

Perception of Community Members Regarding SSA and its Implementation

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Abstract

Universalisation of elementary education in India still remains elusive despite the various programmes initiated by the state. However, the two programmes of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and SSA stand out for its innovative design features and its emphasis on community participation. In fact, the National Policy on Education (1986), and its Programme of Action (1992), recommended not only promoting participation of community in primary education but also a move towards empowering the local community to make management decisions in this regard. The problem at village level can be better understood by members of the village and they can think of some viable solution. Considering this factor, Village Education Committees (VECs) are constituted for the management of education at village level and are deputed with powers to carry on the management of school. This generates interest amongst the community members and more and more people get involved in promoting education. The paper studies the different perceptions of the various village committees regarding SSA and its implementation and draws implication of the study towards the end of the paper.

Introduction

The quest for successful educational attainment of children has been an avowed goal worldwide. This is especially so with respect to primary education among various countries. In the Indian context, the national educational policies clearly envisage universalisation of

elementary education through provision of easy access to educational facilities, promotion of total enrolment, successful grade completion of enrolled children, and reduction in dropout rates and elevation in retention levels. However, the hard reality is that a considerable proportion of children are still deprived

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of easy access to primary education, this is especially so with regard to girl child and those belonging to socio-economically backward sections of the population. The 86th Constitutional Amendment has conferred the status of Fundamental Right to Education. With this provision also, no one really can be held responsible for non-compliance but a positive development seen today is the number of schemes and programmes launched in pursuance of the emphasis embodied in the NPE, its POA and the subsequent committees. These schemes and programmes include the scheme of Operation Blackboard (OB), Non-formal Education (NFE), Teacher Education (TE), *Mahila Samakhya* (MS), state specific basic education programmes like the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project, Bihar Education Project, Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan, Education for All Project in Uttar Pradesh, *Shiksha Karmi* project in Rajasthan, National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education well known as Mid-Day Meal Scheme, District Primary Education Programme and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*.

Status of Elementary Education

Consequent to several efforts, India has made enormous progress in terms of increase in institutions, teachers and students in elementary education. Access to school is no longer a major problem. At the primary stage, 94 per cent of the country's need population has schooling facilities within one kilometer and at the upper primary stage, it is 84%. Thus, the country has made impressive achievement in the elementary education sector. But the flip

side is that even after fifty years of independence, the goal supported by the constitutional mandate continues to be elusive despite all the efforts. The proportion of the illiterates in absolute number continues to increase from 294 millions in 1950 to 850 millions in 2000 A.D. which means we still harbor the largest number of illiterates in the world. Education despite being promoted on a large scale by the government still struggles to survive. Increase in dropout rate, decrease in enrolment rate. Lack of infrastructural facilities, indifferent attitude of teachers towards students and vague understanding of the benefits of education among the parents are some of the major ills plaguing educational scenario in our country (Joshi, 2004).

It is disconcerting to note that in 2001 also the pool of illiterates continues to be formidable as before. There is a common agreement among scholars that the performance of Indian education in case of all three dimensions of UEE, i.e. universal enrolment, universal retention, poorer in case of retention and poorest in case of achievement levels. There are problems relating to dropout rate, low levels of achievement and low participation of girls, tribal and other disadvantaged groups. Compounded with it are various systemic issues like poorly functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, large number of teacher vacancies, poor quality of education and nearly one-lakh habitations in the country without schooling facility. In short the country is yet to achieve the elusive target of UEE, which means 100 per cent enrolment, and retention of children with quality education. To achieve this goal, community

involvement has been visualised as an important thrust area in various intervention programmes. It is realised that the village-based education can sustain for a longer period of time only if the village community is able to take over its running. Community participation in education not only ensures physical and human facilities at schools but also motivates the teachers to achieve higher quality of education. Thus, people's participation in the overall development of the nation has been recognised as a vital process since independence. Among the many centrally sponsored schemes aiming at achieving UEE, the DPEP and SSA stand out for its innovative design features and the emphasis that is laid on community participation.

Education and Community Participation

Education policy makers all over the world have come to view community participation as an effective means of promoting primary education, in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Further, community participation and empowerment in decision making has commonly been understood and propagated as an attempt to counteract centralised actions. It is assumed that community participation and empowerment has the potential to make a major contribution towards education people, increasing their awareness levels, improving their health and living conditions as well as enriching their life styles. The literacy campaigns in different parts of India have also, though not uniformly in all cases, demonstrated the potential role that community members can play for their betterment.

The National Policy on Education

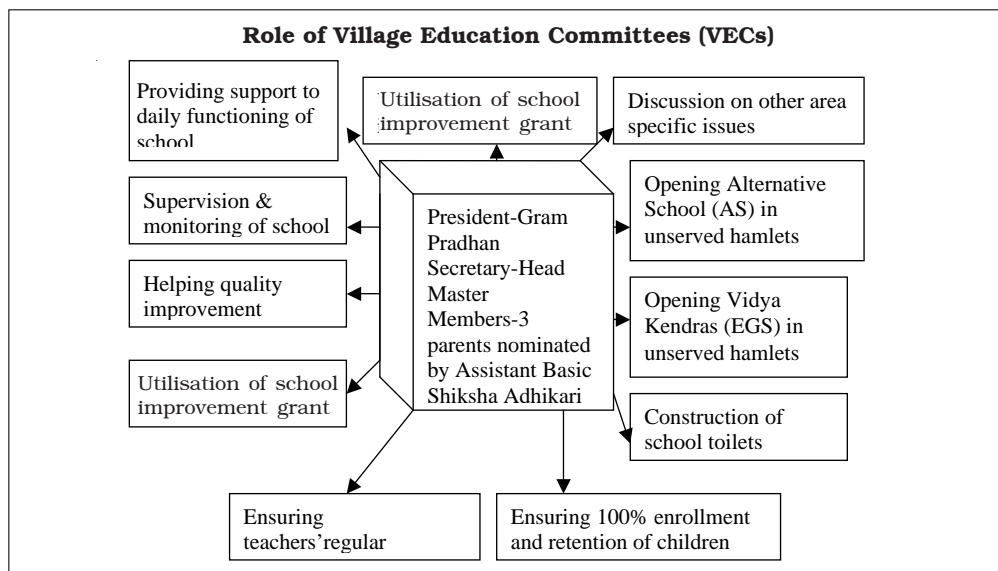
(1986), and its Programme of Action (1992), recommended not only promoting participation of community in primary education but also a move towards empowering the local community to make management decisions in this regard. The Eight-Plan Document clearly enunciated that "in the process of development people must operate and government must cooperate." Thus, community participation over the past decade has been appropriated by almost any group working for change, be it in agriculture, welfare or education. In order to address this issue, the government launched in 1995 the DPEP in a few educationally backward districts and through its experience in 2000 the "SSA" in the entire nation that once again called for community ownership of schools through decentralised participatory approach. These programmes have the promotion of community participation as a major thrust area in their activities; they have tried to evolve special strategies for bringing community and school closer, and also to involve community members in a significant manner for development of primary education. Numbers of informal and formal structures have come into existence such as Mother Teacher Associations (MTA) under the District Primary Education Programme, DPEP, Core Team and Women's Group under Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan apart from Village Education Committees (VECs) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in many states. Community participation and empowerment for primary education is gradually acquiring a place of importance not only in education but also in public administration.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to universalise elementary education by community participation of the school system. The main tasks are to enable the persons in the community, who still believe that issues related to access, enrolment, retention and quality education depend largely on government machineries and teachers, realise the actual situations and to motivate them for performing their specific tasks to reach the social target through SSA. Since then, concerted efforts have been made under SSA to maximize community participation. At the village level different committees like VEC, MTA, PTA, VCWC, etc., have been constituted and specific roles have been assigned to each to ensure community ownership of schools. The procedure of constitution and the functions of these committees are as follows:

Village Education Committees (VECs)

VEC is constituted for the management of education at village level. The problem at village level can be better understood by members of the village and they can think of some viable solution. Considering this factor VEC is constituted and is deputed with powers to carry on the management of school. This would generate interest amongst the community members and more and more people would get involved in promoting education. The members of VEC are *Sarpanch* as the chairperson, coordinator of that primary school and coordinator of Mid-day Meal (MDM) scheme. The co-opted members could be a principal of secondary school, (of there is one) a retired teacher, parents of physically/mentally challenged child, parents of SC/ST children. The following figure shows the role and function of VEC.



MTA (Mother Teacher Association) and PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

To get maximum cooperation from parents and other members of community in district primary education programmes, MTA and PTA are constituted. The framework of SSA envisages that the constitution of different members in these committees be on democratic grounds providing opportunity to people from all sections of the society. A five-member working committee of PTA and MTA be formed, amongst whom one to be the Chairperson. The principal of the primary school becomes the chairpersons of MTA/PTA.

Thus, SSA has very clearly demarcated the roles and responsibilities of each committee and empowered the members of community for effective supervision and monitoring. In this context, this study aims to assess the functioning of the committees formed at village level and their perception regarding the SSA and its implementation. This would lead to realistic and sustainable policy interventions. Presumably, community participation is with reference to the participation of those who are either left out or are participating from the margins. The study aims to find out.

- Is the constitution of the different committees as per the SSA framework?
- Is equal representation given to women and members of SC/ST or OBC?
- How effective are the different committees in performing their functions?

- Is there a feeling of ownership amongst the members of different communities?
- How are SSA and its implementation perceived by the members of different committees?
- How do the members other than those in the committees perceive SSA and its implementation?
- How effective are these management committees?
- What is the extent of preparedness of these committees to achieve the goals of SSA?

Title of the Study

Perception of Community Members Regarding SSA and its Implementation

Objectives

- To study the constitution of different committees, viz, VEC, PTA, MTA and others.
- To study the functioning of VEC, PTA, MTA and others.
- To study the perception of members of different committees, viz, VEC, PTA, MTA and others regarding SSA and its implementation.
- To study the perception of members other than those of different committees regarding SSA and its implementation.

Operationalisation of the Terms

Constitution: In the present study 'constitution' means appointment of members in each committee as stipulated in SSA framework.

Functioning: Here, functioning means the roles and responsibilities of members of

each committee as envisaged in SSA framework.

Perception: Here, perception means the understanding or the way of seeing at of members as well as non-members of different committees towards SSA and its implementation.

Limitation of the Study: Probing the role/ functioning of different committees formed at village level and studying their perception about SSA and its implementation is an extremely salient topic of research. This study by design is modest in its objectives and only sheds light on the perceptions that different members of the committees and other non-members have shown regarding the SSA and its implementation and the information that they gave about their functions and that which was evident from the records.

Methodology

Population: The population constituted all the functionaries of primary school at village level in the Gujarat state.

Sample: The sample as selected through multi-stage random sampling procedure. Four districts of Gujarat, viz Sabarkantha, Navsari, Panchmahals and Bhavnagar respectively from each zone, i.e. North, South, East and West were selected randomly. In the second stage three blocks from each districts, in the third stage, four clusters from each block and in the fifth stage ten per cent schools from each cluster were selected randomly to study the constitution and functioning of different committees like VEC, MTA, PTA, VCWC, etc., constituted under SSA. The perception regarding SSA and its implementation was also

studied from the members of these committees and non-members. The non-members of the different committees were selected through snowball sampling technique. The table given at next page shows the distribution of schools in different districts.

Sources of the Data

The data for the present study were collected from the members and non-members of different committees including the school records, the official documents of SSA and the coordinators of BRC and CRC.

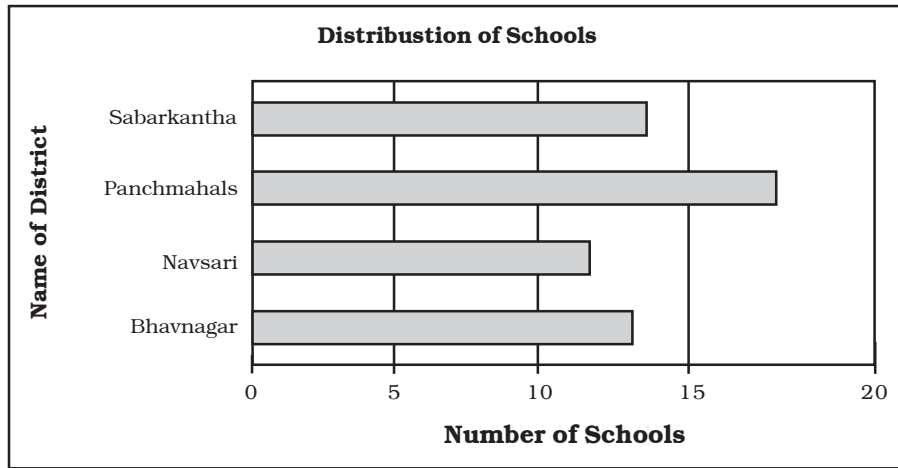
Tools

The following tools were used in the study were prepared through a two-day workshop. The expertise from the department of education, Bhavnagar University and the Maharaja Sayajirao University Of Baroda and Gujarat Council of Primary Education, Gandhinagar were invited.

1. For the first and second objective, an informal schedule cum checklist was constructed to get the record of the constitution of the different committees such as VEC, PTA, MTA, SMC, VCWC, number of meetings conducted, attendance in the meetings, agenda discussed, type of community involvement, programmes initiated, follow up process, records of the expenditure, different roles performed, etc.
2. For the third and fourth objectives, a face-to-face interview was conducted for the community members. A detailed questionnaire targeting the key respondents like village *sarpanch*,

Table: Distribution of Schools

S.No.	District	Block	No. of Schools	Total
1	Bhavnagar	Mahuva	5	13
		Palitana	4	
		Vallabhipur	4	
2	Navsari	Gandevi	4	12
		Jalalpor	4	
		Vansda	4	
3	Panchmahals	Halol	6	17
		Lunawada	5	
		Santrampur	6	
4	Sabarkantha	Bhiloda	4	14
		Khedbrahma	6	
		Prantij	4	
	Total			56



talati and principal of the schools, coordinator or CRC and female members of gram panchayat, parents, teachers and few villagers was prepared and used to interact with the community members to study their perception about SSA

and its implementation at village level. The questionnaire contained questions to probe the different members on the different aspects of SSA including its structure, the formation of different committees under it and its functioning, the

teacher training, the grants, the community participation and the teaching learning activities.

3. A focus group interview schedule was also decided to probe into the complexities in the entire process of community participation. Key questions were prepared focusing on those areas and in those schools where there was a scope of further probing.

Data Collection

The research associate along with the field investigators made field visits to the sample districts to collect data. During the field visits, data from the official records were taken through the information schedule and through questionnaire different members of the committees or the key persons like principal, *sarpanch*, *talati*, coordinator or CRC, parents, coordinator of MDM and other members of the different committees were interviewed.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively based on the type of data. The factual information collected through objective one and two were analysed quantitatively by using frequency and percentage analysis. Information obtained through observation schedule, face-to-face interviews, informal interactions and focus group interview was qualitatively analysed through qualitative content analysis technique which includes (a) Summarising: it means to reduce the data, thus drawing out only the most relevant information. (b) Explication: it

means to explain in a formal way drawing implications and removing the ambiguous words or statements (c) structuring: it means to organise the data therein giving it a form based on the objectives of the study.

Major findings

- With regard to the constitution of different communities, it was found that all the sample schools constituted all the communities.
- In 76.86% schools, the committees were constituted as per norms in the SSA framework.
- In 19.64% school members were co-opted in different committees.
- In 83.28 schools, the members had received community leadership training.
- In 66.5% schools all the members were literate.
- In 19.58% schools, no official records were found.
- In 42% school, the members met only to discuss the condition of different festivals like Pravesh Utsav, 26th January, 15th August and if orders were received from GCPE, Gandhinagar.
- In 38% schools, the members met only to discuss the utilisation of grants.
- In 20% schools, the members met with a constructive agenda of increasing enrolment, improving retention rates and increasing the achievement levels.
- With regard to the grants, except the TLM grant; the members of the different committees and the non-members shared a similar view that the grants have helped improve the

- dilapidated conditions of the primary schools.
- As far as the TLM grants are concerned, a mixed response has come from the members as well as non-members. There were very few who enjoyed teaching through TLMs and did not mind maintaining their records, largely teachers said that they are burdened with the maintenance of records, there is no new idea for preparation of TLM, children cannot help in making these TLMs and so the concept of involving children should be done away with. Children largely were unaware of what was displayed in the classrooms in the form of TLMs but wherever the TLMs were used effectively children enjoyed studying.
 - The study revealed the inappropriate use of the grants especially the sanitation facility, drinking water facility and the computer facility which in most schools were out of order.
 - The structure of SSA as perceived by the members has helped minimise the corruption in the receipt of grants and the decentralised structure with division of labour has ensured quick and effective functioning. Here the non-members were not much aware of the decentralised structure though they knew that different meetings were held at school of different purpose.
 - The community participation has made them feel comfortable and has given them an opportunity to express their opinions in matters regarding the primary education of village. SSA has helped in bringing awareness in parents with respect to the education of their wards and the functions of the school.
 - With regard to the teacher training, output of teachers training was largely found to be dependent on the way of organisation of these trainings and the attitude of individual teachers.
 - The failure of the teacher training could be largely attributed to the unequal distribution of the trainings through out the year, unavailability of experts or the required expertise of the experts and lack of quality training materials.
 - With regard to the achievement of the students, there was an increase in the number of the students passing out in the upper most class since three consecutive years in the sample districts. Out of fifty six sample schools, in the year 2002-03; in twenty one (37.5%) schools, the numbers of pass outs were same as the number appeared. While in 2003-04, this number increased to twenty eight (50.0%) and in 2004-05 to thirty two (57.1%) schools.

Discussion

The need to expand and upgrade elementary education in the country had been recognised as early as 1950 and India made its commitment for it in the constitution. While the goal of UEE is still not within reach, it needs to be acknowledged that government has been making consistent efforts towards it. Among the most efficacious interventions to ensure speedy and expeditious realisations of the goal of universal access along with the stipulations of quality results have been the DPEP and

SSA. Both these programmes had a focus of concern to accelerate the national resolve to achieve UEE in a time bound manner through decentralised planning and community ownership. The education policy makers as well as bureaucrats all over the world have come to realise the indispensable role of community in the successful implementation of any extension and development programme as a participant in decision making, implementation and utilising the benefit of the programme. Since then concerted efforts have been made to maximise community participation in different sectors. In the elementary education sector, the twin programmes through constitution of different communities for the school management at different levels ensured participation of community members.

The present study in this context is an effort to study the constitution and the functioning of different committees formed at village level and to study the perception of the members involved with regard to SSA and its implementation. Education policy makers are looking forward towards such studies to improve the efficiency of the forthcoming interventions and lead to realistic and sustainable policies. Thus, the present research is an attempt to know the way the people involve at grass root level perceive such a robust programme. Moreover, is there any difference in the perception of the members and the non-members of different committees? Answering this question would entail studying the constitution and functioning of the committees and perception of the community members.

With regard to the constitution of the different committees like VEC, MTA, PTA and VCWC, all of these were constituted. Of these the constitution of VEC was as per the norms of SSA while the constitution of MTA and PTA in maximum cases was by the choice of the principal and not on democratic grounds. Of the fifty six sample schools, only in seven of them the principal reported that they had called a meeting of all the parents and elected members on the working committee of MTA and PTA. In case of VCWC the resolutions for the election of members were not found on the record books but the headmaster in many cases reported that VCWC was constituted with the consent of the members on VCWC working committee were elected from VEC. In few cases the members on VCWC working committee were elected from VEC or PTA itself. Here, it may be noted that the discussion is on the basis of results drawn from the records and interaction with headmaster and other members of the committee.

The framework of SSA envisaged maximum participation of the community members and therefore specified in its norms the democratic election of the members on the working committee of MTA and PTA. But the field visits, records and interactions made it evident that the constitution of MTA and PTA was by choice, which in the words of the head master was based on the individual parent's enthusiasm, willingness and literacy status. Of the fifty-six sample schools, in eleven (19.64%) school members were co-opted on different committees. This may be due to the fact that from the list of the members who could be co-opted on VEC, PTA and MTA

do not exist for example, a principal of higher secondary school, a retired teacher, parents of handicapped children, *angan wadi* workers or parents belonging to SC/ST category.

The constitution of these committees at village level is with the sole aim of achieving the targets of UEE through different interventions. Trainings are imparted to these members to make them aware of their responsibilities. The results of the study however reveal that only in twenty-six (46.4%) schools, all the members had received community leadership training while in nineteen schools either half or one third members have received training and in five schools none of the members were trained while six schools had no information. The community leadership training is imparted only once in a year. The researcher feels that at places where half or one third members are trained, the constitution of the committees must have changed after the training was imparted or it may be due to the quality of the trainings that the trainees failed to recognise that they were being trained. This interpretation was drawn from the interaction of the coordinators of CRC and BRC with the different members of the committees. In an interaction with the research team, the members refused to have received training while the coordinators of CRC and BRC made attempts to persuade them that the day had assembled at the bahawan was a training session. The lack of understanding at the trainings also throws light on the literacy status of the members because still only thirty six (64.3%) schools, all the members were literate while in twelve (21.31%) schools,

half the members and in three (5.4%) schools one third of the members were literate of which most of them were only at the stage of learning their signature, while thumb impressions still decorated the official records of the schools. This is the researcher feels will answer how and why a programme which seems to be very appropriate at planning stage fails at implementation.

Probing into the matter entails a discussion on the functioning of these committees. To encompass the functioning of the different committees, the discussion is divided into following three stages:

(1) meetings (2) community mobilisation (3) development of school.

With regard to the meetings, it is important to discuss that how many times in a year the members met, how many members met, what was the purpose of the meetings, when were these meetings arranged was a follow up of the meetings ensured and the reasons behind the existing status. The findings of the study exposed the following facts that while forty five (80%) schools fulfilled the minimum requirement of three meetings a year, only in sixteen (28.6%) schools all the members attended the meetings, in other sixteen (28.6%) schools half of the members attended the meetings and in thirteen (23.2%) school meetings were conducted without fulfilling the requirement of quorum. It is also worth noting that in twenty four (42.9%) schools, all the three meetings were arranged between May to August and one in December mainly for conduction of Pravesh Utsav and celebration of Independence Day and Republic Day. In eleven (19.6%) schools,

no data was available and in twenty one (37.5%) schools there was distribution of meetings through out the year. The finding also disclosed one very important aspect that in twenty four (42%) schools, the members met only to discuss the celebration of different festivals while in twenty one (38%) schools the members met with a constructive agenda of increasing enrolment, improving retention rates and increasing achievement levels. One most significant observation was that there were joint meetings of all the committees, viz VEC, PTA, MTA and VCWC in all sample schools except for the one meeting which was held to announce the elected members of MTA, PTA and VCWC. On the basis of the field experiences and the interactions with the different members and non-members of the committees, it can be said that as far as the meetings are concerned, everything seems to be going finely on records but the distribution of meetings only between May to August and the discussion being limited to celebration of festivals and utilisation of grants exposes the lackadaisical attitude of the functionaries, who are making just piece meal services to the programme and the nation as a whole. The joint meetings of the different committees though they have their own benefits have miserably failed to fulfill the main purpose of the constitution of MTAs and PTAs. The parents especially mothers who otherwise remain confined to the four walls of the house or their veils should get an opportunity to share their views in public, to come forward and fight for their wards education, to promote the education of their daughters. In the joint

meetings, the women again shy away and due to socio-cultural bindings do not open up or gather the courage to voice their beliefs. Thus, the joint meetings seem to have brutally killed the very purpose of MTAs and PTAs. Not only had that but the academic issues had also taken a back seat. The results show that (87.5%) forty nine out of fifty six schools took follow up of the resolutions made in the VEC meetings. The significance of this finding cannot be denied but it needs to be considered in the light of the agenda made and that the results fo follow up were solely based on the responses of the committee members.

Community mobilisation is also one of the important functions of the different committees. But it was sad to see that community mobilisations was understood only in terms of gathering funds from the community in cash or in kind or seeking help for the celebration of different festivals and for physical development of school. A glance at the statistics reveals that in thirty two (57.1%) schools the community raised funds for construction of balmitra varg (a child friendly classroom); in twenty five (44.6%) schools the contribution was in kind. At other places modest support in cash/kind was received. Different kind of support was received at different schools based on the socio-economic status of the people. Some of these included buying slates and pens, preparing play ground for children, procuring benches or infrastructure items such as furniture, fans, etc. play equipments, rendering services like carpentry, masonry, cooking, helping in celebration of Independence Day, Republic Day and Pravesh Utsav.

One can say that the ideology and trend of community involvement in children's education has certainly begun but has been limited to donations only. This speaks the lack of understanding of the functionaries, be it the head master or the coordinators of BRC and CRC regarding community mobilisation. Educating the functionaries regarding the involvement of community members not only for donations or celebration of festivals but also for promotion of different school activities is required. The success of SSA depends on quality of community based planning, implementation and monitoring process. The lack of involvement of the community members at all these exposes their lack of awareness and sensitisation regarding their roles and powers bestowed on them. The field experience of the researcher are a witness to the misconception of the community members who still believe that power lies with somebody else and they are just a party to all the happenings at school but do not have any voice in it. Thus community based planning and implementation does not seem to be working and community based monitoring ensuring transparency remains a distant dream. Although in thirty-nine (69.6%) schools, the community members reported that they ensured the regularity of the teachers but there is still no check on the quality of classroom interactions and the learning as such. The community does not seem to focus much on retention and quality education. The central and state governments have laid excessive emphasis on enrolment and still we are not able to achieve 100 per cent

enrolment. In Gujarat itself 2.84 lakh children are still out of school. The findings show that in forty five (80.4%) schools, regular efforts were made to increase enrolment, in forty four (78.6%) schools, the community members help in conducting surveys, in forty three (71.4%) schools the members contacted the parents in case of irregularity of their wards and encouraged them for girls' education. even the Chief Minister and the Education Minister of the state are figured begging from people the education of their wards especially the girl child. The failure at the enrolment level itself speaks of the quality of education, which fails to attract the children, sustain them and provide them minimum vocational inputs required to earn a day's living. Gandhi's basic education becomes inevitable here because a hungry man cannot be fed with countries, economic is spiritual for him. So to sustain the interest of the learners and to make them self reliant, modification in our educational system is inevitable. In thirty seven (66.1%) schools, the members of different committees sought help from the community members to develop the infrastructure of the school. In forty three (76.8%) schools, the library facility was available and in every twenty four (42.9%) schools, the books were issued to the different community members, in eleven (16.1%) schools only children were the beneficiaries. Here, it is noteworthy that only four schools had a record of the books in the library and had maintained an issue register. While at some of the schools, the books were piled and tied with a string and kept in cupboards. This throws light on the maintenance of the school facilities.

With reference to the development of the schools and the utilisation of the grants the researcher felt a lack of vision and planning on the part of the members on different committees since in one of the schools a pillar was constructed inside the classroom. Not only that but it seemed that the school was least worried about the governmental funds and an attitude that since amount is provided it has to be utilised was prevailing. In one of the schools, in spite of having sanitation facility through SSA grants, another sanitation facility was being constructed under the grant available at the district.

An additional classroom was being constructed but there was no planning in any of the construction. Everything seemed to be going on in a haphazard manner. It is austerity in monetizing only that can establish the appropriate uses of the grants. The researcher draws these inferences through the field observation wherein at many places the toilets were either in very bad shape and no body bothers about its hygiene or if they are in good shape then they were either kept locked or where used by the teacher, the water tank without potable drinking water, the MDM shed built near the toilet, the OBB grants utilised in purchasing revolving chair, office table, lockers for teachers and cup boards for office use, the TLM grants were spent either in purchasing readymade TLMs or charts, fevicol, scissors and coloured pens and as far as its uses is concerned, the children were rarely aware of what these pictures depict. While on records in thirty nine (69.6%) schools, the VEC members reported to have helped the school in creating child-centric

environment, in thirty eight (67.9%) schools effort were made to improve the quality of education, in nineteen (33.9%) schools, the members on different committees said to have helped in ALS centres, in thirty six (64.3%) schools, the efforts to reduce dropout rates were reported. However, the out-of-school children, low retention rates, high dropout and low achievement levels expose these brazen realities. Insight gained from this and previous researches related to classroom transaction and teacher effectiveness, this serve as a mirror for the ongoing teaching-learning practices. It also lays forward one of the several explanations for the performances below expected levels. These demands further researches to study the effectiveness of the programmes not only in terms of the opinions of the functionaries and the beneficiaries but also in terms of the effective field researches. Here in this regard, an attempt to study the perceptions of members and non-members of different committees has been made.

With regard to the perceptions of members and non-members of different committees about SSA and its implementation, a mixed response was obtained from both on different dimensions of the programme. The SSA programme was divided into following four different dimensions for ease of data collection and analysis.

1. Primary school and SSA grants
2. Primary school and SSA structure
3. Primary school and community involvement
4. Primary school and teacher training.

The members of the community did not differ largely on the dimension of community involvement and SSA grant. With regard to the availability of the grants and its utilisation, more than fifty per cent of the schools receive the entire grant timely and utilised it. These grants undoubtedly helped the growth of infrastructural facilities of the schools and the community involvement gave voice to the aspirations of the otherwised mute villagers. This response was found to be common among most of the sample schools except a few were in complain regarding inappropriate utilisation of grants and differential treatment to members of different categories were made. The researcher also observed that many schools had to no planning regarding the uses of grants. Since the government sanctions grant for development, repairing and sanitation, they were simply utilising the amount. In response to the management structure of SSA, the head master and few other community members expressed great satisfaction in the decentralised structure which helped the distribution of responsibilities and further develop the feeling of ownership through more and more involvement of people. While at other places, the coordinators of BRC and CRC expressed their dissatisfaction. They said that, SSA has created a parallel structure at different levels and accorded it with the financial powers while on the other hand there was an already existing structure. For the want of proper coordination between these two structures, the progress of the schools suffers. In one of the schools, the construction task was hampered due to micro level politics. The following is a

picture of that school with single classroom, fifty students and two teachers.

For the non-members of the committee, the structures of SSA were meaningless since many of them were not aware of the different committees formed, their role and contribution towards the school activities and the incentive schemes. They complain that they were hardly invited for school matters except on *Prawesh Utsav* and Independence Day and Republic day. The only change they could make out with the coming of this new structure was the over engagement of the headmaster and the teachers in paper work and meetings. The researcher feels that the lack of planning and organisation of the office task and the training probably led to such an inference. Probing further, demands discussions on the teacher training. With regard to teacher training, neither the teaching fraternity nor the community members were satisfied the way the teacher trainings were organised and the quality they delivered. Quality improvement of classroom transactions and development of competence and efficiency of teachers is one of the significant strategies of SSA. A huge fund flows into for quality educations with phenomenal importance to improving quality of teachers through teacher trainings. The researcher visited four training sessions at four different blocks and observed that not one of them provided the required teaching skills, the desirable attitude and mindset among the teachers. The sessions included a welcome speech, a political speech, some information, tea and breakfast sessions, gossips and a very little sharing of knowledge by few sincere teachers.

Numbers of researches have been conducted in the area of the teachers training and most of them endorsed the research's field observations. Barik (2001) evaluated teachers' training and found that only in 20% classes activity based learning was going on; out of which a very few teachers were not using TLMs. Mishra(2000) also reported that only 20% teachers used activity method of teaching 60% teachers did not prepare lessons,66% teachers did not conduct evaluation at the conclusions of the class period, and 80% schools did not have activity books. Most of the schools used local market TLMs. Sharma (2000) conducted a feed back study of teachers training inputs and found that majority of teachers after receiving training taught in the routine/ traditional way without involving students. Teaching methods varied from lecturing to reading to question-answer, to mix of all these. Student-teacher relationships were formal, in general; evaluation of learning was not taken seriously. In spite of so many evidences the teacher trainings throughout the country are still miserable and have contributed little towards quality improvement of teachers. Of the several explanations forwarded, it has been observed, that the attitude of teachers is of phenomenal importance. The teachers in general feel that training are only for novice, moreover training do not cater to their needs and are in efficient to satisfy theirs hunger for innovative strategies and teaching skills, Chaudhari (2000) conducted a study on training needs of primary school principals and found that they required training in school planning and evaluation, financial, educational

and school management. Patel (2000) also studied the training needs found that teachers required trainings for preparation of quality TLMs, while the community members and the coordinators of BRC and CRC felt a need for developing desirable attitude and mind set among teachers. Thus the effect of training has to be observed in real life context, through feedback from trainees and on the basis of difference between entry and exit - level behavioral/ attitude/ knowledge correlates.

Considering the present status of community involvement, the teaching learning process and the efforts made by the functionaries to improve the quality of educations and comparing it with the achievement of the students, an increasing trend in the achievement of the students in terms of the number of the students passing out was observed. It suggests that although the functioning of the primary schools is not very encouraging still in the last three years an increase in the numbers of schools, where the students who cleared the exams were same as those appeared was found. However as far as the number of students getting more than 60% was concerned there was no improvement in the last three years.

With out any more ado, let me say, I am convinced more than ever that UEE cannot be achieved in the foreseeable future just by pursuit of quantitative goals. To recall the saying of Gandhi, if one takes care of the means, the end would take care of themselves. If one takes care of the means, in this case the attitude of the functionaries, the teaching learning processes capacity building of all the functionaries, institutional

strengthening and well-structured reforms at different levels in different aspects, the quantitative goals would achieve themselves. Let me buttress my contentions by extrapolating Gandhi's saying. If, instead of taking care of the means, one is driven by the ends, what is achieved is not UEE but inflated and fudged statistics.

The finding of the present study though indicate some positive hope, nevertheless they are not very encouraging or tempting indicate something conclusive, and with further exploration we will perhaps be able to say more in this regard. To conclude the researcher would like to say that what all SSA is doing is like engaging in exploratory skirmishes and what is now needed is a forced march in seven league boots. Here the researcher may be blamed for raising only doubts and questions and offering no answers at all. Para phrasing hamlet, one may even say questions, questions and questions. But then as Poincare, the celebrated French mathematician and philosopher, sagaciously put it, the question is not what the answer is but what the question is. Only right questioning can right answer be elicited.

Implications of the Study

"I enjoy teaching as it can shape children to be good citizen of our country. So I want to become a teacher or a soldier to defend my country", said a child from Meghalaya in an interaction with our Honorable President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Such being the importance of teacher in character making and nation building teacher education and teacher

trainings need to be well-planned and organised.

- SSA spends rupees seventy per teacher per day amounting to approximately twenty-five crore yearly, for a twenty-day training. Thus, the content material designed needs to be rich, the DIET lectures, the coordinator of BRC and CRC, head teacher and other expert teacher need to be identified on the basis of their competency and trained in that area who, in turn, are required to give training to other master trainers who will conduct training at their cluster level. Meeting need to be distributed evenly through out the year and should cater to the needs of the individual teachers instead of a centralised planning.
- Some of the members in the school committees, are part of the committee by of the position they hold and their being part of the school committees was merely ornamental or obligatory in nature. There is a need to make a shift in the constitutional structure of the school committees, from status-quo committees to functional committees for the betterment of the school and for the cause of education.
- There is a need for orienting the members of the schools committees and community members regarding their rights and duties towards the school. The component of community based monitoring and accountability to the community and assurance of transparency towards the community can be realised if the

community are sensitised and trained for the jobs assigned to them. The community needs to move from *involvement to empowerment* which is possible only when the community is aware about its power. In the lack of above prerequisites, the changes that are brought as part of decentralised management merely remain on paper.

- It is essential that the decentralised structure should characterise freedom of operation in the village level. Emphasis should be on the quality education that is provided to the children in the school rather than the elaborate paper work that the functionaries are expected to maintain to substantiate the work that they have done. This system of appraisal takes away a substantial amount of precious time and energy that school teachers can use for improvement of their teaching learning process. Too much of reliance on paperwork has made the whole act ritualistic and burdensome. In order to mobilise the community support for education; there is a need to appreciate the local culture and local context. This entails a blend of the local flavour into the educational programme to create a greater sense of belongingness among the community members for the educational programmed.
- The study has revealed that most of the children live below the poverty line and education becomes meaningless for them if their basic

food needs are not met. The study has also alluded that irregularity in the attendance of children has mainly due to the fields while the girls stayed back at home to look after their younger siblings so that their family could manage to meet their ends. On the basis of the research's field observations and the prevailing poverty in rural India, it is very much recommended that children should be provided some vocational education/local craft based education which may not be burdensome, may identify with the local culture and tradition and at the same time may help them earn their daily wages.

- There is typically a lack of significant technical and management skills of local planning. Such training programme should focus in part on management information system and quantitative skills. The planning and management skills that are needed combined with the quantitative (facts and figures) and interpersonal skills form the basis of training. Thus, there is a serious need to envisage a situation where local communities should be called upon to be wholly self-reliant. State level agencies particularly in educational development. It is difficult to envisage a situation where local communities should be called upon to be wholly self-reliant. State level agencies will have an important role to play and will have to work in collaboration with the parallel structure created at different levels.

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