Lack of Community Participation in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: A Case Study

VASANTA SRINIVASA RAO

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, among other things, seeks to promote community participation in school education. The programme has completed its first phase of five years of implementation. This article evaluates the working of the school education management committee in a tribal area of East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. It shows that community participation in improving education is negligible and that members of the SEMCs have limited awareness of the SSA.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship programme that aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education to all children in the 6 to 14 age group by 2010 and bridge social, regional and gender gaps. It assigns the greatest importance to systematic mobilisation of the community and creation of an effective system of decentralised decision-making.

Almost all states and union territories have constituted school education management committees (SEMCs) under the SSA. These committees are to ensure community participation. The nomenclature of the community level structure varies from state to state.1 These community level structures play a key role in micro-planning, especially in the development of a village education plan and school improvement plans. Under SSA the annual work plan and budget is prepared in a participatory planning process by these communities and they take into account local needs and specificity. The SEMC is the mechanism through which public funds for education services flows to the village, through which planning, implementation and monitoring are coordinated.2 Based on these objectives it is proposed to assess awareness in the scheduled tribe (ST) Rampachodavaram agency area in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh to track the impact of the SSA during first phase of its implementation.

The Rampachodavaram agency is a backward area in terms of literacy levels of the tribal population in the district. It has seven mandals, of which three, namely, Y Ramavaram, Ganga-varam and Maredu-milli were selected for the study. These mandals reported the lowest literacy in the district as per the 2001 Census. The literacy in the district was 65.5% (2001) while in the three mandals it was 37.4%, 42.5% and 52.4%, respectively (GOAP 2004).

A multistage sampling method was employed for the selection of mandals, villages and respondents for the study. A total of 26 villages were selected from the three mandals – 10% of the total number of villages in each mandal. The respondents for the study were members of the SEMCs. Among the three categories in each SEMC, two parents out of four, one member of the panchayati raj institution (PRI) – either panchayat president or panchayat ward member whoever was available – and all schoolteachers/headmasters (in the study area most of the schools are single teacher schools or with a maximum of two teachers) were covered. One hundred and twenty-five respondents were selected for the survey in 2006 by simple random sampling from 26 SEMCs in 26 sample villages of the three mandals (Table 1).

1 Awareness of the SEMC Members

The levels of awareness among different members of the SEMCs are reported here.

1.1 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

The fieldwork data indicated that more than 67% of all categories of the respondents are aware of SSA. It is observed that an overwhelming majority (i.e., 87.2%) of the schoolteachers were aware of SSA, whereas in the case of PRI members it was 61% and among parents of the school-going children 52%. Among the teachers, the vidya volunteers were not exposed to the SSA. On enquiring about the reasons for lack of understanding of the SSA among the vidya volunteers, it was found that their recruitment had taken place in the middle of the academic year, hence they were not given orientation or training.

Table 1: Selection of Survey Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S No</th>
<th>Mandal</th>
<th>Total Villages</th>
<th>Sample Schools</th>
<th>Parents of School-going Children</th>
<th>PRI Members</th>
<th>School Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y Ramavaram</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gangavaram</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maredu-milli</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>262</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would like to thank G Sudarshanam for guiding me during the course of my fieldworks, and N Sudhakar Rao for his suggestions on research methodology. I would also like to thank Somya Vinayan for her valuable comments and suggestions on an initial draft.

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On the whole, 45% of the respondents from all the categories said that they do not know what SSA meant. Among the respondents who said that they do not know, parents constitute the largest number. It was also found that nearly 23% of the respondents reported that SSA meant only provision of a mid-day meal programme. Pallala Suhareddi, a parent member in SEMC in Agavalasa village of Maredumilli mandal held the view that "I send my daughter to the school everyday. I do not know about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. I know that every day food is made available to all the children in the school."

1.2 Micro Level Planning
One of the major exercises of the preparatory phase in the SSA is expected to be the preparation of habitation level educational plans through community participation. The SSA has the clear aim of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UAE), and it is mandatory to track the progress of each and every child in the 0-14 age group. The preparatory phase provides for a process and activity based organisation of such committees and training of community leaders for better management of schools (GOI 2000).

Yet, an overwhelming majority (i.e., 90.4%) of the three categories of the respondents (113 out of 125) were not aware of the Micro Level Planning (MLP). And more than 87% of the schoolteachers (41 out of 47) were not aware of this component. During the course of fieldwork, it was observed during discussions that the respondents had not even heard about the MLP. In some cases the teachers explained that they were not asked about the MLP by senior officials whenever they visited the school. Kadala Devireddi, school headmaster in the Government Primary School (GPS) in Gondivada village of Maredumilli mandal said "I was not trained on micro level planning. This is a small village and I know about the details of the children. As of now all the children are coming to school. MLP is not required."

1.3 Awareness on SEMC
The respondents were asked whether there was any committee in the village to deal with issues related to education. Nearly 50% (63 out of 125) of the respondents said that there was no such committee in their villages. It is hard to escape the irony that half of the members in the SEMC themselves did not know that they were members of the committee. In the case of schoolteachers/headmasters, 25 (more than 53%) out of 47 were unaware that they were the conveners in SEMC. Among the teachers, those who knew that they were members, expressed the view that the schoolteachers wrote minutes of the SEMC meetings without conducting formal meetings and took signatures from the members. They also pointed that they signed them because they trusted the schoolteachers. On the same issue, the arguments of the teachers differ. Kechela Laxmi Reddi, schoolteacher in GPS in Kutravada village of Maredumilli mandal said, "the community members never come to the meeting even after repeated reminders. Because of the pressure from the School Complex Resource Person (SCRP) and the Mandal Education Officer (MEO), I am forced to send the minutes of the meeting without conducting the formal meetings". It was also observed during the course of fieldwork that most of the schools do not maintain minutes of the SEMC meetings.

Among the 125 respondents, 63 (i.e., 50.4%) were not aware about their own membership of the SEMC. Palagadda Ramachandra Reddi, who qualified for secondary education and working as Vidya Volunteer in the GPS in G Vottigadda village of Y Ramavaram mandal said, "I have been working in this school since last five months. No one told me about the education committee. The government had not appointed a permanent teacher in this school. We, two vidya volunteers, are working in this school and are not trained about education committees." Pallala Leela Prasad, panchayat president belonging to Valamurru village in G M Valasa panchayat of Maredumilli mandal said, "I know that I am the chairman of education committee. However, there are no formal meetings. The schoolteacher looks after everything. We support the schoolteacher in all the matters regarding running of the school." This indicates that neither teachers nor PRI members take the initiative for conducting monthly meetings.

2 Facilities Available
Basic facilities and infrastructure are required at the school level for better teaching as well as learning process. It is important
to use Teaching Learning Material (TLM) while teaching the tribal children, because they can then understand things easily when the teacher uses relevant play items. TLM refers to one of the methodologies used by the teacher while instructions the students in primary schools. Sanitation and other facilities within the premises of the school are also important in providing a healthy environment for learning. The SSA has taken up these issues to be addressed during its implementation. The data related to the facilities in the schools were collected from 26 schools in the sample villages. Out of the 26 sample schools 13 were Government Primary Schools (GPS), nine Mandal Praja Parishad Schools (MPPS), three Integrated Schools (IS) and one a Mandal Parishad Upper Primary School (MPUPS).

The very poor level of availability of facilities in all areas is presented in Figure 1.

3 Participation of SEMC Members

Below is discussed the different levels of participation among members of the SEMC.

3.1 Monthly Meetings

The strategy for encouraging decentralised planning and decision-making by SEMC is to ensure local participation in school related activities. It is expected that parents remain active in their children’s education. Keeping this as a policy norm and to decentralise the decision-making of school education, the parents of the school-going children and PRI members were made part of the education committee at the village level. It was expected that they would discuss various issues related to education at their village. However, the data reveals that nearly 70% (87 out of 125) of the respondents reported that they had not participated even once in the monthly meetings during their tenure. Bumula Sakhubai, parent member in SEMC in Doramamidi village of Gangavaram mandal strongly felt that “it is the responsibility of the schoolteacher to run the school properly. I did not know that I am a member in the school committee. No one had informed me. I was never asked to participate in the meetings.”

While sharing his experience about organising community meetings S Prabhakar Reddi, school headmaster in Marrigudem village of Y Ramavaram mandal revealed that organising the committee meetings is a challenging task. The members never turn up for discussion in the meetings. Even, if anything goes wrong with the implementation of the mid-day meal programme, they never contribute their time to resolve the issue. Most of the time, I alone have solved the problems with the help of outsiders in the committee. However, our panchayat sarpanch supports me.

A few respondents expressed that they had been involved in and had participated in education related activities during their tenure. Twelve respondents (i.e., 10%) out of 125 said that they had helped in the enrolment of the dropout children in the schools. Six per cent of the respondents reported that they participated and monitored mid-day meal programme. While sharing her experience about how she was involved in mobilising the dropout children, Pallala Nagamani, community member in SEMC in Chinthakarrapalem village of Y Ramavaram mandal, said that there were two boys in our village who dropped out. I discussed this with their parents many times. I also discussed this with the children, but they used to run away if they saw me in the village. I followed up this issue repeatedly with schoolteachers too. Finally with the help of the teachers and their parents, we were able to enrol them in the nearby Ashram School.

3.2 Financial Resources of School

As per the provisions in the SSA, every school has grants for their school development. These grants are spent for the preparation of TLM, for school development and for school innovation. The TLM grant is spent by the concerned teacher for preparation, whereas the school development and school innovation grants are spent by the headmaster. The school headmaster, as a convener, can spend these grants only with the prior consent of the SEMC members taken at the monthly meetings. If the SEMC agree to such expenditure of the grant for school development, the school headmaster passes a resolution, where the members give their consent for expenditure.

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**Figure 1: Facilities Available**

(available/not available)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Available</th>
<th>Not Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate classrooms</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooms for teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys’ toilets</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ toilets</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey.
In the course of the fieldwork and in discussion with the respondents, the community members revealed that they were not aware of the financial resources that the school receives. They also pointed out that “the teachers do not disclose the financial resources and its expenditure”. As a result, they believe that the schoolteachers have a greater say in decision-making over the financial resources. It is felt by the respondents that teachers spent the grants on their own without discussing these issues with them. The respondents also indicated that even they were not aware that these issues were to be discussed in the meetings. All this reveals that the government initiative to create awareness among these tribal groups for their greater participation in school-related activities through various education programmes such as the SSA are being poorly implemented.

4 Suggestions
The SEMC members were asked to give suggestions to improve the functioning of the education committees at their village level. Interestingly, they came up with different suggestions. Nearly 17% of the respondents (21 out of 125) suggested that creating awareness among the tribal parents would enable them to participate in school-related activities. V Prabhakara Vasudeva Rao, headmaster of MPUP School in Jaggampalem village of Gangavaram mandal who has been working for the last 20 years in tribal area holds the view that I have been working very closely with the tribal community. Most of them are not aware about the value of education. Even though they are members in education committees, they are unaware of their roles and responsibilities. Creating awareness among them through kalajatha activities is an important task. They can be easily mobilised, if we really make efforts.

The other suggestions were to introduce mid-day meal programme on a daily basis in the schools, making drinking water available in the premises, use of TLM materials by teachers, provision of better infrastructure schools and so on. All these suggestions reveal that the tribal community members are participating in some way or the other in school-related activities. However, to organise them in a common platform, the RTDA needs to focus on creating more awareness among tribals for better results from their participation.

REFERENCES

NOTES
1 The Village Education Committee (VEC) was renamed as the school education management committee (SEMC) in Andhra Pradesh in 2006.
2 The SEMC in Andhra Pradesh consists of seven members with four parents of the school-going children and one panchayat ward member, the school headmaster as its convenor and the panchayat president as its chairman.
3 Usage of “Agency” is the legacy of the colonial government which identified the areas of tribal concentration as ‘Agency areas’. The agencies were administered with different policy formulation.
4 In the GOMs No 302 of 1986 orders were issued for opening 1,000 single teacher schools in schoolless tribal villages/habitations and these schools were named as “primary schools” in 1986 as one of the policy initiatives of the government in order to develop the tribes. These primary schools were renamed Girijan Vidya Vikas Kendras (GVVK) by in 1994. In 2005 they were again renamed as Government Primary Schools (Tribal Welfare).
5 MPPE Schools and MPUP Schools are under the management of the Department of Tribal Welfare. The Integrated Schools are also called as “Alternative Schools”. These Integrated or Alternative schools are opened in the schoolless habitats, where 5 to 10 children of school-going age are found in a village or habitation. The children can study in these schools up to II class.

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