

Community Participation and Empowerment in Educational Governance: A Study of Performance of School Management Committee in Uttarakhand State

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ABSTRACT

Community participation not only increases ownership but also empowers communities to take important decisions concerning the future of children. It has been proven that when parents get involved in the education of their children, children are motivated and perform better. Moreover, it ensures sustainability of the processes adopted and innovations undertaken. It is evident from the present study that the policy changes in relation to community participation in universalizing quality elementary education has brought a sea change in the Uttarakhand state. The school management committees have played a significant role towards access, enrolment, retention of children in schools and in the overall monitoring of schools. However, there are still challenges in respect to the committees' role and influence on classroom processes and quality education.

Key Words : Community, Participation, Empowerment, Governance

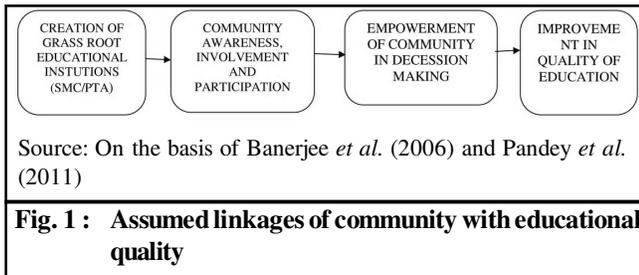
INTRODUCTION

There are a number of examples indicating that quality of education in school has improved significantly where communities have been involved actively. Evidence is found that School Management Committee (SMCs) are involved in a variety of activities ranging from creating and maintaining infrastructure, promoting enrolment, fund mobilization/ utilization, and even strengthening school and classroom environment. Community initiative in the enrolment drive found that kalajatha (organising cultural programmes) effectively generate awareness among parents for enrolment of the children. SMC fairs, parental counselling, and community events for parental motivation were found very significant in many states of the country. In some states, SMCs were responsible for mobilizing and utilizing funds available from the government as well as from other sources. Under SSA, SMCs in consultation with school authorities decide

how to use school grants for the development of schools. There are many instances where community members have been involved in volunteer teaching and teaching learning materials (TLM) preparation, in addition to monitoring regular attendance of teachers and students. Special programmes such as *praveshotsav* or enrolment drive, *mabeti mela* (mother-daughter fair) and tale-conferencing have helped to organize communities around schooling and also for creating demand for education. This has been particularly useful in promoting participation of girls in schooling (Bhatty, 2012). Presence of a SMC in a village has been found playing an effective role in provisioning of infrastructural facilities, fund mobilization and utilization and even in out come of the students through arrangement of community or part-time teacher. In villages with education committees, there would be associated signs of increased commitment to education, represented by greater numbers of teachers in primary education. The SMC made a tangible role in

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resource inputs to the school including teacher numbers, textbooks and other school inputs. SMC experience, SMC monthly meeting, and handling the SMC responsibility has also been found playing an effective role (Mansuri and Rao, 2012). Therefore the linkages of community with education quality can be assumed in the following Fig. 1.



In India since the adoption of constitution, strong need had been felt and demanded to devolve powers to the grassroots level institutions, to ensure more representations, foster greater local commitment to provision of public services like education, sanitation and health and make their delivery cost effective and efficient. Therefore, to facilitate the devolution of governance to grass root level, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (1993) were made. Within the enabling framework of these amendments, state governments adopted various models to devolve powers to PRIs. Some of these models are highly legal, in which state government devolves specific powers to PRIs in well defined manners and some are process based, *i.e.*, they gradually build capacities of PRIs and other stakeholders, to own and run public services (Juyal *et al.*, 2013). Notwithstanding the variations in these models of grassroots governance, after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, invariably all schemes of elementary education be it centrally sponsored like DPEP and SSA or exclusively of state government like EGS of Madhya Pradesh, engagement of the actual beneficiaries and the PRIs is all pervasive. A major breakthrough came with the formulation of National Policy on Education and Programme of Action, 1986 which stipulated that “the local committees, through appropriate bodies, will be assigned a major role in programmes of school improvement”. Consequently, many states involved the Panchayati Raj Institutions in educational management. Notably, the introduction of Article 40 of the Constitution which states that “the State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers

and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government” was another major step in this direction. However, the devolution process got momentum only with the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1992, which empowered state legislative assemblies to devolve powers necessary to enable Panchayats, to function as institutions of governance, *i.e.*, to take decision, implement policies and programme and fix accountability. And many states devolved powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Among these, the Government of Rajasthan initiated two ambitious and innovative education programmes—the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) in 1987 and the Lok Jumbish Project (LJP) in 1992. These projects have developed novel responses to deep-rooted problems of education and have transformed the delivery of education in the state. Both Shiksha Karmi and the Lok Jumbish were initiated as micro-level initiatives and later integrated into state-wide strategies to meet the educational needs of deprived rural communities.

Similarly, Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education are an important component of SSA to bring out-of school children in the fold of Elementary Education. The scheme envisages that child-wise planning is undertaken for each out-of-school children. EGS addresses the inaccessible habitation where there is no formal school within the radius of one km and at least 15-25 children of 6-14 years age group who are not going to school are available. In exceptional cases remote habitations in hilly areas even for 10 children an EGS school can be opened. Similarly Bihar Education Project, and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme have greatly shaped the contemporary thinking and practices of educational governance at bottom level in India. Under DPEP, Village Education Committee or similar institution was assigned the responsibility to prepare habitation level plan for UEE and implement them specially to carry out all construction and maintenance work and procurement of TLE at school level. Some state governments, in the process of devolution of powers have moved far ahead, to the extent that grassroots institutions appoint teachers, regulate their service condition and take disciplinary action. On the basis of many such past experiences, Government of India launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the year 2001-02 in partnership with States and PRIs to realize Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE-

2009) was implemented. As per the provisions of Right to Education Act formation and participation of parents in School Management Committee (SMC) is statutorily mandatory. Strong team of functionaries – equipped with the skill of micro-planning to prepare need-based plan right from school or habitation level to District level has been created in each and every district of the country. The entire system of elementary schooling has been geared up along the right base or entitlement approach to elementary education.

Theoretically political decentralization ensures people's access to fruit of development, but on ground level there is wide gap between policy and practice. Often memberships in the grassroots level organizations have not been fairly representative. The marginal communities projected as the biggest beneficiaries have little or no say to influence decisions of PRIs. Evidently large numbers of parents in the SMC even do not know about availability of fund and its utilization. With a timid vision their focus remains on those activities which are easily identifiable, vis-à-vis to those requiring long term commitment and persistence. Generally, SMC concentrates more on developing infrastructure compared to the improving quality, because of vested political interests. Apparently it does not mean that quality of education is not matter of concern to SMC, but they are reluctant to evolve a mechanism to strike balance between political visibility and long term commitment to improve quality of educational governance. Simultaneously there is great need to improve communication and mutual respect between these two important stakeholders – the teachers and SMC members. As per provision of RTE-2009 parents of children studying in government schools constitute the general assembly of SMC and the general assembly elects majority of members to the executive committee of SMC. This has potential to radically change the elementary schooling system. But the community engagement has to be seen in the dynamic context of elementary schooling system. As the government funded schools are now by and large schools of poor, majority of SMC members belong to poor social and economic strata. They find difficult to actively engage in the affairs of schools due to opportunity cost and lack of required communication skill for. As such community participation in school education level is also hierarchical contrary to the very objective of community engagement in elementary schooling.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate the present status of community participation, empowerment in elementary education and emerging policy issues, district Chamoli of Uttarakhand Sate has been selected for in-depth analysis. Around 25 School Management Committees (SMCs) and 67 members of these committees have been selected for detailed study. To find out the community participation, ownership and empowerment in the elementary education, members of SMCs are requested to share their views and opinion in the whole process of educational planning and development. The community contribution has been analyzed not only to facilitate school infrastructure and planning process but more importantly in empowerment of community in educational governance. Three questionnaires were administered in each village education committee .Technique of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) such as focus group discussion (FGD) was also conducted to assess the challenges and policy issues in the specific context of mountain areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Under Right to Education initiatives, School Management Committees have been formed in each primary school. The committee is the functioning arm of overall development of school. In this study, attempts have been made to analyze the contribution of SMC in the provisoinizing of elementary education in district Chamoli specially the advances in community ownership and management of education. The activities of SMC on different issues were discussed. The SMC members were requested to specify the issues discussed in last four meetings. Their responses have been shown in Table 1 and summarized blow.

In the issue related to class room process the main points of interaction are method of teaching/insist on teaching in simple way, difficulties faced by children in learning English and Mathematics, text book availability and performance of the child in class. In all these issues households are found regular interaction with regular teacher as compared to para teacher. The highest point of interaction made by households with regular teachers are difficulty faced by the children in learning English and Mathematics, methods of teaching and text books availability whereas in para teacher case the highest points of interaction are performance of the child in class and

Table 1 : Details of issue discussed in SMC meetings

Issues	Total (N=67)	% to total
1. Issues relating to class room process		
Method of teaching/ teaching in simple way	44	(65.67)
Difficulties faced by children in learning English	24	(35.84)
Difficulties faced by children in learning Mathematics	24	(35.82)
Text Book availability to children	44	(65.67)
Performance of the child in class	36	(53.73)
Child interaction with peer group/teachers	46	(68.65)
2. Management Issues relating to class room		
Lack of Teachers	44	(65.67)
Lack of Trained Teachers	24	(35.84)
About regularity of attendance of children	24	(35.82)
Home Work and Class Work checking	44	(65.67)
3. Quality of Education		
Requesting teachers to teach extra time/take remedial classes/to cover the course	46	(68.65)
Regarding meetings of various committees like PTA/MTA/Village Education Committee/Dera Committee	44	(65.67)
About celebrating national festivals like independence day/Republic day/Some local festivals	44	(65.67)
Impact of migratory character of Dera on children's education		
4. Facilities available		
Scholarship	24	(35.84)
Sports Co-curricular activities	44	(65.67)
5. Infrastructure		
Maintenance of school building/ facilities of toilet/drinking water and other facilities	46	(68.65)

Source: Primary data collected from field

difficulty faced by the children in learning English. In the class room related management issues like lack of trained teachers, regular attendance of children, home work and class work checking households continuously interacting with regular teachers but in these issues households whose children taught by para teachers are not much more interacting.

Maximum interaction between the regular teachers and the parents takes place with regard to requesting teachers to teach extra time, remedial coaching, coverage of syllabus, meetings of SMC and celebrating national and local festivals. Surprisingly, lowest interaction of these issues between households and para teachers is recorded. As regards to availability of different facilities like scholarship, sports and co-curricular activities house holds related regular teachers as well as para teachers are found regular interaction. Maintenance of School building, providing facilities of toilet /drinking water and other physical infrastructure facilities in school the parents seem to be interacting more with the regular teachers .The high level of interaction on infrastructure related issue is due to most of the students in the government schools

come from the marginalized groups and therefore, the parents must be more familiar with this issues as compared to other issues.

Overall the maximum interaction between the teachers and the parents takes place with regard to home work and class work checking followed by difficulties in learning English and mathematics. From the data discussed above it is apparent that the parents are concerned about the day-to-day performance of the students and do not accord very high priority to the policy issues or organizational issues. It is significant to mention that the SMC level discussion include all the critical factors concerned with better education governance in the school. The higher per cent shows the intense desire of the members of the community to participate and take decision with regards to improving the teaching learning process in the schools where the students get enrolled.

The SMC representatives were also asked to confirm about how many of the decisions taken in the SMC meetings were actually implemented. The overall perception is that only 25 per cent members of the SMC are agreeing that the decisions are fully implemented, 50

per cent members about the decisions are partially implemented and 25 per cent members perception that the decisions are not implemented at all. The implementation issues are crucial in the whole context of community ownership over the teaching learning process in the schools. It seems that specific guide lines are needed to be issued in which accountability be fixed for non implementation of the decisions concerned with school governance (Table 2).

Table 2 : Status of implementation of the decisions taken in the meeting of SMC

Implementation Status	Total (N=67)	Per cent to total
Fully	17	(25.37)
Partially	33	(49.25)
Not at all	17	(25.37)
Total	63	(100.00)

Source: Primary data collected from field

Majority of respondents opined that SMCs are contributing in universalizing elementary education. As per the data, SMCs are actively involved in enrollment of children, ensuring regularity of attendance of the students and ensuring regular attendance of teachers. It is the classical function being assigned to the SMCs. However it is to be made clear than the more than accessibility the community organizations must take part in improving the overall governance of schooling in the underdeveloped districts. The detailed perception in this

regards is given in Table 3.

The SMC functionaries thereafter shared their perception about move of devolution of powers to PRIs. The detailed perceptions is given in Table 4.

As per the data from Table 4, it reveals that more than 70 per cent VEC functionaries are of the opinion that that PRI's must be given the powers to own and manage elementary education. The SMCs respondents are advocating the move for devolution of powers to SMC that since PRIs of which SMC in a functioning arm are grass roots level organization and ubiquitous in presence therefore they can monitor /inspect schools /teachers more frequently and efficiently than any other (about 70 % SMCs). Further they added that being a grass root level organization they have better comprehension of the problems of schooling system (about 50 % SMCs). The other important argument in favour of devolution move is PRIs will utilize grants effectively, efficiently and in transparent manner (about 60 % SMCs), therefore PRIs, can contribute in developing the infrastructure effectively. Besides, utilizing grants, the PRIs can also generate resources on their own, and can also help in improving the delivery system of various amenities and services (about 70 % responses of SMCs). Out of 67 sampled SMCs 28 per cent feels that most of the time PRI members are engrossed in other works, they may rarely find time to look after the schools. Moreover, many PRI members do not have interest in education related issues. Some SMCs members feel that PRIs are not aware

Table 3 : Details of contribution made by SMC in Universalization of elementary education

Status of participation	(N=67)			Total
	Regular	Occasional	Never	
In enrolment of children	7 (28.0)	13 (52.0)	5 (20.0)	67 (100)
In ensuring regularity of children in attending schools	6 (24.0)	14 (56.0)	5 (20.0)	67 (100)
In ensuring regular attendance of teachers	8 (32.0)	11 (44.0)	6 (24.0)	67 (100)

Source: Primary data collected from field

Table 4 : Reasons for Devolution of powers to SMC for management of primary schooling

Reasons	Total (N=67)	Per cent to total
Proper and regular inspection of teacher/ School	47	(70.14)
Help in Infrastructure and development	38	(56.67)
Improve the amenities like water, toilet, electricity	47	(70.14)
Proper utilization of grants	40	(59.70)
Better knowledge of the problem of the area	36	(53.73)

Source: Primary data collected from field

about importance of education, hence they can hardly contribute any thing substantial in the development of education.

Conclusion:

The issues of grass root governance meaningfully bring the point to fore that schooling system partnering with people can provide solutions to many intricate and impossible issues. It is obvious from these that community participation would be relevant only if the marginalized people could voice their grievances and come up with solutions at par with others, having a say in decision-making. Community participation not only increases ownership but also empowers 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, children are motivated and perform better. Moreover, it ensures sustainability of the processes adopted and innovations undertaken. It is evident from the above discussion that the policy changes in relation to community participation in universalizing quality elementary education has brought a sea change in study area. The school management committees have played a significant role towards access, enrolment, retention of children in schools and in the overall monitoring of schools. However, there a long rugged terrain is yet to be traversed in respect to the committees' role and influence on classroom processes and quality education.

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