

OXFAM IN ACTION

Community-Based Monitoring and Grievance Redressal in Schools in Delhi



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया
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Oxfam India is part of a global movement working to fight poverty, injustice and inequality. In India, it works in seven states¹. Oxfam India believes that right to education is important to close the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'². As a founding member of the Right to Education (RTE) Forum, it is working towards increasing people's access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in mainstream public education system, with special focus on the Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and girls. In Delhi, Oxfam India supports Joint Operation for Social Help (JOSH) to establish a community-based monitoring mechanism for schools, improve the quality of education, influence the functioning of government schools, and campaign to ensure effective implementation of the RTE Act.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (henceforth Right to Education Act) guarantees eight years of free, quality education to all children aged six to fourteen years. This is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Education is a social public good and the Right to Education (RTE) Act has reinforced that. The RTE Act has enabled nearly 200 million (20 crore) students to enrol in schools and continue their education.

While the centre and state local bodies are the implementing³ agencies, the Act provides for a decentralised model of governance. Key to this model is a community-based monitoring system of School Management Committees⁴ (SMCs). The SMC comprises of teachers, parents, social workers and local authorities (like Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies). The SMCs are mandated under Section 21 of the RTE Act. The Act obligates inclusion of 50 per cent women and proportionate representation of marginalised communities. The SMCs are mandated to conduct school inspections, check school records, teachers' regularity and punctuality and the condition of water and sanitation, and ensure proper implementation of RTE Act.

Although a strong monitoring system in principle, the SMCs have not lived up to their potential. A research by a leading non-profit Pratham⁵ based in Delhi in 2013 found that only 10 per cent of the SMC parent members interviewed were aware that they were part of the SMCs⁶. The parents are

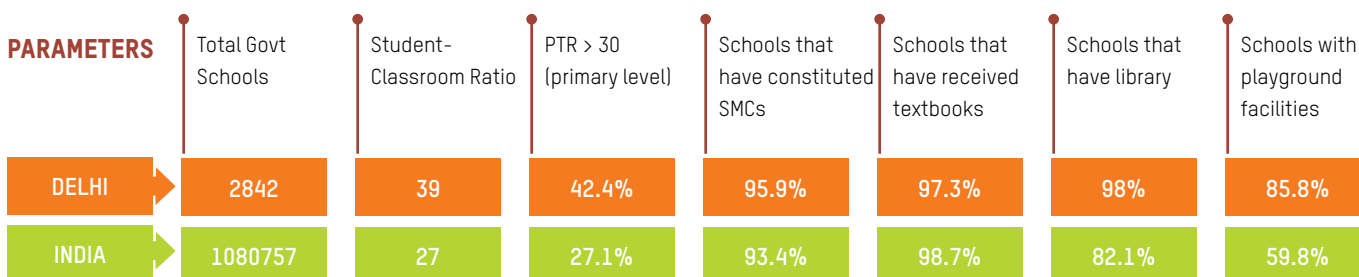
however not responsible for this lack of awareness, there was a lapse on part of the state government and schools in conveying this information to the parents.

The Delhi government issued the circular regarding the formation of the SMCs just five days before the expiry of the three-year time period that was set for the schools' compliance with the Act⁷. The period ended on 31 March 2013⁸. The schools claimed compliance but it is clear that rules for the formation of the SMCs were not followed. A 2014 study by Joint Operation for Social Help (JOSH)⁹, a Delhi-based NGO, found that 94 per cent of parents surveyed reported that they were unaware of the SMC formation.

Where SMCs were formed, there was resistance from schools to allow school inspections. Oxfam India supported JOSH to file a complaint at the Central Information Commission (CIC) in 2011 evoking the Section 4 of the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005. Section 4 of the RTI Act is a proactive disclosure section mandating all public authorities to share information with citizens about their functioning. Since the school is a public authority, compliance to Section 4 was demanded.

Oxfam India initiated its partnership with JOSH in 2010. Based on the complaint filed, the CIC passed a landmark judgement mandating all schools to make accessible a list of documents and records to any citizen on the last working day of every month¹⁰. On this day, the parents are allowed to check the school records and facilities. However, despite the judgement and notifications, there has been a lack of awareness regarding SMCs and school inspections among school principals, teachers and parents. In an attempt to close this gap, improve functioning of the SMCs and ensure that school inspections are held regularly, Oxfam India along with JOSH focused on collectivisation and mobilisation of the community. With this focus, Oxfam India and JOSH mobilised community members in the resettlement colonies and slums of Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri in East Delhi to form SMCs, conduct school inspections, and ensure effective implementation of the RTE guidelines. The Oxfam India-JOSH endeavour has reached out to 1400 parents and community members in 28 schools¹¹.

HOW DELHI SCHOOLS HAVE FARED IN 2014-15



SCHOOL INSPECTIONS AT TRILOKपुरI

On a winter morning of 31 January 2015, a group of 10 mothers were visiting a Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) School in TrilokपुरI. They were SMC members. It was the last working day of the school – the day set aside for school inspections.

The mothers, accompanied by a few colleagues from JOSH, inspected the toilets, classrooms, libraries, and the playground. Having completed their monthly school inspection, they waited at the principal's office to meet her and other teachers. The SMC members examined the school registers. These registers – 15 in all, as the principal informed – were maintained to keep a record of attendance, grants, mid day meal and movement of teachers. There was a register that documented the monthly SMC meetings as well.

The main agenda for the meeting on that day was the high Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR); the absence of school guard / security personnel at the school; unavailability of books; and an under-stocked library. The parents were concerned that the school was short staffed. They explained that according to the RTE Act, the PTR should be 30:1 for primary and 35:1 for upper primary schools. If there were more than 400 children, then the PTR should be 40:1. The principal expressed her helplessness as the appointments of teachers was centralised and thus beyond her mandate.

Though the school had a new building and tall boundary walls, there was no security guard. This was a concern for the parents, teachers, and the principal. The school ran a morning shift for girls and an afternoon shift for boys. A vacant guard's position meant that the school campus was open for practically anyone, including animals, putting the safety of the students at risk. The principal explained that till a guard wasn't appointed, the school was ensuring the safety of children by restricting the play area of the

students so as to ensure they can keep a close watch on the children.

The parents also expressed dissatisfaction at the unavailability of books. Students received the books almost at the end of the session while many hadn't received the full set of course books. The sessions began in April and the first lot of books were distributed after the school reopened following summer vacations in July. The principal explained that as a solution, teachers requested senior students to donate their books to the younger classes. The library too was sparsely stocked. The principal confirmed that they were trying their best to get books for the library.

The meeting went off satisfactorily. The principal patiently heard the mothers out and promised to address the concerns raised. The SMC members, on their part, were non-confrontational. "The SMC members have come a long way. When we started, there was a lot of dissatisfaction among the parents and the meetings usually ended in a showdown. In our trainings, we insist on a friendly dialogue and ensure that all cases are settled peacefully," points out Rekha Koli, programme coordinator, JOSH.

Rekha explains that initially, the schools had been hesitant about the inspections. However, the November 2011 CIC order changed this and made the school accessible to SMC members. For instance, the SMC members in TrilokपुरI area have employed the CIC order to undertake school inspections.

Oxfam India and JOSH have played a critical role in capacity building and facilitating the process of regular school inspections by the SMC. These school inspections have evolved into a collective space where parents and teachers work towards a common aim of improving access to better education for their wards.



Members of School Management Committee meet the school principal, at a TrilokपुरI primary school after inspections

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM



Awareness campaign on Grievance Redressal

Regular SMC meetings and school inspections have inspired parents to be more involved in their children's education and functioning of the school. They have consistently taken up day-to-day critical issues, such as locked toilets, exposed live wires, broken fans, and uncovered drains. One parent informs us how they managed to get the full scholarship amount from the school; the principal had given only Rs 700 out of a scholarship of Rs 1000.

As already mentioned, the Delhi state government had issued the notification to form SMCs just five days prior to expiry of the compliance deadline in March 2013. To this, the schools had claimed compliance with the rules stating that the SMCs were in place. JOSH, in its effort to independently validate this claim, filed an application under the RTI Act seeking details of the SMCs from Trilokpuri schools. The schools responded with a list of names and details. Upon verification with the community, JOSH found that majority of people whose names were given in the list were either unaware or were not keen to be part of any such committees. The SMC members are supposed to be selected through a process of election and clearly this had not been done.

Oxfam India and JOSH approached the school authorities asking them to conform to rules to form SMCs. JOSH, with an expertise in conducting social audit for RTE provisions, began with collectivising the community members to initiate the community-based monitoring process. Bringing the parents and community members on board was not easy. "The difficult part is to get them out. They do not consider education to be relevant or important. So, we have to reach out to them from that perspective," explains Rekha.

First, they identified 50 parents from each school, selecting from among the more active parents and community

members. They were trained at the Community Resource Centre (CRC) on the different provisions of the RTE Act. Meetings were held to build capacity of the parents to undertake school inspections, to identify and report the violations in the implementation of the RTE Act. Out of these 50, ten were identified as probable SMC members who could then get elected by the schools. They were further trained to file grievances and engage with school and government authorities on a regular basis to address challenges in implementation of the RTE Act by the schools. In 2013-14, the community members filed nearly 230 complaints of violations of the RTE Act.

The parents were also trained to file RTI applications to follow up on the filed grievances. During 2013-14, more than 50 RTI applications were filed with the Education Department to follow up on the status of the complaints filed. "The school inspections have shown us how important these grievance redressal mechanisms are for the education and safety of our children," says Rajni, an SMC member.

The community interacts and works closely with school authorities and this has led to some concrete actions. For instance, in one of the schools, the SMC ensured that the school provided for an overhead tank and proper drinking water facility. In another school, the nursery classes were shifted from the first floor to the ground floor. The SMC members felt that young children were vulnerable to accidents if the classes were on the first floor.

To keep a tab on the schools and to document the process, JOSH prepares a school report card compiling the outcomes of the school inspections. This report card includes a school-wise listing of the main problems and the steps taken to tackle these problems.

Though the school inspections are held once a month, the parents meet at the CRC at least a couple of times prior to the school visit. These meetings are useful to exchange ideas, list complaints and identify problems in the different schools. Suggestions are invited, agenda for SMC inspections are drawn, and the next steps planned.

The SMC members and the community members do realise that since school inspections are pre-scheduled, it allows

for schools to make temporary arrangements. For instance, prior to the school inspections, some of the schools clean up the toilets, which, on other days is usually inaccessible. Nevertheless, Oxfam India and JOSH are hopeful that the situation will improve and become sustainable in the long run. After all, the schools that were initially wary of inspections have opened to the idea of community oversight. This, in itself, is a big step forward.



Community meetings with SMC members & parents

TAKING THE WORK FORWARD...

LIKE THE CRC, JOSH ALSO HAS A YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE. THIS IS THE CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE FOR THE YOUTH AND OFFERS TWO COURSES - ENGLISH-SPEAKING AND COMPUTER. THE MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRE REGULARLY ACCOMPANY THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS ON SCHOOL INSPECTIONS. THIS HELPS THEM BETTER UNDERSTAND THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE AND THE COMMUNITY BASED MONITORING MODEL. THE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTRES GROOM THE FUTURE GENERATION TO SUSTAIN THE PACE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

NOTE

- 1 Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Assam
- 2 Oxfam India Policy Brief No. 12 | March 2015 Right to Education Act: Claiming Education for Every Child
- 3 This is applicable to all duty bearers whether state, centre or local government. RTE is also applicable to private schools
- 4 75 per cent representation in the SMC is of parents
- 5 A non-governmental organization, Pratham focuses on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education system. Established in 1995 to provide education to children in the slums of Mumbai, Pratham has grown both in scope and geographical coverage.
- 6 Policy Brief: School Management Committees - Successes, Challenges and Opportunities (June 2014); Accountability Initiative
- 7 The three year window period was given to enable the schools to implement the norms and standards specified in the RTE Act (sec 19(2)). If the schools missed the deadline then their recognition could be withdrawn under the Act (sec 19 (3))
- 8 Policy Brief: School Management Committees - Successes, Challenges and Opportunities (June 2014); Accountability Initiative
- 9 JOSH is a non-profit working with urban poor youth and the larger community in resettlement colonies and slums of Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri in East Delhi
- 10 Mr Saurabh Sharma VS MCD, GNCT Delhi Decision. No. CIC/SG/C/2011/000930/14501; Complaint No. CIC/SG/C/2011/000930 (http://www.rti.india.gov.in/cic_decisions/CIC_SG_C_2011_000930_14501_M_66424.pdf; as viewed on September 21, 2015)
- 11 16 schools run by Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and 12 schools run by the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD)

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