation, monitoring, research, evaluation and other activities of the school apart from construction.

### **ROLE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT 2009**

The community involvement in implementing the Right to Free and Compulsory Education as per the RTE Act 2009 becomes very useful in the areas mentioned below:

- Where parents show reluctance in sending their children to schools though there is no dearth of facilities as far as the provisions for free education are concerned in the neighbourhood. Orphans and destitute who normally become prey to the gangs who engage them for begging, rag picking, shoe polishing, etc.
- Where the parents think that children's education is not a priority but their support to the family income by working in farmland, grazing cattle in the fields, and domestic works is more necessary.
- Where the parents of girl child show discrimination in

not sending her to school. However, their sons attend the schools. This is because of well-known reasons like social taboos, sibling care, domestic works, gathering fuelwood, water fetching, cooking, early marriage, etc. (Sachar, 2015).

### **SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES (SMCs)**

One of the goals of RTE is to empower the SMCs, which could in turn, transform the existing system of education. The SMCs can work better to make school systems effective by constantly taking positive actions and engaging in a constructive dialogue with other stakeholders. Through the cooperative endeavour, the SMCs have the potential to change the school dynamics first at local levels and then at the larger systemic levels.

All the government, government aided, and special category schools shall have to constitute SMCs as per Section 21 of the RTE Act. The SMC is intended to be the basic unit of a decentralised governance model with active involvement of parents in the school's functioning. The idea is that parents are the main stakeholders in the education process and hence they should be the leaders of change, who initiate the reversal of inefficiencies in the system through constructive and collective engagement (Dayaram, 2011).

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

The fact is that community involvement in the dissemination of education would face challenges. However, there is a good prospect of tackling them to a great extent. In an attempt to understand the factors that prevent communities from being involved in formal education, Shaeffer (1994) found that the degree of community participation is particularly low in socially and economically marginalised regions. Traditional exclusion of some groups (women, minorities, youth, and children) often limits their freedom to participate in community-wide initiatives. Ingrained prejudicial attitude towards marginalised groups can manifest themselves through a reluctance to include or work together with them and to value their contributions. To counteract these barriers, quota for representation in the formal bodies (PTA, SMC, etc.), may be implemented initially, until the significance of full community participation is recognised. Many communities have entrenched the power structures, including the schools, which are often characterised by authoritarianism, corruption, and a lack of transparency. Involving local leaders in the participatory assessment process can help generate their buy-in and support and also make them more accountable to the community members.

Illiteracy, lack of economic or material resources, and ill health are among the contributors that lead to sustained poverty and due to poverty poor people limit themselves to take part in community wide initiatives. When individuals are focused on day-to-day survival, it is difficult to set aside the time, energy, or resources needed for engaging in long-term plans, even if the desire and understanding of the needs are present. As communities become more skillful in addressing the challenges, these more complex barriers can also be addressed, leading to fuller participation.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLVING THESE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Following are the suggestions that need to be implemented in order to improve the practice of involving communities in delivering education.

#### ***To understand nature of the community***

As we know that no community is homogenous, it is not easy to examine and understand the community contexts. However, the degree of community participation required by the school needs to be meticulously examined. This is because some communities are traditionally involved in community activities, while others find it difficult to collaborate with schools or even other community members. In the present scenario, it is indispensable to understand the current formal structure and

the function of school along with the role of parents, community and other concerned organisations.

#### ***To assess capabilities of communities and responsible agencies and provide them assistance***

It is necessary to assess community contexts, and the agencies responsible for promoting community participation efforts, in order to create specific plans or components of the projects.

If the agencies do not seem to collaborate with communities in achieving the objectives, there is a need to make them understand the importance of community participation in education. Communities should have a good understanding of why they need to collaborate with the schools, and the benefits that can be yielded. However, understanding and willingness are not enough. Implementing agencies are required to have the technical capability to carry out active community participation, encouraging and involving communities in a great range of school management activities. In this context, financial knowledge to oversee the funding and to operate the school is essentially required.

School, parent, and community organisations also need to have certain knowledge, skills and attitudes to realise successful community participation in education.

### **To establish communication channels**

In order to exercise any kind of community participation, there needs to be an understanding among all the stakeholders. People should be apprised of the benefits of community participation. A continuous dialogue between schools and community is essential keeping in view its long-term benefits. Conducting social marketing and awareness campaigns are also required in order to promote community involvement in children's education. Such campaigns designed to target the parents and community members can help them increase their understanding on the benefits of their collaboration with the teachers and schools.

### **To conduct continuous assessment**

A continuous assessment of the practice of community participation needs to be undertaken as soon as the implementation gets started. The communities are always evolving and so are their needs and demands. Therefore, the strategies need to be modified and tailored accordingly. Also important is to make sure that the different stakeholders' voices are reflected in the implementation practice.

### **CONCLUSION**

Significantly, community participation has drawn greater attention with reference to international and national policy in recent past. It is considered important as an end in

itself (as a democratic right), as well as a means to the achievement of sustainable development. Most of the educationists and researchers all over the world argued that community participation plays a very important role in promoting education in terms of quality and quantity. Community participation can contribute to educational planning and development through various channels such as, advocating enrolment and education benefits, boosting the morale of school teachers, raising money for schools, constructing, repairing, and improving the school facilities.

Education of all children should be considered as a shared social goal for all members of the community and it is important to set up the structures and interventions to involve the stakeholders. These might include the initiatives to improve physical infrastructure, develop efficiency in educational services and improve educational quality, and should also include community members, as well as educational professionals. Indeed, both public response and public action are the essential ingredients for sustainable and continuous development of education. The school has to be viewed as a social organisation, organically linked to the community. Over the years, almost complete disappearance of this space for the local community in managing schools, has significantly contributed towards the decline in the school system. Restoring this legitimate space for the community was exclusively



discussed by the RTE Act-2009. This is an opportunity that we must not lose. As a matter of priority, the essential components of a good school need to be understood, especially by the parents. Thus, understanding the child's learning processes, teacher-child relationships, role of

the school management, issues that the schools face and the role of SMCs in taking schools out of this present mess, etc., are some crucial issues. In this context, skills to engage with schools at the local level as well as at the level of the system, acquire a great significance for the parents.

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