



PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION

AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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Panchayati Raj Institutions

DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION



I wish to ask: what is the difference between Bodh's schools and the government schools? Why is it that the educational levels of children are better in *Bodhshalas*... it is not only because their teachers work very hard, much more than the government school teachers, but also due to us. We see to it that they work well.

What can someone from outside do for you if you don't want to move your own hands and legs? Bodh made us realise this and therefore we have good schools running in our villages.

I hope that the newly elected representatives will also understand this and work for the betterment of education... we are not doing it for anyone but we have to do it for ourselves. It's our role and duty to the people who have chosen us. My support will always be there whenever required.

Gyarsi Lalji, outgoing Sarpanch

(Head of village panchayat)

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Decentralised Governance in Education

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P R E F A C E

The Indian Government has taken many steps since the 1990s to realise the unfinished goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). Among these may be included the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which mandates local self government through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), as it is these which are responsible for the planning and decision-making on a variety of issues and services of local concern, including basic education and primary health care. Though education is a state subject, its governance takes place through the collaborative efforts of the central government, state governments and local bodies. The PRIs, therefore, lie at the very intersection of these collaborative efforts. They are the vehicles through which decentralisation of educational management and governance is channelised.

As part of its interventions in development, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has had sustained and intensive engagement with the issue of educational reform in South Asia and East Africa over the last two decades. During this period, the Foundation has supported several innovative projects under the theme of school improvement in India, generating a range of approaches for improving the quality of school education. Under the Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE), AKF-supported Non-governmental organisations (NGO) Partners in India have initiated a variety of interventions to impact the quality of school education in select states.

The decentralisation of the governance of school education which makes it possible for local communities along with other stakeholders to have a greater say in the management and functioning of schools, has been at the heart of the Foundation's efforts. The role of local communities in providing an enabling environment for their children to participate in school education is therefore a critical aspect of the PESLE approach.

The 73rd and more recently the 74th Amendments provided a guiding framework for democratisation and decentralisation. These amendments revived the PRI framework and for the first time delineated in a detailed manner specific powers to be transferred from the state to local bodies. Education features prominently in these Amendments. Despite legislations in many states, however, the scope and nature of involvement of Panchayats² in school education seems to be limited. The emphasis is more on the 'physical' aspects — construction, repair and maintenance of schools and school infrastructure, rather than qualitative aspects which include classroom activities. Districts and states continue to hold sway over the recruitment and transfer of teachers. It has often happened that an inadequate understanding of roles, responsibilities and the authority of Panchayat members has seriously hampered their effective functioning. This is a common problem in most states. Further, in an attempt to meet the increasing demands for UEE, a large number of community forums have been created. These committees often function in isolation and at times also undermine the mandate and

authority of the PRIs. The real challenge has therefore been to create an interface between the PRIs and these institutions, leading to a greater synergy of efforts.

AKF Partners under PESLE have, over the years, undertaken a range of activities to promote and strengthen the involvement of PRIs through various forums to achieve Universal Elementary Education. Working with PRIs in the context of decentralised education governance has thus been a key area for AKF Partners like Bodh Shiksha Samiti and the Society for All Round Development (SARD), both working in the state of Rajasthan. These experiences have the potential to inform and influence the ongoing efforts and dialogue in the area of decentralised governance of school education.

This document is an attempt to systematically collate the experiences and insights of these organisations for the purpose of learning, wider sharing and dissemination. It shows how, with sustained effort, PRIs can play an active role in taking crucial decisions that positively impact the education of children. The document also highlights the challenges which might well be faced by organisations such as Bodh Shiksha Samiti and SARD while involving the PRIs in the years to come.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The Aga Khan Foundation would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by the European Commission (EC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) towards the implementation of the Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE) in India.

Involving local communities in decision making on matters that concern the education of their children is of crucial importance. It is our aim to contribute to existing knowledge and discourse on decentralised governance in education through sharing the experiences reflected in this publication by the Aga Khan Foundation and two partners in education, Bodh Shiksha Samiti and the Society for All Round Development (SARD).

The Foundation wishes to acknowledge Yogendra Upadhyaya, Aiswarya, Prem Narayan, Madan Jatra, Prabhu Dayal, Madan, Chiranji Lal, Chhotu Ram, Sudhir Bhatnagar, Pradeep, Kishwar Khan, and all the community members, teachers and students that have contributed their personal reflections and experiences.



The 73rd and 74th Amendments
breathed new life into the
Panchayati Raj Institutions
(PRIs) and became the most
significant policy initiative for
decentralised governance.

Panchayats and Educational Governance in India: An Overview

Political decentralisation leading to local self-governance¹ has had its genesis in the processes of development planning which followed India's independence. Indeed, it was an integral part of the Indian perspective even before independence. The Constitution of the country adopted in 1950 made this objective explicit by directing all the States to create local self-government bodies under the framework of Panchayati Raj through an electoral process. This spirit was enshrined in the following statement under Article 40 of the Constitution: *'The State shall take steps to organise village Panchayats² and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.'*

In keeping with this objective, many states enacted the Panchayati Raj Act in the 1950s, though these acts were not uniform in their visualisation. As a result therefore, a shared understanding and discourse of decentralisation failed to develop.

The 1990s witnessed perhaps the most significant moves towards decentralisation both in terms of policy reformulation and interventions in the field. As a matter of policy, the revival of PRIs was sought through the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution in 1992 that made the setting up of local bodies at the village, block, district and municipal levels, through a process of democratic elections, mandatory. This is possibly the most significant policy initiative for decentralised governance that India has formulated since independence.

Except for indirect references, the **1986 National Policy on Education** (NPE), an important landmark in the history of the development of education in the country, does not clearly address the issue of devolution of power to local bodies. However, in the revised version of this policy in 1992 (around the time of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments), the alternative to centralised bureaucracy was clearly articulated.

A special committee of the **Central Advisory Board on Education** (CABE), set up in 1993 attempted to take the process forward by recommending the setting up of Village Education Committees (VECs) and an Education Committee within the Panchayat Samitis (at the block level). This was in addition to the district board on education that had been recommended as part of the NPE of 1986. The problem of fund flow to the PRIs was highlighted as a concern by the committee. The committee also reiterated that the PRIs would need to be nurtured and supported for a sufficiently long time if they were expected to take on the varied challenges of educational management and development at the grassroots level.

In the more recent **District Primary Education Programme** (DPEP) and the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** (SSA), the district finally became the unit for planning. In SSA, habitation-level plans feed into the block-level plans which in turn inform the District Elementary Education Plans (DEEP). This may be considered an important development for bottom-up planning. The SSA attempts to involve PRI members at the habitation and block levels in its planning.

The decentralisation discourse in education received renewed attention after the **93rd Constitutional Amendment** making universal education a fundamental right for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. It is being increasingly realised that the management of education requires greater sensitivity and understanding of the processes of social change at the ground level. In this context, decentralisation implies structural changes, devolution of functions, responsibilities, as well as power and authority.

CURRENT SCENARIO

A review of the available literature suggests that though these steps are seen as far-reaching, and that they reflect the commitment of the national leadership to revive and make operational the concept of self-governance by local communities through the PRI, they only provide an enabling framework for decentralisation, requiring positive action at the state level for implementation through necessary executive and legislative measures.

The studies reveal that though the state governments had passed legislation to form Panchayats and primary education had been included in the list of functions to be transferred to the Panchayats, most Panchayats were not clear about their role as well as the functions they were expected to perform. This was due to a lack of information or official communication from respective state governments regarding the transfer of power to Panchayats. Very often, an

inadequate understanding of the roles, responsibilities and authority of the Panchayat members has seriously hampered their effective functioning. This remains a common problem in most states, highlighted through studies of PRIs and their role in primary education.

Further, in a situation where adequate funds are hard to generate, Panchayats are not in a position to use these funds for education; in any case education is not given the priority it deserves: roads, water and electricity are treated as priority areas. Finally, in most states, the lack of participation, and involvement of backward groups and women in this process of bottom-up planning and development remains glaringly visible.

The involvement of PRIs raised hopes as far as the objective of the UEE (Universalisation of Elementary Education) was concerned, since decentralisation was expected to achieve better accountability, larger resource mobilisation, and the empowerment of excluded people. However, scholars who have been following the developments with regard to decentralisation over the years express scepticism regarding the performance of PRIs, especially with regard to the issues of inclusion and participation of marginalised populations.

This scepticism has also resulted, in many instances, in the creation of many community level forums/committees as part of the planning and implementation of various development schemes. In the context of education, these take the form of School Development and Management Committees (SDMC), Village Education Committees, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and so on. Often, these committees work at cross-purposes and without any coordination with the PRIs, further eroding the mandate of the latter.





Panchayati Raj Institutions and Education: Bodh Experience

Bodh Shiksha Samiti, a non-governmental organisation, came into existence in 1987 with a vision to *'participate in the formation of an egalitarian, progressive and enlightened society by contributing in the evolution of a system of equitable and quality education and development for all children'*. Developing and implementing child-centred and congenial classroom processes that would facilitate smooth and educationally productive schooling of deprived children was seen as an important objective flowing from this vision. The Aga Khan Foundation has been providing support to Bodh for about 15 years.

Bodh's approach is characterised by the centrality accorded to community participation. The organisation believes that schools function better when the communities actively participate in their management. Hence, the strategy is based on the premise that the local community, local government representatives, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), and school teachers are equal partners in the development of quality education in their communities. In essence, all stakeholders should endeavour to create an alternative system of participatory school governance. Therefore, working with Panchayats as institutions of local self-governance becomes a key intervention in this strategy.

Bodh currently works in 52 urban and educationally deprived localities of Jaipur and 43 Panchayats of Thanagazi and Umren Blocks of Alwar. Its '*Bodhshalas*' (Community Resource Schools) operate in 7 locations in different parts of Jaipur city and 40 locations in Thanagazi and Umren blocks. As part of its outreach programme, Bodh also works with 200 mainstream government schools, both in Jaipur city and in Alwar district, and provides them pedagogic and managerial support directly and indirectly, i.e., by providing them resource teachers and/or academic support. Earlier, under the Janshala Programme,³ Bodh had worked with the government schools of four districts of Rajasthan, i.e., Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer and Bharatpur.

THE PROBLEM

Like many a grassroots organisation, Bodh welcomed the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments with much hope and enthusiasm. It considered the Amendments *'to be a daring step towards intensifying democratic and decentralised governance at the grassroots level'*. But the initial euphoria over these Amendments soon gave way to serious questions regarding the limited impact they had at the grassroots level—the organisation now believes that 13 years later, the Amendments which promised much to Panchayats to begin with, have delivered very little in reality. According to Bodh's analysis of the current PRI scenario, there has been very little progress with respect to the transfer of funds, functions and powers to Panchayati Raj bodies. This stems from a lack of political will, bureaucratic support and conceptual clarity about the institutions of self-government as envisioned by the 73rd Amendment. Thus, the entire process of decentralisation seems to have been derailed to a great extent.

PRIs open up enormous opportunities for local participation.



At the same time, however, Bodh believes that these Amendments have the potential of opening up enormous opportunities for participation in democratic processes at the societal level. In Bodh's view, the following constraints and possibilities exist in the current scenario:

- The PRI is not merely a system of participatory self-governance. It also ensures political empowerment of the poor, marginalised, and the oppressed (traditionally, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and Women). By virtue of the Constitutional Status bestowed upon the PRI, it has the potential to revolutionise the way local self-governance has till now been perceived.
- Adequate autonomy must be bestowed upon the Panchayati Raj Institutions, or they will merely be able to act as petty implementing agencies of the state. In this connection,

the provision of a legal framework does not guarantee implementation of the Amendments at the ground level. Therefore, the mere creation of a three-tier system⁴ is not enough — its actualisation will happen through the creation of a supportive systemic environment at each level. What this means is that the legal framework made available and provisions therein should be augmented by a perspective plan based on needs and realities, which should focus on building people's capacities to contribute meaningfully.

- Even if elections are held to these Panchayati Raj Institutions, being elected for the position does not *by itself* guarantee the accountability of PRI representatives towards the people — effective participation can only be ensured through the development of systemic consciousness.

Yogendra, Secretary – Bodh Shiksha Samiti, says, *'Such systemic changes to make PRI entities more functional may be achieved by involving various development agencies, non-governmental organisations and individuals in the process, who can help in initiating a 'new brand of politics' that is genuinely committed to the democratic decentralisation of issues central to human development, such as education and health.'*

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: POSITIONS AND BELIEFS

It must be reiterated here that Bodh's work with PRIs on education has organically evolved out of its experiences of directly engaging with communities first. A deliberate strategy of working with PRIs as constitutionally mandated structures of governance through which people can give shape to their dreams for development only came later.

Bodh believes it is not possible to ensure quality education for children without understanding the varied, real and complex nature of society. It is therefore important to engage reflectively with families and community organisations and systematically bring them to a point where they may begin appreciating how essential it is to provide quality education to their children. Without this, there cannot be a paradigm change in children's education. Bodh's conviction regarding the centrality of the community has resulted in a fervent desire to establish mechanisms for community participation in all its programmes.

For Bodh, advocacy of self governance goes beyond the mere delivery of basic services and includes aspects related to local decision-making based on developmental needs, and creating



systems of transparency and accountability in meeting those needs. In this regard Bodh endorses and supports the oft - repeated statement of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan that '*community ownership is vital to ensure accountability and needs to be cultivated by assigning responsibilities in grassroots level activities*'. Indeed, a special feature of Bodh's work lies in its belief that '*community participation*' is not enough; the programme has to be '*owned*' by the community. The uniqueness of Bodh's approach to community involvement is that it is *inbuilt in its modus operandi* itself, i.e., it is not seen as an '*add-on*' aspect that needs separate attention.

Another underlying belief that permeates Bodh's thinking is that *all the stakeholders are willing to participate in the process of providing quality education*. The question, however, that arises at this point is whether these stakeholders are adequately aware of their own potential to play an effective, participatory role in the process and whether they have the necessary wherewithal to translate their aspirations into reality. It is in this context that Bodh has taken up the challenge of making key stakeholders fully aware of their responsibilities through continuous interaction and a process of orientation. However, such processes have to be sustained over long periods of time if they are to make any difference. This calls for continuous reinforcement through capacity-building exercises, and constant dialogue with the community to explore ways and means to make education accessible to all children. Further, management of education in rural areas calls for greater sensitivity to the dynamics of social processes.

Bodh realises that making demands on the community to send children to school and for improving the school environment is not enough — mechanisms to empower the disempowered to enable them to participate in larger forums also have to be established. These can eventually result in making functionaries, teachers and others accountable to the community.

The *meaning* of community participation, therefore, has been redefined within the context of the holistic framework of education/school development initiatives at the grassroots level with particular stress on the following:

- Capacity building of all stakeholders to deal with educational management issues and to empower them to participate in academic dimensions of schooling like curriculum, pedagogy, etc.
- Devolution of sufficient power and authority to the local community network of stakeholders.
- Bringing about attitudinal change in bureaucrats for greater sensitivity to and understanding of problems and social processes at the local level.
- Creating a supportive and responsive environment in the higher echelons of bureaucracy.
- Bringing about a change in the generally-held notion that the community owing to its handicap of illiteracy and absence of academic and managerial skills cannot do justice to any assigned responsibilities and may not be able to use its authority judiciously.
- Eliminating discriminatory attitudes, reflected in policies and programmes designed for poor, deprived and illiterate people, who live in rural areas.

It may be said that it is in the context of the integration of community- and child-centred, congenial classroom processes and their acceptance at the community and government level that Bodh has established its unique identity. This approach has successfully made much headway in bringing often-heterogeneous communities together, overcoming differences in their socio-cultural and political ideologies/identities and affiliations.

PRI INTERVENTIONS IN THANAGAZI AND UMREN

Having extensively worked in the slums of Jaipur for over a decade, Bodh began its work in the villages of Thanagazi and Umren blocks of Alwar district in 1999.

Thanagazi and Umren are among the most difficult and inaccessible blocks of Alwar district, which is itself among the poorest and most educationally deprived districts of Rajasthan. Bodh's programme area is located amidst the thick forest area of Sariska and the hard rocky terrain of the Aravalli hills. Means of livelihood are limited to agriculture, livestock and agricultural labour. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) largely inhabit Thanagazi while Umren has a mixed population of these communities as well as Meo Muslims and Sikhs. The area is also inhabited by nomadic communities like the Banjara, Nat, Lohar and Bawariya.

Unlike other elected representatives, such as the Members of the State Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Members of Parliament (MP), PRI members continue to *live in the same geographic constituencies as the members of their communities, and hence, are not in a position to ignore the specific circumstances, living conditions and problems faced by the communities*. In their day-to-day existence and work, they cannot survive without establishing a close relationship with the electorate. At the same time, their position offers them the opportunity to establish linkages outside the community as well. They interact on a regular basis with the general administrative apparatus of the state, as they attempt to generate resources for the welfare of the people. In this context, Bodh is aware that if communities are organised enough, they can exert pressure on their elected representatives and the general administration to bring about a people-centred development process. Its experiences demonstrate this possibility adequately.

Bodh consciously did not opt for the 'individual-centric' approach in its work with communities, but went for 'systemic' or community-level changes. In the first phase, which began in 1999, 40 community schools (*Bodhshalas*) were established in un-served, un-reached habitations by Bodh as a response to the demand from the community. The setting up of schools was a collaborative exercise.

Prem Narayan, a member of Bodh's rural education team, echoes the difficulties of working in Bodh's operational areas: *'The moment you enter areas like Reika Mala, Kraska, Kundalka, Kaleka and Duhar Mala you feel you are entering into the Stone Age! It is a Herculean task to bring the issue of children's education to the forefront in such a scenario. Yet, the only hope for sustainable human development in these areas is education, which can lead people towards the path of progress.'*

Bodh's dedicated teachers worked alongside the community and were instrumental in establishing a valuable partnership. Progress was tardy, tedious and tortuous, but Bodh's

community workers and teachers worked with conviction and steely determination to bring about changes in mindsets of people living in far-flung and isolated communities.

Surjan Singh, who looks after the rural education programme, recalls, *'It took almost six to eight months to even convince people that education is critical for the holistic development of the child. However, the very thought that community schools could be established in partnership with Bodh, did not go down well with the local community. They were very doubtful about the role of non-governmental organisations. This was reflected in their constant refrain. They would often say that, "Aap log to paise ke liye ye sab karte ho, aur kuchh din baad chale jatey ho" (you do all this for money and will go back after sometime). So, the initial rapport-building phase was very crucial and was handled very sensitively by us. In retrospect, I can say that our convictions about what we were doing and our ability to patiently build trust helped these communities to change their opinion and encouraged us to move forward.'*

After 1–2 years, it was noticed that a gradual change was taking place in perceptions and attitudes, in the context of the schooling of children. Not only were the local communities becoming more articulate, the PRI members who were till then watching these developments from a distance, were slowly beginning to get involved. These were the first 'converts' to the process. Till then, they had not imagined that such changes could occur within their communities.



Another challenge was to understand the 'political' undercurrents among these communities. As time went by, Bodh's workers noticed that community representatives often had the tendency to drag Bodh into their local issues and conflicts. There was thus the danger of taking sides in local conflicts and developing biases about certain sections or persons in the community. In some places, influential persons like the Panchayat Pradhan even attempted to influence Bodh's community workers to work with some sections of the community, and leave out the rest. Comments like 'sabse mil ke kya karogey tumhey bata to diya hai, wohi karo' (What will you do by meeting everybody? You do what you have been told to do.) were commonly heard.

Bodh was motivated by the agenda of inclusion despite many constraints.



However, Bodh continued its work undeterred by these pressures, motivated all the time by the agenda of inclusion. Despite these constraints and difficulties, the initial phase of trust-building and mobilisation was characterised by activities that helped in the mapping of the educational status of children in these areas. Household surveys, weekly and monthly meetings, street plays, film shows, etc., were all used to create a conducive environment for providing formal education to children. Gradually, there was a turnaround — people started listening more attentively to the Bodh team, the establishment of *Bodhshalas* in the areas proved to be a turning point, and the villagers started believing the intentions of Bodh. Mohan Lal, a *Bodhshala* teacher in Badgujan village, recalls how it took nearly four years for their *Bodhshala* to come up in a proper building in the village. Since early 2000, till March 2004, the *Bodhshala* functioned under trees at various locations in the village even as the organisation struggled to create awareness about children's education among the local community. The process was tortuous, but ultimately rewarding when the community decided to allot land for the school, and raised financial resources for the structure, etc. The local Panchayat was actively involved in this process. Credibility was established. Results, however, were uneven.

Each village has its own unique experience of success and frustration to narrate. Often, the forums that Bodh created for discussing educational issues were used for local politicking. Chhotu Ram, a *Bodhshala* teacher from the 'Hari Singh ka Ghoda' village explains the reasons for this unevenness: *'In some Panchayats, initiative by the PRI members and other community representatives was taken quickly. However, the important thing is that the time allocated in these meetings for educational issues went on increasing.'*

Madan Jatra, a rural team member, recollects that *'In the beginning I experienced rude and insulting reactions from the people when we tried to get them to sit together in one place for discussion on any issue. It took days of constant contact to organise a meeting in a community. We performed plays and enacted street performances to get people interested in talking to us.'* In villages like Sanvri ka Bans, consisting of a population of Meo Muslims and Sikhs, Bodh found it difficult to even bring both the communities together at meetings.

These examples illustrate that the *Bodhshalas* were not opened as a service to be delivered to these areas — they got established only when there was complete acceptance as well as a demand by the community for such schools.

All these developments first found collective expression in a meeting organised by Bodh in 2000 at Thanagazi, in which the communities were invited to plan the next steps. This meeting is considered a milestone in the organisation's work with the community. Bodh considers this meeting as the beginning of its formal interaction with Panchayats. It is also looked upon as the starting point of Bodh's efforts with the PRIs in this area. Though PRI representatives were not invited specifically by Bodh, they attended this meeting due to the realisation that *'there was something happening'* that they could not ignore any longer being people's representatives themselves. The communities had amply demonstrated that it was very possible for their children to receive school education, often even in areas that were untouched by 'modern development', through the basic services of the state. Already Rs 1 million had been mobilised by these communities to improve the basic conditions in their schools.

Even as many Panchayat members pledged their support to the work being done by Bodh, the latter proposed that it could contribute Rs 15,000 to each village from its budget towards the construction of *Bodhshalas*. The rest of the amount would have to be mobilised by the community, including the PRIs. Subsequently some of the PRI representatives such as the Ward Panch and Gram Panchayat Sarpanch extended overwhelming support and managed to mobilise cash as well as materials from their respective villages, which in turn enabled the construction of *'pucca' Bodhshalas* in many places.

From this point onwards, the organisation strengthened its relationship with the Panchayat representatives — for instance, the PRI members began to regularly attend the inauguration of various *Bodhshalas* as well as other functions held on their premises. The Bodh team ensured their participation in the decision-making related to the functioning of these schools. In each monthly meeting with the community, Bodh made it a point to apprise the Panchayat members about the progress, condition and status of the *Bodhshalas*. *Bodhshala* teachers also used the opportunity to emphasise the roles and responsibilities of the PRI members during these meetings. As a matter of fact, the unconditional support and trust of the community generated much enthusiasm and energy among *Bodhshala* teachers, and their work in turn was received more and more positively by the Panchayat members.

It may be illustrative here to note that Bodh's initial attempt to work directly with the government school teachers through training did not take off, due to the lukewarm response by the teacher community to this initiative. In hindsight, Bodh feels that the wide acceptance of Bodh's work by the government school system later was directly a result of the momentum generated by its work with the local community, which in turn had its impact on the way PRIs got involved. In this way, the right conditions for Bodh to work with government schools were created. This strengthened Bodh's conviction about the immense possibilities arising out of greater community involvement in school education.

GOVDI'S STORY

The story of the developments in Govdi village from 2001 onwards not only represents the turning point in Bodh's work in the rural areas — it also illustrates clearly Bodh's understanding, approach and philosophy of working with rural communities in providing an alternative education and in its management.

Prabhu Dayal and Madan were teachers working in the *Bodhshala* of Indauk village, adjacent to the Sariska wildlife sanctuary, nearly 15 kilometres from Govdi. It so happened that Rameshwar, the Sarpanch of Govdi, and his friends visited Indauk one day, to attend to some local affairs in the area, and while doing so visited the *Bodhshala*. The Sarpanch was impressed with the essential characteristics of the *Bodhshala*: the children seemed to be learning and enjoying in the process; the teacher seemed to be dedicated; and the *Bodhshala* seemed to be an integral part of the village.

Rameshwar reflected on the condition of the government school in his own village. It was dying a slow death. Only 60 children were left, and over 150 children had moved on to join the nearby private school. The *Bodhshala* left a deep impression in his mind, and made him wonder how the government school in his own village could be transformed in a similar manner. He invited Prabhu Dayal and Madan to take part in community-level discussions in Govdi in which he played a crucial role. Teachers from the government school were also invited. Among them was Chiranjil Lal Sharma, who too was concerned about the rapidly deteriorating condition of his school. Such discussions and reflections went on for over six months, and Bodh watched these developments carefully, all the while participating in the process. Finally, the community decided to do something. Impressed with Prabhu Dayal's work, the people from Govdi came to the decision that they wanted him to work in their village with the government school to improve its situation. Besides the younger children, the education of adolescent girls in the village also remained a concern which they brought up for intervention. They wanted Prabhu to spend two hours every day with these girls. They raised their demand with the Panchayat and made it clear that they would like the Panchayat to take this initiative forward. As a result, Bodh found itself confronted with the challenging prospect of working with the government school. Moreover, the local community was raising the demand.

During these six months, parents, community members and leaders, PRI members and school teachers along with Bodh discussed various possibilities to retrieve the situation. Grand commitments were made. *'We will get all the out of school children back to school within*



7 days', somebody said. The school was cleaned. More and more people started visiting the school, something that had never happened at Govdi before. In the process, they collected Rs 80,000. It was decided that a part of this money would go towards Prabhu Dayal's salary, and the other part would be spent in purchasing educational and play materials for the children in the school. The picture of a different kind of school motivated these people to do things they had never done before for the school.

Sensing an opportunity to do something useful, Bodh agreed to the community's proposal, and had Prabhu Dayal appointed at Govdi. They managed to convince the community to contribute to half his salary. The other half was contributed initially by Bodh. The government school teachers of Govdi were perplexed at this turn of events — would the officials from the education department agree to this arrangement? The Govdi PRI, led by Sarpanch Rameshwar, assured them that the Panchayat would take care of these concerns in discussion with the education department.

This development is often considered by Bodh as a good example of a tripartite arrangement between the community, teacher's collective and an NGO. The idea of 'habitation based' planning, emphasised mostly in documents of initiatives like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, was actually put into practice as an outcome of these deliberations.

Yogendra, the secretary of Bodh, recalls his meeting with the people from Govdi village, in the rural campus of Bodh at Bodhgaon. *'One day, 25 people from Govdi came to meet me. They were all troubled about the state of their school. They must have deliberated a great deal about this, because they mentioned to me in that meeting that they had created a playground facility in their school, using nearly 200 tractor loads of mud which were flattened neatly around the school. This indicated to me that they were serious about doing something....'*

Prabhu Dayal began to play his new role in right earnest supported by all the goodwill and expectations that had been generated. Three months later, nearly 200 children who had joined the nearby private school, came back to the government school. The private school had to be closed down. Within six months, there were palpable changes in the school in terms of the overall environment, children's attendance, classroom activities and children's learning as well. There was for the first time 100 per cent enrolment in the government school of Govdi — it became the first school in all of Alwar district to achieve this distinction under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This was immediately recognised by the district administration. The collector, and other education department officials, descended on Govdi to celebrate its success. A

massive gathering of 5,000 people from Govdi and other adjoining areas rejoiced in an event that began at 6 pm and went on till late evening. The local MLA was also invited to join the celebrations.

At this occasion, with all key government stakeholders present, the plan for the next year was also discussed. A strong demand to extend the primary school to start the sixth grade for girls was made. It had been observed that girls would usually drop out after primary school, hence the need was felt to start this facility in Govdi itself. It was then that an additional teacher, Chhotu Ram was appointed by Bodh and the community to work with Prabhu Dayal in Govdi village. The community contributed half his salary as well and the other half came from Bodh. As these developments took place, one could notice the palpable change in how the community viewed the school. From being addressed as a '*sarkari school*' (government school), people began referring to it as '*hamara school*' (our school). Within two months of the massive gathering at Govdi, the government upgraded the Govdi school to Grade VI. Here was an instance where the community actually dictated the pace and nature of change — the education administration had no choice but to accept these changes as they were motivated from below. Sarpanch Rameshwar, among others, was at the helm of the driving force for these changes.

To recognise the upgradation of the Govdi school, a foundation stone was installed on its campus. The contributions of the Sarpanch and Bodh were inscribed along with the MLA's name. For the first time, the contributions of a non-governmental organisation were formally recognised in the development of a government school, something that was unprecedented in the area.

Similar developments were also tracked in Bhopala, an adjoining village. Om Prakash Yogi, the Sarpanch of Bhopala (a village in the Saleta Panchayat), got the same MLA (who had been present in Govdi) to inaugurate the programme with the government school there, and recognise the changes in his village. The Bhopala village community then went on to demand similar changes in their school. As time passed, a large number of people came to Govdi to see what was happening. Many even went to meet Rameshwar at the Panchayat Samiti office in Thanagazi, if they did not find him at Govdi. Slowly, a spirit of healthy competition developed among the Panchayats. In the initial stages, as many as 15 Panchayats undertook a *joint* resolution to institute similar changes in their schools. A partnership bond was developed. Govdi had created a ripple effect that began to have far-reaching consequences that even Bodh could not have foreseen.

In the current scenario, and having gained the valuable experience detailed above, Bodh patiently waits for the community, PRI and the teachers to arrive at a shared understanding of what needs to be done for children's education in their villages. Only once this base is created does the organisation offer its support. As of today, 50 villages in Bodh's operational area have committed to undertake steps to put in place a different system of managing their educational affairs. These include the remote villages of Kraska, Kaleka, and Duhar Mala, not connected by any road and mostly accessible only by foot.

In 2002, the Pradhan of Umren block, Ashok Dikshit (who till then did not have a positive opinion of NGOs and their work), was invited to attend the inauguration of a *Bodhshala* structure in Indauk village. This event became an opportunity for the community as well as Bodh to share with him the extensive work done for the education of the children, and as a result, Ashok Dikshit invited the organisation to work with the government schools of Umren block. By this time, the people's elected representatives had been successful in reaching the local communities to make them aware of the issues of access and quality of education. Thus, the need for children's education was beginning to be firmly established in the area. The Panchayat Samiti's written invitation to Bodh, stating expectations and commitments about improving the educational status of the area, is often considered to be the impetus behind the changes and improvements in the far-flung hamlets of Kraska, Sirawas, Rogda, Rundh, Doba and Milakpuriya of Umren Block.

As a result of Bodh's efforts, and the ripple effect that it created, the PRIs were gradually becoming more aware of their roles, responsibilities and rights as far as the education of children was concerned. Through the support and cooperation of the Gram Panchayats, not only were there improvements being made in the physical infrastructure of the schools, but a conducive environment was being created for further dialogue and an expression of concern about the need to improve the quality of the schooling system.

An important milestone was reached when, in August 2004 — the Panchayat Samitis of Umren and Thanagazi wrote to the Education Secretary of Rajasthan, endorsing Bodh's Jan Pahal⁵ Programme, and expecting the state to provide the support needed for its success.

जनपहल कार्यक्रम, अलवर

(द्वारा बोध शिक्षा समिति, एए-1, अनिता कॉलोनी, बजाज नगर, जयपुर)

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दिनांक: 24.8.04

श्री बी.एन.शर्मा (I.A.S.)
शिक्षा सचिव
राजस्थान-सरकार
जयपुर ।

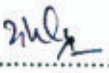
सम्मान्य महोदय,

हम अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता अलवर जिले के थानागाजी एवं उमरैन उपखण्ड के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में गुणवत्तापूर्ण प्रारम्भिक शिक्षा के सार्वजनिकीकरण हेतु, हमारी पूर्ण सहमति के आधार पर बोध शिक्षा समिति द्वारा विकसित 'जनपहल कार्यक्रम' का परियोजना-प्रस्ताव आपके विचारार्थ प्रेषित कर रहे हैं ।

आपसे अनुरोध है कि संवैधानिक निर्देशों एवं राष्ट्रीय तथा राज्य की शिक्षा नीति की दृष्टि एवं लक्ष्यों के अनुरूप शिक्षा के प्रसार तथा उन्नयन की इस एकजुट जमीनी पहल को शिक्षा-विभाग, राजस्थान सरकार की औपचारिक स्वीकृति एवं समर्थन प्रदान करने का कष्ट करें ।

सधन्यवाद !

भवदीय


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सचिव
बोध शिक्षा समिति


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प्रधान
पंचायत समिति, उमरैन


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प्रधान
पंचायत समिति, थानागाजी


..... लगातार.....
जिला अधीक्षक, पंचायत राज कर्मचारी संघ
अलवर

(This Document was signed by the above mentioned officials as well as 21 Sarpanchs and 21 Head Masters of Thanagazi and Umren Blocks.)

A seminar organised by Bodh on 24 August 2004 is considered to be an important milestone in its journey of consolidating community efforts towards the provision of quality education to all children. On this day, PRI members, other community representatives, and teachers came together in the office of the Umren Panchayat Samiti and made a unanimous statement in the presence of B. N. Sharma, the then education secretary of Rajasthan, the Gram Panchayats, CBOs, and teachers from government schools with Bodh, had undertaken the responsibility of improving the quality of children's education in government schools. This collective declaration was considered historic, and Bodh believes that it had all the elements of a people's movement for education in the two blocks. This led to the establishment of an agreement between Bodh and individual Panchayats.

For Bodh, this event was significant in more ways than one. Not only did this declaration of the Panchayats provide the organisation a broader mandate for its work but it also created opportunities and provided the much needed opening to work more intensely with the government system, something that had not happened despite all the formal attempts to work with the government till then.

CREATING AND STRENGTHENING FORUMS

By this time, Bodh had created several openings for dialogue and engagement with the communities and their representatives.

COMMUNITY LEVEL MEETINGS The most fundamental forum is at the level of the community. In these monthly meetings the status of school, teachers' attendance, teaching-learning processes/methods and infrastructure requirements, etc., become the focal points. The PRI members not only actively participate but also ensure that the meeting is held as scheduled.

GRAM PANCHAYAT MEETINGS Gram Panchayat meetings (village-level) held on the fifth and twentieth day of each month become the platforms to take forward the work initiated in the form of joint ventures by Bodh and the Panchayats. Often, education becomes a priority topic for discussion.

PANCHAYAT SAMITI MEETINGS These monthly meetings at the block level provide ample space for an open discussion regarding educational initiatives led by Bodh and the Panchayats.

They also provide impetus for an expansion of the programme, and for the addition of new features to the programme. These meetings have often resulted in an increased monitoring of schools' functioning through regular visits made by PRI members, district officials, etc.

GRAM SABHA MEETINGS These occur once in six months in each Gram Panchayat. Bodh has been successful in bringing the issue of education to the centrestage in such forums, and this has resulted in a number of solutions being put forward.

VILLAGE-LEVEL EDUCATION MEETINGS With Bodh's intervention '*Gram Shiksha Sabhas*' have been formed in all the villages of the project area. The monthly meetings of the *Gram Shiksha Sabhas* (village education forums) have provided the various stakeholders with a platform to share their concerns and suggestions about the educational programmes. Increasingly, stakeholders now collectively plan for the development of the schools and demonstrate their commitment towards improving their quality. The Shiksha Sabhas thus play a crucial role in keeping up the momentum to solve educational problems at the village level.

PANCHAYAT EDUCATION GROUP In this forum, Panchayats come together for regular monitoring of schools and assess the educational progress at the cluster level.

BLOCK-LEVEL PANCHAYAT GROUP This group comes together once a year at the block level. It includes all the Panchayats that Bodh works with. So far, this forum has convened once, in February 2005, following the third round of Panchayat elections in Rajasthan.

KISHORI SAMOOH/MAHILA SAMOOH These are dedicated community level forums that have been most effective in encouraging the women and young girls to come out of their houses and gain greater control over their conditions. Such a forum is important for them not only to get together to know of each others' welfare but also for the opportunity to participate in forums which are most accessible to them. *Kishori Samoohs* (adolescent girls' groups) and *Mahila Samoohs* (women's groups) have a varied set of activities ranging from education, literacy to discussions on maternal and child health, hygiene, nutrition and issues such as family planning and community development.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMME COORDINATION COMMITTEE This represents a significant step in actually creating a forum and the mechanism to supervise, monitor, support and strengthen education programmes (*Bodhshalas*, government schools) of the block and thereby take ownership of the same. This committee has been constituted most recently (October 2005).



The Panchayat representatives have invariably initiated the forums described above for children's education. They serve to illustrate and reinforce the belief that local self-governing bodies can assume the role entrusted to them and perform the functions expected of them. Events like the one that took place in February 2005, in which outgoing and newly elected PRI members including a large number of women PRI members met, debated, and exchanged experiences and ideas to demonstrate the proactive role in education that is being increasingly played by the Panchayat representatives. Such platforms contribute to the building of solidarity, which is so critical in overcoming internal divisions among people and communities involved in the collective action to make meaningful education a reality for children. They also provide space to plan for the future — a positive outcome of the February 2005 event was the decision to start a residential girl's camp. The local MLA, Kanti Meena, proposed this. As a result, a camp for 100 girls has come up in Bodh's rural campus at Bodhgaon, with support from the communities.

Groups like the *Community Programme Coordination Committee* help in taking the agenda even further. They formalise the involvement of local communities and their PRI representatives in their children's education, cutting across caste and party lines. Discussions around the issue of sustaining processes and initiatives can be held at such forums, whose chairpersons are the Pradhans of both Umren and Thanagazi blocks.

LESSONS FROM GOVDI, BHOPALA, KRASKA...RETHINKING ASSUMPTIONS AND THINKING OUT OF THE BOX!

Yogendra sums up the lessons for Bodh from Govdi in the following words: *'Govdi provided us the idea for the first time that an aware and organised community, with support from its PRI and the teachers, has the power to transform the functioning of the government school. Our Jan Pahal programme had its genesis in these developments. We came to realise that alternate educational management mechanisms are possible. These can effectively replace the traditional top down approach which strangles the educational system and prevents possibilities from unfolding.'*

In Bodh's understanding, rural communities have assimilated their internal contradictions and practices of exclusion and discrimination that have existed over long periods of time to such an extent that these practices have got 'grooved' into a framework of relationships (one-one, one-many, many-one) which determine the equations of power, gender, etc., in these communities. What is permissible and not permissible within this framework is also determined in formal and informal ways. However, communities have an 'external face' which often presents a picture of 'managed harmony'. If one looks deeper, however, the undercurrents become apparent. Fundamental problems do not get addressed in this 'status quoist' reality. Issues of exploitation and exclusion are not questioned. A few influential persons manipulate this reality — they are the ones who have access to resources. It is in their interest that this 'managed harmony' is not disturbed.

Usually agencies working for social development only tinker with this reality. According to Bodh, there are broadly two options for bringing about change that would allow an egalitarian order to emerge. First of all, political activism can expose the existing polarities and contradictions, and challenge their very existence. However, very often, NGOs do not have the wherewithal to contain the volatility that such processes may result in. The second option, which Bodh believes in, is to create an ideal of the **'common good'** which everyone in the community aspires to achieve. The education of children is one such ideal; nobody can deny the need to reflect upon this need. Aspiring to achieve this ideal naturally has implications for how rural societies have to reorganise and mobilise themselves around this issue.

Thus, the identification of this common good and the collective action that it may result in, has the potential to break down barriers and help overcome deeply entrenched practices of social exclusion. For agencies like Bodh, the challenge lies in creating conditions where this need is

expressed and reflected upon collectively. This can then lead to collective action. The celebration of achievements in each village by hundreds of people is an example of the 'collective' coming into being. An 'educational social norm' is thus created in the community, which can have far-reaching implications in the reorganisation of rural societies that have been divided by caste, class, religion and gender barriers for long.

In this conception of things, the term 'Community-based organisation' (CBO) has a different connotation altogether. 'It does not any longer refer to any particular committee as such,' opines Yogendra. *'In a true people-centric sense a community-based organisation refers to an aware and organised community, the entire community and not just a handful of persons. Of course, as one moves up in the system, there is a need to have structural representation, say at the block or district level, where you may need committees. At the village level, however, the situation has to be more open and informal, where everybody can participate.'*

In such a scheme, where does the PRI fit in? How does it relate with the CBO? *'The CBO encircles the PRI',* explains Yogendra. *'PRI members become a part of this larger organisation of the community. They can drive processes of change, and can participate in it. They are in a unique position to contribute by virtue of the fact that they are elected representatives. However, this need not give them any pride of place.'*

ASSESSMENT OF WORK WITH PANCHAYATS

More than five years have passed since Bodh's rural education programme began. The organisation has developed interesting ways of reflecting upon its achievements and limitations in the course of its work with PRIs so far. In some Panchayats, work has been going on for five years, and in other Panchayats interventions began 2–3 years ago. In those Panchayats where Bodh has recently expanded its work, the initiatives go back just a few months. Participation levels of PRIs are very much dependent on the time spent with them and the work done with each Panchayat. In the same way, schools that belong to the Panchayats where work has been going on for a longer period are in a better condition as compared to those schools where work has begun more recently. However, on the whole, it has been realised that there is an intimate and very significant relationship between the participation of Panchayats and the overall school development. This can be deduced from a simple method of understanding how PRI involvement (or the lack of it) influences school effectiveness or development.

In Bodh's terms, overall school effectiveness is defined by factors such as children's enrolment, attendance, their retention, their learning levels and their achievement as well as the number of teachers available, their attendance, school infrastructure and the extent of community participation, etc. Based on these criteria, Bodh classifies schools as belonging to three categories: A, B and C (Read A, B and C as 'good', 'average', and 'needing improvement', respectively). This simple system helps in arriving quickly at an overall picture of the status of work in these schools.

In order to understand how PRIs contribute to school effectiveness, Bodh has identified factors such as their regularity in meetings, regularity and frequency of school observation, frequency and content of discussions on school education in Panchayat meetings, deliberations on education between PRI members and education officials, efforts to provide adequate infrastructure/facilities in schools, efforts to mobilise the participation of the local community in the matters of the school and reaching out to the teachers, etc. These factors determine the nature and extent of participation by the PRIs in education. If we now attempt to understand PRI involvement in schools, the following points become clear:

- In most locations where *Bodhshalas* and government schools belong to the 'A' category, Bodh's work with the local communities and their PRI representatives dates back to at least 5 years. Here, PRI members visited the schools at least three times during a month, apart from taking part in community meetings, being regularly in touch with education




department officials regarding various issues faced by their schools, and demanding (and often ensuring) appointment of teachers as per need. Villages of Dahlawas, Turkiawas, Kishori, Garhbasai, Bhagdoli, among others, are examples in this category. In most 'A' category schools, we find that the Panchayat Sarpanch belongs to that village itself.

- In most of the above-mentioned Panchayats, school infrastructure was provided through the Panchayats by leveraging resources from various schemes. In Digariya, Kushalgarh, Madhogarh and other Panchayats, resources available under the government's 'Swarna Jayanthi Rozgar Yojna' were used to construct school buildings and classrooms.

Bodh has been working with the Gram Panchayats and community at large for the last five years. Rajasthan has by now seen three rounds of Panchayat elections, with the third round having concluded in February 2005. In Bodh's analysis, despite all the challenges, community participation processes initiated by the organisation have begun taking the shape of a movement. More and more communities are now coming forward to seek and offer support to make access to educational opportunities possible for their children in the remote areas of Thanagazi and Umren blocks.

Yogendraji says, *'The role of external agency lies in ensuring that everyone — women, men, teachers, PRI members, and children can participate in the process of community development. Once this happens, resistance can eventually diminish, as Bodh has witnessed on so many occasions in many villages over the years.'*

Panchayati Raj Institutions and Education: The SARD Experience

 Society for All Round Development (SARD), a non-governmental organisation, came into existence in 1996 on the premise that there was a need to focus on *'previously overlooked communities (particularly rural communities) and promote their development through participatory, holistic and integrated programmes'*. SARD's vision is that of a society that gives equal opportunities and ensures that the basic minimum needs of all citizens are met through environmentally sustainable economic activities. Flowing from this vision is the organisational mission according to which *'the participation of minority and disadvantaged communities in mainstream development processes will be increased.... SARD will strive to empower these groups, particularly women, by improving their access to quality education and health....'*⁶ Education, especially primary education, has evolved as a key intervention given the extremely low attainments among children in its operational areas of the Mewat region of Rajasthan. SARD believes that its interventions for children should result in *'meaningful education which is sensitive to their context and needs....'*⁷

In SARD's scheme of things, interventions in the area of education must be located within a larger process of participatory development through an 'entire community' approach. The notion of community participation is thus *'based on the firm conviction that no organisation can achieve its objectives for social development in the true sense without the active cooperation of the community. No positive change can occur without the community feeling the need for it. The community's active involvement is necessary for making it competent enough to sustain the changes occasioned by the intervention...community participation and empowerment, are integral rather than incidental components....'*⁸

SARD's vision for the PRI is that it has the potential to play a central role in the integrated development of the Mewat region, leading to the empowerment of its people. SARD therefore views the PRI not merely as the 'channel', but as the 'maker' of change. The organisation's



vision for the PRI thus places the people's institution in a position where it will actively, in consultation with local communities, use the resources available for their socio-economic development. 'Integrated' here implies 'all aspects' of people's development — economic, social, cultural and educational.

THE PROBLEM

SARD has been working with Meo-Muslims, a community of farmers and agricultural labourers, living in some of the remotest areas of the Deeg, Nagar and Kaman blocks of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan since 1999. The Meos who trace their roots to the early Aryan invasion of northern India call themselves Kshatriyas (warriors), who converted to Islam in the 14th century and have preserved their social and cultural identity. Historically, the region inhabited by the Meos has seen much turbulence, having been subjected to repeated invasions.⁹ Situated in the midst of the Aravalli hills, the geographical terrain of Mewat is harsh, the soil is hard and rocky and not suited for agriculture. Means of livelihood are limited to agriculture, livestock rearing and agricultural labour with the result that this community has been isolated from 'modern development', leading to its further alienation.

Sudhir Bhatnagar, CEO SARD says, *'The lack of an institutional set-up and the apathy of the local government, coupled with inadequate training of teachers and the lack of a committed teaching workforce, has further aggravated the educational situation of this community. SARD therefore views education of children as a key intervention among other initiatives like health care and developing environmentally sustainable livelihoods, and so on.'*

SARD's area of operation (supported through AKF's education programme) includes direct intervention in 14 villages of Deeg and Kaman blocks of Bharatpur district, where it has its *'Taleem Ghar'*, also known as the *'Quality Education Centre'* (QEC). This caters to children in the age group of 3–14 years. Children, who do not have access to basic education, and those who have dropped out and have never been to formal government schools, are encouraged to participate in the QEC programme. Currently, there are 18 QECs. Nine of these are situated in five Meo-dominant villages. The other nine villages primarily consist of Jats and Gujjars belonging to the OBCs. Through its outreach programme, SARD works directly with nine government schools, and provides academic support to 72 government schools.

SARD's vision for the PRI has emerged out of its analysis of the constraints and challenges confronting the development of the PRI as a genuine people's institution. On the whole, awareness among PRI representatives, especially at the Gram Panchayat (village assembly) level regarding their roles and functions, is low. Children's education does not appear on the radar of the PRIs. Further, clear guidelines were not provided to the Panchayat members in terms of activities that they need to undertake, as well as the responsibilities they can discharge.

It also became clear that though provisions exist for regular meetings, these do not take place at the desired frequency, or for that matter, in an effective manner. A perception exists further, that Mewat, with all its orthodoxy, illiteracy and conservative traditions, would not embrace the path of 'modern' development. Further, personal interests of the representatives of the people often take precedence over community interests, needs and goals.

Women's participation in local decision-making is also very minimal. Often, men act as proxy PRI representatives of the women elected to the position of the Sarpanch (at the village level) or Panchayat Samiti Pradhan (at the block level). Caste and personality dynamics have also been observed to be a major factor that have created divisions in the PRI and hence influence allocations of PRI resources for local development.

As far as Meo Muslims are concerned, their religion too plays a crucial factor — there is a strong feeling of being excluded deliberately by the state apparatus as well as the larger society. This

is compounded by a weak leadership within the community, which continues, in many ways, to be under the influence of religious leaders and their conservative theology.

Jawahar Singh Bedum, who earlier served as a member of the District Panchayat Council (Zilla Parishad) says, *'The education department has a stranglehold and controls all the affairs. As far as finances are concerned, the DPEP/ISSA funds are routed through the district project committee and at the ground level we have the school development and management committee. The PRIs are nowhere in the picture!'*

**Building networks
and creating forums
for shared learning.**



INTERVENTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

SARD's approach of working with PRIs is two-pronged in that it aims to activate and strengthen the functioning of the PRI at the village, block and district levels in the three-tier system. At the grassroots level, interventions and activities have focused on the Gram Panchayat; at the block level, the Panchayat Samiti and at the district level, the Zilla Parishad. The organisation has constantly explored how representatives of the PRI could be involved in different ways so that their resources could be used for children's education — these have involved the creation of forums by SARD, as well as participation in existing platforms under the PRI.

The organisation's strengths lie in its ability to build networks and create forums within which members of minority and disadvantaged communities, government officials, Panchayat members, schoolteachers, religious leaders, parents and NGOs come together in partnership to share learning, coordinate education-related activities and find solutions to pressing local problems. Thus, over the years, the various strands of SARD's work have together come to be

seen as approaches of 'convergence' and 'multi-stakeholder' involvement. SARD's strategies of working with the PRIs have so far involved:

- Creation of platforms for interaction, where PRI representatives and government department officials have often come together to exchange information, cooperate with each other, break barriers, overcome isolation, and undertake joint planning, budgeting and decision-making.
- Bringing education issues to the centrestage at various levels in the PRI system. SARD has often attempted to go beyond the physical parameters of access, space, etc., and tried to initiate dialogue on qualitative issues, by regularly participating in available PRI forums at the district, block and village levels.
- Enhancing the awareness level of PRIs regarding the problems of the block and the village and also supporting PRI representatives to clearly understand their roles, functions and the norms that empower them.
- Involvement of PRI members in SARD staff selection and transfer — this is to establish organisational transparency and also to create a feeling of ownership for its work.
- Involving PRI members in generating resources from the villages for QECs and government schools; also generating resources from the community (through grain banks, for example) and available government schemes.
- Identification of interested and enthusiastic PRI members with whom SARD works intensely to bring about a change in attitudes, etc.
- Undertaking exposure visits of PRI representatives, government officials, teachers, etc., to educational institutions — over the past 2–3 years, many PRI members have visited educational institutions in different parts of the country to enable them to develop a better understanding of children's learning. From time to time, SARD has also facilitated the participation of PRI members in its QECs to show that alternative approaches to teaching children do exist.

WORKING WITH PANCHAYAT SAMITIS

In the initial stages of its foray into the Panchayati Raj system in 2000–2001,¹⁰ SARD started by meeting the block and district Panchayat Pradhan and Pramukh respectively. One such experience was when SARD representatives who wanted to introduce the organisation and

its work first met Yaduveer Singh Koror, the Pradhan in 2001. He shared his firm opinion that all non-governmental organisations have their vested interests in merely accumulating money and in the process, do short shrift to the task at hand. The second interaction, which followed soon thereafter, was somewhat better. SARD staff met him again to invite him to their *Ward Panch* orientation programme. He accepted their invitation and also attended the programme. This provided him with an opportunity to understand SARD's work better, and left him with the curiosity to learn more.

When the Rajasthan government organised a series of meetings in SARD's operational areas to create a better interface with the local communities (under the 'Administration-with-the-People' programme), Yaduveer visited Toda village as part of this programme. He also visited SARD's Taleem Ghar and was deeply impressed by what he saw — not only were children regular in their attendance, they also appeared to be learning without textbooks and with the help of play, poetry, songs and stories .

Subsequently, as part of their educational interventions, SARD organised an exposure visit to Bodh Shiksha Samiti for teachers from government schools. Yaduveer was invited to talk to the teachers' group selected for the visit, and say a few words of encouragement before they left. His curiosity resulted in an extended interaction with the teachers, and he ended up joining them on this visit! He would recollect later, *'We liked the Bodhshalas. Children were actually using their time to learn. Our discussions with Yogendraji from Bodh were also very useful.'* In similar ways, he appreciated the work of URMUL Trust,¹¹ Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH)¹² and Dr. Reddy's Foundation¹³ (DRF), particularly the 'multi-stakeholder approach' of DRF on later visits organised by SARD.

With time, Yaduveer became more and more involved in the educational activities of SARD. He even spoke highly of the organisation at all the meetings and forums in which he participated. Subsequently, he organised the supply of textbooks worth Rs 50,000 to all children in all the Taleem Ghars of SARD. In village Rundkhoh, he allocated Rs 20,000 for the construction of a room that would house another Taleem Ghar in the school campus. His recognition of SARD's work was also evident in the Panchayat Samiti meetings, where SARD was increasingly given the space to share its views and concerns about education and children. He extended unflinching support from his side when SARD began to get involved in the BEC meetings.

The organisation also regularly extended invitations to the block-level Panchayat Samiti members for any event/function it organised. At the same time, SARD elicited support from

these people's representatives for its interventions in the Mewat region. However, the initiative to deal with the problems of the Mewat area evoked a lukewarm response from the officials and PRI representatives — there was a general atmosphere of cynicism. Nobody, it seems, was keen on undertaking any development activity in this area. The argument was that Mewat, with all its orthodoxy, illiteracy and conservative traditions, would not embrace the path of 'modern' development.

Around this time, SARD sought permission to participate in the monthly meetings of the Panchayat Samiti of Deeg block. However, this did not happen easily. One year had to be spent getting to know the PRI members for the region before the organisation could gain entry into the Samiti meeting in November 2002. Unlike the Gram Panchayat meetings, where anyone can participate, block-level meetings are not open to everyone. Only those who are invited can attend.

The Panchayat Samiti monthly meeting is attended by all department heads (education, health, public works, etc.). The Block Development Officer and the Sub-divisional magistrate also participate in them. These meetings are generally conducted in a very open manner, and there are many queries regarding various schemes and their progress on the ground. The meeting follows a strict protocol. Pradeep from SARD says, *'It is almost like a mini parliament session....'*



With time, SARD's involvement in the block Samiti meeting deepened. The organisation began sharing the progress of its '*Taleem Ghar*' (QEC) programme in subsequent meetings and sought support for the same. This usually followed the presentation of the education status in the block by the Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEO) and Block Resource Centre Facilitator (BRCF). SARD also used this opportunity to showcase its work through photo exhibitions and the distribution of pamphlets among the Samiti members.

The responses to SARD's sharing of experiences were varied. Samiti representatives from villages with a predominantly Hindu population often wondered why the organisation was not working in their areas. With many Hindus among the staff of SARD, why was the organisation working primarily with the Meo Muslim community? There was also a demand for SARD support to government schools. Since SARD had limited resources, it was not in a position to extend its '*Taleem Ghar*' programme to more villages. However, there was an agreement with the Block Resource Centre Facilitator that additional human-resource support in the form of a Cluster Resource Centre Facilitator (CRCF) would be provided by SARD in one cluster, to begin with. As a result, SARD supported the appointment of a CRCF in the Khoh cluster which has 24 schools.

**SARD took
advantage of every
opportunity to
make a difference.**



What was the nature of discussions related to children's education in the Block Samiti meetings? As mentioned earlier, the BEEO and the BRCF made presentations every month. Pradeep recalls that the discussions mostly focused on numbers and statistics, akin to questions of a factual nature often asked in the legislative assembly sessions at the state level. Status of school infrastructure, and teacher appointments, transfer and regularity were the points that routinely came up for discussion. There was no discussion about other issues, like the quality of teaching-learning for instance.

SARD staff would patiently sit through these meetings, taking note of the proceedings, especially those that related to SARD's work and the issues pertaining to education in Mewat, in general. They discussed with the BRCF and the BEEO about the status of education programmes in Deeg block, and attempted to explore ways in which the organisation could be involved.

In Yaduveer Singh Koror's words: *'Earlier, the government schools were hardly functional. When SARD began, we were very hopeful that finally some good work would be seen in our villages. Nobody was willing to come to these remote villages earlier. SARD organised some initial meetings with us, where they made us aware of their programme. We came to know about their strategy of community participation, and something inside me told me that we needed to cooperate with them. In the last 3–4 years I can confidently say that we have done several things. Today, you will see government teachers and SARD teachers working side by side — this is beginning to make the system accountable and efficient. We have helped in doing all this, perhaps, because we are selfish. We are interested in showing to others the kind of development that has taken place in our areas.'*

The winter of 2002 (January and February) was a turning point of sorts for SARD's interventions with the PRI system in Deeg. Following a Block Samiti meeting, Khushi Ram, the BRCF, expressed his difficulty in organising training for the teachers of Deeg. The matter was related to developing teacher capacities and understanding regarding the preparation of teaching-learning materials (TLM). Also, as part of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), each primary school teacher was given Rs 500 every year to develop TLM. In most cases, this amount was not spent usefully — lack of ideas on how to spend this amount led to teachers usually purchasing materials from the market, or preparing materials that were not very useful.

SARD saw here an opportunity to make a difference. They requested Bodh Shiksha Samiti, Jaipur, to conduct a 3-day refresher training for the Deeg teachers on TLM preparation in June 2002. SARD staff too conducted some sessions in this training; they were aimed at helping teachers to develop clarity on conceptual issues in education. After an initial resistance to SARD, the teachers accepted their involvement in training, and appreciated their inputs. Sensing an opportunity for making a dent in the system, SARD organised an exposure visit of 2 days to Bodh's rural education programme in the Thanagazi block of Alwar district, Rajasthan.

This was the beginning of a series of such programmes involving PRI members, education department officials and teachers. These involved training for teachers, exposure visits to different educational institutions, like Bodh Shiksha Samiti, URMUL¹¹, SIDH¹², DRF¹³,



AKES, I¹⁴, Ekalavya, Bal Bhavan and BRAC¹⁵ for PRI members, education department officials, teachers etc. In 2002 and 2003, many such interactions took place. As a result of this association with Bodh and visits to many other educational institutions, the SARD education team went ahead and developed its own curriculum and teacher manual for classes I to V in three learning areas, namely language, mathematics and environmental sciences (EVS).

The exposure visits helped in the following ways. First, they helped to create a constituency for SARD's work at the block and district levels. By giving the opportunity to key PRI members and government officials to see and learn from the experiences of other organisations working in difficult contexts, SARD managed to create a 'buy in' for its work in Mewat. Second, barriers between individuals were reduced to a significant extent: PRI members, department officials, teachers, all realised the value of cooperating with each other in making the dream of universal education a reality in Mewat. Most importantly, it helped in creating an understanding about educational issues and the possibility of providing quality education to children from marginalised communities. This also acted as a fillip for SARD's *Taleem Ghar* programme.

The visit to the Bal Bhavan (Children's Centre in Delhi) resulted in an important development — even as this document is being written, the District Panchayat Council, through the District Collector, has informally conveyed to SARD that they are ready to donate land for the Children's Centre in Deeg apart from bearing part of the development costs.

Encouraged by this success, SARD began broadening the scope of its involvement with the Block Panchayat. Gradually, issues related to teaching-learning, school and classroom quality, etc., were placed before the Samiti meeting every month from March 2003 onwards. It seemed that issues like children's enrolment and school infrastructure were given more attention than the qualitative aspects of classroom processes.

The third round of elections was held in February 2005. The 33 percent reservation for women in Panchayats has enabled a number of women to be in a leadership position in the PRIs. This is an opportunity that has been misused by men in several villages. In Mewat, for instance, the practice of the male acting as a proxy PRI member abounds. They call such persons the *Pradhan Pati*, *Sarpanch Pati* and *Ward Pati* ('pati' means husband). The *Pradhan Pati* and the many *Sarpanch* and *Ward Panch Patis* take all the decisions on behalf of the women, whose authority by and large remains on paper. Whereas this trend largely continues to exist, efforts have continued to help women realise the strength of gaining such a position.

Consider the case of Chandravati who has been elected as the *Pradhan* in Deeg. As the *Pradhan*, she has the privilege of receiving the support of the women PRI members and other women in the local communities who can play a crucial role in influencing the path of people's development in Deeg. She says, *'I was scared initially, but have now started attending meetings. My sons and husband have played a major role in encouraging me to fight this battle.'* On being asked about the huge responsibilities that she is expected to shoulder, she assertively adds, *'My dream is to see all the women come together...my family now consists of 136 Panchayats, and I have to solve their problems. Wherever they are, people with responsibilities will need to do their job.'*

Meanwhile, SARD has explored other forums and activities to interact with Panchayat Samiti members. These include the quarterly stakeholder meetings and events like Sports Mela, Health Mela, meetings of the District Collector and Panchayat District Council members, etc. The 'quarterly stakeholder meetings' have been an important turning point in SARD's work at the block and district levels. These are key events that bring together important people's representatives, officials, community members, teachers, and so on. These events provide the occasion to meet and build bridges with Panchayat members, teachers, department officials and children, etc., from all over the Block.

EXPERIENCES WITH THE BLOCK EDUCATION COMMITTEE (BEC)

A positive fall-out of SARD's work with the block Panchayat Samiti is that of the links established with the BEC. Education and Public Health are important development issues which have their own departments at the block level. The BEC is responsible for improving the educational situation in the block. Like the Samiti meetings, SARD now gets to participate in the BEC's monthly meetings. This has been happening since December 2003. Some of the suggestions made by SARD regarding school architecture were followed in constructing some Cluster Resource Centre Buildings in Deeg block.

**In these schools,
children enjoy
themselves
even as they learn.**



Unlike the Panchayat Samiti meetings, whose continuity has been affected since the new members were elected, the BEC meetings continue to be held every month. Continuous engagement of SARD and BEC has helped them to discuss issues related to enrolment, retention, pedagogy and teaching-learning material development in the schools, among other things. A decision, for instance, was taken by the BEC to supply SARD's QECs with government text books. Another decision has been to augment the cluster-level school monitoring mechanism with an additional Cluster Resource Centre Facilitator (CRCF) whose position will be supported by SARD. Presently, three clusters (one each in Deeg, Nagar and Kama blocks) have been chosen for this initiative.

A former research officer from SARD recalls, *'We realised that the Ward Panch and the Block Pradhan had mostly never met. How could they be expected to work together then?'*

SARD's future work with the BEC is expected to focus on strengthening the refresher teacher training, participating in and supporting the research tasks of the BEC, developing plans to

strengthen the School Development and Management Committees (SDMC), and merging the SARD QECs with government schools.

GLIMPSES FROM THE GRASSROOTS: EXPERIENCES WITH GRAM PANCHAYATS

In the initial stages of its foray into the Panchayati Raj system in 2000–2001, SARD constantly explored how PRI members could be involved in its work at the ground level. In the beginning itself, SARD co-opted the Ward Panch and Sarpanch in helping it to decide the structure and composition of its community organisations in the villages where it worked. They were part of the process in which SARD was facilitating the local community to decide the structure and composition of the community organisations.

The trajectory of experiences of SARD at the community level with *Gram Panchayats* (GP) has been different from the experiences at the block and district levels. Unlike the block-level meetings, which were streamlined to quite an extent there has been a lack of clarity in thought and practice at the community level regarding the Panchayats. Village-level meetings have been irregular. Most of the discussions at these meetings revolves around non-educational issues.

Instances of indifference to educational issues among parents are very common in Mewat. Nevertheless one can still find exceptions like Nazeer Khan (the Ward Panch and community organisation member from Garhi Mewat) who is genuinely interested in his children's education. For want of a better option in Garhi Mewat, he sent his children to his relatives' home in Haryana for a higher quality of education. When SARD started its Quality Education Centre in Garhi Mewat, Nazeer was among those supportive and curious people who took interest in the QEC. He was very impressed by the fact that children were not only enjoying their time in the QEC but also learning a great deal. He discussed many issues related to teaching children with the teachers at the Centre. Finally, convinced by what he saw and heard, he brought his children back to enrol them in the QEC. Today he proudly says, *'I am happy about my decision. My eldest son Tariq is now in class V in the government school having spent two years at the SARD QEC. My other two sons, Afroj and Niroj, are still studying in the QEC.'*

SARD started the Taleem Ghar at the village Panchayat level. Initially, there was resistance to the idea of the Taleem Ghar, as these were perceived to be parallel centres to the government school. Gradually, this resistance gave way to an acceptance of them as stepping-stones into

the schooling system. This was largely due to the support they received from the education department officials; often such support was reiterated in the village Panchayat meetings. SARD also sought the support of experienced faculty from the State Resource Centre, Jaipur, and the Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi who played a crucial role in educating the local communities about SARD's work.

As SARD intensified its work in the Taleem Ghar, the idea of working with selected government schools emerged. Bodh's model of placing an additional teacher in government schools was adopted by SARD. The idea involved initiating school-based change through these 'change agent' teachers. Had it not been for the support of the Panchayats and the Block Education Committee, it may not have been possible for SARD to introduce this idea in the schools. As far as results are concerned, it is still too early to say what impact such a programme has had.

As the process unfolds, more and more Panchayat representatives have begun taking interest in education. For example, Ramvir Singh, the Gohana Panchayat Sarpanch has accompanied the CRCF to the Monaca village government school in his Panchayat to monitor teachers' attendance and this has resulted in improved teachers' attendance in schools.

At the ground level, SARD finds itself at the crossroads at this stage, even as it grapples with challenges of a different kind at the block level: the latest round of Panchayat elections that concluded in February 2005 have resulted in many new members being elected to the PRI at various levels. The challenge will be to bring together these newly elected representatives and create a space for dialogue to enable them to understand their roles and responsibilities.

Looking Ahead

Through the 73rd and 74th amendment of constitution the Indian state has created an enabling framework for decentralisation. Different states have vested differing powers to PRI's in respect of education but in most cases without the appropriate financial allocation/provisions for PRIs to take any concrete steps. This coupled with the lack of supportive mechanisms and generally hostile attitude of bureaucracy towards the PRI functionaries have stopped PRI's from becoming effective institutions, working to fulfill their mandates. Certain provisions in the Act have been made mandatory like regular elections of Panchayat, constitution of Gram Sabhas, reservation for women and SC/STs which reads as '*states shall*' and certain provisions like what all can be placed in the purview of panchayats have been left optional where it reads '*states may*'. These optional provisions have created ambiguity and have made PRIs teeth less in many cases. States have not made necessary provisions to facilitate functioning of PRI's.



These experiences have proved that if the Civil Society Organisations fill up this gap (by mobilising, training and handholding of the PRI functionaries, and also mobilising necessary financial support) these institutions are able to deliver well beyond the expectations. It is also clearly evident that it is in the PRI's interest to work for the improvement of education in their respective area. All that they need is facilitation and support. Support also in terms of certain financial provision to give concrete shape to their resolve. They are in a better position to understand and articulate people's genuine need compared to any other level of government.

It has also been proved beyond doubts that the CBOs and Panchayats working together can create tremendous synergy and galvanise the grass root efforts for changing the entire governance, especially educational governance. They need not necessarily be working at cross purposes as many critiques have viewed in the past. Active involvement of CBOs contribute towards democratic functioning of the Panchayat and help Panchayat to set right agenda for itself, thereby becoming accountable towards the people.

**There is a new
confidence and
positive atmosphere
for change.**



The challenge before these NGO's is to institutionalise these efforts made by them. The Education Resource Centre of Bodh plans to work as a resource centre for training of PRI functionaries and CBOs as well. The processes and forums created for interaction of different stakeholders in education also need institutionalisation. This also emerges as an advocacy agenda vis-à-vis governments for the civil society organisations. Merely enacting legislations without executive and financial support and facilitation will not be able to ensure the dream of decentralisation.

It is evident that, different forums created for interaction among all stakeholders, have contributed in breaking the vicious cycle of cynicism that existed earlier. One witnesses a new

confidence, a positive atmosphere for change in the project areas. Each stakeholder is willing to take a few steps to change the situation, unlike in the past. They are no longer blaming each other for the failure. This cultural change is a huge social capital created through dialogue, which has tremendous potential to catalyse the process of change in the area. These experiences have demonstrated without any scope of doubt that with decentralised governance, schools can function as a vibrant institution.

E N D N O T E S

- ¹ In recent times, the word 'governance' has required a new definition, which goes beyond the realm of financial accountability. All stakeholders — government, civil society, etc., see it as a process of setting priorities. It means much more than developing basic facilities like roads, water, schools, etc., and is concerned with institutional arrangements and mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability to the people.
- ² The idea behind the 'Panchayat' evolved in ancient India and is one of the oldest democratic systems still in use today. It consists of a three-tier structure at the village, block and district levels and is meant to provide impetus to political decentralisation of governance.
- ³ The Janshala (GOI-UN) Programme was a collaborative effort of the government of India and five UN agencies — UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA—to provide programme support to the continuing efforts towards achieving universal elementary education.
- ⁴ Three-tier system: Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat (village-level), Panchayat Samitis (block-level) and Zilla Parishad (district-level).
- ⁵ The Jan Pahal programme is Bodh's rural education programme. It involves establishing *Bodhshalas* and working with government schools in a tripartite arrangement between Bodh, the local community and Panchayats for UEE. This initiative is jointly supported by Oxfam N(O)VIB and Goodearth Education Foundation.
- ⁶ SARD's vision and mission.
- ⁷ 'Concept and Functioning of Quality Education Centres (QECs)' (Autumn 2003)' SARD.
- ⁸ SARD's Approach Paper 3, on 'Community Participation and Empowerment' (Autumn 2003).
- ⁹ Mewat Development Authority.
- ¹⁰ SARD's timely response during the fire incident in Garhi Mewat village in 2000 (in which almost all the houses were gutted) was the turning point in its history of work in the area; its efforts to arrange relief from Delhi were appreciated by the Panchayat and block officials. Subsequently, they started taking SARD's presence seriously in the block.
- ¹¹ URMUL Trust is an NGO working in Western Rajasthan in India.
- ¹² Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH) is an NGO based in Uttarakhand in India.
- ¹³ Dr. Reddy's Foundation is the social arm of the pharmaceutical group Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and is based in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. DRF is also a partner in the AKF initiated Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE).
- ¹⁴ Aga Khan Education Services, India is a service agency of the Aga Khan Development Network.
- ¹⁵ Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee.

G L O S S A R Y

AKES,I	Aga Khan Education Services, India
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
BDO	Block Development Officer
BEEO	Block Elementary Education Officer
BEC	Block Education Committee
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRCF	Block Resource Centre Facilitator
CABE	Central Advisory Board on Education
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRCF	Cluster Resource Centre Facilitator
DEEP	District Elementary Education Plans
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DRF	Dr. Reddy's Foundation
EC	European Commission
EVS	Environmental Sciences
GP	Gram Panchayat
MLA	Members of State Legislative Assembly
MP	Members of Parliament (central government)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NPE	National Policy on Education
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PESLE	Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education
PRIs	Panchayati Raj Institutions
PTA	Parent Teacher Associations

QEC	Quality Education Centres
SARD	Society for All Round Development
SC	Scheduled Castes
SDM	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SDMC	School Development and Management Committees
SIDH	Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TLM	Teaching Learning Material
UEE	Universalisation of Elementary Education
VEC	Village Education Committees

ABOUT THE SERIES

The publication is a compilation of the experiences in education from the Aga Khan Foundation. It illustrates various methods and techniques that have been used to reach out to marginalised and disadvantaged communities to improve the availability and quality of education.

The Programme for Enrichment of School Level Education (PESLE) was initiated by the Aga Khan Foundation in India in 1999. The programme, through support to a number of partner NGOs, piloted and expanded innovative approaches in school improvement and integrated important elements into the formal system. These have included new approaches in teacher training, professional development, curriculum innovation, school management and governance. All approaches have the active participation and involvement of the community. The impact has been measured against improvements in three areas: enrolment, retention and learning achievement.

Over the years, working closely with the various communities and educators, a number of good practices emerged that have resulted in a transformation and a visible impact on the quality of education, have now become institutionalised. Some have been adopted, both in the government and non-government sectors.

It is hoped that the series will prove useful for practitioners, policy-makers, implementers and scholars, as illustrations of experience and practice that started small but with the potential to address the larger issues in education.

We would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to all those that have made this series possible.



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