School Management Committees: A Move Towards Open Government in Education in India

Sunita Chugh

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Cover drawing: NIEPA

Aknowledgements

Foreword

Open government emerged about a decade ago and has been gaining momentum over the past few years, likely as a result of recent advances in information technology. It is based on the assumption that the rapid development of new technologies combined with the pressure for more transparent and accountable governments will push countries to explore innovative approaches not only to share information with the public, but also to consult citizens and engage them in education service delivery. Moreover, by helping to redefine citizen-government boundaries, it is believed that open government can help improve transparency and accountability in the management of public sectors (including the education sector), and beyond that, the overall public administration culture.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines open government as the transparency of government actions, the accessibility of government services and information, and the responsiveness of government to new ideas, demands and needs. The Open Government Partnership identifies three major principles underlying this concept, namely: information transparency, public engagement, and accountability. The European Commission emphasises the principles of transparency, collaboration and participation, open data, open services, and open decisions. Finally, the World Bank defines open government using the principles of transparency, citizen engagement and participation, and responsiveness.

A cursory review suggests that there is a dearth of literature on open government in the education sector and a lack of systematic identification of practical experiences within this framework. Moreover, there is no uniformity among definitions of 'open government' in the education sector and an absence of clarity regarding the various domains of open government observed in the educational field. There is also a growing need to evaluate the impact of the increasing number of open government initiatives developed within the education sector around the world and to analyse and draw lessons from the challenges and barriers associated with their implementation in order to achieve their full potential.

The challenge for educational planners is huge – to pay due attention to open government concerns at each step at the policy and planning cycle. Each step allows for varying degrees of citizen input and participation: during the first stage citizens can help identify the problem and discuss possible policy options; then, during policy implementation, they can monitor whether the policy is being implemented as planned, detect weaknesses and shortcomings, and contribute to the identification of solutions. However, citizens can also contribute actively to the evaluation of education policies and programmes through social audits, thereby complementing other more formal systems of 'checks and balances to hold governments to account for their education commitments' (UIS, 2018).

In this context, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has decided to launch a new research project entitled 'Open government in education: Learning from experience' as part of its 2018-21 Medium-Term Strategy. Open government is understood here as the opening up of government data, processes, decisions, and control mechanisms to public involvement and scrutiny, with a view to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education. It calls for renewed government-citizen interaction and relies on the principles of transparency, citizen engagement, and participation, as well as government responsiveness. IIEP's project aims at promoting more responsive, effective, and innovative educational planning with a focus on citizen involvement. Its specific aims are as follows:

- to foster an understanding of what is meant by open government in the education sector;
- to explore perceptions of open government approaches in education among all major stakeholders;

- to establish a list of criteria that maximise the successful implementation of open government initiatives in education;

- to evaluate the impact of open government initiatives specifically as they relate to the aims set out in SDG 4; and

- to provide recommendations to education decision makers and planners on how to make informed decisions about the design and implementation of open government policies in education.

This research contends that all three principles of open government – transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement – are pivotal to achieving SDG 4. Through open school data, the public can verify that their governments spend money in a fair manner, which maximises opportunities for marginalised populations to access education. Open procurement can deepen the level of transparency and accountability in education contract management, thereby ensuring that procured items (e.g. school equipment, textbooks) actually reach their beneficiaries. Moreover, open policy and planning promote the involvement of minorities in the formulation of policy, which helps to make policies and curricula more diverse and inclusive. Lastly, social audits, like community monitoring, can be an effective means for verifying that school resources are being used correctly.

In 2018, IIEP undertook exploratory work to better formulate what is meant by open government in the education sector, and to document and assess early, innovative initiatives developed in that field. On this basis, the Institute launched in 2019 a global survey to review existing initiatives. It also launched seven case studies illustrating the diversity of open government initiatives in education. Each case prioritises one of the following aspects of open government: open policy, open budgeting, open contracting, social audits, and crowdsourcing. The cases combine the following data collection methods: gathering of contextual information using secondary data related to the programmes/initiatives under review; a qualitative inquiry with semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions; participatory observation; and a large-scale quantitative enquiry involving the distribution of 250 questionnaires to school stakeholders using a multi-level stratified sampling method.

This study describes how the school-community interface has strengthened in the form of school-based management structures in India. More specifically, it examines the functioning of school management committees (SMCs), which have crystallized as an outcome of about 50 years of government initiatives towards educational decentralisation. It is part of a series of works commissioned by IIEP under its open government in education research, and as part of its global capacity-building programme on Ethics and Corruption in Education.

IIEP wishes to thank the author, Sunita Chugh, for her valuable contribution.

Muriel Poisson

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Glossary

BEP	Bihar Education Project
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CI	Co-curricular Index
CP	community participation
CRC	cluster resource centre
CWSN	children with special needs
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EFA	Education for All
LEADS	Life Education and Development Support
MEO	Mandal Education Officer
MIS	management information system
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MMS	Mandal Mahila Samakhya
MTA	mother-teacher association
NAS	National Achievement Survey
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPSSE	National Programme on School Standards and Evaluation
PPI	Pass Percentage Index
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institutions
PTA	parent-teacher association
RTE	Right to Education Act
SARAL	Systematic Administrative Reforms for Achieving and Learning
SATS	Student Achievement Tracking System
SBM	school-based management
SC	scheduled caste
SCRP	School Complex Resource Person
SD	socially disadvantaged
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDMC	school development management committee/school development and monitoring committee
SMDC	school management and development committee
SDP	school development plan
SMC	school management committees

SSEF	School Standards and Evaluation Framework
ST	scheduled tribe
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TLM	teaching-learning material
U-DISE	Unified District Information System for Education
U-DISE+	Unified District Information System on Education Plus
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UT	Union Territory
VEC	village education committee
WAMGs	women's associations and monitoring groups
WS	weaker section

Executive summary

This country report on open education was prepared against the backdrop of a long and chequered history of community participation in school affairs. In India, open education (i.e. open government in education) has become more relevant within the framework of decentralised educational governance where the school-community interface in the form of school-based management structures has been strengthened. Here, the role of school-based management needs to be seen in the context of the community providing a more robust and meaningful contribution to the schooling process. This study focuses on the effectiveness of school management committees (SMCs, a form of community participation) in initiating transparency, ushering in citizen engagement and building accountability in education as an exemplar of open government in India. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015) for Education, the recently released National Education Policy 2020 also articulates equitable and inclusive education for all as the overarching vision for the education system. The open education initiatives have the potential for long-term impact on not only equitable and inclusive outcomes for students but also significant socio-economic changes that can alter the power relations within society.

In line with the objectives of IIEP's project on open government, this study seeks to formulate an understanding of what is meant by open government in education in India and attempts to document practices of open government approaches in schools. At the centre of this document lies the conceptualisation and functioning of school-based management structures, which have crystallised as an outcome of about 50 years of government initiatives towards educational decentralisation. The establishment of these structures -- as school management committees -- was made constitutionally viable with the formulation and implementation of the 2009 Right to Education Act. The Act, an extension of the fundamental Right to Life guaranteed under article 21 of India's Constitution, ensures that all children of 6-14 years of age have access to and can complete free and compulsory elementary education. Other provisions of the Act make all stakeholders accountable for ensuring this mandate, including schools, teachers, parents, community, members of the school management committee, and the larger public. Given this background, our study presents a layered account of community participation in education through the functioning of SMCs as an effective means to realise the concept of open education within a rights-based framework.

This document critically reviews open education in India through two major lenses:

1. School-related information aggregated at state and national level. This database in the form of UDISE+, NAS and NPSSE with helpful indicators can be used by school heads, teachers and SMC members to collaborate on evidence-based decision making for school improvement. The data are available in the public domain. These can be used as an effective tool for social audits by school management committees in their role as accountable stakeholders.

2. Some 50 studies, both all-India, as well as micro research, on the functioning of school management committees.

The review has been organized around three critical parameters of open education: transparency, citizen engagement and accountability. Broadly speaking, our studies point to initial steps being undertaken for the constitution of SMCs, awareness of roles and responsibilities of members, limited participation in school activities and a few instances of SMC capacity building. Many studies that point to successful practices in the functioning of SMCs have also been documented in this report. In addition, a separate section towards the end highlights those schools where SMCs are meaningfully contributing to the preparation of development plans and improving the quality of education. Firsthand information was gathered in three case studies that capture

the contribution of SMCs and the community in the schooling process along with the voice of SMC members being heard constructively.

The document applauds the numerous initiatives being taken to extend open education in India with respect to school management committees within a rights-based framework. However, more sustained and meaningful involvement of school-based management structures in school improvement will be needed to achieve the optimum level of operation as stipulated in education policy and programmes of the Indian education system. It is hoped that as open education matures in India, its impact will progress through the following stages:

1. Short-term impact – visible through better SMC constitution and selection procedures, more involvement of SMC members in decision making processes and committee meetings, with growing awareness of the roles and responsibilities that school improvement requires.

2. Medium-term impact – SMCs gradually expand their role to become academic supervisors alongside school officials and are fully involved in the learning progress of children. This impact would be manifest in improved service delivery by school principals, teachers and education/school system officials at district/block/cluster level.

3. Long-term impact – would be observable in societal change, where disadvantaged sections of the population and women represented by SMCs have noticeably enhanced their knowledge, skills and capabilities. The community will feel empowered and become accountable to the school and the school will become accountable to the community.

Introduction

The context

The idea of open government finds resonance with democracy, of which India is a living example. Being the largest democracy in the world, India has embraced diversity and inclusion as cornerstones for creating an equitable society through development. The field of education, a major component of this development effort, occupies a place in the 'Concurrent List' of the Constitution of India, and pertains to both central and state governments. Policies are formulated both at the central and state level, but it is the states that are considered as the primary implementers in accordance with their local context. In a country of 36 states/union territories (UT), educational governance structures are largely similar everywhere. The governance of school education at the state/UT level is fairly elaborate, with its administrative units at district, block and cluster level, hierarchically placed in this order and with one being nested inside the other. The school is placed within a cluster, which is the lowest unit of educational structure in all states.

In India, at present, there are about 1.5 million schools at elementary level (catering to age group 6-14) and about 0.5 million schools at secondary level (catering to age group 15-17). Added to this, the number of elementary schools in the government sector represents about 73%, private aided 4.7%, and private 19% (UDISE, 2016-2017) of total provision,[1] which implies that a large proportion of parents send their children to government schools at the elementary stage. To make schools responsive and accountable to both parents and the community, several measures have been taken by the State, making it mandatory for school heads to engage with parents and the community at large. Hence, the role of the community in the functioning of schools at elementary level in India is substantial and can be considered as an important stakeholder for open government, a critical feature of any thriving democracy. Needless to say, government elementary schools cater to a diverse set of students, cutting across different religious, social, cultural and economic categories, positioning diversity as a pan-Indian phenomenon. Thus, the community base is not only large but also diverse at elementary level. In contrast, government schools at secondary and higher secondary level represent a far smaller percentage of total provision in this sector, with around 41.7% government, 16.1% private aided and 40.3% private (UDISE, 2016-17).

At this scale, open education in India is itself a major challenge, having to administer and manage complexities emerging from a vast network of schools and communities. Despite the constant new challenges, central and state governments working in tandem have ensured the robustness of the democratic fabric, and succeeded in placing the goals of educational equity and quality at the forefront in all national and state education policies.

The community has always played a significant role in school education in India, right from ancient times when education was the prerogative of the community up to modern times, when more structured systems of supervision and accountability came into existence. In India today, responsibility for school management in the public sphere lies primarily with the community, establishing a direct link between community and school with an emphasis today on open government. Open government provides a space where citizens, as individuals and

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[1]- In India the State funded sector consists of government, local body and private aided schools. Government and local body schools are owned and financed by the government directly in case of government schools, and indirectly through grants to local bodies. The private aided schools are owned and managed by private individuals or trusts, and financed up to 100 percent by the government under grants in-aid policies following official instructions. The private schools sustain mainly on fees paid by students and other alternate sources of income.

groups, can collaboratively seek, exchange or review ideas and information with regard to government policies, schemes and their operations. The three critical parameters of open government --transparency, accountability and citizen engagement -- can be positioned and studied within the framework of community participation in the Indian education system (Poisson, 2019). Thus, for this case study, the role of the community or community participation becomes the running theme underlying the exploration of open government in India and how it functions.

This study is one in a series of studies commissioned by IIEP on open government initiatives in different countries. It seeks to assess the effectiveness of school management committees (a form of community participation) in bringing transparency and accountability into schools as an example of open government in India. It begins with a discussion on the significance of the community as a major stakeholder in education, followed by a brief note on the notion of community and the nature of community participation in India. There follows an explanation of how community participation in school education has evolved over the years, along with changes in national level policies on decentralisation and the formulation of the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2009.[2] Open government initiatives through community participation are detailed in Section 1. The three ensuing sections on school management committees assess the functioning of SMCs in light of the principles embedded in the open government framework and are based on an extensive review of the literature. These three sections revolve around the principles of transparency, citizen engagement and accountability as a means to comprehend school decision-making processes and school improvement. This is followed by a section documenting good practices in the functioning of school management committees, which highlights innovations in open education. And finally, the last section provides recommendations for the future.

Conceptual framework

Community involvement in improving educational processes rests on the idea of making educational structures accountable to the people who are at the heart of democracy. In this dynamic between a public institution (the school) and the people, government play a supportive role in ensuring the provision of resources, whereas the people create accountability mechanisms for the institution (Poisson, 2019; Mc Cowan, 2011; and Arvind, 2009). In this way, the government fosters the actual realisation of citizen rights that allow democracy to function at grassroot level, often through collective action. Poisson (2019) describes open government as 'the opening up within the education sector of government data, processes, decision and control mechanisms to public involvement and scrutiny with a view to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education'. Open education (i.e. open government in the field of education) is an innovative approach to educational planning and citizen involvement resting on the principles of transparency, accountability and citizen engagement (Poisson, 2019). It favours participatory policy processes, which are an effective method for restructuring a decentralised and people-centred governance structure.

In line with the objectives of the project on open government, this study seeks to formulate what is meant by open government in the education sector in India while exploring perceptions of open government approaches in education among all stakeholders. For a better understanding of the concept of open government in the context of education, UNESCO (2020) lists five major tools – i.e. school report cards, school portals, school committees, social audits, and community monitoring – which can effectively bring transparency, accountability and citizen engagement into the life of public institutions. Open education thus finds resonance in community-based structures and mechanisms adopted for school improvement in India, where school-based management tools, such as social audits and community supervision, have attempted to limit risks of corruption and

2- The Right to Education Act (2009) obligates the appropriate government authority to ensure compulsory admission,

of misuse of finances in governance structures (Poisson, 2021b), as highlighted in various national policies and the 2009 Right to Education Act.

In the context of India, open education can be conceptualised within the democratic space of rights-based education. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) states that children have the right to be heard and express their opinion. The school and the community, independently, become the site for a child's expression and thought processes. As school alone cannot ensure a child's holistic development, especially for young children, parents and other family members play a vital role in helping children express their views and to protect their children's rights. Moreover, a child coming to school is not a 'clean slate', because children already belong to a family or a community and come equipped with the knowledge, language, experiences and culture of their background. Therefore, parents need to be considered as an equal partner for the holistic development of the child. Children's rights in India were further reinforced with passage of the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2009, which made it mandatory for all children 6-14 years of age to access and complete free and compulsory education. The RTE Act made all stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents, community, members of the school management committee and the larger public, accountable for ensuring this mandate. With the implementation of this Act, school management committees (SMCs) became constitutionally mandated structures in all elementary schools across the country, bound by uniform rules. The RTE Act also conferred rights on individuals of the community to effectively participate in educational processes, through school-based management structures. *Box 1* quotes the Right to Education Act 2009 on the role of the community and school management committees.

> **Box 1. School management committees and the role of the community in RTE Act 2009 (Relevant Sections)**
>
> Section 21:
>
> A school other than a school specified in sub-clause (iv) of the clause (n) of section 2, shall constitute a school management committee consisting of the elected representatives of the local authority, parents or guardians of children admitted in such school and teachers;
>
> Provided that three fourths of the members of such committee shall be parents or guardians;
>
> Provided further that proportionate representation shall be given to parents or guardians of children belonging to disadvantaged groups or weaker sections.
>
> Provided that fifty percent of Members of such committee shall be women.
>
> The school management committee shall perform the following functions, namely:
>
> – monitor the working of the school;
> – prepare and recommend School Development Plans;
> – monitor the use of the grants received from the appropriate government or local authority or any other source; and
>
> Section 22:
>
> – every school management committee constituted under sub-section (1) of section 21 shall prepare a School Development Plan, in such manner as may be prescribed;
>
> – the School Development Plan as prepared under sub-section (1) shall be the basis for plans and grants to be made by the appropriate government or local authority, as the case may be; and
>
> Section 24:
>
> – hold regular meetings with parents and guardians and apprise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn, progress made in learning and any other relevant information about the child.
>
> Section 35:
>
> The local authority may issue the guidelines and give such directions as it deems fit, to the school management committee regarding implementation of the provision of this Act.

As discussed in the literature on rights-based education, the concept of rights has a wider connotation (Tomasevski, 2001) which entails the right to education (related to access), rights in education (protection of and respect for learners) and rights through education (development of capacities for exercising human rights). Within this broad spectrum, it is understood that children and adults alike not only have access to educational experiences but also 'have their full set of human rights upheld within the institution and develop those capacities necessary for exercising and defending those rights throughout their life'. This is also well articulated by the capabilities approach.

In the context of such converging concepts as democracy and open education, the 'constructive' value of democracy resides in the fact that it 'gives citizens an opportunity to learn from one another, and helps society to form its values and priorities' (Sen, 1999: 10). Sen proposes that rights should be 'conceived as a set of fundamental moral and political values that are constructed and reconstructed through argument and debate in the public sphere' (ibid.). This approach ensures that rights frameworks in their broadest sense are sensitive and responsive to local contexts and provide for the diversity of ideas, opinions and values among different groups and individuals. Adopting a capabilities approach also reinforces the moral commitment for providing quality education, in which the community and the state are co-partners (Tikly and Barrett, 2011). This means that the

community is not merely an observer of school processes, but also exercises its rights by being meaningfully engaged in school improvement (Mc Cowan, 2011). The framework of this study thus presents a layered account of community participation in education through the functioning of SMCs that help apply and realise the concept of open education within the rights-based framework (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Open Education

Right to Education

Community

School Management
Committee,
School and the Child
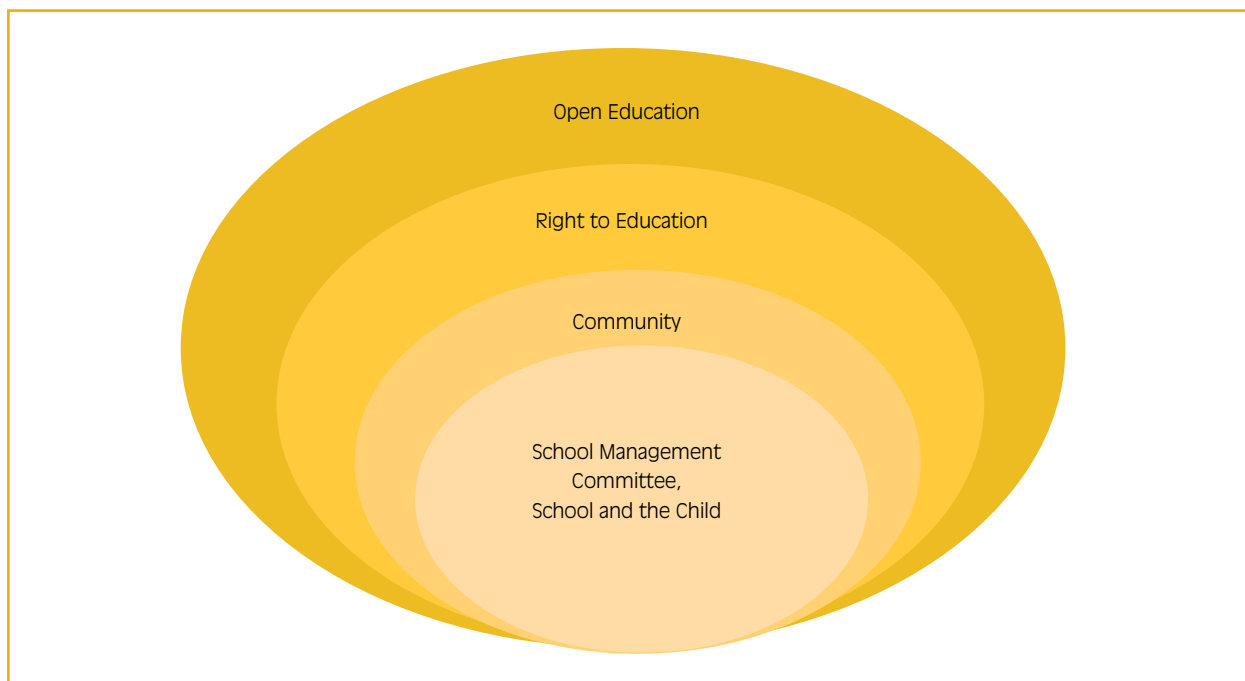
Source: Author

Methodology

This study charts the evolution of open education in India in the context of community involvement in schooling processes. It offers a detailed review of studies on the development of open government in light of the changing trajectory of national policies on education in India. It touches on the themes of open education, community participation, decentralisation, national- and state-level databases and school-based management structures, through the lens of the three principles of open education, i.e. transparency, accountability and citizen engagement. Several government initiatives for assessing the reach and relevance of the education database to local communities have been implemented. These include the Unified District Information System on Education plus UDISE, the National Programme on School Standards and Evaluation (NPSSE), and the National Achievement Survey (NAS). Together, these initiatives are expected to introduce to the general public the idea of accountability throughout the education system of the country.

The major part of this study, however, rests on an extensive literature review of school management committees (SMCs) and school development management committees (SDMCs) between 2009 and 2019. Since being constitutionally mandated in 2009 by the Right to Education Act, these committees, which involve local community members, have been established in each government and government-assisted school in the country,

although their functioning varies across schools. Some 50 studies of schools and their stakeholders (head teachers, teachers, students, parents, community members, representatives of local governance institutions, government officials, and members of the school management committees) in different parts of India were examined, in order to understand the extent to which transparency, accountability and citizen engagement have been realised. Finally, this study presents some examples of good practices among school management committees.

It is organized into six sections:

Section 1 sets forth the context of community involvement in education, and charts the historical evolution of community participation in schooling processes in India through decades of changes in national policies on education.

Section 2 reviews various databases of school related information, aggregated at national level, that can be used for building transparency and conducting social audits.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 compare the functioning of school-based management structures across India in the context of open education. The studies focusing on the cross-cutting themes of transparency, citizen engagement and accountability are mentioned in more than one section.

Section 6 documents good practices in school-based management and presents conclusions drawn from the study.

1. Community participation in education: the trajectory towards open education

Policy makers and educators have not only recognised but also advocated the significant role of communities in the administration, management and monitoring of educational institutions. In the development agenda of the global world, community participation in education has long been visualised as the 'creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to and influence in the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development' (United Nations, 1981, p.5 as cited in Midgley, 1986, p.4). This emphasis was already evident during the much celebrated 'Education for All' (EFA) movement initiated at Jomtien in 1990. Education for All received a further impetus with the formulation of the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, which pledged to achieve quality basic education for all by 2015. To achieve the EFA goal of providing children with quality education in a conducive learning environment, the Dakar framework for Action placed the role and engagement of parents, community members, health workers and local government officials at centre stage. It also emphasised the participation of civil society because of its pivotal role in identifying barriers to achieving EFA goals, developing policies and strategies for removing these barriers and, in the process, developing an accountable yet flexible education management system.

The subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (2015) on education stressed the role of communities in ensuring quality education for all. To achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 of ensuring inclusive, equitable and good-quality education and lifelong learning for all, the Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-18 highlighted the importance of accountability in education systems. It showed how governments and other education actors could collaborate and be responsible for making the education system more accountable on legal, political, social and moral grounds. Adding to this, Poisson (2021b) has demonstrated how communities can use social audits to help schools function in a more efficient and accountable manner, which is another path to achieving SDG 4.

The international community also agrees that the community is a significant lever for transforming education systems: 'those schools closest to the community are in a better position to make responsive and relevant decisions about how teachers, principals and schools should operate to best serve the needs of local children' (Chapman, Barcikowski, Sowah, Gymera and Woode, 2002, p. 2). Thus in many countries, communities have been positioned as a means to achieve various educational objectives, such as improving access and coverage, identifying problems reflecting local priorities, developing a relevant curriculum and learning materials, improving ownership, local accountability and responsiveness, reaching disadvantaged groups, mobilising additional resources, and building institutional capacity (UNICEF, 1992; Talbot and Verrinder, 2005, cited in Aref, 2010; Putnam, 2000). The literature identifies both macro-level (structural and organizational) and micro-level (pedagogy and learning outcomes) benefits of community participation in education (Binda, 1999; Campbell and Vainio-Matila, 2003; Harris, 1998). The family, the school and the community with children at the centre, form the three 'overlapping spheres of influence' that serve the core purpose of supporting and facilitating children's development (Epstein, 2002; Epstein and Salinas, 2004)..

To achieve this objective, a shift in perspective is necessary, wherein the school, the community and the family work collaboratively to support learning and children's development, while at the same time strengthening school processes. Strong school-community relationships can enhance problem solving and give rise to innovations that improve chances for student success (Chrzanowski et al., 2010), while also upholding local culture, traditions, indigenous knowledge and pride among children in their community's heritage (Lacy et al., 2002 cited in Aref, 2010). Constant purposeful communication with parents also has an impact on learning outcomes of children (Khalifa, 2012; Leithwood and Louis, 2002; Masumoto and Brown-Welty, 2009). Hence, by improving

the quality of school education and enhancing children's learning outcomes, the community has become a notion broad and significant enough to be accepted in both the literature and policies at ground level.

1.1 Genesis of community and its participation in education in India

Historically, India has a long tradition of philanthropic and community initiatives supporting education. In pre-colonial times, facilities for mass education were available broadly in *madrasas* (educational institutions for Islamic teachings) and *pathshalas* (educational institutions for Hindu teachings) – among other traditional institutions. These were maintained locally, often by the landlord, with parents supporting the teacher(s) by contributing local produce for food, such as grains and vegetables, or clothing. The size of these institutions varied based on the availability of funding and resources. With the onset of colonial rule and its evolving policy of supporting education through the medium of English from Grade 6 onwards, a number of English-language convent schools and colleges opened up in many parts of the country. Yet, this new education system remained accessible only for a select few, an elite educated class which could support the British government in its administration. During the British period, Christian missionaries also expanded education. During the colonial period, the linkages between school and community weakened, and the community was not able to play a significant role in the management of education.

In the post-independence period, it was primarily the State that provided schools and managed education in the country. Schools gradually became alienated from the communities they served, with the best quality education reserved for more privileged socio-economic groups. Until the turn of the 21st century, elementary education remained mostly public and funded by the government. In parallel, however, private schools, including low-fee private schools, began to emerge. Despite the strides being made towards massification of elementary education with a focus on inclusion, the variations between public and private management of schools created even greater exclusion within the existing divide, based on gender and socio-economic status (Ramachandran, 2012; Govinda 2007). This led to growing dissatisfaction with the centralised structures and top-down approaches of educational governance, resulting in a paradigmatic shift in the national educational discourse. The 1986 National Policy on Education advocated for an education system that was more responsive and accountable to the community, with a view to improving access, equity and the provision of quality education. These changes were in consonance with the general principle of participatory democracy, evident in parallel reforms in cross-sectoral governance structures in India. The 1986 National Policy on Education led to the setting up of an institutional framework for community participation at district and sub-district levels in the form of district boards of education and village education committees (VECs). In due course, community participation in education was operationalised through various community institutions located inside the school, such as parent-teacher associations, mother-teacher associations, and school management committees.

Box 2. Types of formal and informal school-based management structures

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)

This is a school management structure involving parents as the main stakeholder. PTAs are responsible for monitoring the daily activities of the school along with helping in its management. Members include the school principal, teachers and parents of the children who are studying in the school. Selection of the Chairman, Secretary, teachers and parent representatives in a PTA is done through elections. Meetings are held at least once a month. Usually, the class teacher maintains a Suggestion/Complaint Register for the parents of every class. The principal and vice-principal review the Register regularly and take appropriate action on the suggestions and complaints.

School Management Committee (SMC)

The SMC is a formal school-based management structure required in every school since the 2009 Right to Education (RTE) Act. The members of a SMC include the parents or guardians of the children in the school, representatives of local authorities and teachers. The members are elected: as stipulated in the RTE Act, three fourths (75%) of its members should be from the community of parents/guardians, and half should be women. There is also a provision for the inclusion of representatives from weaker sections (certain castes and tribes) of the (population. The remaining one fourth (25%) of SMC membership comprises equal numbers of local authorities, teachers and students.

School Management and Development Committee (SMDC)

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, Universalization of Secondary Education), launched by the Indian government in 2009, stipulates that School Management and Development Committees should be constituted for secondary and higher secondary schools. Their specific composition may be decided by the states/UTs. SMDCs also include representatives of local authorities, academic staff, experts in particular fields, officials, representatives of disadvantaged groups, women and parents / guardians of students.

SMDCs are assisted by two committees, the School Building Committee and the Academic Committee. The Ministry of Education has recommended that in the case of composite schools (i. e. schools having primary, upper primary and secondary sections) only one SMC may be constituted. The SMC may also perform the functions of the SMDC as provided for in the RMSA guidelines in addition to its statutory functions mentioned in Sections 21 and 22 of the RTE Act. The suggested composition of SMDCs is not binding. The states/UTs are allowed sufficient flexibility to nominate members according to their local and regional requirements, precedence and practices. The School Management and Development Committee is expected to work closely with the Parents Teachers Association to optimise the functioning of the school.

Mother-Teacher Association (MTA)

This is an informal structure constituted for school management and development through the involvement of mothers of children studying in the school.

Women's Associations and Monitoring Groups (WAMG)

These are community-based groups that work to improve education through the involvement of mothers and other women in school matters.

With the onset of a people-centred developmental discourse, there has been a purposeful restructuring of the traditional community to encourage greater participation in the social sector (predominantly health and education), which has given rise to a new notion of 'community'. For administrative purposes, and in the context of local governance, a community came to be understood as a geographically defined area or persons living therein. This is different from a sociological conception of community, where the community exists across a defined geographical area, uniting around common cultural beliefs, norms, customs or even habitus, closer to being 'interest bonded' (Kantha and Narain, 2003). Traditionally, an Indian community also sustains a diverse and heterogeneous character operating around the axis of caste-class-religion,[3] which adds an additional level of complexity to the processes of community participation (Niranjanaradhya, 2014).

> **Box 3. A note about terms and designations specific to India**
>
> There are broadly four social class or caste categories in India. The general caste applies to those who enjoy high social status; the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe populations are historically the most disadvantaged groups and belong to the bottom of the caste and socio-economic hierarchy. 'Backward classes' is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify a group of people that are educationally or socially disadvantaged. However, for the purpose of reaching a broad international audience with this UNESCO-IIEP series of case studies, some of these terms have been replaced, as appropriate, by such descriptors as: disadvantaged, underprivileged, poorer socio-economic, marginalised, vulnerable. And, finally, a word about Indian numbering: 'lakh' means 100,000.

In the Indian educational context, three categories of community membership are found to be prominent – the parents, the larger community and the elected representatives. The roles played by parents and the larger community in education are manifold: parents can support children in education at home; community members can contribute through involvement in school development, solving problems, monitoring teacher attendance and the use of school grants, and also raising awareness for educational change (Noronha, 2003). Elected representatives are an integral part of community structures in education as they also provide financial and resource support to schools. Furthermore, in many villages and towns, local non-governmental organizations are also found to be active in the education sector. Though all members of these organizations may not belong to the local community, their contribution to the school system can nonetheless be considered as a part of the community.

Considering the historical and contemporary significance of community involvement in schools, Indian national- and state-level policies have used the community as a means to further strengthen participatory and deliberative governance in which the State and the people are positioned as equal partners (Arvind, 2008). The mutual involvement of the State and people in education becomes most empowering when community involvement operates in its true sense, meaning that the disadvantaged are also deeply engaged with decision-making processes leading to equitable outcomes and meaningful experiences for children (Poisson, 2019).

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[3]-See *Box 3* above for more information on this.

1.2 Open government initiatives in India: towards decentralisation

In India, communities with socio-cultural and economic diversities also exhibit geographical variations. This multilayered socio-economic fabric affects children's education in myriad ways. For instance, issues faced by children attending schools in the central Indian plains are different from those in the hilly areas of the extreme North. In conflict prone areas, children endure constant constraints because schools may be in lockdown for days at a time. Moreover, in almost all parts of the country, issues stemming from linguistic diversity, migration and natural calamities are evident. In such a varying context, uniform government strategies and schemes often fall short of addressing educational needs of the community and its children.

Given this background, the efforts of the national government in post-colonial India were largely aimed at attaining consolidation and uniformity across the country. The Forty Second Amendment (1976) of the Constitution of India brought about a significant shift in education policy discourse. Education was included as a subject in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India.[4] This amendment made the central and provincial/ state government equal partners in framing and implementing education policies. Simultaneously, international developments in e education were also having an effect on policy discourse in India. In 1990, the Jomtien conference on Education for All (EFA) set a significant agenda for achieving universal primary education while stressing that the 'recognition of the vital role of both families and teachers is particularly important' (Article II).

Consequent to these national and international developments, a large number of projects focusing on improving access, infrastructure and quality in education were initiated in the provinces/states. The meaningful engagement of communities in the schooling process was a common and important feature. Some of these notable projects were the Bihar Education Project (1991), the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (1993), Lok Jumbish, the 1992 Peoples Movement for EFA, and Shiksha Karmi (1987) in Rajasthan. These projects highlighted the significance of community participation in improving the enrolment, retention and participation of children in school. The school-community structures typically took the form of village education committees (VECs), core teams, and Mahila Samooh (women groups). In addition, communities identified local volunteers to provide educational support to children. These projects further paved the way for a more broad-based community participation in education.

Community participation in education thus became a major topic of discussion in India throughout the 1980s, and decentralisation was being recognised as an important component of administrative and educational reforms because it '…promises to enhance efficiency and democratic voice within government by creating linkages between government officers and the communities they represent' (Bogaert, Goutali, Saraf and White, 2012). In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act of the Constitution of India created a three-tier administrative structure popularly known as the *Panchayati Raj* institutions for local self-government in rural areas and Ward committees in urban settings. The Central Advisory Board of Education[5] (CABE) set up a Committee on Decentralised Management in 1993, which proposed the creation of village education committees, and was given responsibility for monitoring the attendance of children and teachers, and for supervising the overall functioning of the school (Oxfam India, 2014). The village education committees, consisting of the school head, teachers and community members, can be considered as precursors of the more formal school-based management structures that exist today in schools.

In 1994, almost simultaneously with the setting up of *Panchayati Raj* institutions, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), which made districts the unit for initiating decentralised educational planning, was launched. Its main purpose was to revitalise the movement to achieve the universalisation of primary education. DPEP was launched initially in 42 educationally disadvantaged districts of the country; it targeted specific areas

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4-The implications of making education a concurrent subject is that the centre can implement direct policy decisions in the state (province).
5-The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) is the highest body to advise the central and state governments in the field of education.

and strived to reduce educational disparities among social groups. Gradually the programme was extended to other districts. The programme stressed the active role of the community in district-level planning by involving teachers, parents and village education committees. The goals of community mobilisation under DPEP were twofold: on the long term to create community-owned schools, in which the responsibility of both the school and schooling rested with the local community; on the short term, to include community participation in the planning and management of schools, the construction of school buildings and their maintenance, and the monitoring and evaluation of schooling processes. An evaluation of this programme in the Kandhamal and Boudh districts of Odisha revealed that even though the programme was successful, some measures failed to have a positive impact (Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority, 2007). This was largely due to nonfunctional committees, and the absence of close interaction between teachers and the community even though DPEP had firmly established districts as the unit for educational planning and paved the way for other similar initiatives.

The next decade marked a significant goal post internationally. As successor to the Jomtien Conference, the World Education Forum was convened in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 specifically to review EFA progress during the intervening decade and to set goals for the future. These were to 'ensure access and completion of free and compulsory primary education of good quality by all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities by 2015'. To achieve these goals, the international conference emphasised developing responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management. Consequent to the Dakar Conference, a nationwide programme known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiya[6] (SSA) was launched in India in 2001. It aimed at making elementary education universal across all geographical locations and social groups. This nationwide mission proposed local-level planning to ensure the access and participation of all children, accomplished through the development of local action plans in consultation with local community members. The mission also emphasised the active participation of the community in school planning and management. In addition, various other micro-level structures at school level, such as the school management committee (SMC), mother-teacher association (MTA), parent-teacher association (PTA) and women's associations and monitoring groups (WAMG) were created. It was soon realised that the actual 'action site' was the school, which had to function in close collaboration with the community to improve its processes.

1.3 Right to Education Act (2009) and school management committees: open education in India

Improving quality and enhancing student learning levels are a priority for education systems in developed and developing nations alike. This has required the transfer of decision-making authority from state and district offices to individual schools. New theories and research show that in a decentralised environment, those who are empowered for decision making have more control over their work and remain accountable for their decisions (Murphy, 1991). This strand of thought has given further impetus to the idea of school-based management in alignment with the rationale of educational governance. Explaining the concept of school-based management, Malen et al. (1990) states that 'school-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, as a form of decentralisation that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvement might be stimulated and sustained.' Broadly there are four models that typify the various arrangements included in school-based management reforms (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009):

6- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All movement) launched in 2001 was an Indian government programme aimed at the universalisation of elementary education within a set time frame. Now it has been merged with Samagra Shiksha, an overarching programme for school education extending from preschool to class twelve. It subsumes the three schemes of SSA, RMSA and teacher education.

- Administrative control, in which decision-making authority is devolved to the school principal;
- Professional control, in which teachers have main decision-making authority and use their knowledge of the school and its students;
- Community control, in which parents have major decision-making authority; and
- Balanced control, in which decision-making authority is shared by parents and teachers.

In the Indian context, school-based management has been conceptualised in the spirit of 'balanced control' where decision-making authority is shared by parents and teachers (including the school principal). School-based management in India was formally established in the Right to Education Act 2009. This Act came into law almost two decades after the process of decentralisation of education had already been initiated in India. The RTE Act provided legal force to free and compulsory education of children of 6-14 years of age. It is Section 21 of the RTE Act 2009 that mandated the establishment of school-based management structures in all the schools of the country, thus formally creating school management committees (SMCs). The Act specified the role of the community in school processes, including: improving access and coverage of schools, identifying and taking into account local priorities, developing a relevant curriculum and learning materials, creating an ownership ethos, reaching disadvantaged groups, mobilising additional resources and building institutional capacity (Pailwar and Mahajan, 2005). These school management committees are located inside the school, with members elected from the school and the local community. *Figure 2* shows the relative position of these committees in India's education system.

Figure 2. School management committee in the education system in India
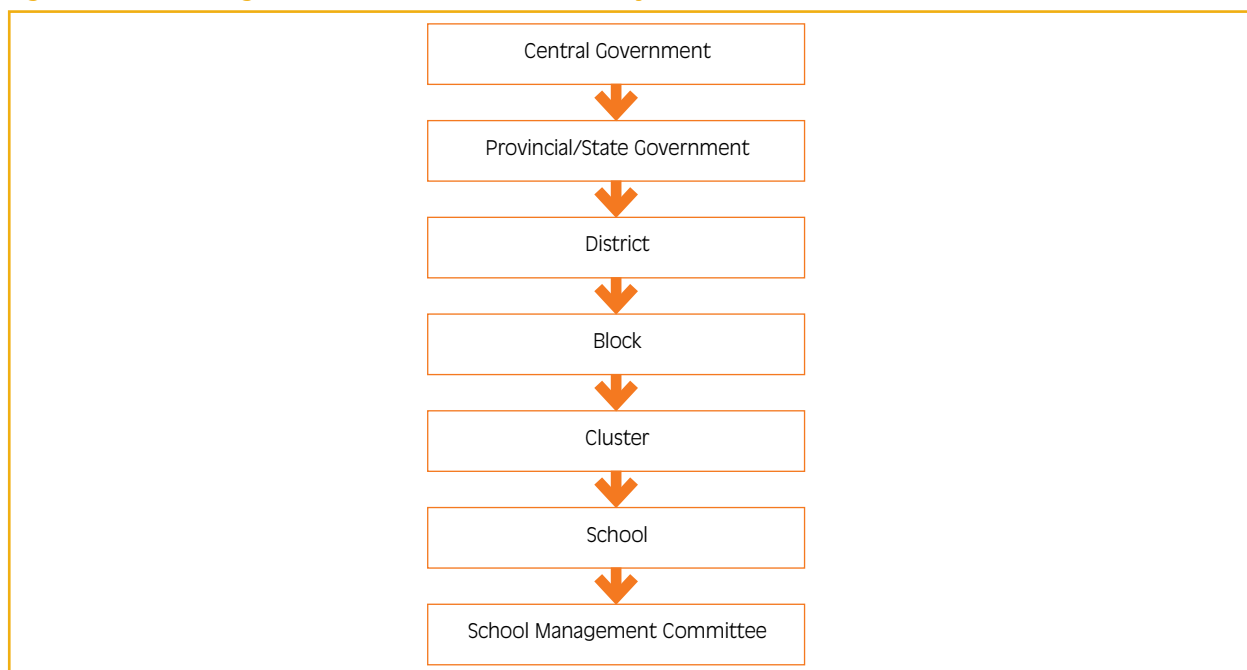
Source: Author

The RTE Act makes school management committees mandatory in all government, government-aided and special category elementary schools in the country. It states that three fourth (75%) of its members should be from the community of parents/guardians, and that half of the committee's members should be women. There is also a provision to include representatives from disadvantaged populations in the SMC, with participation depending on their proportion of the village/ward population. The remaining one fourth (25%) of SMC mem-

bership is distributed in equal parts among local authorities, teachers and students. The Act also specifies the functions of SMCs in the planning and management of elementary education (see *Box 1*).

The members of the SMC are elected from the representatives of local authority -- parents, guardians and teachers. Schools send a circular to the parents via students or just inform them that if they are interested in nominating themselves as an SMC member, they can come to the school and provide their details. The election is decided by majority count. Voting happens every two years and for a total of 12 to 15 SMC members in most cases. In terms of representation of women and disadvantaged groups, norms are followed. This process may vary from state to state as there are 36 states/UTs in India, however the norms for the constitution of SMCs must be strictly adhered to as they are specified in the Right to Education Act 2009 (details given in *Box1*).

In 2010, an amendment to the RTE Act 2009 specified additional functions to be performed by SMC (see *Box 4*).

Box 4. Additional functions of a school management committee according to the RTE Act 2010 (Amendment)

- Create awareness in simple and creative ways among the population of the community on the rights and entitlements of the child as described in the Act, and the duties of the appropriate national government authority, local authorities, schools, parents and guardians.

- Ensure the enrolment and attendance of all children, especially from the disadvantaged and vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the population.

- Ensure that the disadvantaged and vulnerable populations are not discriminated against.

- Facilitate non-enrolled children's access to and participation in special training.

- Monitor the identification and enrolment of children with special needs.

- Ensure that the benefits conferred on children by the RTE Act reach them in a timely manner.

- Prohibit private tuition by teachers of the school.

- Monitor that teachers are not over-burdened with non-academic duties.

Overall, SMCs are operating within the decentralised framework at the level of de-concentration but are not yet at that of devolution.[7] Devolution would mean handing over financial powers and authority to the community. If this happens, it would usher in school-based reforms completely in tune with the local needs of people and their specific requirements, with the community having complete ownership of schools.

In India, there are around 1.5 million elementary schools and 0.5 million secondary schools in the government and government aided sector. Each state government has modified the constitution of SMCs to respect the broad framework of the RTE 2009 Act. However, there are variations in the number of SMC members, the election procedures and their actual functioning and performance in the schools. Sporadic micro level studies shave been conducted across the states, but the functioning of all school management committees across the country have not been documented and disseminated. It is hoped that the national e-learning DIKSHA portal,[8] will make more data and case studies available.

7- Devolution is the final stage of decentralisation, where financial – and not just administrative – powers are handed over to the local institution.

8- DIKSHA serves as the National Digital Infrastructure for Teachers (*https://diksha.gov.in/*)

1.4 The road ahead

In 2015, six years after the enactment of the RTE Act 2009, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 17 objectives that all 193 UN Member States agreed to achieve by the year 2030. These goals call for sub-national and local governments to act as catalysts of change, addressing issues related to poverty, education, gender equality and sustainable infrastructure. SDG 4 aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. In accordance with this goal, the Government of India initiated a Comprehensive and Integrated Scheme (*Samagara Shiksha*) in 2018-19, extending from pre-school to Grade 12, with the broader aim of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes. The programme views the 'school' as a continuum from pre-school, through primary, upper primary and secondary to senior secondary level. This convergence of international and national level policy discourses in education has had a significant impact on the functioning of school management committees, which are now tasked with helping to make inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stages a reality.

2 Using data to build a transparent open education system in India

This section details the national and state level initiatives with regard to school databases. Aggregated at national level and open to the public, these cover school information, school evaluations, and student assessment for all government and government aided schools in the country. All the information made available at national, provincial/state, district, block or cluster level is generated at the school, which becomes the repository of data collected through a bottom-up approach. In an open education framework, school-related data can be used as a powerful tool for social audits as well as for ensuring transparency and accountability of the education system, and for encouraging citizen engagement. Even though aggregated at the national level for the purposes of national and state level planning and management, the primary use of this data lies in the hands of the school, where different realities on the ground can be addressed. The data at school level can be shared on multiple community interface platforms, such as school management committees and parent-teacher associations, or during meetings with mother-teacher associations.

2.1 The Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) and UDISE+

The Indian education system is one of the largest in the world. This system has generated an immense database on schools that is used to monitor progress towards sustainable development goals and the implementation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. Maintaining reliable, accurate and up-to-date statistics is crucial to the task. India is one of the few countries that have been collecting economic and social statistics since the middle of the 19th century, and several sets of time series data are available on a large number of indicators. With the passage of time, data requirements for the preparation of educational plans have increased. To overcome the problems of inordinate delay, inaccuracy and unreliability of data, the District Primary Education Project (DPEP, 1994) established an Educational Management Information System at district, state and national level. The task of developing a school-based statistical system was initiated by NUEPA (renamed NIEPA in 2017) in 1995, and thus the District Information System for Education (DISE) came into being. Initially its scope was limited to primary level; however, gradually it increased coverage to the elementary level, and then was extended to secondary and senior secondary schools. The integrated database came to be known as the Unified District Information on School Education (UDISE), which collects data on all schools in the country.

Recently, efforts were made to upgrade UDISE to UDISE+ (UDISE Plus), which has the following new features:

1. A dashboard for data analytics and data visualisation, which includes time series data to study trends over years and monitor growth. Progress in key performance indicators can be tracked.

2. The system is linked to GIS mapping and it can generate school report cards.

3. A separate module for third party verification, which includes a mobile application.

Under UDISE+, data are collected from school as a unit; data on enrolment are aggregated by gender, grade, social and religious category. Additional data cover school infrastructure, teaching staff, and other related items. Data aggregation at cluster, block, district and state level is seamless and in real-time.

At present UDISE+ collates data from over 1.5 million elementary and 0.5 million secondary schools across the country on a variety of variables: location, type of school (e.g. by shift, level, management); receipt and expenditure of school development funds and incentives; infrastructure (e.g. building, classrooms and their condition,

principal's office, kitchen, library, laboratories); facilities (water, toilets, access ramp, enrolment (by class, gender, caste, religion, age), teachers (by age, educational and professional qualifications, gender, caste.), examination results (by gender, caste), incentives (by class, gender, caste), and children with special needs. In addition to the core variables, the states can add supplementary variables to meet their specific needs. A few states have also developed their own state level education information system, such as 'Samagra Shiksha Portal' by Madhya Pradesh, 'SARAL' by Maharashtra, UDISE-Punjab by Punjab, or SATS (Student Achievement Tracking System) for Karnataka.

UDISE/UDISE+ data are detailed and comprehensive, covering all aspects of school functioning, including a robust student database on enrolment, retention and achievement. Their purpose is two-fold: one, to be used as the basis for educational planning at school, cluster, block, district, state and national level; and, two, to be shared on school-community interface platforms, such as in meetings of school-based management structures in order to assess the current situation of the school and subsequently plan for its future development. With UDISE/UDISE+, each school can put forth information needed for community members to take stock and contribute accordingly, for example by helping to construct boundary walls, volunteering educated youth from the community to assist teachers, organizing awareness drives for enrolment, or contributing teaching-learning materials.

Box 5. Education information system for students in the state of Madhya Pradesh

On the Madhya Pradesh Shiksha Portal, each family is allocated a unique identification (ID) code and each family member is identified through this family ID. It is used to monitor, plan and transfer benefits under various welfare schemes. The job of enrolling families under the Samagra services programme was entrusted to the Department of Rural Development of the Madhya Pradesh state government. Only families are given unique Samagra IDs, not individuals. Children get their IDs through their families. The Samagra ID was made compulsory for enrolling children and for transferring them from one school to another. A separate Samagra register is maintained with other details on children, such as their grade level and school, their gender, social and religious category, whether they get promoted or not, and whether are transferred and admitted into another school Data are collected and digitised through the Samagra Shiksha Portal, which has also been designed to identify children eligible for benefits under different schemes and to transfer the benefits (mostly in cash) to them. Children need not to apply for these benefits individually as they are allocated automatically..

2.2 National Achievement Survey (NAS)

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has been conducting the National Achievement Survey (NAS) since 2001. It has successfully conducted four cycles in Classes 3, 5 and 8 and will soon complete the 2nd cycle for Class 10. The NAS 2017 conducted for Classes 3, 5 and 8 was based on learning outcomes developed by NCERT. The major objective of conducting the National Achievement Survey is to have a system-wide indication of the education system's effectiveness. Using districts as the unit of reporting, the NAS 2017 helps the education system develop differential education plans and need-based teacher support programmes up to the district level to support children's learning. The Survey's testing instruments are competency based and linked to learning outcomes designed by NCERT. An accurate assessment of learning outcomes at different stages of education can provide important insights as to whether the inputs made into the elementary education system has helped in improving the educational health of the nation. NCERT conducted the NAS in November 2017, collecting data from approximately 120,000 schools, 270,000 teachers, and 2.2 mil-

lion students through tests and questionnaires administered in 701 districts of the country. The data collected and analysed were summarised in the form of auto-generated district reports providing an objective overview of the current situation in each district. This information was shared with districts in the states so that they can prepare district-specific intervention programmes in collaboration with NCERT.

The schools included in the NAS 2017 as sample schools have data for student achievement which can be discussed in SMC meetings for planning and improvement of student learning and achievement.

2.3 National Programme on School Standards and Evaluation (NPSSE)

The NPSSE is an initiative by India's National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), under the aegis of Ministry of Education, that aims at evaluating each school as an institution, and at creating a culture of self-improvement for more accountability. At NIEPA, the 'School Standards and Evaluation (Shaala Siddhi)' unit develops the NPSSE programme under the guidance of the National Technical Group (NTG[9]) in close collaboration with states. The NPSSE views the evaluation of schools as the means, and school improvement as the goal. School evaluation refers to the assessment of each individual school's performance in a holistic and continuous manner, and aims to create a collaborative culture with the active participation of all stakeholders for making professional assessments and decisions. The programme envisions reaching all schools in the country by creating a sustainable and institutionalised nation-wide system of school evaluation. It hopes to develop a technically sound conceptual framework, methodology, instrument and process of school evaluation that will suit the diversity of Indian schools. The School Standards and Evaluation Framework (SSEF) comprises seven 'key domains' for evaluating school performance: -Enabling Resources Teaching-Learning and Assessment, Learners' Progress and Attainment, Managing Teacher Performance, School Leadership and Management, Inclusion, Health and Safety, and Productive Community Participation.

Each domain has a set of 'core standards' that address the most significant elements of the respective domains. There is a 'response matrix' at the end of each key Domain to record assessments. In this framework, each school is measured- according to both self-evaluation and external evaluation.

Self-evaluation is considered as the heart of the school evaluation process. It is intended to provide school personnel with a common understanding of the school's overall performance and identify priority areas for improvement. It is a continuous and cyclical process, embedded in day-to-day school activities and represents a collaborative effort involving all its stakeholders, including the SMC/SDMC. External evaluation follows as a complementary exercise to self-evaluation so as to ensure that the two approaches work in synergy and respect the strengths and insights that each brings to the overall evaluation.

In order to get a sense of how the NPSSE functions, it might be helpful to take a closer look at the core domain 'Productive Community Participation', which the NPSSE framework defines as members of the school management committee, teachers, learners, parents/guardians, local residents, associated cultural organizations and NGOs all working together. The school needs the support of the community for achieving its objectives and providing quality education to its learners. The active engagement of the school with the community ensures optimal utilisation of school resources, holistic development of learners and better management of the school. The school thus needs to establish a meaningful relationship with the community for mutual benefit. In every school there is now a SMC/SDMC to participate in school management in the areas of planning, implementation, resource mobilisation and monitoring. These school management committees also play a major role in improving enrolment, retention, teaching-learning and learning outcomes. The five core standards with respect to this domain are as follows:

9-The National Technical Group (NTG) comprises members from diverse institutions across the country to provide guidance and support.

- Organization and management of SMC/SDMC;

- Role in school improvement;

- School-community linkages;

- Community as learning resource; and

- Empowering the community.

Each of these core standards has three levels of descriptors by which to measure the progress of community involvement in school processes. The descriptors are provided in Appendix 1. As of 2020, a total of 415,897 schools had completed self-evaluation, and 39,643 schools were in the process of completing self-evaluation. External evaluation of 173 schools had been completed, while it was still in progress for 18 schools.

• Summing up…

The UDISE+, NAS and NPSSE provide a robust diagnostic database for information on school infrastructure, teachers' qualification, students' enrolment and learning outcomes, which are all useful indicators for school heads and teachers to assess the status of their schools. These databases also help school functionaries evaluate areas of strength and improvement that should be taken into account for school development, with a focus on improving student learning. Moreover, the databases are useful for sharing school- and student-related information with SMCs in a more transparent manner. It is expected that as the capacity of school management committees is enhanced, they will be better equipped to dialogue with school functionaries and collaborate on evidence-based decision making for school improvement. School data accessible in the public domain can provide school management committee members with the tools they need to perform social audits and become fully accountable stakeholders..

3 ● Transparency in the functioning of school management committees

Within the framework of open education, transparency can be understood as the access by citizens of timely and reliable information on decisions and performance in the public sector (Armstrong, 2005; Linders and Wilson, 2011 as cited in Moura and Papadimitriou, 2016). Only when stakeholders have access to information and become involved in decision making, as well as in the performance of educational institutions, can they be considered as meaningful contributors to open education and to a well-functioning democracy. The understanding of the term transparency is closely associated with making educational institutions more accountable to their stakeholders, not only in terms of resources but also financial management. Without access to this information there can be no transparency. However, merely providing data online is not sufficient: efforts must be made to actively make information on data, processes and policy accessible to all citizens (Poisson, 2019). Transparency also emphasises the importance of an unambiguous description of the roles and responsibilities of members of school-based management structures. These measures, together, can be seen as essential for dealing with the mistrust associated with public institutions, as well as a precondition for public accountability (Bovens, 2017).

3.1 Constitution of school management committees

The Right to Education Act 2009 formally mandated the establishment of a school management committee (SMC) for each school. Despite varying membership numbers across states, it is generally agreed that in a school with fewer than 750 students, the total number of SMC members can be 16 in addition to the convener and joint convener of the committee. In a school with more than 750 students, a total of 20 members is the norm, apart from the convener and joint convener. For the execution of administrative affairs, a chairman or vice-chairman is to be elected from the parent-representatives. The school principal or teacher in charge is usually the ex-officio member convener of the committee. The convener has the right to invite three experts at a time to offer advice regarding such matters as the protection of children, health, nutrition, psychology and administrative work being undertaken by the committee. The SMC must meet every month or at least every two months. Parents/guardians are to be elected in the general meeting of parents/guardians. Every resolution must be passed by a proper quorum (without proxies) of one-third of the total membership in attendance.

Studies have confirmed that most schools did indeed establish SMCs. Bandyopadhyay and Dey (2011) found that SMCs were constituted in around 90% of schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and in all elementary schools of Jharsuguda District (Meher and Patel, 2018). A large-scale study covering 1,204 SDMC members in 16 districts of the state of Rajasthan (Ajmer, Alwar, Baran, Chittorgarh, Churu, Dausa, Dungarpur, Ganganagar, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Karoli, Kota, Sikar, Sirohi and Udaipur), confirmed that prescribed processes for selecting school-based management committees were followed (Mahajan et al. 2008). SMCs in the five states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh were also composed as required by the RTE Act 2009, with 75% of SMC members being parents or guardians. SMCs in all states included women, Muslims, and members belonging to educationally underprivileged communities. In Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, students were also represented in SMCs, and in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha local people skilled in art and other cultural activities could become SMC members. Bihar also reserved SMC seats for the biggest school donor from the local community.

In most of the states, the composition of SMCs is in compliance with RTE Act 2009. In Odisha, the SMCs were largely compliant except in terms of having separate SMCs for primary and upper primary schools. They also did not have seats allocated to ward/Panchayat members or local educators. The prescribed procedure for electing SMC members was not followed in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and half of the schools visited in Andhra Pradesh. In Odisha, all village education committee (VEC) members were converted into SMC members, keeping in mind the required composition. Although head teachers in all the schools in these states were well aware of the SMC election process, many of the schools did not follow it. Jharkhand was the only state among the five states where SMCs respected the mandated election process. Consultation with SMC members in Andhra Pradesh revealed that village elders, who were also politically influential, were present during the SMC constitution process, and their opinions were taken into consideration (Jha et al., 2014).

A study covering 110 SMCs from 60 elementary schools showed that more than 50% of SMC members reported that committee members were elected on the basis of their educational background, and around 37% reported that SMC members were elected on the basis of their economic status (Singh and Sood, 2016). In a few instances, it was also found that some of the schools did not respect the prescribed structural composition of SMCs. This was true for the Municipal Corporation schools of Delhi where, despite the mandated 50/50 split, Sethi and Muddgal (2017) found that75% of SMC members were male and only 25% were female.

3.2 Are SMC members aware of their roles and responsibilities?

An all-India study conducted by the Central Square Foundation (2014) collected empirical evidence on the effective functioning of SMCs and their successes, challenges and opportunities. The overall challenges faced by SMCs included unawareness of stakeholders – principals, teachers and especially parents – regarding school-related information and their role and responsibilities towards the school. A study by the National Coalition for Education (2013) in Bihar, Gujarat, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, on the functioning of SMCs, collected quantitative and qualitative data from 100 schools. In-depth interviews with head teachers and SMC members revealed that around 80% of teachers had learned about SMCs through government notices, and the other 20% were informed through capacity building programmes and newspapers. On the other hand, around 75% of SMC members learned about school-based management structures through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in their area, while others received this information from the school and various training programmes for SMC members. As far as awareness of their roles and responsibilities was concerned, 40% of responses of SMC members highlighted preparation of the school development plan and improvement of the quality of education as the predominant role and responsibility of the SMC. Other roles highlighted by members were: increasing school enrolment, school monitoring, management of school funds and enhanced community participation in school governance. A study by Kumar (2012), conducted in the Kullu district of the state of Himachal Pradesh, focused on the roles and functions and the level of awareness among SMC members. Even though SMC members were reported to be democratically selected, most of them were not aware of the purpose and procedures adopted in the selection of committee members. Members were also not aware that they were members of the school's executive committee, nor of the position they held in the SMC.

Another study, conducted by the Centre for Child and the Law (2004) in the state of Karnataka, examined the emergence of school-based management structures in the form of school development and monitoring committees (SDMCs). Karnataka was one of the pioneers in establishing robust school-based management structures. It developed SDMC policy as a collaborative effort between the state government and the Centre for Child and the Law along with the active participation of teachers' unions and civil society. In Karnataka, SDMCs were constituted by state executive order in all primary, upper primary and secondary schools. A total of 469 SDMCs

across eight districts in four divisions of Karnataka were selected for the study. Eight blocks and three clusters from each block were selected randomly. All the schools of the sampled 24 clusters were included in the study. The key objectives of SDMCs were stated as achieving universal elementary education, the replacement of earlier village education committees (dominated by officials and a non-parent elite group), ensuring effective functioning of government schools and effective participation of the community, motivating teachers for quality education, promoting decentralised and transparent decision making, resolving issues related to enrolment, attendance and quality of education, and mobilising resources for school development. The study revealed that even though SDMCs were functioning well in terms of the roles prescribed, there were issues such as class and caste identities that needed to be overcome to ensure the participation of all SDMC members. It also revealed stark ground-level realities, such as schools being unclear about the norms governing the composition of SD-MCs. Even the head teacher who had the responsibility of constituting the SDMC was not completely aware of this responsibility. The members were aware about the activities of the school, but issues related to finance were less well known.

Box 6. School development and monitoring committees (SDMCs) in Karnataka

School development and monitoring committees (SDMCs) are a school-based management structure established at state level to involve the community in school education. They were established by different state governments in different years before the formal constitution of SMCs for school management was mandated by the central government through the RTE Act in 2009. The government of Karnataka, on the recommendation of the Education Task Force (2000), replaced the then existing village education committees and school betterment committees with school development and monitoring committees, consisting of nine elected parent representatives. Of these nine, three were to be women, two should represent underprivileged population groups, and one should belong to a minority community. In addition to the nine representatives, the committee should comprise the head teacher, a health worker, *anganawadi* (childcare) worker, representatives from community-based organizations, NGOs, and elected representatives from gram (village) *panchayat*,* *taluk* (block) *panchayat*, and *zilla* (district) panchayat, as well as local donors.

* A gram panchayat (GP) is the lowest administrative unit within a district. A GP typically includes two to three revenue (officially recognised) villages, and the local government is formed at the GP level. A block is an administrative unit between a district and a GP.

Another study, conducted in nine districts of Madhya Pradesh by Shrivastava (2018), examined the functioning of SMCs and the awareness that SMC members and their president have of RTE rules. The study covered 81 government primary schools (9 schools from 9 districts) and 405 SMC members. A majority (315 out of 405) of SMC members were aware of their roles and responsibilities with regard to financial regulations, while 22% had no idea about their role in the utilisation of school funds and related activities. Around 80% of SMC presidents were aware of the relationship between SMCs and the RTE Act. A majority of members identified the following roles of SMC: monitoring teaching and learning (85%), collaboration on issues related to school development (79%), involvement in issues related to problems faced by children (50%), and assistance in school operations (56%). Almost all SMC members participated in one meeting a month, but very few (8%) participated twice a month. Less than half of them were aware of the School Development Plan and participated in its preparation, probably because they lacked clear understanding of challenges faced by SMC members also included lack of clarity on policy documents and the low literacy level of committee presidents and members, which created further ambiguity in understanding their role and responsibilities. Sethi and Muddgal (2017) found that very few SMC members were aware of the RTE Act and SMC functions. Only 15% of SMC members were aware of the academic progress of children in school. It was reported that school development plans were not prepared in any of the schools covered in the study.

A study conducted in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh by Bandyopadhyay and Dey (2011) assessed the effectiveness of SMCs functioning. Data were collected from 88 schools in 3 clusters though interviews with SMC members and head teachers, revealing that SMC members were not aware of the status of the school in terms of the number of children enrolled, dropped out or never enrolled. The reason for this unawareness, as reported, was that no remuneration was offered to participate in the management of the school. They were also unaware of the financial support to schools as very few schools (only 4 out of 79) were able to provide details on the financial support they received. A comparative study between two locations, one in Medak in the state of Telangana and the other in Morigaon in the state of Assam by Sharma (2014) found that teachers and parents in Morigoan had better understanding of community participation as compared to teachers and parents in Medak. In both locations, most SMC members monitored teacher attendance and midday meals.

The role of SMCs in strengthening school-community relations was studied by Kumar and Singh (2016) in Bihar. They documented that SMCs were unable to contribute to the management of the school system effectively because of low awareness and low participation. The prescribed process of selection was not followed by the school, and parent SMC members were not elected but simply named as an SMC member. There was low participation by women and members from different social categories in committee meetings. The SMC members were also not aware of their role in the preparation of the school development plan.

A study done by Oxfam India (2015) showed that SMCs did not function according to regulations, and even SMC members were unaware that they were on the committee. Though there were minutes of meetings held, many of these meetings were in fact not held. SMC members were not aware of the processes and decisions taken by the schools, but complied with signatures when asked by the teachers. Rao (2009) reported limited awareness of SDMCs by their members in the tribal area of the East Godavari District in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The study covered 125 members of 26 SDMCs from 26 villages. It found that half of SDMC members were not aware of their membership and expected participation in the school development management committee.

3.3 Frequency of SMC meetings in schools

As a general rule, SMC meetings should be held once a month. However, studies have found that reduced frequency is common. Slightly more than half of SMC members (54%) attended a meeting once every 3 months (Sethi and Muddgal, 2017). The head teachers of 44 schools reported that meetings were conducted about eight times a year, but other SMC members revealed that in fact the meetings were held much less frequently (Bandyopadhyay and Dey, 2011). In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, meetings were held once a month. In Meghalaya, meetings were held every 4-6 months, and in Gujarat once every month in some schools and once every 6 months in other schools. In schools of West Bengal, SMC meetings were held once a year, but SMC members were largely unaware of these meetings (National Coalition for Education, 2017).

3.4 SMCs in rural-urban areas

SMCs in urban and rural areas do not face the same problems. Studies showed that the challenges associated with rural areas included: groupism among members (could be based on caste, class and collaboration of SMC members), lack of awareness among the community, and lack of active involvement of parent members. Problems faced by SMC members in urban areas included: lack of interest of some SMC members, lack of coordina-

tion among parents and teachers, and problems related to infrastructure (Meher and Patel, 2018). An important aspect of quality education highlighted by Dwivedi and Naithani (2015) was the inequitable achievement gaps among students in rural areas of India. The study did not focus on any particular state or district but raised general issues concerning rural areas. Among the challenges faced at community level was that parents were unaware of these issues. They did not have adequate knowledge of their rights and powers under the RTE Act. Because of their lack of knowledge, they were unable to exercise their power to question or monitor the education of their children. Among issues adding to the ineffective outcomes of SMCs were lack of awareness of the importance of education and, in particular, of the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act. Other problems included little knowledge about SMCs, inadequate levels of participation, poor communication with district administrators, and lack of involvement in budget tracking.

3.5 Open budget as a measure of transparency

Within the framework of open education, one of the most important criteria is that of open budgets, which implies that the budget information the public receives from the government is transparent. One of the SMC's major tasks is to monitor budget income and expenditure, such as grants received from government agencies, a local authority, or any other source, or outlays for teaching learning materials, school development and school maintenance. Studies point to different experiences of SMCs in exercising their responsibilities and decision-making autonomy in this regard.

The RTE Act mandates the principal or head and the SMC president to open a joint bank account. In an enquiry about the success, challenges and opportunities in the functioning of SMCs, the Central Square Foundation (2014) found that a majority of schools had opened a joint SMC bank account so that the SMC could access financial information and exercise its authority over school finances and expenditure. The study documented a high participation of SMC members in discussions about the annual budget and opening a joint SMC bank account in nine Districts of Rajasthan, namely Bharatpur, Burdi, Churu, Dausa, Dholpur, Manumangarh, Jaipur, Karauli and Sawai Madhopur.

One of the responsibilities of SMCs is the procurement of goods for the school following the prescribed method of procurement. In this regard, Sahgal (2012) found that in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the method of procurement, the quantity of items to be obtained and their estimated cost, the month in which the procurement process was supposed to be completed was mentioned, but the process of procurement itself was not clear. The study was conducted in the Khairatabad Mandal District in Hyderabad. According to the study, the school principal declared that the SMC had real decision-making power but the extent to which it was involved in the actual procurement process was not known. Likewise, in the tribal area of East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh, members had no knowledge about the school budget and expenditures, nor the items that might incur costs. SMC members reported that teachers did not share any information regarding school funds and did not discuss these issues with them (Rao, 2009).

In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, research by Bandyopadhyay and Dey (2011) found differences in how SMC members and head teachers regarded information on financial matters. SMC members in Rewa (10%), Dindori (35%) and Rajnandgaon (15%) reported there was discussion about school expenditures but without specifying what items were involved. However, SMCs did discuss issues related to children's education and also made other contributions to the schools. A study conducted by Kumar (2018) highlighted that separate funds were not reserved for SMCs in 20 government schools of Delhi. Rather, SMCs used funds under Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS),[10] i.e. the parent-teacher association (PTA), to perform their functions. Head teachers

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[10] Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE).

expressed their dissatisfaction with this joint account holding. The basic purpose of giving financial powers to the SMC was to make both the school and community accountable for the flow of funds and to ensure transparency, which was not appreciated by the head teachers (Centre for Child and the Law, 2004). Studies also reported lack of awareness among SMC members with regard to fund availability and use (Singh and Sood, 2012; Bhattacharya and Gowramma, 2018).

• Summing up…

This section has presented findings about SMC membership, awareness of roles and responsibilities of SMC members, frequency of meetings conducted, and the functioning of open budgets as a critical parameter of transparency. The analysis reveals variations in the level of awareness of the roles and responsibilities of SMC members as mandated in the official circulars and the RTE Act 2009. Low awareness points to sub-optimal functioning of SMCs as effective stakeholders in open education. However, where SMC members were found to be aware, they did contribute to increasing enrolment, monitoring of schools, school development planning and even monitoring of teaching-learning processes. The studies indicate that SMC meetings were held less frequently than mandated. Studies dealing with transparency in financial matters of schools are limited in the Indian context. Despite some schools having joint bank accounts with SMC presidents, it was found that in some cases head teachers were not forthcoming in sharing financial powers with SMC members. The few studies that are available suggest that schools do not readily share information and ensure transparency in the flow and use of funds with SMC members. One reason is the perception of head teachers that SMC members do not possess the necessary competency for monitoring fund flows and use. It is also possible that they are not comfortable in sharing this information, and prefer to use the funds as they see fit. Research suggests that SMCs in India have yet to attain maturity with using a mechanism that ensures transparency.

4 ● Citizen engagement in school management committees

Citizen engagement signifies the interface between 'citizens and government that promotes participation and collaboration in proposing, designing, planning, implementing, evaluating and monitoring a project and plan that is responsive to citizens' needs and demands. It is a two-way channel for cooperation and communication, responsiveness and active participation' (Poisson, 2019). Community involvement in schools can take many forms: collecting and analysing information, defining priorities and setting goals, assessing available resources, deciding on and planning programmes as well as managing them, designing strategies, monitoring progress of programmes and evaluating their results and impacts.

4.1 Monitoring of school activities by SMC members

This section looks at the actual participation of SMC members in monitoring of school activities as an indicator for assessing citizen engagement within the framework of open education. A case study conducted in the Balikhand Primary School situated at Purusottampur Grampanchayat, Simulia block, Balasore district in the state of Odisha, explored the functioning, participation and contribution of SMCs in such areas as quality of teaching, efficiency in using funds, creation of health awareness, provision of sanitation facilities, and development of school infrastructure. SMC members participated in enrolment drives[11] for all children of 6-14 years of age. Enrolment drives are organized by the schools and usually include rallies in the village or locales where students are invited to enrol in school. Focus group discussions with students revealed that continuous follow-up of attendance was conducted by community members and teachers. SMC members kept regular contact with parents. Around 60% of SMC members monitored the absenteeism of students, and all SMC members made efforts to know the cause of their absence by reaching out to them and their parents (Rout, 2014). The study reported that all SMC members attempted to understand reasons for the learning problems faced by students. All SMC members also contributed to the improvement of school infrastructure by investing in building repairs, and to the purchase of teaching and learning materials (TLM) and utensils. All SMC members further reported that challenges and problems were discussed with government officials for immediate action.

Findings concerning community participation in 118 schools of the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh revealed that planning frameworks in public schools were weak compared with the stronger ones in privately-run schools (Prabhakar and Rao, 2011). Despite the established planning frameworks in private schools, neither parents nor the community were involved. By contrast, in the small chunk of public schools where a robust planning framework had been established, parent/community participation was true to the open school spirit. Some SMCs had been used by the government to execute and implement their schemes. However, they did not participate in decision making with regard to attendance and regularity of teachers and children, or the problems encountered by the children in school. They were not concerned with the problems faced by teachers, the day-to-day issues that might arise; they did not liaise with authorities or elected bodies to bring to their attention the difficulties the children or teachers faced such as lack of textbooks, inadequate physical infrastructure and poor quality of education. Thus, the communities were never empowered to play an active part in the management of educational institutions for which they had to make a considerable contribution.

11-Enrolment drive activities include creating awareness of the purpose of the drive, the value of education, and urging parents to get their children/wards admitted to government schools with the help of school principals and teachers (and staff of the district education department in some cases). The drive aims to attract more and more students to government schools.

The inclusion of committee members in school management through planning and development bodies was better in the public school sector than in the private sector. The study recommends that the professional management of schools is possible only when resource allocation and decision making are decentralised to the level of individual schools.

Another study reported that all SMC members were aware of the attendance of students and participated actively in admissions and the organization of mid-day meals (Mohalik, 2018). According to Bhattacharya and Mohalik (2015), 38% of SMC members were involved in monitoring mid-day meal preparation, distribution and hygiene; 32% in enrolment drives, identifying out-of-school children and special needs children; and 34% in generating community awareness about the RTE Act. Around half of SMC members reported on the poor quality of the teaching-learning process and mentioned teacher skills were inadequate to provide quality elementary education. Around 60% of SMC members reported that the annual evaluation of school activities was done by committee members (Singh and Sood, 2016). Mostly it was the Chairperson and a few SMC members who actively participated in meetings. Those members who did attend meetings, would place their signatures on resolutions but were not aware of the discussions and resolutions passed (Grover, 2018).

Das (2015) investigated the functioning of SMCs in a tribal block of Gumma in the district of Gajapati in the state of Odisha, covering 100 SMC members. He found that because of low literacy rates in the community, the participation of SMC members in school management and decision-making was also low. Only 32% of the members attended SMC meetings, while only 13% were aware of the different kinds of funds received by the school. The SMCs were mostly involved in school infrastructure development. There were also reports of lack of interest and irregular attendance on the part of SMC members (Oxfam India, 2015). In some schools, the irregularity of SMC meetings meant that there was less member involvement in the preparation of school development plans (Mohalik, 2018). The lack of interest in school management issues among poor and illiterate parents was identified as the main challenge to SMC participation. Half of the SMC members reported a lack of awareness among committee members as the main constraint in preparing the school development plan (Bhattacharya and Mohalik, 2015). Rout and Sharma (2018) also highlighted poor awareness of parents and community member as a major impediment, along with lack of participation due to household work, lack of funds, lack of trust and cooperation between the school administration and SMC members (Singh and Sood, 2016).

4.2 Participation of committee members in SMC meetings

In all schools studied, SMC meetings were supposed to be conducted once a month, in accordance with the RTE Act requirements (Grover, 2018). But following a closer look, Rao (2009) found that parent signatures were taken by teachers without actually having conducted any formal meetings. Often, teachers sent the minutes of non-existent meetings because they were under pressure from the School Complex Resource Person (SCRP) and the Mandal Education Officer (MEO). A study was conducted on successful school management in three *Navodaya*[12] schools located in the districts of Kolhapur, Gadchiroli and Ernakulam in the states of Maharashtra and Kerala (Kharparde, Srivastava and Meganathan, 2005). Successful schools were selected on the basis of the Pass Percentage Index (PPI) and Co-curricular Index (CI).[13] The study investigated the roles and functions of the principals, teachers and stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of school-related activities. In these schools, parents were involved through the village management

[12] Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) is a system of schools primarily catering to talented rural children.

[13] The Pass Percentage Index (PPI) was computed on the basis of the number of JNV students in grades 10 and 12 passing national examinations during the years 2001, 2002 and 2003; and the Co-curricular Index (CI) was calculated on the basis of information provided by the school about student participation in sports and games, literary and cultural activities, and community-based activities.

committees, parent-teacher councils, and parent-teacher associations. Actual meetings with parents were organized and held every month, as stipulated.

A mega study conducted in four states of India by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (2019) assessed the functioning of SMCs in Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana. The study included a total of 40 schools (12 from Bihar, Telangana and Orissa each, and 4 from Rajasthan) and collected information from parents, teachers, students, head teachers, community members, Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, and government functionaries, as well as from government records and school documents. Results showed the frequency of school meetings was very low and that in Bihar and Rajasthan there were only negligible efforts to improve the situation.

SMC meetings were held once or twice a month, as needed, although teachers in the Medak district reported low attendance (10%) of members. Both teachers and parents admitted that teachers performed all the work, and that SMC parent members only came in order to sign the attendance register. Parents said their low participation was due to scheduling overlap with their work. In some cases, women preferred to send their husbands to the meeting as they felt unheard. Participation also suffered because of cultural, class and gender differences between parents and teachers. Corruption and political pressure were also reported as reasons for low participation. SMC parent members mentioned instances of misappropriation of funds. Many parent members also highlighted political pressure in decision making in SMC meetings (Sharma, 2014).

The National Coalition for Education (2017) highlighted that SMC members did not participate actively in financial matters, observing that all financial decisions were taken by the head teacher. Corruption and malpractice in the use of school funds was common because state officials seldom visited the school, and SMC members were not trained to deal with financial matters. The NCE chairman observed that he signed cheques without having any information on how this money was going to be used. In one of the schools visited, SMC members cited a case where the Adhyaksha (chairman) had given the responsibility of distributing school uniforms to a relative of the school head. Even though school uniforms were supposed to be free, they had requested money from the students. Some community members were politically very active and tried to influence the school administration with their own political agendas. The chairman of the SMC (elected panchayat member) even demanded a 15-20% commission of the total school funds. After that, it was suggested that politically active persons should not be allowed to join the SMC.

The reasons stated for non-participation of members in SMC meetings were: occupational constraints, work at home, health issues, and lack of information. Meeting dates were recorded in a school register, but SMC members were not aware of it. The meeting schedule was not fixed, and most of the time meetings were held on a working day (Sethi and Muddgal, 2017; National Coalition for Education). All SMC members mentioned that community members had been invited to share their experiences and raised questions related to inadequate school infrastructure, including the insufficient number of classrooms and common rooms, and lack of separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls (Rout, 2014). More than 80% of the SMC presidents attended meetings once a month, while more than 50% of the nominated ex-officio members attended meetings regularly (Centre for Child and the Law, 2004). The most important challenge faced by SMC members was the fact that they could not get time off from work or farm labour to attend SMC meetings. Other challenges included inadequate training of SMC members and their poor participation in the preparation of the school development plan (SDP) and its execution. It was suggested that schools should fix meetings at the convenience of SMC members rather than that of the school (Kumar, 2012).

Nayak (2009) explored the actual and expected roles of SMCs in school governance. The study found that their functioning was not at all satisfactory. Some of the reasons identified were: untrained teachers, poor economic background of members, lack of financial aid, lack of coordination among members, inadequacy of classrooms, lack of incentives for SMC members, political interference and reservation of SMC seats in the village community. The male members argued that they were better in governing SMCs than their female counterparts. The

study further underlined that caste, class, gender and political affiliation of members did affect the functioning of SMC in multiple ways. Corruption, cultural barriers such as the caste system and political pressure, all contributed to poor performance. Even after reminders, around 70% of members did not attend the SMC meeting even once. There were a few (16%) members who participated in efforts to enrol children who had dropped out of school, and to monitor the mid-day meal (Rao, 2009). Low parent participation led teachers to mail student report cards to parents. The reasons given for their low participation in meetings were: poor economic status of parents (who could not compromise their daily wages), schools located too far away, and poor Internet connectivity (Kharparde, Srivastava and Meganathan, 2005). In the majority of schools in Bihar, low attendance ranging from 5 to 8 persons in a meeting was recorded. In the schools of Rajasthan, reasons for not attending the meetings included travelling a long distance from home to school, unsuitable timing of meetings due to work (parents often working as labourers), and health issues. In Bihar, Odisha and Telangana, reasons listed for not attending meetings were: low-income constraints, high opportunity cost for attending, and travel costs. Parents also mentioned that as farm labourers they were often out of the village for seasonal work (TISS, 2019).

The Centre for Child and the Law (2004) reported that the unsuitable timing of meetings was a constraint for parents employed as agricultural workers or day labourers. The same study found that the subject of how to improve learning rarely appeared on the SMC agenda. Attendance by the president and SMC members was satisfactory, with 85% attending monthly meetings, while 50% to 70% nominated ex-officio members to attend the meeting. Reasons given for non-participation were: unsuitable timing for parents and lack of information about the meeting. Roles and responsibilities of SMCs in Hoskote, Kushtagi, and Mundari in the state of Karnataka were also examined by Vaijayanti and Mondal (2015), based on the analysis of the minutes of SMC meetings held during the academic year 2014-2015. The study covered Hoskote, Kushtagi, and Mundari blocks across three districts of Bengaluru, Koppal and Gadag respectively. A total number of 119 schools and 432 meetings were analysed. Findings revealed that around 60% of schools in Hoskote and Kushtagi block, and around 36% of schools in Mundari, held SMC meetings with an agenda, but only 19% of the meetings in Hoskote and Kushtagi and 50% of the meetings in Mundari focused on the school development plan. In Rajasthan, the head teacher was not able to present any register of meetings, or any other document related to the SMC. In Bihar, registers were maintained for SMC meetings and agendas related to academic, infrastructure and finance issues were noted. Information on school events and distribution of uniforms and textbook- related information was also recorded in the register. It was noticed that some topics, such as infrastructure and finance were mentioned frequently, whereas others were given less attention (TISS, 2019).

4.3 Participation of women in SMC meetings

In a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the functioning of SMCs of ten government middle schools in Kullu district in the state of Himachal Pradesh, it was found that the SMC participation of different social groups such as scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and other disadvantaged groups was satisfactory. However, despite adequate representation of women, they did not participate actively in SMC meetings. Matters related to the teaching learning process were not discussed at these meetings, and so SMC engagement remained limited to administrative and infrastructure issues while academic issues were ignored (Kumar, 2012). Oxfam India (2015) found that women were under-represented in SMCs. In the state of Punjab, Grover (2018) studied the structure and process of SMC membership, the level of awareness and the participation of the SMC chairperson and SMC members in government primary schools. Data were collected from 120 schools from 6 districts of Punjab including Ajitgarh, Amritsar, Bathinda, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, and Muktsar. The study covered 111 SMC chairpersons, 372 SMC members and

417 teachers. The findings revealed that women, scheduled caste and other underprivileged classes were well represented in the SMC, exactly as mandated in the RTE Act (Grover, 2018).

4.4 Engagement of SMC members in rural and urban areas

Data collected from 80 parents (40 from rural and urban areas each) revealed differences in their attitudes towards the functioning of school management committees. Rural parents had a more favourable attitude than urban parents towards SMCs (Baral et al., 2019). This study was conducted in 20 elementary schools (10 rural and 10 urban) of Sambalpur district, Odisha. A majority of parents and teachers in the study agreed that the Government's policy to make the establishment of school management committees at the elementary level mandatory was a good step. Most of the parents showed a positive attitude towards SMCs, but some were not sure about the roles and responsibilities that SMC members should assume. Life Education and Development Support (LEADS), a non-governmental organization involved in development work in rural areas and urban slums of Jharkhand, had a positive influence on the functioning of SMCs and raising awareness of their members. A school development plan was prepared by SMCs in 15 schools, while a consolidated plan was prepared in 10 schools (Jha et al., 2014).

Arvind (2008) reflects on findings of the impact of the Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education Assessment (PESLE) commissioned by the Aga Khan Foundation, India (AKF-I). PESLE is an initiative to improve enrollment, retention, and achievement of children by reforming government school systems and practices in urban and rural areas across the states of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The PESLE Project achieved some notable results: mobilising the community and developing local perspectives on education; evolving culturally relevant pedagogic practices to improve educational outcomes; influencing the state bureaucracy with informed field realities; and building social ties among all stakeholders. The information collected from rural areas provides evidence that participatory school governance could enhance local empowerment by building the capacity of communities to raise concerns, hold the state accountable, set agendas, build social capital, and develop indigenous solutions to local problems. The findings suggested that to create a wider 'ownership' of the local school it was important to build capacities of the local rural community in terms of knowledge of their rights, roles and responsibilities. Besides strengthening the practice of collective decision making, a more inclusive and representative leadership at the grass-roots level needed to be built to support a culture of accountability and transparency. It was also recommended that people in rural communities should engage directly with the state-level administrative bureaucracy.

• Summing up...

The findings emerging from the review of studies focused on citizen engagement, point towards SMC members being involved in enrolment drives and efforts towards ensuring regular attendance of students. In some instances, SMC members are actively engaged in monitoring student absenteeism and probing into learning problems faced by students. However, active involvement of SMCs in the full range of school activities remained less than optimum. More than a decade has already passed since the RTE Act 2009 mandated school-based management structures, and made space for women and disadvantaged sections of the population to become partners in school development, and in the learning of their children.

SMCs were created specifically to give disadvantaged groups agency to raise their voices concerning their needs and expectations for their children's schooling. However, the success is only partial because SMC meetings were usually conducted less frequently and the representation and participation of women was less than stipulated. Thus, SMCs are functional, but in the majority of cases, members are either not involved in decision-making processes, or their say is not included in the developmental process of the school, often due to the attitudes of school functionaries. Despite this, considering that steps towards open governance are nascent, efforts are being made to involve community members in schooling processes and, in a few instances, SMCs are actively engaged in the planning and implementation of school activities. This implies that when school heads consider that engagement with SMC members is beneficial for the holistic development of the child, SMCs do contribute in a positive way. This message needs to be heard by all the schools, and capacity building of SMCs should be made a priority.

5. Accountability of school management committees

The success of open education depends on three kinds of accountability: 'clearly defined responsibilities; the obligation to provide an account of how responsibilities have been met; and legal, political, social or moral justification for the obligation to give account' (Poisson, 2019).This implies that greater awareness and clarity about the roles and responsibilities of SMC members is needed to ensure that their participation in decision making alongside school functionaries is taken into consideration. Only then can SMC members make a meaningful contribution to the school and improve resource effectiveness even in contexts of limited resources (Murgatroyd and Sahlberg, 2016, cited in Civil Society Organization, 2019). After the success of the universal access to education effort, the focus has shifted from educational input to output, i.e. improving the quality of education. Political and social trends, such as massification, marketisation, decentralisation, standardisation and increased documentation of educational practices, have also contributed to the spread of new forms of accountability. Finally, trust appears to play a crucial role: it is only when stakeholders feel valuable and heard that there is trust and willingness to interact freely with organizations. This trust can materialise through actions such as the sharing of aims and objectives leading to positive impacts (CSO, 2019).

Here, accountability encompasses the notion of execution of roles and responsibilities by SMC members, participation in SMC meetings, contributing to improving schooling processes and preparing school development plans. The most significant aspect of effective community participation rests on capacity building of SMC members that can help them emerge as accountable stakeholders. This section, therefore, also includes studies that recommend training and capacity building of SMC members.

5.1 Execution of roles and responsibilities

Most of SMC members were not aware of the purpose and procedures adopted in the selection of committee members. Often they were not aware that they were members of the executive committee, or the position they held in SMCs. As a result, they failed to understand their role in preparing the school development plan or monitoring school activities (Kumar, 2012). Another study (Kumar, 2018) looked at challenges faced by 100 SMC members in 20 government schools in Delhi. It found low awareness about roles and responsibilities leading to inability to contribute to the preparation and use of the school development plan. Singh and Sood (2012) examined teachers' perception of SMCs in two tribal areas of Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts in Himachal Pradesh. The information collected from 181 teachers in 60 elementary schools revealed that SMCs were attaining only moderate to low effectiveness. A majority of teachers (74%) reported that the limited awareness that SMC members had of their roles and responsibilities hindered their ability to effectively contribute to school improvement. Jha et al. (2014) examined the extent of the decentralization of power to local education authorities – i.e. including on the state, district, block and school level – and their status in 20 schools from five states, namely: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. It was found that no SMC members, except the Chairperson and the head teacher, were informed about annual school receipts and expenditures, and thus could not participate in the social audit. These findings suggested that both parents and the community needed to be made aware about the norms, functions and responsibilities of SMC members. It recommended that the head teacher and teachers should take the lead in ensuring this awareness raising (Jha et al., 2014).

5.2 Agenda sharing in SMC meetings

In a study on SDMCs in Karnataka, Vaijayanti and Mondal (2015) found that SDMC meetings were held using an agenda in Hoskote (60%), Kustagi (60%) and Mundari (36%) blocks. Some of these meetings were devoted to the school development plan (19% in Hoskote and Kushtagi blocks, and 50% in Mundari block). Other items on the agenda included issues related to quality of teaching learning processes, use of grants for improving school infrastructure and surroundings, and mid-day meals, but little attention was paid to teachers, scholarships for socially disadvantaged students,[14] school uniform distribution, drinking water and toilets, and the composition of SDM committees. There was also little discussion about enrolment and out-of-school children, as no plan had been prepared to get them back into school. In all three blocks, the quality of discussion was poor. Yet the school development plan components did include deliberations on school infrastructure, development and maintenance, incentives to increase enrolment (school uniforms, textbooks, scholarships and mid-day meal). In Kushtagi block, relatively more discussion was observed about the quality of education than in Hoskote and Mundargi blocks. Kumar (2018) suggested that minutes of SMC meetings be circulated extensively among communities, so as to share information with them and increase their motivation to participate. To make social audits a reality, it is important that the school, led by the school head, be transparent and share the agenda for SMC meetings with the members prior to the event. Agenda items must be directly relevant to the progress of the children and the school so that ownership by SMC members can be built around these.

5.3 Extent of participation in SMC meetings

Once the SMC members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities, it is the extent of their participation in meetings that decides how effective their contribution will be. Even so, several groups were still left behind: parents, due to their low literacy levels (Vaijayanti and Mondal 2015), and women (even committee chairpersons) whose participation was passive rather than active (Kumar, 2012). This lack of interest among parents was perceived as a major problem (Bhattacharya and Gowramma, 2018). More than 60% of 181 teachers in 60 elementary schools in two tribal areas of Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts in Himachal Pradesh believed that SMCs had conducted an annual evaluation of various school activities (Singh and Sood, 2012). The participation of head teachers in SMC meetings was also poor, and lack of communication by parents was given as a reason (National Coalition for Education, 2017).

An investigation into the structure, formation, roles and functions of SMCs in ten government middle schools in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh was conducted by Kumar (2012). The study collected information from head teachers, teachers, chairpersons and SMC members through personal interviews and questionnaires. It found that the composition of SMCs was as per the mandate the RTE Act. Nevertheless, despite 40% of chairpersons being women, their participation was not active. Participation of different social groups, including disadvantaged castes and tribes, however, was found to be satisfactory. A study undertaken by the Indian Institute of Education (Pune, 2006) investigated school dropout in primary education. It identified a cultural gap between parents and teachers, which might account for their reluctance to participate more actively in school planning and management. Parent members also reported a lack of information about SMC meetings (National Coalition for Education, 2017). All government schools in Karnataka had constituted SDMCs, but it was found that in the past six months many members had not attended any meetings (Sadananda and Chandrasekhar, 2008). In addition, around 10% of schools had not maintained any record of these meetings.

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14 India has adopted a policy of affirmative action for socially disadvantaged groups. Special incentives are given to SC/ST students for improving their participation in school.

5.4 Preparation of school development plans (SDPs)

Preparation of a school development plan is important because it sets out the vision, goals and implementation steps for school progress. Drawing up the SDP is supposed to be a collaborative process involving all stakeholders, including the community. A number of studies have looked the matter.

The National Coalition for Education (2017) studied the functioning of 600 SMC members from 300 schools in five states, namely Gujarat, Meghalaya, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Information was collected through interviews and focus group discussions with head teachers, teachers and SMC members. Almost all the schools (more than 90%) in Gujarat produced SDPs with both SMC members and head teachers involved, although it was revealed that the plans had actually been prepared by teachers and then handed over to the parents. In Uttar Pradesh, 25% of SMC members and 50% of head teachers were involved in SDP preparation, while in Punjab 90% of schools developed SDPs but only a few SMC members were aware of it. In West Bengal, only 2% members knew about the school development plan. Everywhere the plans were developed for three years except for Punjab.

A study by Mohalik (2018) focused entirely on implementation of the RTE Act with regard to the rules and provisions for out-of-school children, children with special needs, and those who were disadvantaged or vulnerable. It also looked at the functioning of school heads, teachers, and SMC members in 44 elementary schools in Jharkhand. Information was collected from 44 school principals, 44 teachers and 44 SMC members through group discussions. None of the principals, teachers or SMC members – regardless of their locality – was aware of the school development plan.

A study conducted by the Centre for Child (2004) looked at the level of SDMC member participation in school life. It covered 469 SDMCs from 8 districts of Karnataka. The study found both a lack and inadequate dissemination of information among stakeholders. There was much confusion among headteachers, teachers and parents regarding the norms, the tenure, frequency of meetings, and the composition of the SDMC. Even student members were unclear about their roles, which lowered their self-confidence. Members were particularly unaware of the objectives related to school finances. But on the other hand, most SDMC presidents and women members were aware of their powers and duties.

In Rajasthan, there was no mention about the SDP, although members were aware of it, while in Bihar members were not even aware of the SDP. Only in Telangana, half of SMC members were knowledgeable about the SDP, which was then in preparation. Some members had actively participated in its preparation (TISS, 2019). SMC members in Odisha had also participated in the preparation of the SDP, although their suggestions were not taken into account. In some parts of Odisha, according to SMC members, only the headteacher and the SMC president were involved in decision making (TISS, 2019). The 20 secondary schools studied in Purba Medinipur district in West Bengal also faced certain obstacles. Out of 100 SMC members, one third believed the whole process was dominated by teachers whose inconsiderate behaviour towards parents' views and assumption of superiority during SMC meetings, combined with the lack of government assistance with preparing the SDP, were serious constraints. Least participation was seen in purely academic activities because SMDC members were already engaged in supervising and monitoring finance and planning. The study found that SMDC members demonstrated moderate awareness and performance supervising infrastructure needs, preparing annual accounts and expenditures, monitoring the use of funds for school development and preparing the school development plan. The greatest awareness and best performance were reserved for participation in school events and in equity related matters (Bhattacharya and Gowramma, 2018).

5.5 Capacity building of SMC members

All states developed training manuals, but only around 20% of SMC members were actually trained; and trained SMC members rated these training sessions as ineffective due to a 'one size fits all approach' (Jha et al., 2014). Technical training was particularly needed for budgeting and expenditure, given the education level of SMC members, while women and members from disadvantaged communities needed specific training on gender dynamics, as men tended to overpower the women who expressed themselves during SMC meetings.

A study by Kar (2019) in 65 lower primary and primary schools in Golaghat district in Assam states that SMC training had been provided for 12 months by state education authorities in almost all the schools. The importance of quality training for teachers was emphasised as they can motivate parents to become more actively engaged in school management. A majority of teachers (71%) reported that their training had been useful. However, when conducted in traditional lecture and discussion mode, this training programme did not lead to hope for outcomes. It was recommended that training should be modernised and adopt newer methods. Singh and Sood (2012) suggested that awareness campaigns and publications could provide other means to increase motivation. In another study carried out in Golaghat district of Assam, Teron (2012) found positive results, in that training programmes were attended regularly by SMC members who took their participation in SMC meetings seriously.

Research has shown that slightly more than half of the SMC members got some training under the SMC training initiative of the state government. It was suggested, however, that scheduling meetings in the evening would increase attendance by parents who work in agriculture (Grover, 2018). Overall, training was received by 60% of SMC members, who also reported that there was an efficient use of school funds, 'smart' classrooms, increased enrolment, and improved school results (Singh and Sood, 2016). Kumar (2018) has stressed the need and benefits of more capacity building for parents and the community about roles, responsibilities and functions of SMCs in order to increase participation in school processes.

In the state of Rajasthan, all school management committee members, as well as children, participated in the government SMC training programme. For SMC members, this was their first experience in government training (TISS, 2019). Suggestions for improving the functioning of SMCs included increasing availability and allocation of resources, and delegating more responsibilities to SMC members. The study also recommended increasing the participation of women and marginalised groups, and to provide an allowance to low-income parents for participating. And, finally, since not many SMC members were aware of the school development plan, or participated in its preparation, it was recommended that focused discussions on the SDP be held at school level, led by a block or cluster resource coordinator (NCE, 2017).

• **Summing up…**

This section has presented an overall picture of SMC functioning in different states of India, including sporadic instances of success in achieving representation of different social groups and women in SMCs, in reporting on the conduct of SMC meetings and awareness of monitoring of school activities. Studies did point to involvement by SMC members in the preparation of the school development plan, one of the SMC's most significant roles. However, it was also found that members were inadequately prepared to work on it collaboratively with school personnel and other stakeholders. Many studies suggested that the low education level of parents and the community -- compounded by lack of training -- were major draw-backs. The need for capacity building programmes and effective processes for ensuring the participation of SMCs in school processes was highlighted. Accountability is a two-way process, wherein school heads are accountable to SMC members for sharing the agenda and details on funds received and their use, and seeking the collaboration of SMC members in the school development process. On the other hand, parents/SMC members become accountable only when they acquire a sense of ownership of the school, which is itself dependent on factors such as clarity about the roles and responsibilities they should take on, the trust they have in school functionaries, and being actively involved in school decision-making processes. Only then will SMC and community members be able to conduct effective social auditing. So, for the moment, developing the accountability of school heads towards the SMC and community, and vice versa, is still a work in progress in India.

6 ● Successful practices of school management committees

Attaining open education entails setting up new criteria and structures for getting communities involved in the governance and functioning of schools. Even though India is still in the early stages of its experiments with school-based management structures and their stakeholders as being responsible for social audits, there are a few studies which highlight successful practices of SMCs in school management and improvement. This chapter is based on a review of these studies.

6.1 Capacity building of SMC members

A significant feature observed in the Kurukshetra district in the state of Haryana was the linkage between Zila Parishad (District Council) officers and the SMC (Rani, 2016). Information was collected from four schools (2 each from rural and urban areas) and 32 parents. More than half (64%) of the parents agreed that SMC members had received counseling from the Zila Parishad, and around 80% stated that the Zila Parishad had provided guidance, as stipulated in the RTE Act 2009.

A large majority (around 80%) of parents agreed that SMC members were monitoring the availability of basic school facilities as well as ensuring the attendance and retention of children in the school. More than half of the parents agreed to having SMC members generate funds for development of education in the village, and around 76% believed that the SMC was using these funds effectively. Some 60% of parents agreed that steps were being taken by SMC members for the education of children with special needs and more than 80% confirmed there were good relations between SMC members and teachers. The training programmes attended by SMC members were considered useful for the effective implementation of the RTE Act 2009.

6.2 Parents want schools to function better

A report from the National Coalition for Education (2017) presents some of the best practices adopted by SMC members in five states. In Meghalaya and Gujarat, they made efforts to mainstream out-of-school children and increase enrolment by meeting with parents to encourage them to send their children to school. In Uttar Pradesh, SMC members also urged parents to understand the importance of regular school attendance and helped them to enrol their children. The 'School Chalo Abhiyan'[15] drive was conducted by SMC members to increase school enrolments. In West Bengal, SMC members held meetings with ICDS workers[16] to collect information about school attendance, marginalised and drop-out children, and to find ways to improve the situation and take the necessary steps. SMC members in Meghalaya regularly carried out monitoring inspections of school activities. They also collected funds from villages for acquiring books, uniforms and teaching learning materials, which they distributed to the children. Punjab reported on efforts to provide proper infrastructure

15- 'School Chalo Abhiyan' is an initiative to increase enrolment in government schools launched by the Uttar Pradesh state government in 2017. It is organized every year for children in the 6-14 year age group to promote education, mainly among drop-outs, and covers various towns and districts in Uttar Pradesh.

16- Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) workers visit children's homes in their respective areas and collect information on children in school, and drop-out and marginalised children.

for transportation and sanitation, while Meghalaya reported that SMCs had organized annual drives and programmes for sanitation and sports.

Parents in the village of Shivhari in Maharashtra discovered that their SMC had been secretly disbanded by the school principal. Led by the SMC president, himself a parent, the SMC and some other community members thus filed a Right to Information application with the Block Education Officer to check the names on the original list of SMC members. They realised that the school principal had modified the official sheet and changed the names of SMC members elected by the community. The case was followed up, the principal was reprimanded and the original SMC members were eventually reinstated (Dayaram, 2011)

The cooperation of parents to increase student retention and achievement and reduce drop-out rates was also sought in 30 elementary schools (15 rural and 15 urban) in Jharsuguda district of Odisha (Meher and Patel, 2018). All the schools prepared school development plans with the support of SMCs, and also worked to raise awareness about community rights. According to Kumar (2012), in government middle schools in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, the elected SMC members were energetic, young and educated. The participation of SMCs in extra-curricular activities was thus very high, and they gave their full support to school efforts to promote sports and cultural activities. As a result, students from some schools also participated in national-level sports competitions.

6.3 Civil society organizations' efforts to make SMCs more effective

Civil society organizations have been playing a significant role in improving the quality of education through the capacity building of citizens. A case study on community-based accountability and parental participation evaluated improvements in school management by looking at the impact of the *Vidya Chaitanyam* project on 16 randomly selected schools in two intervention areas (Madaksira and Bukkaraya mandals[17]), compared with 16 randomly selected schools in the control area of Rolla mandal (Galab et al., 2013). *Vidya Chaitanyam* (VC) is a project that builds citizens' capacity and supports them in demanding, monitoring and advocating for quality education service delivery from government and non-government basic education providers in Andhra Pradesh. Their objective is also to empower citizen groups of 60 selected village organizations (VOs) located in seven mandals of Anantapur district in rural Andhra Pradesh to monitor, report on, and claim their rights of access to quality basic education. An important feature of this project is the inclusion of 'capacity building of illiterate and semi-literate women to evaluate the quality of basic education provided in state schools through the use of school scorecards.'

The study reported better functioning of SMCs in schools of rural Andhra Pradesh due to greater parental participation under the *Vidya Chaitanyam* project. Additional signs of improvement were: more regular meetings, greater parental awareness, increased parental interaction and discussion over school issues with SMC members, and the setting of purposeful SMC agendas. Considerable improvement was also evident in teacher attendance, student attendance, student performance and the quality of the mid-day meals. These findings were supported with qualitative evidence collected from parents, headteachers and students on improved teacher attendance and efforts in the classroom.

At the same time, a community-generated school scorecard prepared and presented by women had a positive impact on school accountability, allowing local education officers to gain valuable insights into school performance. The project particularly benefitted women by empowering them in monitoring school quality using a simple scorecard which they then used to pressure local primary schools through collective action with women's self-help groups. Women were thus empowered to speak up on school issues during meetings attended

17- A mandal in Andhra Pradesh is an administrative unit below a district.

by Mandal Education Officers. The project emphasised the importance of renewing the relationship between parents and the school, and focus group discussions confirmed the rebalancing of power relations between schools and the parent community.

Box 7. SMC's successful campaign to improve safety in Nuapada, Odisha

Children and teachers in the Kamlamal school of Boden block were used to minor accidents stemming from the 1100 KV power line that was connected to the transformer located inside the school compound. Following their training on school development planning, SMC members presented their case to the Collector and the District Education Officer and followed up on it regularly until action was taken within a month. The District Office appointed an engineer to look into the matter and 100,000 rupees were allocated to move the transformer someplace else.

Source: Dayaram, 2011.

The large international non-governmental organization Oxfam is also active in India, and supports the development of SMCs (Oxfam India, 2015), while Lokmitra, another non-governmental organization based in Raebareli in the state of Uttar Pradesh, works with parents through SMCs and contributes to building alliances by federating them at district and block levels. Lokmitra provides training to SMC members – both residential and non-residential. In the residential sessions, the focus is on bringing about an attitudinal change. Apart from the training itself, the experience of living, eating, and working in a democratic manner has had a huge impact. Discussions and debates were held on topics like the purpose of education, the role of SMCs, and how teachers, parents and children can together improve the school.

Life Education and Development Support (LEADS) was established in 2005 to work for the empowerment and economic development of under-privileged people in the rural and urban slums in Jharkhand and adjacent states like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. Although LEADS has worked in various domains like gender, children's rights, and environment, it has a distinctive approach that is applied to all. This approach focuses on community empowerment and mobilisation, networking, followed by advocacy and lobbying at the state level. It has achieved much success lending support to SMCs after their capacity building. Through the training imparted by LEADS, the SMC, teachers and Gram Sabha (village forum) members came up with a jointly formulated school development plan through a participatory and democratic process. It was prepared in 15 schools, and a consolidated plan for 10 schools was submitted to the block-level education officials by the SMC federation. Some of the resulting best practices included developing easily accessible information materials for the community on the RTE Act and on the roles and responsibilities of the SMCs (Oxfam, 2015). And, finally, separate toilets for girls and boys in around 20 schools were provided due to pressure from SMC members and parents.

Apart from these successful practices initiated by some leading non-governmental organizations, the researcher also collected first-hand information on effective functioning of SMCs in Delhi and Uttarakhand. The details are provided below.

Case Study 1. The dynamic principal's role in ensuring a well-functioning SMC and school in Delhi

School Name: SarvodayaCo.Ed.Vidyalaya, Masjid Moth, South Ext. II, New Delhi, 2017

The school Sarvodaya Co.Ed.Vidyalaya, Masjid Moth, South Ext was visited in 2017. It was located in a narrow lane and was attended by children from slums and other neighbourhood areas. The purpose of the visit was to understand how the school head and teachers engage with the community, especially SMC members, and whether the SMC is involved in the formulation and implementation of the school development plan. It was observed that the meetings were regularly convened and the minutes meticulously prepared. Any suggestions proposed for further action were recorded in the proceedings, and in the next meeting actions taken were reviewed and documented. SMC members observed that information about the meeting was given well in

advance, and included the agenda. If an Annual Day or Sports Day was to be celebrated, SMC members would help organize the event. The MLA (local authority) nominated an educationist from the local area to advise the school; she was knowledgeable about the school and participated in formulating the school development plan. However, no capacity building for newly elected members was provided and the only way SMC members were oriented was through their participation in meetings. During interactions with parents and other committee members, parents could freely come to school and interact with the principal and teachers. For example, some of the parents also commented that on the recommendations of their neighbours and relatives, they even succeeded in getting their ward/child admitted to school in grade 6. They found the school head to be friendly and working towards school improvement. The school head was very dynamic, and motivated his teachers to remain connected with parents. He believed in community participation, in planning and implementing ways to improve both the school and learning levels of children.

Case Study 2. A rebuilt school, community-built hostel and mid-day meals for slum children in Uttarakhand

School Name: Junior High School 55 Rajpur, 2018

The school was housed in a rented 186-year-old building. Due to its old and dilapidated infrastructure, it was slotted for demolition. However, in 2008, a new principal was appointed, who was known to be an effective leader and had already served in difficult circumstances. Within two months, with the support of the community and friends, the school roof was reconstructed, floors repaired and toilets built. The community contributed 43,000 rupees[18] for these improvements. The principal negotiated with the electricity and water department to ensure that electricity and water were provided. In July 2008, he proposed to the District Education Officer to start the mid-day meal scheme for siblings of children aged 6-14 years. With the support of the community, other voluntary organizations, and the Department of Education, the school built a hostel which could accommodate 22 children. In 2010, orphan children and rag pickers were given priority for admission to the hostel. The school then sought the help of retired teachers willing to come and teach extra classes to improve the learning levels of these children. Asra Trust, an NGO, provided material, financial and human support to the school. The number of students using the residential facility increased to 255. With the cooperation of the community and NGOs, these children were assured free food, housing, clothing, reading material, beds, furniture, fans, coolers and more. There was also a water tank with the capacity to store 18,000 litres of drinking water, taps, and physical resources like computers worth more than 50 lakh rupees[19]. In collaboration with Asra Trust, the school also contributed to building a temporary shed, where children from neighbourhood slums could come and study. The NGO provided transport service for these children commuting from their homes to school and back. SMC members were active participants in all the negotiations with different stakeholders.

Case Study 3. A well-functioning SMC in Delhi

Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya No. 2, in Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi, 2019

When this school, the Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya No. 2, in Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi was visited in 2019, some unusual features were noted. Half of the parent members of the SMC were women, and a total of nine parents attended the focus group discussions. Three parent members of the SMC were also part of informal and non-governmental organizations in Delhi. Altogether 12 SMC members were elected. One female member, a social worker, spoke openly about different school issues regarding infrastructure, learning levels of children, and teacher quality. She was vocal about how the SMC was an aware group of members who regularly visited the school. The researcher reported it was apparent that the SMC was engaged in school activities in a constructive manner. It was also found that those parents whose children were performing well academically were the ones selected for the SMC. When parents were asked their reasons for choosing this school, they mentioned: close to home, good performance results and their own inability to pay for private school. Parents

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18- Approximately US$ 590
19- 5 million rupees or about US$68,785

visited the school on a regular basis (every 4-5 days) and described how they supported their children by helping with their homework. Parent SMC members also participated in school activities. On one occasion, they filed a complaint about the police van not being around for the security of girl students, and the school principal reported that they had the full support of the SMC. A three-day capacity building exercise for SMC members was successfully carried out by the cluster resource centre, and additional training was provided under the Samagra Shiksha government support to education programme.

• Summing up…

This section presented several case studies and an overview of good practices regarding the functioning of SMCs. The findings show that success comes from building the capacity of SMC members and encouraging school functionaries to have trust in the abilities of committee members regardless of whether they come from disadvantaged groups. This can even be an asset to the school. The case studies also highlight effective school-community relations, coordination between stakeholders, i.e principals, teachers and parents, and how ownership of school activities can be achieved by SMC members. Parents become valuable partners in decision making when schools make efforts to inform SMC members about the meeting agenda, become transparent about funds and fund expenditure, and involve members in planning and implementation of the school development plan. All three case studies reveal that parents feel the school is trustworthy. At the same time, the school has been able to gain that trust by sharing school information and being transparent through open budgets. It will be important to document and disseminate other similar examples. It has been suggested that each block education officer should collect evidence about good practices and share this with other schools. This effort is already underway through the Ministry of Education's (MOE) DIKSHA portal. As mentioned in Section 1.3, DIKSHA is an e-portal launched by the MoE in 2020 for providing digital information to all teachers and school principals. Being a national repository, officers from the field can upload data and examples of good experiences on a regular basis through their respective state governments.

Conclusion

India is considered to be one of the youngest countries in the world. With rich demographic dividends and a thriving democracy, the country looks up to its younger generation as pointing the way to a future of social, economic and cultural development. A vast majority of India's population has access to elementary education in the public sector, thus positioning India's government as a key player in deciding what educational opportunities will be available to children. However, despite phenomenal strides in quantitative expansion of the school system at elementary level, uneven quality is still a major concern for educational planners and administrators. In the 1980s, one of the main obstacles to providing quality education was seen as stemming from a highly centralised structure and the government's application of top-down approaches, without account of the local context. In response, various government reports and policies started advocating for and supporting an education system that was more responsive and accountable to the community. How to empower communities and increase community participation became a major agenda item and priority in the mid-1980s, along with efforts to reform education through decentralisation. Some of the notable decentralisation reforms included: the 1986 National Education Policy, the 1992 Programme of Action, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992 and 1993, and the 1993 recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on Decentralised Management. These created a context for reforming the education system by empowering the community to locally generate and implement institutional practices to support the school. Policy documents were explicit about the need to empower communities because they are one of the crucial stakeholders whose interests are to be protected.

Despite on-going efforts, however, it was clear by the end of the 1990s that the hoped-for community participation and improved quality of education was not yielding the desired results. This led to a policy shift to school-based management, with the creation of structures like SMCs/SDMCs at school level that became responsible for the formulation and implementation of school-based plans. One of the biggest challenges in promoting community participation was to ensure that the marginalised and the disadvantaged were also involved in the process (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000; White, 1996), which meant that these structures were expected to include representation from these communities. A brief and successful experience of educational decentralisation in India was followed by the Right to Education Act 2009 that mandated access to free and compulsory education for all children 6-14 years of age. The provisions of this Act imputed accountability for ensuring access and schooling processes to all stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, parents, community, members of the school management committee (SMC) and the larger public. With the implementation of this Act, SMCs became constitutionally mandated structures with uniform rules in all elementary schools across the country. In the context of the RTE Act 2009, SMCs continued to build strong linkages between schools and the community. However, with the coming of Samagra Shiskha, an overarching programme extending from pre-school to Grade 12, school-based management structures suddenly found a new vision to aspire to, namely to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school through to senior secondary level in line with SDG 4.

The coming of this Act laid the foundation of open education in India, which is now building on the structures of school-based management that already exist in the public sector and rest on the community in order to establish a direct link between community and school.

This study has focused on exploring the effectiveness of school management committees (a form of community participation) in bringing transparency, citizen engagement and accountability to school education as an example of open government in India. Open education (i.e. open government in the field of education) is an innovative approach to educational planning and citizen involvement resting on the principles of transparency, accountability and citizen engagement (Poisson, 2019). This concept of open education finds resonance in the community-based structures and mechanisms adopted for school improvement in India. These are a means for

social auditing and community supervision in the functioning and outcomes of schools. It is argued that effective school-based management will limit the risk of corruption and misuse of finances in governance structures, objectives also consistent with various national-level policies and the Right to Education Act 2009.

The following section attempts to articulate the findings of this research according to the objectives outlined in IIEP's research proposal on open government (Poisson, 2019, pp. 22-23).

Understanding open government in education in India

At the outset, the conceptual understanding of open education in India in the context of school-community relations can be defined as a move towards educational decentralisation, away from centralised structures and towards local school/institutional-level autonomy and planning, in collaboration with community stakeholders. The Right to Education Act 2009 gave further teeth to school-based management, mandating the establishment of school management committees (SMCs) and charting their road towards success. In addition, recent policy and implementation frameworks, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha have included provisions for capacity building for members of SMCs so that they are aware of their roles, are able to better articulate their responsibilities and become part of the school's decision-making processes. Thus, open education in India is progressing within the framework of rights-based education. It draws its strength from a capabilities approach wherein policy and implementation frameworks in the Indian context are viewing community empowerment as being both an instrumental as well as intrinsic goal: Instrumental, in that community members are empowered to become co-decision makers along with the school, and intrinsic for developing capable citizens.

In view of the above conceptualisation of open education in India, this study has reviewed:

- **School-related databases**, which provide school-related information aggregated at state and national level. In the form of UDISE+, NAS and NPSSE, the databases can be used by school heads, teachers and SMC members to collaborate on evidence-based decision making for school improvement. The data are available in the public domain, and can be used as an effective tool for social audits conducted by school management committees in their role as accountable stakeholders. They also help school functionaries to assess which areas of strength and improvement to take into account for school development, with a focus on improving student learning. The usefulness of these databases lies in sharing school- and student-related information with SMCs in a more transparent manner. It is expected that as the capacities of school management committees are developed, they will increase their ability to dialogue with school functionaries and collaborate on evidence-based decision making for school improvement.

- **Studies on transparency** point out that while SMCs have been constituted in most schools, there are nonetheless many inconsistencies in the selection procedures of members. Sharing information in a transparent manner remains a work in progress, but the SMCs were constituted as stipulated, and they have been monitoring teaching-learning processes, and been involved in issues related to school development and children's progress. Research has shown that SMC participation in meetings was satisfactory, but their role in decision making was limited. Indeed, one of the most significant findings is that SMC members from most of the schools were not aware of their roles and responsibilities in general, and even less of their role as academic supervisors. Information about the SMC's role in financial matters was also limited and, in some cases, the head teachers did not appreciate the financial powers (e.g. holding a joint bank account) given to SMC members. Studies dealing with open budgets as a means for building transparency in educational governance were limited and the few that were available point toward SMCs not being involved in school finances. One of the reasons given for this is the perception by head teachers that SMC members do not possess the neces-

sary competence for monitoring fund flows and expenditure. It is also possible that they were not comfortable in sharing this information, and preferred to use school funds as they saw fit. Hence in the school education context, we still do not have a mature transparency mechanism in the functioning of SMCs.

- Studies on citizen engagement reveal that even though SMCs have been created in schools as platforms for citizen engagement, their active involvement in different school activities varies across states and remains less than optimum in a large number of schools. The RTE Act 2009 which mandated the establishment of school-based management structures more than ten years ago, deliberately made room for women and disadvantaged segments of the population to become partners in school development, and in the learning of their children. These structures, in the form of school management committees (SMCs), were created specifically to allow disadvantaged groups to gain agency and raise their voice in demanding that schools also fulfill their needs and expectations. However, success has only been partial. SMCs are functional but in a majority of cases, members are either not involved in decision-making processes, or their say is not deemed worthy of inclusion in the developmental process of the school.

- An exhaustive review of accountability research findings shows that SMC members were either unaware or inadequately prepared to collaborate on the preparation of the school development plan. Many studies point to the low education levels of parents and the community as being a major constraint to developing accountability. Most important, studies emphasise the lack of effective and much needed capacity building programmes for SMCs.

Perceptions and insights of main stakeholders

Despite a mixed overall picture, there are some examples of successfully functioning SMCs. The findings reveal that critical factors for operative SMCs are effective capacity building programmes, mutual trust between SMC members and schools, transparency, and open communication. The three case studies selected for this report have highlighted effective school-community relations, coordination between stakeholders, i.e. school principals, teachers and parents, and SMC ownership of school activities. Schools working to include parents in decision making demonstrated a willingness to make SMC members aware of the meeting agenda, become transparent about funds and fund allocations, and to involve SMC members in the planning and implementation of the school development plan. In all three case studies, there was mutual trust between parents and the school as a result of sharing school-related information based on transparency and open budgeting. A multi-state study on the functioning of SMCs in schools documented opinions of school heads (National Coalition for Education, 2017). A few of them did value community engagement in the schooling process as they believed that it has helped to build community ownership. This was useful because it helped the school to understand the culture, customs and background of students which, in turn, enabled them to better meet their educational needs. The study documented that community involvement increased student enrolment and regular attendance. On the other hand, some school heads considered that community members were a burden and unnecessarily interfered in school affairs, especially in fund allocation. Their perception was built on the belief that illiterate members of the SMC were unable to understand the detailed rules and regulations involved.

Criteria for successful implementation of OG initiatives in education

In order to successfully implement open government initiatives in education, the following criteria can be taken into account:

- There needs to be a focus on creating awareness about the roles and responsibilities of SMC members in the composition and selection procedure of SMCs. This is instrumental for building their ownership of the school and ensuring their active and enthusiastic participation.

- Guidelines on the election process must be clearly expressed and shared openly with the chairperson, school head and other SMC members. Greater transparency and accountability in the process of forming the SMC is required. It needs to be democratic, involving all the parents, and especially by giving due representation to disadvantaged sections of the population.

- There is variation across states on the tenure of SMCs, which is two years in some states and three years in others. The members must be duly informed and the election must take place on time.

- Induction training for newly elected members needs to be organized and it should be done periodically to keep them updated on new developments as they occur.

- Comprehensive capacity building programmes need to be designed for SMC members that cover quality parameters such as monitoring regular attendance of teachers in school, their engagement in classroom teaching, and their behaviour towards students, as well as monitoring students' progress both in academics and extra-curricular areas. Capacity building must take place in the local language. Training on financial aspects must be a part of the package as this is necessary for the proper monitoring of fund flows and allocation.

- SMC meetings need to be held at times convenient for all members to ensure that they can actively participate. Regular attendance at SMC meetings is not a mere formality: participation ensures active engagement with the school.

- A network of SMC members must be created for better communication and coordination.

- For capacity building programmes, local experts and educationists, who best understand local contexts and issues, should be engaged.

- Dedicated modules should be developed for capacity building of master trainers.

- SMC members need to be oriented toward priority areas through open communication and also have access to details of the school development plan so that they can be empowered to collaboratively prepare the SDP.

Impacts of open government initiatives in education

The impact of open government initiatives in education can be divided into short-term, medium-term and long-term effects.

- **Short-term impact**: as regards transparency, citizen participation and accountability, the constitution of SMCs has helped to increase the involvement of SMC members in meetings and decision-making processes; it has also helped them better understand their roles and responsibilities in school improvement.

- **Medium-term impact:** gradually, the role of SMCs in the Indian context has evolved to act as academic supervisors alongside school functionaries and to be directly involved in the learning progress of children. This impact would be evident in improved service delivery by school principals, teachers and education officials at district/block/cluster level.

- **Long-term impact:** this is concerned with the SMCs' representation of disadvantaged groups and women so as to improve their access to education in every sense, and also to reduce the social distance between school and the community. An active role of SMCs in this area will improve the quality of education as parents will become more aware and informed about the education needs and learning behaviour of their children. Parental awareness will provide necessary positive inputs to teachers and school heads, which will lead to better quality schools/education. Citizen engagement in social audits by all groups of society, irrespective of their socio-economic, educational and religious background, will be in the best interest of all children and protect their right to education. The goal is that all groups, and especially those who are disadvantaged, obtain an equal voice to represent the specific education needs of their children. This is vital for bridging the gaps and ensuring greater equity.

Recommendations

Based on a review of research conducted on the functioning of SMCs in India, this study has identified the following recommendations as having priority:

▶ There is the urgent need to provide equitable and quality education for all, along with removing disparities among various social groups. This is in line with SDG 4, which focuses especially on disadvantaged groups. For reaching this goal, the community, and in particular SMC members, need to become knowledgeable about the developmental and learning needs of children coming from disadvantaged sections of the population. In this way, stakeholders would be better equipped in supporting the school and the learning progress of each child.

▶ SMC members need to be given more autonomy to increase the school's accountability for educating its students

▶ SMC members need capacity building to ensure they have the skills needed to contribute to open budgeting, regulating school finances and monitoring academic activities in order to make open education a reality
▶ With the recent incidences of child rights violations especially of girls, Muslims and Dalits in schools, it is a matter of prime importance that SMC members and teachers receive training regarding the rights of children. Also, since grievances are addressed first to local authorities, there is a need to enhance their knowledge of appropriate remedial actions. Training of SMC members on legal processes related to rights violations and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act,[20] enacted in 2012, is essential. SMC members should be able to take immediate action with support from local authorities.

20- The POCSO Act, or the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, was established to protect children against offences like sexual abuse, sexual harassment and pornography. It provides a child-friendly legal framework for conducting trials by which the perpetrators could be punished.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Descriptors to measure community involvement in school processes

Productive Community Participation

The term 'community' refers to members of the school management committee, teachers, learners, parents/guardians, local residents, associated cultural organizations and NGOs. Working together with community members is critical to school development. The school needs the support of the community for achieving its objectives and providing quality education to its learners. The active engagement of the school with the community ensures optimal utilization of the school resources, holistic development of learners and better management of the school. The school, therefore, needs to establish a meaningful relationship with the community which could benefit both the school and the community. The SMC/SDMC have been constituted in every school to participate in school management in the areas of planning, implementation, resource mobilization and monitoring. They also play a major role in improving enrolment, retention, teaching learning and learning outcomes.

Reflective Prompts

Q1. How does the community/SMC/SDMC contribute to school planning and management?

Q2. What role does the community/SMC/SDMC play in improving teaching learning processes and learning outcomes in the school?

Q3. What linkages has the school established with the community?

Q4. In what ways does the school mobilize community resources for its development?

Q5. In what manner does the community mobilize resources for school development?

Factual information

1. Number of members of SMC/SDMC: _____

2. Composition of SMC/SDMC:

Provide number of representatives for each category in given box

a. parents _____ b. teachers _____ c. women_____

d. minorities _____ e. local authorities_____ f. SC/ST _____

3. Number of meetings organized during the last academic year _____

4. Average attendance in the meetings organized during the last academic year _____

5. Number of SMC/SDMC members who have received training _____

6. Activities/areas in which SMC/SDMC provided support to school last year _____

Appendix 2. SMC/SDMC levels of action

Core Standard	Descriptor		
	Level-1	Level-2	Level-3
Organization and Management of SMC/ SDMC	Meetings are organized without a pre-determined agenda; only a few members attend the meetings; SMC/ SDMC takes decisions largely in the areas of finance and infrastructure	Meetings are organized as per the mandate with prior notice and fixed agenda; most members attend the meetings and participate in the discussions; SMC/ SDMC also take decisions on issues other than finance and infrastructure	The SMC/ SDMC meetings are organized regularly and additionally when the need arises; identified issues and plans to resolve the same are discussed; the SMC/ SDMC also facilitates, monitors and reviews the implementation of the decisions
Role in School Improvement	SMC/ SDMC is aware of the provisions of the RTE Act-2009 as well as SSA/ RMSA provisions relating to school; School Development Plan(SDP) is shared at the SMC/ SDMC meetings	SMC/ SDMC facilitates implementation and ensures compliance with RTE Act-2009 as well as SSA/ RMSA provisions; suggests activities that require immediate attention in the SDP; shares information related to RTE Act-2009 as well as SSA/ RMSA with the community	SMC/ SDMC participates in the school evaluation process; helps identify and prioritize development needs; jointly prepares the SDP with the teachers and monitors its implementation for holistic development
Empowering Community	SMC identifies additional resources required for the implementation of SDP and potential sources for procuring the same	SMC mobilizes resources for maintenance of the school and for improving its facilities; school and community jointly organize functions within the school and in the community	School and community reach out to other sources such as NGOs, corporate bodies, alumni, etc. to mobilise resources; school organizes/ undertakes activities for the benefit of the community like cleanliness drive, literacy campaigns, awareness against gender and social discriminations, etc.; actively initiates online platforms for sharing of good practices relating to community participation in schools

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT →

Source: www.shaalasiddhi.niepa.ac.in

The study

This study developed as part of IIEP-UNESCO Research Project 'Open Government: Learning From Experience describes how the school-community interface has strengthened in the form of school-based management structures in India. More specifically, it examines the functioning of school management committees (SMCs), which have crystallized as an outcome of about 50 years of government initiatives towards educational decentralisation.

In this context, it critically analyses the availability of school-related information, and reviews around 50 studies (both all-India and micro research) on the functioning of SMCs around three major dimensions of open government, namely: transparency, citizen engagement and accountability. It demonstrates that if initial steps have been taken for constituting SMCs, much more is required to make them functional, pointing in particular to the lack of awareness of their members about their roles and responsibilities, their limited participation in school activities, and the inadequacy of capacity building provided to SMC members.

In conclusion, the case study recommends that SMC members get oriented on the developmental and learning needs of children coming from disadvantaged sections, on open budgeting and the regulation of school finances, and on monitoring of academic activities. It also recommends that SMC members be granted more autonomy to ensure the accountability of the school towards the education of their students. It further insists on the need to inform SMC members on legal processes related to the violation of children's rights.

The author

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