



# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

## CREATE INDIA POLICY BRIEF 4

FEBRUARY 2011



### EFFECTIVE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Community based organisations, such as School Management Committees (SMCs) and other *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs) have a significant role to play in the local governance and functioning of schools. The recently introduced RTE Act has made the formation of SMCs mandatory. In addition to government documents and the thematic paper, *Changing Framework of Local governance and Community Participation in Elementary Education in India* (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010) this policy brief draws upon data collected in CREATE's Community and School Survey (ComSS) from 88 schools in 3 clusters in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. This Policy Brief provides a brief analysis of school governance at local level in India. It was written by Madhumita Bandyopadhyay and Moitri Dey.

#### **The role of governance in combating exclusion and ensuring meaningful access**

Indian society is divided based on class, caste, gender, and religion. These factors are related to children's access to education and their participation in the learning process. This is evident in the disparities in educational access and attainment between different social and economic groups. Improved governance of education has been identified as one way through which levels of access, quality and participation in education can be improved (UNESCO, 2009) and which can reduce various problems related to inequality which accentuates exclusion (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Visualising this important role of governance, the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act emphasises the involvement of communities in school governance through SMCs to ensure school quality with equity.

Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, (2010) argue that combating educational exclusion is closely associated with an increase in awareness among local governing agencies about local educational problems and their effective participation in day to

day functioning of schools as well as in decision making processes. This policy brief explores local governance involving parents and communities. Data was collected from different schools in the study through interviews with members of SMCs. Almost all government run elementary schools have SMCs. Key questions are whether these organisations are functioning effectively or not and whether their members have the knowledge of education issues and capacity to manage education effectively. This policy brief discusses these issues followed by a brief discussion of policy implications.

#### **Local governance in India**

Local governance of education is not a new phenomenon in India. After independence, in order to bring together territories with diverse historical, socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, educational governance received immediate attention. The responsibility for governance of school education was largely given to state governments and eventually the decentralisation of public governance in general, and of education, in particular. This has consisted of moving decision making powers to structures and authorities to sub-

state levels. The concept of *Panchayati Raj*<sup>1</sup> and the community development frameworks were adopted to create education governance institutions below state level.

Though almost all states policies include SMCs, there are considerable variations in actual practices, posing tremendous challenges in school governance. School functioning has improved significantly in places where communities have been involved actively (Ramachandran, 2001; Govinda and Diwan, 2003). There are a number of examples of how communities have been involved in schooling (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Some states have legitimised the constitution of such bodies through enactments of rules and regulations and there are two options for state governments with respect to local governance (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). The first option has been to adopt a technical administrative approach, which involved top down transformation through the changing of rules and regulations with or without corresponding legislation. The second option has been a social political approach, involving building institutional structures from below through the direct and active participation of the people at the grassroots. These issues of functioning of local governing bodies are illustrated with empirical material.

### School Management Committees: Community and School Data

Data on the responses from SMC members of 79 schools (9 schools did not have SMCs) reveal the extent to which SMCs are involved in school functioning and whether they are providing any support to schools. This has also revealed their perceived roles and responsibilities in the educational development of their villages. In addition to this, interviews were also conducted with head teachers to gather information and opinions about the participation of SMCs in schools.

### Participation of SMC members in meetings

According to head teachers, SMC meetings were regular in many schools in 2007-08 (Table 1). Head teachers of 44 schools reported that the meetings were conducted frequently i.e. more than 8 times in 2008. There was a difference between the opinions of SMC members and head teachers with respect to the frequency of SMC meetings as well as the

issues discussed in these meetings. According to the SMC members meetings were less frequent than head teachers claimed, and discussions often focussed on the utilisation of funds and the school development grant which is given to each school. Head teachers reported that in some schools discussion focused on quality and school activities as well as school infrastructure (Table 1).

**Table 1: Head Teacher's Report of contribution and support of SMCs**

	Rajnandgaon	Rewa	Dindori
<b>Frequency of meeting in last year</b>			
1-5 times	14 (16)	4 (5)	
6-8 times	3 (3)	3 (3)	
more than 8 times	9 (10)	12 (14)	23 (26)
<b>Issues discussed in SMC meetings</b>			
Expenditure related Issues	5 (6)		
Quality and school activities	13 (15)	4 (5)	1 (1)
Infrastructure related Issues	3 (3)	2 (2)	
Others	7 (8)	13 (15)	22 (25)
<b>Type of contribution</b>			
Financial Contribution	4 (5)		
Others	12 (14)	5 (6)	
No Contribution	10 (11)		23 (26)

Note: Total no. of Head Teachers/In charge is 88. Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

Other contributions include providing cooperation and suggestions, physical support, help with mid day meals and admission.

There were variations in the opinions of SMC members as well as school heads located in different schools in three different areas. For example, in Dindori, 35% out of 23 SMCs reported that they discussed the utilisation of funds without specifying the item on which the fund was utilised compared to 10% and 15% respectively in Rewa and Rajnandgaon. Only four schools in Rajnandgaon SMC could provide details of the financial contribution to the schools. No other SMCs in other schools in entire study area could provide details of any financial support to the schools indicating that they were unaware of these.

The head teachers also reported the kind of contribution provided by the SMCs. In Rewa, head teachers in only five schools could report the contribution of SMCs. In Dindori, most of these SMCs reportedly did not have any contribution (Table 1). SMC members in only one school in Dindori discussed various issues regarding development of schools. In the majority of schools a wide range of issues related to children's

<sup>1</sup> *Panchayati Raj* is the three tier system of democratic decentralisation in India which provides a platform for local self governance.

education were discussed. It is clear that the degree of participation of SMCs varies considerably from school to school and across the clusters and that this is likely to have an impact on school functioning.

**Opinions regarding school functioning:** SMCs were not satisfied with the functioning of some schools where the learning level of children is very low. This is most common in Rajnandgaon and Rewa clusters. In Rajnandgaon, only 37% of SMCs reported that they are satisfied with the functioning of the school. In Rewa where around 59% of the SMCs reported satisfaction with the functioning of the school, the performance of the students was very low. However, the majority of SMCs (83%) in the poorest and most remote cluster of Dindori expressed their satisfaction regarding school functioning despite it being the poorest performing cluster on the CREATE competency tests.

**Table 2: Responses of SMCs regarding enrolment, drop out and never enrolment**

Cluster	Response of SMCs			Actual No. and % of Children		
	All children enrolled	Some children not enrolled	Total SMCs	Drop out	Never Enrolled	Total
Rajnandgaon	21 (78)	3 (11)	27	106 (7)	50 (3)	3,054
Rewa	29 (100)	0	29	82 (7)	78 (7)	2,248
Dindori	6 (26)	5 (22)	23	103 (17)	153 (27)	1,129

Note: Figures in the bracket Indicates percentage

These misjudgements by SMCs may be because they are not aware of the situation in their schools and/or because they are not allowed to participate in monitoring of schooling activities. They appear often to be unaware of the poor performance of children and the type of facilities and teaching that should be offered. SMCs need a greater awareness of relevant standards and possible interventions when educational provision is of a poor standard.

**SMC members gave various reasons for a lack of satisfaction with schools:**

- lack of classrooms;
- teachers and teaching aids;
- teachers' ineffectiveness; and
- lack of teacher's interest in children's studies

**Opinions about never enrolment and dropout:** Most of the SMC members were not aware of the

prevalence of dropout and never enrolment in their villages. For example, according to the household data of 2008, in Rajnandgaon cluster there were 106 drop out children and 50 students who had never enrolled in school. However, out of 27 SMCs, 21 responded that all the children in their village were in the school and only three schools reported that some children were not enrolled. In Rewa, the situation was worse and SMCs in all 29 schools responded that all children were enrolled in school. In contrast, the household data shows that the cluster had 82 students who had dropped out and 78 children who had never been enrolled (See Table 2).

There is a mismatch between the perception of SMC members and the actual situation with respect to access and participation. Only 6 SMCs in Dindori responded that all the children are enrolled in the school. In other schools SMCs seem to be aware about the high levels of never enrolment and dropout in the cluster.

**Reasons that SMCs gave for non enrolment and drop out of students included:**

- truancy,
- repetition,
- absence of middle/high schools within the close vicinity, and
- demands for care for siblings.

Table 3 shows some opinions expressed by SMC members on absenteeism, school performance, support and utilisation of funds.

**Table 3: Awareness Level and Opinions of SMCs regarding various school related issues**

Items	Rajnandgaon	Rewa	Dindori
aware about teacher absenteeism	25 (92)	28 (97)	22 (96)
aware about students' absenteeism	20 (74)	28 (97)	23 (100)
satisfied with school functioning	10 (37)	17 (59)	19 (83)
providing support to parents	22 (81)	27 (93)	18 (78)
aware about alternative means of education for never enrolled children	9 (33)	10 (34)	10 (43)
aware about fund utilisation	3 (11)	11 (38)	2 (9)

Note: Figures in the bracket Indicates percentage

**Provision of support to parents by SMC members:** Most SMCs (56%) in Rajnandgaon were unaware of alternative options to educate those

children who were out of school. Other SMCs were in favour of conducting bridge courses, and conducting literacy campaigns with teachers to make parents and community members more aware, and encourage them to send their children to school. In Dindori a large proportion of SMCs do not have any knowledge about any alternative ways of providing basic education.

**Opinions about teachers' absenteeism:** Out of 27 schools in Rajnandgaon, SMCs of 14 schools claimed that there is no teacher absenteeism; in 7 schools SMCs reported that either they discussed or checked teachers' presence in the school. In Rewa, in 17 out of 29 schools', SMC members said that there was no teacher absenteeism in their schools and in 11 more the school's SMCs reported that no action could be taken to prevent teachers' absenteeism. In Dindori, SMC members in 11 schools reported that they do not have problems of teacher absenteeism. Absenteeism was mentioned as a problem in SMC meetings in 8 schools. Other data from schools indicated that both student and teacher absenteeism were serious problems with between 20% and 40% of teaching time being lost across all the clusters.

**Policy Implications:**

- SMCs should focus on tracking each child's progress and continuously monitor critical indicators. Records of attendance and achievement must be generated through systematic record keeping and made available to SMCs for school level planning and monitoring. SMCs should ensure the maintenance of these records and should also maintain detail financial records of income and expenditure.
- Meetings of SMCs must be conducted on a regular basis and should include discussion about participation of children and their access and retention in education as well as discussing funding and expenditure.
- SMCs need resources to build capacity and awareness among members to help them assess needs and requirements for effective learning. Guidelines and checklists are needed for SMCs and should be generated at different levels (national/state/district) to give SMCs a framework. Most SMCs across the three clusters are not aware of levels of access, participation and attainment of children in their area.
- There is a need for coordination of child related programmes making schools the nodal agency where the SMC acts as the apex planning and implementing body to oversee children's wellbeing and rights to education. The school development

plans must be shared in *gram sabha* (village council meetings) organised from time to time.

- The active participation of parents and community members from disadvantaged groups in developing an inclusive education system addressing issues of 'meaningful access' is important. SMCs should contribute to a system of social audit at local level.
- More people should be involved in the proper functioning of schools through media campaigns including hoardings, poster campaign, and print and electronic media discussions.
- Financial support should be provided by the government for the smooth functioning of the SMCs and implementation of school development plans as envisaged by the recent Right to Education Act.

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