

Community Owning on Elementary Schools to Ensure Quality Education

P. Selvi, Lecturer, DIET, T. Kallupatti

Abstract

Participatory Management of Schools involving the communities has been recognized as crucial at policy level. The distinction between 'genuine and pseudo-participation is often overlooked. In most of the cases, the community participation in school improvement is being obtained through involvement of Parent Teacher Association which is a department promoted body that dances to the tune of the officials and teachers. On the other hand, there are non-parent public who represent various sections of the society, have stake in the improvement of the school and willing to contribute their ideas, time and resources for the welfare of their own school. In the present experimental research study, four sample elementary schools were purposely chosen covering three union schools and one Kallar Reclamation School. The defunct VECs were revived and the capacity of the members of VECs were also built to take up micro plans in their respective schools. Further, School development Micro Plans were prepared with the active participation of the stakeholder using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Technique. The micro plans are being implemented and monitored by the people that are the expected outcome of the experimental study being silently observed by the researcher remaining as outsider.

Introduction

Participatory Management of Schools involving the communities has been recognized as crucial at policy level. Still different people have different notions about what it is all about. The distinction between 'genuine and pseudo-participation is often overlooked. In most of the cases, the community participation in school improvement is being obtained through involvement of Parent Teacher Association which is a department promoted body that dances to the tune of the officials and teachers. On the other hand, there are non-parent public who represent various sections of the society, have stake in the improvement of the school and willing to contribute their ideas, time and resources for the welfare of their own school.

Community Participation at Present

The on-going Sarva Shiksha Abihian (SSA) programme that strives to universalize elementary education with community participation, has tried to achieve community participation through Village Educational Committee (VEC). Though the VECs have constitutional status in the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994, the formation and functioning of VECs are not to the desired standards. Majority of the VECs are not aware of their roles and responsibilities and they are not functioning on their own. In many panchayats, the local people are not aware of the existence of VEC in their villages. The resulting effect is lack of sense of owning on the local school by the local community.

An Experiment on achieving Community Owning

An attempt has been made to build the capacity of the VECs on its roles and responsibility expected of them and to prepare a Micro plan for improving performance of the schools with active participation of stakeholders including CBOs. By implementing the micro plan to improve the performance of the schools, the outlook of schools can be shifted from Government institution to people's institution with more social accountability and transparency.

The research project is specifically aimed to study the existing procedure being adopted for involving the local community in the improvement of school and quality education; to identify various Community Based Organizations (CBOs) those have a stake in the development of school & quality education; to impart capacity building for the VECs to perform their role expected of them; to conduct Thematic Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to prepare Micro plans for the improvement of schools and to document the process and the outcome of the innovative participatory school improvement approach for further scaling-up

For which, Tirumangalam Panchayat Union has been selected purposively for the present study because of its proximity to the District Institute of Education and Training where the researcher has her services. Two Union Primary schools and two Kallar Primary schools were selected at random as sample for the present study. PRA techniques were used to prepare Problem Inventory and Needs Assessment, to Prioritize the Problems and Needs, to rank the preference activities and to Prepare Micro Plans for improvement of schools. In PRA exercises, collection and analysis of primary data are not done separately. It is a participatory method, wherein collection of data/information and its analysis are done simultaneously with active participation of the people.

Micro Planning

Individual School Improvement Micro plans for all the four schools have been prepared with a active participation of various sections of stakeholders of the local school including the Village Educational Committee Members, school teachers, retired teachers, representatives of local Non Government Organization, women Self Help Group members, Youth Club Members, Alumni of the school and interested general public.

Stages of Micro Planning

S.No	Stages of Micro Planning	PRA Techniques
1	Assessment of Community Relationship with schools	Venn Diagram
2.	Needs/Problem Assessment	Problem Inventory
3.	Prioritization of Needs and Problems	NSL Chart
4.	Resource Identification and mobilization	Focus Group Discussion

1. Participatory Assessment of Performance of School

PRA-VENN Diagram exercise was conducted to find out the importance and their relationships of various institutions operating in the village. The size of the circle represents the importance of the institution to the people. Bigger the size of the circle, greater will be the importance of the institution to the people. Distance from the centre of the diagram represents the relationship of the people with the institution. Longer the distance, lower will be the relationship. The results of Venn Diagram shows that the relationship between the school and the community is greater in Sungurampatti and Vidathakulam villages. In most of the village, the community relationship with NGOs is greater than the relationship with the school

2. Problem Inventory and Needs Assessment

On the basis of the identified indicators during the capacity building programme of a best school, the problems and needs of the Union Primary Schools were critically analyzed and identified.

3. Prioritization and Preference Ranking of Problems and Needs

The problems and needs of schools were prioritized and put in the NSL (Now, Soon and Later) Chart. The needs were further ranked according to the preference of the people.

4. Preparation of Action Plan

The prioritized and ranked felt needs of the schools for better performance were further discussed and a micro plan was drafted. The micro plans includes list of activities to be implemented, responsible person/organization for implementing the micro plan, Resource mobilization monitoring and evaluation of the proper implementation of the plan.

The implementation of micro plans will be closely monitored and reported by the VEC. It is suggested that an expert team may evaluate the implementation of the micro plan and the VEC will facilitate the process.

The problem inventory and needs assessment done in the sample villages has covered only the following aspects during the PRA (except in Sundarampatti village)

1. Basic infrastructural facilities need for the schools
2. Improvement of school environment and
3. Additional Teacher

This shows their lower level of understanding on community managed quality elementary education. But in Sungarampatti village, the stakeholders have covered various aspects of school functioning and educational process during the problem inventory and needs assessment of the PRA exercise.

Majority of the stakeholder of Primary School feel that involving in curriculum/syllabus designing, teaching-learning process and preparation of Teaching-learning material are not their responsibility and should not involve in such activities. The one day capacity building exercise for the VEC members is only an eye opener on School-Community relationship and co-management of schools for quality education. The VEC needs to be trained on the holistic approach towards quality education on long term basis.

On the other hand, decentralization of management of school with the community (VEC) can not be expected in a short duration of time. The VECs needs to be nurtured and their capacity has to be built on a regular basis to perform their functions on their own and to effectively perform their role expected of them.

The participation of VEC is greater in Sungurampatti than the other three villages. More over, their understanding of the roles and responsibility of VEC is better than the other sample villages. The coverage of issues in the Micro Plan is broader than the other three villages. The involvement of the H.M/Member Secretary of the Sungurampatti VEC and the homogeneity of the village can be attributed for the better performance of the Sungurampatti VEC.

In all the four sample villages, the participation of CBOs especially the women SHGs was remarkable. In Sungurampatti and Keelaurappanur villages, the participation and involvement of Youth Club is excellent. But, the enthusiasm of the CBOs have to be sustained with the effective functioning of the VECs.

Concluding Remarks

To sustain the participation and involvement of the community in the management of the schools, the effective functioning of the VEC should be ensured. Though the VECs have the constitutional status in the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994, the functioning of VEC at panchayat level is not up to the expected level. The VECs that are taken for the present research study are not functioning properly except in Sugurampatti panchayat. The corrective measures to improve the poor functioning of the VEC include

1. *Reorganize of VECs with interested and active members. In this connection, the services of local NGO may be utilized.*
2. *Capacity building of the VECs on their roles and functions for effective functioning on a long term basis.*
3. *The performance of the VEC should be graded annually and the poor performing VECs should be given with a special package of Capacity Building exercise to improve their functioning in the co-management of schools.*
4. *Total transparency should be maintained in all the functions of the VEC including financial transactions.*
5. *VEC should be involved in all the important issues and its decision should be recorded in its minute's book and action should be taken accordingly.*
6. *Assistance of local NGOs may be availed for strengthening of VEC functioning.*
7. *AEOs and DEEOs should closely monitor the functioning of VEC in all the Schools.*
8. *Performance of VEC should be taken into account while assessment of the school performance.*

The role of CBOs was observed greater in preparing micro plans and local resource mobilization. Hence a better space for CBOs to play an active role as partners in the joint venture towards quality education.