

# Occasional Papers

## Decentralized Management of Elementary Education and Role of Self-Governance Institutions

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**2016**

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**July 2016**



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# Decentralized Management of Elementary Education and Role of Local Self-Governance Institutions

R. S. Tyagi\*

## *Abstracts*

*Decentralization is seen as a means of improving the efficiency of education systems and quality of educational services through the participation of local people in planning and decision-making. In this context, the establishment of grassroots' level democracy through local self-governance has become significant. India strived to accelerate the process of development through active participation of people at the grassroots' level even before Independence. The present paper is based on a recent comparative research 'Study of Management of Elementary Education under Panchayati Raj Institutions in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh — Progress, Participation and Perspective'. It attempts to examine whether powers of educational planning and management of elementary education, as mentioned in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, have devolved to three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions at district, block and gram panchayat levels. Further, the paper discusses comparative strengths, and weaknesses in terms of structures, functions, roles and responsibilities of PRIs for managing elementary education in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The paper argues for a wider research on these issues and has given the necessary roadmap for the future policy and concrete strategy for the development of school education under Panchayati Raj Institutions.*

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The author would like to thank the anonymous referee of the NUEPA Occasional Paper series for their suggestions to revise the paper.

## **Introduction**

The major concern of education policy reforms has always been to make the delivery of educational programmes more effective. As schools are the ultimate delivery points in the overall educational management, administration of school education in India has undergone unprecedented changes. The direction of policy reforms in management of elementary education indicates enormous efforts towards the changes that have taken place from the centralized command and control of education to the decentralized participatory management of people. In decentralized management, the flow of delivery becomes quicker and decision-making easier and more realistic when planning decisions can be taken at the lower spatial level. Since decentralization of administration encourages people to participate in the planning and decision-making process, enormous efforts have been made in the past to empower people and to decentralize educational administration at district, block and village levels. It is in this context that the establishment of grassroots' level democracy, through local self-governance, has become significant.

## **Initiatives for Decentralization of Educational Administration and Panchayati Raj Institutions**

The involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the management of education can be traced back to as early as the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a corollary to the Woods Despatch (1854) that directed the levy of local tax to defray the cost of maintaining schools. Several subsequent developments had taken place to begin the era of local self-government, including the historical resolution of Lord Ripon on local-self government (1882) and Local Self-Government Act of 1883, The Montagu Chelmsford Reforms and, subsequently, the Government of India Act (1919) accelerated the process of transfer of power to local bodies. The only exception to this process was the Hartog Committee (1929) which suggested withdrawal of powers already delegated to local authorities. India has striven to accelerate the process of development through active participation of people at the grassroots.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), in the modern context, started in 1959 as a sequel to the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report, which recommended the establishment of an inter-connected three-tier organizational structure of democratic decentralization at village, block and district levels. As a consequence, primary education became the responsibility of *Panchayat Samitis* in Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and in some other states. A major breakthrough came with the formulation of National Policy on Education and Programme of Action, 1986 which stipulated that “the local committees, through appropriate bodies, will be assigned a major role in programmes of school improvement”. As a consequence, several states adopted the system of Panchayati Raj in educational management. The introduction of Article 40 of the Constitution which states that “the State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government” was another step in this direction.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts marked a new era in democratic decentralization in India. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment envisaged to establish a three-tier system of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels and the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment proposed establishment of municipalities to provide a robust legal framework to strengthen local self-government institutions. These amendments were, however, in the nature of enabling measures for the states to create these bodies and entrust them with authority and resources, as were considered appropriate and adequate. Apart from making it obligatory for the states to constitute these bodies and entrust them with authority and resources, the amendment made it obligatory for the states to hold elections; prescribe quotas for representation of women and scheduled castes/tribes; and constitute a finance commission to review the financial position of the panchayats. The Eleventh Schedule to the Act, containing a list of 29 items, indicates that education, including primary and secondary schools, technical training, vocational education, adult education and non-formal education, will be the responsibility of these institutions. Under the Act, provisions of Section 243G are not mandatory, giving enough flexibility to the states to take decisions in their prevailing situations. However, the states are expected to act in the spirit of the Constitution by devolving powers for management of educational institutions and programmes to the Panchayati Raj bodies.



While the Panchayati Raj legislation articulates the national commitment for decentralized power to PRIs, the National Policy on Education, too, reiterates this commitment.

The Central Advisory Board of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India) constituted a Committee in February 1993, to formulate guidelines on decentralized management of education in the context of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments. The Committee, while recommending responsibilities and functions to Panchayati Raj bodies, stressed that *Panchayat Samitis* and *Zilla Parishads* should have the authority to recruit and appoint teachers for their schools (subject to government guidelines) and administer the services of government school teachers and subordinate officials of the education department (with their service conditions being protected) should be placed at the disposal of these bodies. The guiding principle of the recommendations was that development of rural areas can be best achieved by entrusting the local people with the responsibility of managing their own affairs. It cautioned against hasty decentralization of management since Panchayati Raj bodies would require time to equip themselves to effectively discharge their role.

The underlying principles of the CABE Committee's recommendations were based on the following factors: Panchayati Raj bodies would require adequate preparation and strengthening before they are able to perform their new roles; being inexperienced in administration, they would need capacity building; they would need, at least in the initial stages, financial and resource support from Central and State governments; they must be sensitized to the needs of handling education cadres with restraint and imagination; delegation of powers should take into account past experience and future requirements for the Constitution of the Standing Committee on Education at *Zilla Parishad* and *Panchayat Samiti*; their functions should include supervision of elementary schools and enrolment drives, mobilization of resources, construction and repair of physical facilities, preparation of plans on the basis of prescribed norms and so on.

On the contentious issue of recruitment, appointment, transfer and control of staff, the Committee recommended that while the *Panchayat Samitis* and *Zilla Parishads* have the authority to recruit and appoint teachers for the schools (subject to government guidelines), the services of government-run school teachers and subordinate officials of the education department (with their service conditions being protected) should be placed at the disposal of these bodies.

### **Inferences from Research Studies**

In the case of decentralization, schools are given greater autonomy in educational decision-making; with the devolution of local control over curriculum and teaching methods to local communities and the teachers and principals of school themselves. If the local educational authorities see themselves as responsible for educational delivery, reformers reason, educational quality will improve (Carnoy, 1999). Decentralization makes the planning process people-friendly and participatory; plans more local specific; and the educational institutions more efficient and effective (Varghese, 1996). Govinda (2003) professed that decentralization policies are closely linked to the specific country context. They are underpinned by three main motives: (1) they aim to increase the effectiveness of education making it more relevant to local needs; (2) they are a means of democratically promoting people's participation by empowering local authorities; and (3) by putting emphasis on performance accountability, they intend to improve the provision of services. For decentralization to be integrated with the system of educational governance in any country, it is essential that appropriate institutional structures be created and sustained at sub-national levels.

In this context, it would be pertinent to recall how recent research views the role of PRIs in managing school education. There are divergent views and even critical ones. It had, originally, nurtured a fond hope that transferring education to PR bodies will provide on-the-spot supervision and control of schools and this, in turn, will lead to quality improvement in education. But it proved otherwise as the quality of supervision was found to have considerably declined due to ineffective supervision, haphazard inspection, tardiness of administration and insecurity of teaching staff

(Krishnamacharylu, 1993). However, ever since the responsibility of construction of building was given to *pradhans* and headmasters, the buildings were constructed in time and were of better quality (Zaidi, 1993). Nonetheless, interference of non-officials in posting and transfer of teachers and using them for purposes other than teaching was found to have adversely affected their performance and morale (Chalapati, 1992). The dual control over education, without clear demarcation of powers and functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Education Department, naturally resulted in confrontation and conflict between them (Bhargava and Venkatakrishnan, 1993). In the last two decades of the last century, for example, primary education in West Bengal under PRIs has not been at all encouraging (Acharya, 2002). Many stakeholders now seem to feel that the hierarchical and bureaucratic control over the primary education system has not decreased in any way even after the establishment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (Govinda, 2003). The involvement of panchayats is only deemed to be in terms of providing community support; their role is peripheral, if not nil, in the management and administration of education.

The Institute of Social Sciences (1996) launched a countryside study on Restructuring of Elementary, Primary and Non-formal education in the context of new Panchayati Raj and constituted four commissions for this purpose. The first commission (chaired by Prof. N. K. Ambhast) on the effectiveness of school/non-formal education found that the involvement of the Panchayats was only in terms of providing community support; their role was peripheral, if not nil, in management and administration. They played an important role in enrolment of students but did not have any say in the content part of the programme.

The second commission of inquiry (chaired by Mr. Venka Reddy) examined the issues of administration, planning, management and finance under Panchayati Raj. While arguing in terms of quantitative achievements, it drew attention towards the deteriorating quality of education. Even in few cases where the facilities were available, the drop-out rate rose very high, the levels of learning were very low, with standards of teaching far from satisfactory. The third commission of inquiry (chaired by Prof. M. Aram) on community participation of ECC&E, elementary education and adult

education found that acceptability of Panchayati Raj Institutions by teachers was a big problem and that a sustainable role of village education committees in the planning and management of education at the village level was still to be ensured. The fourth commission (chaired by Prof. V. Eswara Reddy) recommended incorporation of adult education, non-formal education and early childhood care and education into the system of Panchayati Raj, in accordance with the spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, pointing out the need of transferring powers to the Panchayati Raj in terms of policy, planning, financing and management. It proposed that *Gram Panchayats* need to be continuously strengthened so that they could emerge as self-contained, self-sufficient and stable units in the administrative system of the Panchayati Raj.

Besides poor coordination between the PRIs and the schools, the ground reality indicated very weak and ineffective implementation of the *panchayat* system as regards role of women in PRIs, resulting in little progress on the path of real decentralization (Josephine, 2008). PRIs cannot deliver the desired results as they are rarely empowered to share any meaningful responsibility in the field of education. Empowerment of *panchayats* is ultimately the only solution to all the related education problems at the village level (Mathew, 2008). The importance of *panchayats* in universalization of primary education is often sidelined by contradiction in the guidelines of specific programmes, leaving very little scope for local governance to be involved in it (Rai, Dale and Chatterjee, 2008). Elected members of PRIs do not have any administrative powers; they cannot take any disciplinary action against any teacher, even if he or she is found guilty of any irregularity. There is hardly any capacity building programme for PRIs in school management. In spite of provisions in the guidelines that PRIs will be responsible for recruitment and selection of teachers, they are not included in the selection committees of teachers; they are simply assigned the task of posting of teachers in schools from the list of selected teachers.

### **PRIs and Educational Development Programmes**

Despite several diverse research views, several educational development programmes were conducted in the country in the decentralized mode where PRIs

played an important role. The Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), introduced in the decentralized mode in the country and implemented through a participatory management approach, was the first significant step towards localizing educational decision-making process. Other development programmes conducted for universalizing elementary education in the decentralized mode were the Bihar Education Project, the *Lok Jumbish* Project and *Shiksha Karmi* Project in Rajasthan and the Basic Education Project (Education for all Project) in Uttar Pradesh. These programmes argued quite well for participatory management in planning and decision-making process and provided the experiences for launching similar educational development programmes like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in some selected districts in the country. Subsequently, the Government of India launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) where the focus of planning and decision-making was on decentralized administration and management.

The trend of transformation of management strategies from development programmes for elementary education seems explicitly clear from the fact that there has been a major shift in the downward swing in the command and control from central and state level to district level, from district level to block level and from block-level to village/habitation-level. The emergence of educational development programmes brought a much-needed shift in the delivery mechanism of educational services as states started recruitment of teachers at local level, increased investment in basic education, and in expenditure pattern, specifically from staff-salary oriented budget to infrastructure development-oriented budget, with financial aid from international agencies. There was also shift from supply-oriented paradigm to demand-oriented paradigm in so far as the educational needs at the local level were concerned. Educational plans are prepared at the block level, on the basis of demand for educational facilities at habitation level, and consolidated at the district level. As a result, planning and management of elementary education has become participatory at the local level with the help of Village Education Committees and School Management Committees (Govinda, 1997). The implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) assigned a major role to Panchayati Raj Institutions, making block-level *panchayat* as a Local Authority for providing support

to and participating in management of elementary education at the block level, in general, and at school, in particular. School Management Committees have also their representation in *gram panchayats*.

### **Research Methodology**

Based on a study ‘Management of Elementary Education under Panchayati Raj Institutions in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, this paper examined research questions with regard to both the states, such as whether powers of educational planning, financing and management have been fully transferred to PRIs in both the states and how coordination is maintained between the PRIs and education departments, etc. The main objective of the study was to investigate the devolution of powers to PRIs at different levels and to know the democratic participation in educational management at different levels. While Madhya Pradesh is an educationally backward state, Gujarat is an educationally advanced one. Three representative districts, that were variously educationally advanced, average and backward on the basis of educational indicators, from each of the states were selected, namely Sagar, Dewas and Shahdol from Madhya Pradesh and Mehsana, Junagarh and Valsad from Gujarat. Primary and secondary data were collected at state, district, block, village and school levels from both the states. Fifteen schedules were developed for conducting interviews with different stakeholders, including school heads and teachers, presidents, members of *gram panchayats*, block and district *panchayats* and members of Standing Committees of Education in Madhya Pradesh and District Education Committees in Gujarat. District and block-level Chief Executive Officers of PRIs and Education Officers, including officials of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, from all the six districts in the two states were also interviewed.

### **Management of Elementary Education by PRIs in Gujarat**

Gujarat Panchayat Act is in force in Gujarat in compliance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India. Three-tier arrangements prevail in Gujarat state viz. *Gram Panchayat*; *Taluka (block) Panchayat*; and *District Panchayat*. There are 26 district *panchayats*, 224 *taluka panchayats*, and 13,693 *gram panchayats* in Gujarat, while revenue villages total 18,356. The management of elementary education

has been a shared responsibility of the state government and Panchayati Raj Institutions since the reorganization of the state in 1964. The Panchayati Raj Act of 1993 and related Rules further reinforced their roles and responsibilities in the management of elementary education. PRIs participate in the management of elementary education through the District Education Committee (DEC). The DEC is a body of elected members of District *Panchayat*. It has a minimum strength of seven members and a maximum of nine elected members of District *Panchayat*. District *Panchayat* can nominate two members in the committee. The District Primary Education Officer, a Class-I officer of Gujarat Education Service, is a Member Secretary of DEC. An elected member of District *Panchayat* is Chairman of DEC. A nominated member cannot vote and cannot become the Chairman of the District Education Committee. One of the nominated members must have experience of at least 10 years in primary, secondary, higher secondary or vocational schools. Another nominated member must be an educationist from any University in India. Of all the members of the committee, two should be women, while one should be from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Other Backward Community (OBC) category and, in the case of unavailability of such a person in the Panchayat, other category member can be considered for selection.

Unlike the District Education Committee at the district level, there is no Education Committee at the block/*taluka* level. Education Inspectors at block/*taluka* level are under the Taluka Development Officer, who is an executive officer of the Block Panchayat. Education Inspectors belong to the Education Department; they are largely responsible for educational administration at the block level, covering inspection, supervision and monitoring of schools and teachers, and also for implementation of different programmes. The Block Resource Centre Coordinators (BRCCs) of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are responsible for academic support, supervision and quality improvement. There is, however, hardly any meaningful convergence and coordination between Education Inspectors and BRCCs. Education Inspectors are under the control of the Taluka Development Officer (TDO), with the TDO being the drawing and disbursing officer of the department at this level while also being responsible for service matters of teachers and Education Inspectors working in the *Taluka*. Though the Block

Resource Centre Coordinators (BRCCs) are not technically under the control of the TDO, they are assigned many types of work, that may not pertain to their exclusive area of educational responsibilities. They are basically teachers assigned with the duties of BRCCs. Personal interviews with the Education Inspectors and BRCCs revealed a sense of dissatisfaction with regard to the present arrangement of educational administration, wherein the TDO also becomes important in the overall context of managing and controlling primary education at the block level. A common thread running through all the responses was that the TDO hardly took any interest in educational management, as he or she did not belong to the Education Department cadre. The block-level educational administration in the state, as such, appeared to be relatively weak. Obviously, the kind of accountability required for educational development was found to be missing in such a case.

The Village Education Committees, constituted at village level, comprise three to 15 members, depending on the size and population of the village. While the minimum qualification for membership is passing Standard IV, it is, however, also necessary to be a member of the *Panchayat*. The functions of VEC were found to be two-fold viz. to help in the selection of site for the school building and to provide assistance for maintenance of school building. It is responsible for primary schools under its jurisdiction in the matters of checking of attendance of students in various standards shown in the register and physical verification, drawing the attention of the administrative officer regarding irregularities, i.e., attendance of teachers, and in the opening and closing of the school, etc..

For implementation of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 2 Phase II in the state in 1999, the state Education Department passed a resolution regarding formation of VEC in all villages across the state. Considering that VEC was a village-level body, therefore, the *Sarpanch* of the village was, by designation, Chairman of VEC, with the role of managing primary education in the village; the head teacher was, by designation, Member Secretary of VEC and the Cluster Resource Coordinator (CRC), under DPEP, was a person through whom the school communicated with higher level authorities to help improve its enrolment and retention. CRC coordinator was, by



designation, the Vice-Chairman of VEC. The role of the *Talati* (Revenue officer at Village *Panchayat* level) is to maintain all demographic records of the village and help the school in revenue matters and *Panchayat* women members are also involved in VEC as members in order to help in improving education of the girl child.

Thus, the structure of VEC was found to be as under:

1. Chairman : Sarpanch
2. Member Secretary : Head teacher of primary school
3. Vice-Chairman : CRC coordinator
4. Member : Two female members of the panchayat
5. Member : Talati-cum-Mantri
6. Member : Headmaster/teacher of local secondary school
7. Member : Retired teacher staying in the village
8. Member : Parents of disabled child
9. Member : MDM worker
10. Member : Anganwadi Worker

However, in place of Education Inspectors, the state has recently created the Cadre of Block Education Officers (under Education Department) who now control total elementary education, including RTE, SSA, MDM and other development programmes. The effective implementation of RTE is possible only if the educational governance structure is competent enough, in terms of power and assigned responsibility, to take up the leadership role at the appropriate level. In view of this, at the request of the Department of School Education, Government of Gujarat, National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) conducted a situational analysis of block-level educational administration and recommended the creation of a Cadre for Block Education Officers (Kumar & Tyagi, 2013).

In so far as the role of PRIs in the changing situation is concerned, Gram Panchayat has been made the Local Authority as per the provisions of RTE. This involves functions like identification of neighbourhood schools/area for the children, conducting social mapping of the village and providing educational facilities, enrolment of all non-enrolled children, age-specific admission of children in schools and their

special training, and also keeping records of every school. Convergence with different departments and linkages with NGOs, redressal of grievances relating to the protection of child rights and representation in the School Management, constituted at school level under RTE in place of VECs, are among its other functions.

### **Management of Elementary Education by PRIs in Madhya Pradesh**

Madhya Pradesh has been making continuous efforts since 1994 to decentralize the management of school education to local level and to empower the community so as to make education responsive to people's needs. The scenario emerging from the discourse, henceforth, indicates that the state seems to be a laboratory of experiments for decentralized management of education. As the political government changes in the state, administrative structures for decentralized management of elementary education also change.

#### **First Scenario**

##### *Three-tier PRIs*

As the State Government enacted the Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 in accordance with the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, the responsibility of managing school education (from Classes I-XII) was transferred from the School Education Department to the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1996. The Government Order, dated October 30, 1996, of the School Education Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh specified the management and coordination of schools by Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Order specified measures to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions and develop them as units of self-governance, as per 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, and to implement the commitment of the state government in the field of school education. All school education staff at the *Zilla* (district) and *Janpad* (block) levels were brought under the *Zilla Panchayat* and *Janpad Panchayat* respectively.

Further, the state government created Shiksha Missions (advisory bodies) and Shiksha Kendras (implementing bodies) at the state, district, block and cluster levels, under the overall command of Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM) at the State level. It was envisaged that this structure would provide support to the Panchayati Raj

Institutions, via mission-mode approach, for the management of elementary education. At the State-level, *Rajya Shiksha Kendra* was created by bringing together the Directorate of Adult Education and Literacy, the State Council of Educational Research and Training, and a set-up of the Education Development Programme like DPEP. Similarly, at the district level, *Zilla Shiksha Kendras* were created under the overall command of the Chief Executive Officer, *Zilla Panchayat*, with the District Project Coordinator of DPEP being its principal coordinator. Representatives from the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), adult education and literacy, non-formal education were brought under the umbrella of *Zilla Shiksha Kendra*. At the *Janpad* level, Block Education Officer, Block Resource Centre (BRC) Coordinator under DPEP and a representative of DIET worked under the *Janpad Shiksha Kendra*. Chief Executive Officer of *Janpad Panchayat* was the programme coordinator at the *Janpad* level. Below the *Janpad* level, *Jan Shiksha Kendras* were created at the cluster level for the purpose of monitoring and implementing educational programmes. The headmaster of the local middle school was made the *Jan Shiksha Prabhari*.

At the district level, the District Education Officer, Secondary Education and the District Project Coordinator of *Zilla Shiksha Kendra* directly reported to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PRIs. Secondary Education was outside the purview of the management of *Shiksha Kendras*, but, as mentioned earlier, was under the management of PRIs. There was a District Standing Committee on Education (*Zilla Shiksha Sthayi Samiti*) under the District Planning Committee of *Zilla Panchayat*. The Vice-President of *Zilla Panchayat* was the President of District Standing Committee on Education. With regard to elementary education, the proposal received by the District Project Coordinator of *Zilla Shiksha Kendra* from the *Janpad Shiksha Kendra* was sent to the CEO, Panchayati Raj. It was clarified that the establishment work relating to all the staff working in regular scales would be looked after by the Education Department, and on retirement of a person, the post concerned would go to the dying cadre and, against it, the appointment would be done by the Panchayati Raj Institutions. At the initial stage, Village Education Committees were responsible for management of primary and upper primary schools at village levels. The powers transferred from Education Department to PR Department are as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Powers and Functions Transferred to PRIs under Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994**

Sl. No.	Powers Remaining under State Sector	Powers transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions		
		Zilla Panchayat (Standing Committee on Education)	Janpad Panchayat (block) (Standing Committee on Education)	Gram Panchayat (Village Education Committee)
1.	Recognition of schools	Management and running of schools	Inspection of all schools falling under village self-governments	Establishment, management and conduct of primary, secondary and senior secondary schools
2.	Specification of curriculum and textbooks	Arrangement of school building etc.	Advocacy- publicity for literacy campaigns	Collection and distribution of text books and school material
3.	Planning and conducting examinations	Duration of study and vacations in schools	Construction, extension and maintenance of primary school buildings	Construction, repair and maintenance of secondary school building costing up to Rs. 500,000
4.	Assessment of students' educational levels	Purchase of teaching materials	Supply of free uniforms to girl students	Distribution of scholarship
5.	Preparation of annual academic calendar	Supply of free text books and Book bank scheme	Book bank scheme	Book bank scheme
6.	Approval for starting new courses in schools	Distribution of free uniforms	Conduct of formal school programmes	Appointment of instructors and supervisors
7.	All co-curricular activities at the divisional and state levels	Non-formal education programme	Total literacy campaign	Selection of Gurujis in EGS schools
8.	Innovations in school-based activities	Mid-day meal programme	Recruitment, selection and posting of teachers in primary schools	
9.	All activities related to collection and analysis of educational data	Operation blackboard scheme	-	-
10.	Implementation, supervision and monitoring of central and centrally sponsored schemes	Distribution of 'free ship' and scholarship	-	-
11.	Responsibility for training of teachers and other staff; control over the staff of teacher training institutions such as DIET and BTI	Recruitment, selection and posting and transfers of teachers in upper primary, secondary and senior secondary schools.		
12.	Power for decision-making regarding opening of new schools and construction or extension of school buildings using funds provided by the state government; constitution of district planning committees according to the policies provided by the state government.	-	-	-

Source: Directorate of Public Instruction, Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal.

### *Zilla Sarkar*

In order to make the administrative system more decentralized, responsive and accountable to the people's needs, the state had constituted a decision-making structure in the form of *Zilla Sarkar* at the local level, with a State Minister of Cabinet rank, preferably belonging to the district, being its Chairman, and the District Magistrate its Secretary. The main objective of establishing this body was to make the administrative machinery more sensitive and provide speedy sanction and approval, at the district level itself, of the decisions taken by the *Zilla Panchayat*. The practice followed earlier was that the *Zilla Panchayat's* recommendations of all the programmes had to be sent for final approval at the state level. Under the new set-up, these powers were to devolve on the *Zilla Sarkar* at the district level. The District Planning Committee provided an institutional base for the *Zilla Sarkar*. However, with the change of political governance in the state, the structures of Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Missions and *Zilla Sarkar* were abolished but management of school education under PRIs continued to remain. Likewise, *Shiksha Kendras* at the state, district block and cluster levels, also continued.

### **Second Scenario**

#### *Parent-Teachers' Associations*

Parent-Teachers' Associations (PTAs) were established as statutory bodies at the school level through the Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam 2002, with administrative and financial powers given to these bodies. All powers of school management, given to VECs, were transferred to PTAs. All functions of gram panchayats, related to school management, were transferred to *Gram Sabha* (a village under a *gram panchayat*). VECs, now known as Education Committees and constituted under *Gram Sabhas*, were considered supervisory and monitoring bodies for primary and upper primary schools. PTA, in this case, was regarded as an unit of the Education Committee of Gram Sabha. However, Education Committees were not allowed to participate in the school management activities. Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, 2002 envisaged that plan proposals, emanating from PTA, would be sent to the *Gram Sabha* through the Education Committee for its approval, and be forwarded by the *Gram Sabha* to *Jan Shiksha Kendra* at Cluster level before being transmitted

further to the *Janpad Shiksha Kendras*. However, this practice was never followed. The members of PTA include the mothers and fathers of all children enrolled in schools and the teachers. Earlier, elections to Executive Committee of PTA were held annually but an amendment made in the *Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam* in 2006 envisaged that members of the Executive Committee would be elected for two academic sessions. At the primary level, there would be 14 members of Executive Committee while at the upper primary level, there would be only 12 members.

In primary and upper primary schools, the mother or father or guardian of each of those children, who secured highest percentage of marks in the annual examination of the preceding academic session in Classes I-IV and in Classes V-VII, would be the members of the Executive Committee. The President and Vice-President would be selected from among members of the Executive Committee. A *Shala Shiksha Kosh* was established for each Parent-Teacher Association; about 80% grants given to the school under DPEP, and later under SSA, were transferred from *Zilla Shiksha Kendra* directly to this *Shala Kosh*; and the decision to use the resources is taken by PTA. Funds to distribute incentives like uniforms were also provided to PTAs account directly. The role of PTA in school improvement, apart from general management of school, included developing village-level educational plans, financial planning, procurement plans, decision-making, record-keeping and audit.

### **Third Scenario**

#### *Policy Changes*

Changes in the policy and approach of educational development in Madhya Pradesh have taken place several times in the past following every change in the government. These changes occurred from top to bottom, resulting in a clear lack of coordination between the administration and the PRIs since decisions relating to administration, finance and academic issues were taken by the Education Department and conveyed to the PRIs at different levels.

As in the case of Gujarat and even all the states and UTs in the country, due to implementation of the RTE, the role of PRIs in the management of elementary

education has undergone a sea change. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, the Local Authority has been identified as the *Janpad Panchayat* and Block Education Officer. Local Authority has to play a major role in conducting social mapping and enrolling non-enrolled children in age-appropriate classes after providing special training. It is also responsible for providing schooling facilities, through opening of primary and upper primary schools within one kilometre and three kilometers radii from the village periphery. It is also responsible for making arrangements for providing education to children with special needs as well as providing seasonal hostels for children of migratory labourers. At the village level, the School Management Committee (SMC), which has the representation of *Gram Panchayat*, is responsible for preparation and implementation of School Development Plan for a three-year period, setting the target for requirement of teachers, additional classrooms, other infrastructural facilities like potable water and separate toilets for boys and girls.

### **Findings of the Study**

With the creation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, decentralization was initially expected to achieve higher economic efficiency, better accountability, larger resource mobilization, lower cost of service delivery and higher satisfaction of local preferences. However, this study found that PRIs at district, block and village levels were given a nominal role in the management of elementary education with the main functions of managing elementary education in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh being undertaken by the education department at district, block and *Gram Panchayat* levels. In the process, the community was denied participation in planning and management of elementary education. Therefore, effective devolution of functions, as envisaged in the Constitution, has not taken place. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Government of India (2008), in its report on 'Rural Governance', observed that in most parts of the country, the intent of Article 243 G was ignored by denying autonomous space to local bodies. Panchayats continued to function within the framework of what may be termed as a "permissive functional domain", since very limited functional areas have been withdrawn from the line departments of State Governments and transferred to local bodies.

## Lack of Policy Reforms for Adequate Devolution of Powers

The study found that in **Gujarat**, DEC is only a paper-signing authority; it does not have any administrative powers that devolved to it as per the Act. All the functions, as discussed earlier, were performed by the Education Department. Their main functions included construction of school buildings, overseeing the disputes regarding admission, transfer and promotion. Even in the matter of construction of school buildings, there was overlapping of powers as same powers had been given to *Taluka Panchayat* even though no Taluka Education Committee exists. The study found that *Zilla Panchayat*/District Education Committee did not have any role in the education policy formulation and its implementation. Consequently, *Zilla Panchayats* and *Taluka Panchayats* in Gujarat were not involved in the development programmes of elementary education like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. They were completely isolated from the decision-making process in the planning and management of SSA. They were neither included in the district nor block-level task force of SSA. Participation, if any, of PRIs at the district level was generally effected at the instance of the education department which was too casual and occasionally like peoples' mobilization campaigns for awareness generation.

**Table 2**

### Presidents of Zilla Panchayat on Devolution of Powers

Sl. No.	Questions	Gujarat			Madhya Pradesh		
		Mehsana	Junagarh	Valsad	Shahdole	Devas	Sagar
1.	Whether all powers and responsibilities under 73 <sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendments for management of elementary education have been devolved?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
2.	Are you fully able to exercise these powers?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
3.	Do you think that provisions of State Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 are adequate for managing elementary education in the state?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
4.	Do you think that progress in elementary education is better at present than before since it is being managed by PRIs?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
5.	Have you received training in planning and management of elementary education?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Field Study



Undoubtedly, this is not as per the Constitutional provisions with devolution of powers under 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment or Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act. Inadequate devolution of powers happened on account of the unwillingness of the government and the autocratic attitude of bureaucrats in the education department and in the Panchayati Raj Department as well as they were not prepared to give up their administrative and financial powers. These impediments had an adverse effect on managing of elementary education by PRIs as while on paper, they were given the responsibility, in practice and functioning, they remained on the periphery of decision-making with regard to planning and management of programmes under policy reforms of education.

The responses show that the Presidents of District Panchayats of Mehsana, Junagarh and Valsad (sample districts) were not aware of the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and the Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, and their responses differed from one another. One out of three presidents were of the view that PRIs are effective in management of elementary education and want all members of District Panchayats and VECs (now SMCs) to be provided with training on school management. Again, only one out of three presidents felt that women are very active and can contribute positively in the development of school education. However, two of them opined that while there were few women PRI members who were aware and active, the majority of them did not have enough voice and understanding of school education development and their participation in the programmes was also hitherto inadequate. One of the district panchayat presidents indicated that management of primary education is still not dealt adequately by PRIs since SSA is not under their control, with planning and implementation of educational programmes being independently undertaken by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority. Training on management of school education is still not given to *Zilla* or block personnel. All the three presidents, in this regard, wanted to have basic orientation training in school management. This clearly indicates a serious lack of political will on the part of the state government to adopt policy reforms in the administration and management of elementary education.

In the case of Madhya Pradesh, the Presidents of *Zilla Panchayats* pointed out that while on paper, powers had devolved but in practice, the devolved powers could not be exercised. It was disclosed that powers had been given theoretically but not practically. All the three District Panchayat Presidents did not consider the provisions of Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 as adequate for managing elementary education in the state. The main difference between the functioning of PRIs in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh was that, while in Gujarat, PRIs were not involved in policy formulation and implementation, in Madhya Pradesh, on the other hand, they were given the major responsibility of managing not only elementary education but secondary and higher secondary education also at district and block levels. This included teacher recruitment, as also planning and implementation of programmes at district and block levels on paper, even though all the work at both these levels is carried out by education officers. At the village level, PTAs were given administrative and financial powers in respect of primary and upper primary schools while gram panchayats were not given any role. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of PRIs at district and block levels, designated as the Chief Programme Coordinators of *Zilla Shiksha Kendra* and *Janpad Shiksha Kendra*, exercised all powers.

### **Inadequate Capacity Building**

Findings of the study show that Presidents of District Panchayats of both the states were not aware of the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendments and provisions of States' Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, with respect to management of elementary education. Only one out of the three Presidents in both the states believed that PRIs were effective in the management of elementary education and wanted all members of District Education Committee in Gujarat and Standing Committee on Education in Madhya Pradesh to be provided with training on management of elementary education. Presidents of District Panchayats in Gujarat said that management of primary education was still not dealt adequately by PRIs since SSA was not under their control, and planning and implementation of educational programmes were carried out independently by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Authority. The study wondered as to how PRIs would be able to exercise their powers if they were not given training.

## **Bureaucracy Prevails over Democratic Representation**

*Zilla Panchayat* Presidents of both the states said that only those presidents were able to exercise their powers who could interpret the rules in the rule book. CEOs, sometimes, did not coordinate with the presidents, and did not accept their demands on the plea that this was not in the rules. Hence, all powers were given to and administered by CEOs themselves. They said that even though there was devolution of powers, PRIs at district level meant only CEOs and almost all the decisions were taken by them. No actual power was exercised by elected persons. It was argued by the Presidents that suggestions and recommendations given by them were not followed by the bureaucrats, indicating that in spite of devolution of powers under 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment or as per state Panchayati Raj Acts in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the exercise of powers was not done by the democratically-elected representatives. This was because of unwillingness on the part of the governments and the autocratic attitude of bureaucrats in the Panchayati Raj Department. CEOs in the Panchayati Raj Department and even senior education officers in the Education Department were not in favour of giving up their administrative and financial powers. These impediments had an adverse effect on the managing of elementary education by PRIs, as while on paper, the latter were given the responsibility but in practice and in terms of actual functioning, they were confined to the periphery of decision-making with regard to planning and management of programmes of elementary education.

### **Frequent transfers of CEOs**

CEOs in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat who seemed to be more powerful were not able to persistently stay in the district. They were transferred frequently. How could they ensure implementation of the provisions of Panchayati Raj Act if they did not stay in any district for a considerable period of time? Since elected members were not empowered and education was not a priority of CEOs, who then would be responsible for education management? Again performing duties pertaining to education by the education officers was not a condition of democratic decentralization. Table 3 indicates that 21 CEOs were transferred during the 13-year period from 1996 to 2009 in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh; one CEO was transferred in nine days and another in 10

days. Changes in the policy and approach of educational development in Madhya Pradesh had taken place several times in the past with every change in the government. These changes occurred from top to bottom, resulting in a clear lack of interface between the educational administration and the PRIs since decisions regarding administration, finance and academic issues were taken at the state-level and conveyed to the lower levels.

**Table 3****CEOs Transferred from Sagar District in a 10-year period from 1996 to 2009**

Sl. No.	Names	Date of joining	Date of leaving	Period of stay
1.	Smt. Kalpana Shrivastav, I.A.S	17/06/1996	17/09/1996	3 Months
2.	Shri S.C.Jain, S.A.S	18/09/1996	03/01/1997	3 Months & 16 Days
3.	Smt. Smita Gaate, S.A.S	03/01/1997	02/01/1998	1 Year
4.	Shri Shivram Patna, S.A.S	07/01/1998	30/03/1998	2 Months & 23 Days
5.	Shri S.C.Jain, S.A.S	30/03/98	24/04/98	25 days
6.	Shri Hariranjana Rao, I.A.S	25/04/98	05/07/99	1 year, 2 months & 10 days
7.	Shri S.C.Yarya collector	06/07/99	15/07/99	10 days
8.	Shri J.P.Tiwari, I.A.S	16/07/99	19/09/01	2 years, 2 months & 5 days
9.	Shri S.C.Yarya collector	19/09/01	27/09/01	9 days
10.	Shri R.P.S.Tyagi, S.A.S	27/09/01	17/09/03	1 year, 11 months & 20 days
11.	Shri A.K.Shivhare, I.A.S	18/09/03	23/12/03	3 months, 6 days
12.	Shri Pradumna Sharma	24/12/03	23/03/04	3 months
13.	Shri G.K.Sarsvat, I.A.S	24/03/04	07/07/04	3 months, & 13 days
14.	Shri Pradumna Sharma	08/07/04	18/07/04	11 days
15.	Smt. Shuchi Shmita, S.A.S.	19/07/04	01/12/04	4 months & 12 days
16.	Shri H.P.Varma collector	02/12/04	05/12/04	4 days
17.	Shri Z.U.Sekh, S.A.S.	06/12/04	18/07/06	1 year, 7 months & 13 days
18.	Shri Shobhit Jain, I.A.S	18/07/06	14/03/07	7 months & 25 days
19.	Shri I.S.Thakur	14/03/07	09/04/07	26 days
20.	Shri Dr. Srinivas Sharma, I.A.S	09/04/07	30/03/09	1 year, 11 months & 21 days
21.	Shri R.K.Tripathi, I.A.S	30/03/09	Continue	

Source: Records of Sagar Zilla Panchayat Office

## **Lack of Effectiveness of PRIs in Gujarat and in Madhya Pradesh**

### *At District Level*

In Gujarat, the Chairmen of DEC of Valsad and Mehsana districts stated that no power, as envisaged under 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, had devolved on them (as indicated in Table 3). All the three Chairmen of District Education Committees of Mehsana, Junagadh and Valsad stated that even though they were involved in monitoring educational activities, they were not having any powers and involvement in decision-making on any financial, administrative or academic issues. They also indicated that since they were not aware of the provisions of Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 for the management of elementary education, there was no question of exercising any power. All the three Chairmen, however, acknowledged that there were sufficient funds available for PRIs for managing elementary education. However, only one Chairman of DEC (of Junagadh) acknowledged that elementary education is better managed by PRIs. They demanded that for quality assurance in school education, monitoring should be entrusted to the District Education Committee and there should be involvement and control of PRIs on SSA. On the other hand, DPEOs, as secretaries of the DECs, were not satisfied with the performance of the District Education Committees with regard to management of primary education as they felt that District Education Committee members used political pressure for benefiting their own people and made unnecessary demands for their own political benefits as well. Moreover, DPEOs said that even the school monitoring system by the education committee was very poor, irregular and unstructured; and that internal meetings of the District Education Committee and lack of their proper coordination with district education office could not ensure the desired results.

Table 4

**Views of the Chairman of the District Education Committee in Gujarat and  
Chairman of the Standing Committee on Education, Madhya Pradesh**

Details	Gujarat (District Education Committee)				Madhya Pradesh (Standing Committee on Education)			
	Junagadh	Valsad	Mehsana	Overall acceptance	Shahdole	Dewas	Sagar	Overall acceptance
Total no. respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Whether all the provisions of the 73 <sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment including powers and responsibilities have been devolved to you?	No	Yes	Yes	66.66%	No	No	Yes	33.33%
Have the administrative, financial and academic powers been delegated to you under the State Panchayati Raj Act, 1994?	No	No	No	0%	Yes	Yes	No	67.33%
Do you know that provisions of State Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 are adequate for managing elementary education in the state?	No	No	No	0%	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Are you fully able to exercise these powers?	No	No	No	0%	No	No	Yes	33.33%
Do you agree that elementary education is better managed by PRIs?	Yes	No	No	33.33%	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Whether adequate funds are available for PRIs from Education Department for conducting programmes for elementary education?	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%

*Source: Field Study*

In the case of **Madhya Pradesh**, Presidents of Standing Committee on Education of Shahdole and Dewas districts stated that they did not know the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and the powers and responsibilities that devolved under it to PRIs. However, they indicated that administrative, financial and academic powers have devolved to them under the Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. All the three presidents of Standing Committees on Education of Sagar, Shahdole and Dewas agreed that there were adequate provisions in the State Act for management of elementary education in the state and that adequate funds were available from the Education Department for PRIs for conducting programmes of elementary education (as per Table 3). Only the president of Sagar district acknowledged that he was fully able to

exercise these powers. Nevertheless, all the three presidents seemed to agree that elementary education is better managed by PRIs.

The Presidents of Standing Committees on Education admitted that, barring supervision, they were not able to do any significant educational management. They would visit the school and give the feedback to the District Project Coordinator of *Zilla Shiksha Kendra*. The responsibility lay with the District Project Coordinator to take the final decision in the matter. It was also reported that there was no involvement of the Standing Committee in matters of recruitment as also in transfer of teachers.

On the basis of data from the present study, it can be concluded that although the Madhya Pradesh Government has been generous in respect of devolution of powers to PRIs since 1996, it has been noticed that even after a 15-year period, exercising of powers was not done properly by the PRIs. Many disparities were found between what was stipulated in the Acts and what was actually being practised. It was found that Presidents of Standing Committees were powerless and were unable to exercise their powers.

### ***At Block Level***

As discussed earlier, there was no Block Education Committee like the DEC at the district level in **Gujarat**. Two Block Panchayat Presidents were interviewed from each of the three districts, Mehsana, Shahadole and Junagadh. While all the six block Panchayat Presidents were cognizant of their responsibilities towards education enhancement, they were not well aware of their roles and responsibilities relating to involvement in educational programmes. They did not know much about effective utilization of funds and strategies for enrolment and retention of children and especially about planning and implementing of different educational programmes at village and block levels. Moreover, they were not satisfied with transfer and recruitment of teachers as they did not have any direct involvement or participation in the process. In addition, they desired to be involved in SSA too and wanted the SSA to work under the control of the Block Panchayat. It was felt that BRC and CRC should be under the *Taluka Panchayat*. *Taluka Panchayat* Presidents were **sceptical** about the progress of

elementary education and with the management of schools by *Gram Panchayats*, because they felt Sarpanchs were not capable of managing financial matters. Where VECs were not good, they would create many problems in schools. In some of the schools, the Sarpanch would demand money for signing papers. In a few cases, the Sarpanch wanted labour contract for construction whereas, as per SSA norms, a Village Civil Works Committee member is not eligible to be the contractor. No doubt, majority of the schools had very good experience of VECs but these can be considered as exceptions. Cases of mis-utilization of funds also occurred and teachers had to look for cement and other materials for ensuring timely completion of construction or repair works. Asked whether adequate funds were available from the Education Department for PRIs for conducting programmes for elementary education, all presidents replied in the affirmative.

In Gujarat, Taluka Development Officers (TDO) had to look for more than 10-12 development departments in the block and handle so much workload that they were unable to prioritise on education. Education Inspectors, at the block level, were also involved in work other than education, with their service conditions being managed by TDOs. Besides, no TDO remained in the same taluka for long due to frequent transfers. Thus, they are not able to put in adequate efforts for development of school education. Education Inspectors laid emphasis on strengthening PRIs for improving primary education in the village since they regarded formation of PRIs as a good step of the state government for management of school education in the village.

In **Madhya Pradesh**, there is a Janpad Shiksha Kendra. All the work of management of elementary education, including implementation of RTE at block level, is carried out by the Block Resource Centre Coordinator under SSA. Considering that the Block Education Officers, who look after total school education (Classes I-XII), are selected by promotion, a majority of them reach the post of BEO at the fag end of their service when they have a few months left for retirement. Under the circumstances, they have no interest in the management of elementary education.



In the study, five of the six Presidents of *Janpad Panchayat* received training on subjects under *Janpad Panchayat*, including education. While all the six Presidents acknowledged being given some powers in theory, three of them disclosed that they hardly exercised their powers. Majority of them opined that the provisions of Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 were adequate for managing elementary education in the state. It was found that only three of the respondents were having the Rulebook containing provisions and guidelines for managing different subjects given to them. However, when asked about the rules, they were unable to interpret the rules properly. Incidentally, they were unanimous in their view that there is greater progress in elementary education at present than before, since it is being managed by PRIs. Majority of the Presidents reported that adequate funds were available to PRIs from the Education Department for conducting programmes for elementary education and that they visited schools for inspection. They did not have any problems in the recruitment of teachers as they were not involved in the process. However, they hardly took part in educational planning and reported experiencing problems in the matter of teachers' transfers while emphasising that they should be provided training in school management.

Regarding the formation of PTAs at the school level, while three Presidents labeled it as a good step by the state government, five of them indicated that there was no involvement of PRIs in PTA and, as such, PRIs have not been given representation in planning and management of primary and upper primary schools at *Gram Panchayat* level. Education Committees or VECs and *Gram Sabhas* were not functional. It was apparent that the role of PRIs had been sidelined at the school level. While the Education Committee of the *Gram Sabha* was responsible for monitoring and supervision of the activities of the Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA), ironically the *Gram Sabha* was not functional and the Education Committees were not constituted. *Gram Sabha*, which was the lowest level body, did not have representation in the PTA. Only two *Janpad Panchayat* Presidents were satisfied with the practice of transferring 80 per cent of the school funds directly from *Zilla Shiksha Kendra* to the PTA. However, they felt that as a consequence, Panchayats at the block level had no role to play. This gave rise to the question as to how the goal of democratic decentralization

could be achieved. Only two Presidents were satisfied with the coordination of the CEOs at *Janpad* level. They felt that all the powers had been given to CEOs who did not care for either any instruction or any proposal. Majority of them were satisfied with the working of the Standing Committee on Education at the *Janpad* level.

As discussed earlier, the Vice-President of the *Janpad Panchayat* functions as President of the Standing Committee on Education. Six Presidents of Standing Committee on Education of *Janpad Panchayats* were interviewed. It was found that five Presidents had received training on educational management. However, three Presidents, while acknowledging that powers had been delegated to them, indicated that conditions became worse when they exercised the powers. Only one President exercised his powers and thought that provisions of Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 were adequate for managing elementary education in the state. However, five of them reported that progress in elementary education is better at present than before since it is being managed by PRIs. More interesting was the fact that all the six Presidents felt the need for training in school management. Only one President said that formation of PTA was a good step by the state government. Four Presidents did not agree saying that there was no involvement of PRIs in PTA and, as such, PRIs have not been given representation in planning and management of primary and upper primary schools. Only one President was satisfied with this system since PRIs were not aware of what was happening at school level. They opined that PRIs should have a role in financial management in schools. In this context, giving funds directly to PTA created a condition of non-transparency, wherein the general public as well as elected persons were unaware of fund utilization or, for that matter, whether proper utilization was being done or not? Three Presidents were satisfied with the coordination with CEOs at block level, while two Presidents were happy with the working of *Janpad* level Standing Committee on Education and only one was satisfied with the working of village Panchayats. Their response in this regard was an indication of structural inefficiency in the system. Despite all the provisions, people were not empowered and did not participate in the democratic system.

### ***At School Level***

Head teachers and teachers of the schools in **Gujarat** felt that school management by VECs, at the village level, was most effective and was an excellent step of the state government. Prior to the formation of VEC, nobody cared for education in the village. But since the formation of VECs, the concerns of the local people on education have been raised. Majority of the village schools benefited in terms of physical support from local people and also received all required support for improving school education. Community participation and contribution in school education resulted from their involvement in educational programmes through VEC's efforts. However, in some villages, it was found that the VECs created hurdles. More powers to the VECs resulted in harassment of school staff, especially the female staff. Besides, as the result of PRI involvement, internal politics played a major role and affected school management. A common issue that emerged from the study was that not a single VEC was able to state its roles and responsibilities while most Village Panchayats were not really clear about the functions they were expected to perform. On the positive side, there were cases where Panchayats had done well in the matter of infrastructural development of the school. In a majority of the schools, it was found that though the Panchayats could supervise the attendance of teachers, they could not give comments/remarks on the teacher's conduct in the school register/documents. In other words, the *Sarpanch* had no authority to initiate action against the teachers since the VECs were created under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and were responsible for the enrolment of all children in school. The *Sarpanch* could only complain about the erring teacher to higher authorities and recommend some punishment.

In **Madhya Pradesh**, there was no involvement of PRIs in PTA and, as such, PRIs had not been given representation in planning and management of primary and upper primary schools. All stakeholders agreed that as per *Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam*, 2002, the PTA was, in theory, a part of the Education Committee of *Gram Sabha* but in reality there was no practical existence of Education Committee or VEC in *Gram Sabha*. It emerged that the role of PRIs had been sidelined at the school level. Education Committee of the *Gram Sabha* was responsible for monitoring and supervising the

activities conducted by the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) but these committees were not constituted. It seemed that no initiative was taken by the PTA/Cluster Resource Centre to get any proposal approved from the Education Committee and *Gram Sabha*, as envisaged in the *Adhiniyam*. Their role was for namesake in which they were neither interested nor motivated to involve in the development programmes since all powers in the Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, 2002, have been given to PTA.

### **Lack of Empowerment of People**

Democratic decentralization is a development process to ensure participation of each member of the community in overall programme development and delivery. In general, schemes and programmes are prepared at the top level and transferred to the grassroots' level for implementation. To ensure participation from grassroots' level, Panchayati Raj Acts came into force. However, it was found that in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, in spite of provisions for decentralization of powers, people were not empowered. The study shows that in Gujarat, there was a District Education Committee but its functions were just peripheral and the members of the Committee were not involved in planning and decision-making. At the block/*taluka* level, there was no Taluka Education Committee for planning and management of elementary education. In the case of Madhya Pradesh too, though there was a well-defined structure and function of PRIs in place for management of elementary education but, over the years, PRIs role has been minimized, if not gone altogether, at district and block levels. At village level, their role has been completely eliminated by creating PTAs in place of VECs. The reason for this could perhaps be that education officers at any level do not like to give up their administrative and financial powers. On paper, powers devolved to PRIs but in the name of lack of capacity building, these were exercised by the education officers. The root cause lies somewhere with the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments as it was made obligatory and not mandatory on the part of the state like in the case of Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. As such, as the Second Administrative Reform Commission puts it, the states are not able to map out activities which could be transferred as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment.

## **Suggestions for Improvement**

In the case of **Gujarat**, there was a need to make policy reforms in so far as the management of elementary education through Panchayati Raj Institutions was concerned. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment envisaged empowerment through participation of people in local governance. It called for transfer, not only of management of elementary education, but also of total school education with adequate funds, which were currently given to the Education Department. It was, therefore, necessary that more powers devolved to PRIs for managing elementary education. It is suggested that they be involved in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other development programmes of elementary education at district and taluka levels so that people can feel a sense of belonging, ownership, sharing in decision-making and empowerment.

For this purpose, there is a need to make provisions in the Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 providing more powers to District Education Committee. It is also necessary to constitute a Taluka Education Committee which can provide support to local authority and help in managing elementary education. For educational administration at the block level, earlier there were Education Inspectors who had to work under the Taluka Development Officer of the revenue department. As discussed before, the state has recently created a Cadre of Block Education Officers, at the block level, on the recommendations made by a situational study of block-level educational administration, conducted by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, on the request of the state government.

The Right to Education Act envisaged the formation of a local authority, which would oversee the functioning of primary and upper primary schools, in general, while providing support to School Management Committees, in particular. The local authority would be constituted with a combination of PRIs at taluka level and local-level educational administrative set-up, viz. the Block Education Office. Further the Taluka Education Committee, as mentioned earlier, would advise on overall development of elementary education and provide support to local authority in implementation of programmes of elementary education. This would break the isolation of PRIs from participating in planning and management of elementary education. Since the

implementation of RTE, SMCs have been constituted in the state for looking after the school management. SMCs also involve the participation of PRIs. PRIs could also be playing a greater role in school management through SMCs in coordination with the local authority.

In the case of **Madhya Pradesh**, it is suggested that at block and district levels, all the activities related to school management like planning, budgeting, mid-day meal, building construction etc. should be thoroughly analyzed and only thereafter, activity-wise or sub-activity wise, powers should be given to PRIs at district and block levels. No legal provision can empower the people, if they are not aware of it. As indicated by the study, *Sarpanch* of the *Gram Sabha*, Presidents and members of PTA were not aware of their roles and responsibilities related to school management. Since PTAs have been rechristened as SMCs under RTE and have been vested with the responsibility of preparation of School Development Plan, intensive training needs to be provided to SMCs on planning and supervision skills, feedback system, record-keeping, etc. School funds were spent exclusively by PTA by creating a situation wherein members of PRI did not take any interest. Since PRIs are part of SMC and they have also the responsibility of local authority, they require intensive training on school management activities in accordance with the provisions of RTE.

### **Proper Mapping of Activities**

In case of both the states, it is necessary, as suggested by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and also observed by the Second Administrative Reform Commission (2008), Government of India, that there must be proper demarcation of activities to be transferred by the Education Department to the Panchayati Raj Department. It was almost done by the State of Madhya Pradesh at the initial stage but it was observed that nearly all the powers transferred to PRIs are, at present, administered by the Education Department, thereby minimizing the role of local governance in educational management. Both states need to take steps for intensive involvement of PRIs, not only in elementary education, but also in total school education, as per the essence of the 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Article 243G of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment.

## **Capacity Building**

There is a need not only to prepare and implement capacity building plans, but also to plan for the recurrent training of PRIs in educational administration and management, planning, budgeting, coordination and convergence, programme management and in respect of ethical aspects of the profession. All these aspects of training must have focus on the Child Rights Perspective, as envisaged in RTE and in Article 21A inserted in the Constitution of India in 2002 relating to Fundamental Right of Education. This is possible only when powers are devolved in the true sense and the capacity building programmes are conducted for PRIs. It is also necessary that there should be a system of assessment and feedback aimed at strengthening the local governance of elementary education in the states.

## **Notes**

1. In Gujarat, the class structure of elementary education is I-VII. The District Elementary Education Officer has been named as District Primary Education Officer. The state is in the process of making class structure of I-VIII for elementary education, as per the recommendations of National Policy on Education, 1986.
2. Village Education Committees were constituted under PRIs. Later, these were restructured under DPEP, which was conducted in the backward districts of the country.
3. *Gram Sabha* of a village is under *Gram Panchayat* which has 2-3 villages.
4. Line departments are the departments from which the administrative and financial powers are to be devolved to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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