

POLICY BRIEF: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Successes, Challenges and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

This policy brief highlights the successes, challenges and opportunities in the functioning of SMCs as envisioned in the RTE Act.

Section 21 of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE), mandates the formation of School Management Committees (SMCs) in all elementary government, government-aided schools and special category schools in the country. The RTE Act envisions an SMC as the basic unit of a decentralised model of governance with active involvement of parents in the school's functioning.

SMCs are primarily composed of parents, teachers, head teachers and local authorities.¹ Active parental participation has the potential to improve the efficiency of a school as parents have the highest incentive to demand a better quality of education for their children.² The RTE Act stipulates that SMCs should:

- Monitor the working of school (Mid-Day Meal provision, toilet facilities, teacher attendance, etc.)
- Monitor the utilisation of grants received from the appropriate government, local authority or any other source
- Prepare and recommend the annual and three-year School Development Plan (SDP), which addresses infrastructure, academic achievement, etc.³ These plans should collectively feed into creating an Annual Work Plan (AWP) for every district, and subsequently, every state.

SUCCESSSES

In the past four years, the implementation of the SMC provision has seen the following successes:

- **Notification of state rules:** All States and Union Territories have notified their State-specific SMC rules.⁴
- **Formation of SMCs:** According to 2012-13 District Information System for Education (DISE) statistics, 88% of government and government-aided schools have formed SMCs.⁵
- **Creating the infrastructure to delegate financial powers to SMCs:** 95% of schools that have SMCs, have made the SMC President a joint bank account holder with the headmaster to facilitate the SMC's entitlement over grant expenditure.⁵

¹However, this composition varies across States, depending on State specific rules.

²Banerjee, A., Banerji R., Duflo, E., Glennerster, R. Khemani, S. 2010. *Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Education in India*, American Economic Journal: Economic Policy.

³The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

⁴According to the SMC page on MHRD website, <http://mhrd.gov.in/smc>, retrieved on 21st April 2014

⁵DISE flash statistics 2012-13

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

To address the challenges facing the functioning of SMCs, several opportunities drawn from empirical evidence from India are highlighted below:

I. Awareness about rules and roles

Challenge: Headmasters, teachers and especially parents are not fully aware of the existence of SMCs, school-related information and their roles and responsibilities.ⁱⁱ A greater effort is required to encourage headmasters to share information with parents.

Opportunity: An annual information campaign could disseminate information on the election process of SMC members and the roles and responsibilities of SMCs.ⁱⁱⁱ

To disseminate school-related information, states should operationalise SSA-mandated 'transparency boards' in schools. These boards should be painted on a wall in a common area within the school grounds and should include information on student-teacher attendance, Mid-Day Meal status and receipt of entitlements.^{iv} Transparency boards are a simple, cost-effective way to encourage schools to share information with parents and facilitate access to school-level data.

Sustained discussion with the community and old SMC members about what SMCs can do during their tenure could increase their awareness levels.

II. Guidelines on the election process

Challenge: Most state rules do not stipulate an election procedure for SMC formation. Assam and West Bengal are exceptions that provide a detailed procedure for the election of SMC members.

Opportunity: States should form and communicate clear guidelines for SMC formation. The election process should outline the composition of a GBM (General Body Meeting) and parent-voter list to members of the community, especially students' parents. In addition, clear guidelines regarding dissolving an entire SMC or individual members in case of non-participation should also be outlined.

III. Tenure of SMCs

Challenge: Most states have a two-year tenure for SMCs. This is challenging because two years is not sufficient time for the SMC to create lasting change.^v

Opportunity: State governments should be encouraged to pass a government order to increase the tenure of SMCs to three or more years, in order to give the SMCs more time to understand and plan for school needs.^{vi}

More research on the election process and the ideal tenure of SMCs needs to be conducted. For example, if a number of old SMC members could carry forward their tenure into newly constituted SMCs as mentors, they could aid in training new SMC members.

IV. State training efforts

Challenge:

Fund allocation and utilisation for training: SSA allocates up to Rs 300 per SMC member for the State.⁶ The allocation forms between 1% and 2% of states' allocated budgets. Even these allocated funds are utilised minimally. For example, in 2012-13, Maharashtra spent 14% and Madhya Pradesh spent 22% of the total money allocated for SMC trainings.

Timing of training: Trainings take place once a year. The follow-up sessions to the trainings either do not take place at all or they are not conducted on time. According to the Minutes of the PAB meetings, in Maharashtra, trainings were conducted after the third quarter of FY 2013-14.⁷ By the time SDPs were completed in schools, planning for the Annual Work Plan & Budget (AWP&B) was well underway.

Training pedagogy and approach: States generally train only three to four SMC members from each school. MHRD has acknowledged and documented the poor quality of SMC trainings. For example, in 2012-13, the Project Approval Board (PAB) suggested that Andhra Pradesh improve its training content and plans as SMC members did not stay for the duration of the training. The PAB made similar observations for Rajasthan in 2013-14.

Opportunity:

Fund allocation and utilisation for training: States should prioritise SMC training to be more timely and effective. Thus, States should track whether the utilisation of funds is timely. MHRD should prioritise expenditure and increase allocations for SMC trainings incrementally in order to encourage States build their capacity to train SMC members. MHRD should also prioritise reporting and discussion on the quality of SMC trainings during annual appraisal meetings.

Timing of training: State governments should conduct trainings within 1-2 months from when SMCs are constituted. Moreover, trainings for creating the SDP should be timed to take place in the third quarter, before the annual planning cycle, so that members have time to understand their school's problems and create a plan in time for the annual planning cycle.

Training pedagogy and approach: State trainings have the potential to be more engaging and participative through activity based learning, visual aids and group work.^{vii} State governments should encourage platforms of peer learning through a network of SMCs and by strengthening SMC linkages at the gram panchayat.

Training should build capacity of all SMC members so that they can understand school-level finances and participate in the planning process. In order to do so, greater in-school support may be required for SMCs members. Moreover, easy-to-use planning guidelines and forms can be incorporated into the SDP, to guide SMC members through a step-by-step planning process.

⁶Source: PAB - As per allocations made for the FY 2013-14

⁷Minutes of the 192nd PAB meeting for Maharashtra for FY 2013-14

V. Empowering SMCs to create School Development Plans (SDPs)

Challenge: According to the 2013 PAISA district studies, SDPs are infrequently made in school, but even where plans are made, they are not created in a participative manner, and do not address the school's most pressing needs.^{viii} This may be attributed to two reasons-ineffective trainings, which do not build the SMC's capacity to plan and untimely flow of funds to schools, which affects the SMC's ability to spend funds according to its plans.^{ix}

Further, SMCs have limited financial powers. They have the discretion to spend only three untied school grants - School Development, School Management and Teaching Learning Material – thus limiting their ability to plan for the needs of their school. Of these, allocations for Teaching Learning Material grant stopped in FY 2013-14, thus reducing the spending power of the SMC to less than 2% of the total money that schools receive in one year.

Finally, SDPs are not collated and incorporated into the district level Annual Working Plan & Budget (AWP&B), as a result, school level plans are not reflected in the State's planning and budgeting process.

Opportunity: States should ensure that the school grants reach schools by July every year in order to enable SMCs to plan expenditure efficiently. This will require increased coordination with bank officials to ensure timely disbursal of funds. School headmasters and SMC members should be alerted about delay in grants. In addition, when a school grant reaches the account, the headmaster and SMC president can receive an SMS so that the SMC can plan withdrawal and expenditure efficiently.

There is a need to integrate school level training with the State planning process, in order to ensure that SDPs are created in time for the annual planning cycle.

In addition, SDPs should be collated and integrated into the district's planning and budgeting process, and further incorporated into the State's annual AWP&B.

ⁱHowever, there is significant inter-state variation in this data. For example, while 93% of schools in Rajasthan have formed SMCs, only 7% schools in Delhi and 51% schools in West Bengal have formed SMCs. This data on the high percentage of SMC formation is corroborated by the 2013 PAISA District Studies, which found an average of 99% schools across six states had formed SMCs.

ⁱⁱ A 2014 study by the Delhi-based NGO 'JOSH' found that 94% of parents surveyed recorded that they were not informed about SMC formation, despite the fact that school administration had received official notification from the government to create an SMC. Similarly, research by Pratham Delhi in 2013 found that only 10% of the interviewed SMC parent members were aware of their membership status. In addition, the 2012-13 PAB minutes for Rajasthan indicate that the awareness level amongst SMC members was not up to par according to the monitoring agency. Only a few communities were aware of the grants they were entitled to spend.

ⁱⁱⁱA 2008 World Bank study in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka indicates that community-focused information campaigns can increase the parent and community participation in the school.

^{iv}In 2011, PAISA district studies found that transparency boards for school grant receipt and teacher attendance rarely existed and when they did, they were not updated regularly. In Jaipur, Rajasthan, few schools had boards - 29% schools had boards with information on grants, and 30% had information on teacher attendance. Whereas, in

Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, while 64% schools had boards on grants and 62% had boards on teacher attendance, few schools updated them frequently - only 21% and 42% respectively.

^vThe study on the efficacy of the Karnataka based NGO Prajayatna's interventions found that the quality is significantly related to the age of SMCs. Frequent elections lead to shortened duration of the SMC's tenure and diminished its effectiveness.

^{vi}Several states like Orissa, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal have a longer SMC tenure of three years.

^{vii}NGOs around the country have been experimenting with various reporting mechanisms within communities. In rural Andhra Pradesh, the CFBT Education Trust conceptualised a scorecard in the form of a mobile application in order to build the capacity of SMC members to monitor school functioning. In rural Rajasthan, Educate Girls employs a traffic signal-based school report card with pictures of different aspects of school functioning to build the monitoring capacity of SMC members. Accountability Initiative has created and piloted the use of school monitoring and expenditure planning formats that were used by SMCs in Andhra Pradesh between 2010 – 2012. These formats were reintroduced in Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra to provide SMCs with a simple step-by-step guide to increase participation and support to the school.

^{viii} While 98% schools in Satara district in Maharashtra and 94% schools in Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh had formed SDPs, 54% schools in Sagar district, in Madhya Pradesh had created SDPs and no SDPs were created in Rajasthan's Udaipur and Jaipur district. Moreover, parental participation in creating the SDP varied. For example, while 95% schools reported at least one SMC member participating in creating a SDP in Maharashtra, only 72% schools recorded similar parental participation in Kangra.

^{ix}According to the 2012 PAISA National Report, over half of India's schools received their three school grants towards the end of the third quarter – by November 2012.