

## **Contextualizing Community Mobilization in Uttar Pradesh: An Analysis of Unnao District**

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### ***Abstract:***

Launched in 2001, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is Government of India's flagship programme meant for achievement of Universal Elementary Education. One of the strategies of SSA has been to promote decentralized approaches. The present paper is one of the outcomes of the field study of ten Village Education Committees of Unnao District, Uttar Pradesh. It is focused on the two different learning contexts of community mobilization intervention. Contextualization of what has been envisaged regarding community mobilization and participation presents an abysmal picture. Cutting across blocks and schools, it was found that local communities were aware about importance of education but official support and stereo type system of the educational bureaucracy had been proved to be less sensitive towards local people. Though community participation in very limited sense had been observed in some of the schools, it was confined mainly to a few issues like enrolment drive and distribution of mid day meal.

**Key words:** District Perspective Plan, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal

### **Introduction**

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in 2001 in all the districts of India to fulfill the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education. Supply as per demand for quality education, promotion of social justice, strengthening the inter linkages between the central, state and the local level, effective involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Management Committees, Village/Ward/Slum Education Committees, Parents Teacher Associations, Mother-Teacher Associations other grassroots level organizations were some of the key features of the programme. State created new structures were expected to bridge the gap

between community and school through the processes of mobilization particularly on issues like enrolment, retention etc. but it has not happened in actual situation. Though Government reports provide the rosy picture of change in the community participation at grass root level, the ground level reality contradicts the official position. The present paper is one of the outcomes of the field study of ten Village Education Committees (VEC) of Unnao District of Uttar Pradesh. It is focused on the community mobilization intervention under SSA programme but in two different contexts of the same district. Forthcoming discussion of the paper has four sections. The very first section mentions of the number of schools, infrastructure, teachers in positions, status of enrolment and drop-out in Unnao District. The same has been analysed in context of ten primary schools in Auras block and Sumerpur block in section II. The next section explores Village Education Committee and its' structure and functions at the grass root level. The last section provides a comparative study of the two blocks and ends with conclusion.

### **Section I.**

#### **Infra-structure, Teachers in position and Educational Status of Unnao**

Unnao is an old district of Uttar Pradesh and is situated between two metropolitan cities- Lucknow and Kanpur. With 16 developmental Blocks, 05 Tehsils, 954 Gram Panchayats, 268 post offices, 03 municipalities and 15 Town Areas. There are 38 EGS schools, 32 madarsas, 2340 Primary and 442 Upper Primary Schools, 44 High Schools and 63 Intermediate Schools in Unnao. It is noticeable that above upper primary stage, the number of schools remains surprisingly less. Unnao has 2845 villages and 4229 habitations but schools are not sufficient. Status of Enrolment shows that more than four lacs children in the school going age (6-11 Yrs.) are enrolled in the academic session 2012-13. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has been recorded as 104.2% while Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) remains 99.02%. GER and NER is further low in case of girls in general and SCs/STs in particular. Drop-out rate is high at primary level and so is the number of out of school children. Position of Teachers indicates that 6427 permanent teachers are there in Unnao against 8034 posts sanctioned posts. Categories wise break up reveals that Headmasters/head teachers are 1201 and assistant teachers are 2432 in number. In addition, there are above 3500 Shiksha Mitras. Nature of recruitment also differs from permanent teachers to Shiksha Mitra. While Shiksha Mitra gets appointed by VEC and Gram Pradhan from local panchayat, the assistant teachers are appointed by the Government. Teachers' training is an important component of skill development and it includes both- pre-service training and in-service training. It is also important to mention that SSA has separate provisions of training for permanent teachers and Para-teachers. While majority of permanent

staff receives in-service training for a short duration, Shiksha Mitras get it at least for three weeks. Records from BSA office indicate that first round of in-service training has been imparted among all the teachers but subject based skill development has not taken place for more than half of the assistant teachers. Shiksha Mitras are supposed to be trained for one month every year before the commencement of session but secondary data indicates that they are not trained every year. Those who are trained do not receive training for the stipulated period i.e. at least three weeks.

Infra-structure in schools is seen influencing quality of education provided to students. All weather school buildings, sufficient infrastructural facilities, adequate classrooms, library, instructional materials and teaching aids help to create an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning. Condition of the roof, walls, and doors and so on are important in creating an attractive study environment in classroom. Official figures projects that majority of primary schools in rural area are having two class rooms. Schools with more than three classrooms are one third of the total number. Rural urban dichotomy exists so far repairing of school building is concerned. Urban area schools do not need minor /major repairing but rural area primary school buildings need it. Figures reveal that 244 schools require minor repairing and 108 stands for major civil works. It seems that provision for separate office for headmaster/mistress, separate staff room, separate office room, separate activity room for children are not made available from SSA. As per available data, more than 77% schools do not have a boundary wall. 25% schools in rural Unnao have not been provided with toilet facilities. Water is an essential commodity for a number of needs but it is surprising to note that it is not available in many schools. On the basis of Government data it can be argued that infrastructure in primary schools is not sufficient to ensure quality schooling and it needs to be improved at par with existing norms of SSA.

## **Section II.**

### **Infra-structure, Teachers in position and Educational Status in Ten Primary Schools**

Primary and secondary data collected from five primary schools from Sumerpur and five primary schools from Auras demonstrate a different situation of what has been illustrated by BSA office, Unnao. Primary Schools located at Patan-I, Patan-II, Dubai, Diwankheda and Kakrari from Sumerpur and Adampur, Dakauli, Inayatpur, Parsaraha and Utara of Auras

Block reflect a poor scenario of existing facilities and educational status. A careful analysis explains that SC constitutes almost half of the total enrolment. Representation of minority category seems to be adequate but drop-out rate is still high. It is further high among girls cutting across boards. Teachers' position and training status reveals that twenty one teachers were there in all the ten schools of Auras and Sumerpur blocks. Two schools one in each block emerged as single teacher school while rests are having at least two teachers including Shiksha Mitra. Patan-II has four teachers and it emerged as a school having highest number of staff among ten schools. Shiksha Mitras constitute 43% of staff which suggests that almost half of the twenty one posts are laying vacant for permanent teachers. The situation indicates towards shortage of teachers in rural blocks. The issue of teachers' shortage appears more serious in Auras than Sumerpur. Capacity building of teachers is a crucial issue directly linked with quality out-put of teaching and learning process. While all the permanent teachers in both of the blocks had received one round of training on general issues, half of them were yet to be trained on subject related issues. Ideally, Shiksh Mitras are to be trained every year before new session but it has been revealed that such training do not take place at regular basis. Majority of Shiksha Mitras had received just one or maximum two training programmes and that too of small duration i.e. two weeks.

Facilities for education include library, black boards, duster, chalk, TLM, teaching aids (globe, charts, flash cards, pointer, science kits, science charts, geometry box etc.), furniture in the classroom and other teaching-learning materials. Essential items for co-curricular activities, sports and games and other recreational facilities are equally important in supporting the effectiveness of schools. In both of the blocks no primary school has a library. All the schools under study had black boards made up of concrete and permanently fixed in the wall. Almost all of the boards were found in usable condition. But according to the teachers, supply of chalk and dusters had not been was regular in all the ten schools since the beginning of the project. As far TLM is concerned, there was virtually a little in all the ten primary schools. Basic sports items like volley ball, football, badminton and cricket set were not available in any of the schools. In both the blocks, mats/*tats* were seen and that too not adequate for students. Most of the students from standards I, II and III were observed sitting on floor on jute and plastic bags. They had to manage their own sitting materials. For teachers, at least one chair and table was seen in most of the schools but it was not up to the SSA norms. Some of the schools had purchased some mats for students but many of the mats are torn and damaged.

On the basis of above discussion related to educational profile and educational infra-structure it becomes clear that access is still an issue in both the blocks of Unnao as SSA has not been able to address it. Similar was the case with vacant positions of teachers. Information on infra-structure illustrates that majority of primary schools has two rooms and a verandah in front and it was not sufficient to accommodate all the students. Ancillary facilities drinking water, lavatory, urinals, and separate urinal for girls etc. are surprisingly absent in almost all the primary schools.

### **Section III.**

## **Structure and Functions of Village Education Committee in Auras and Sumerpur**

Under the intervention of Community Mobilization and Participation, the first step taken by SSA was formation of VEC. The district had formulated strategies to involve community through awareness campaign, sensitization and use of folk media, video shows, street dramas, Ma-beti mela, School Chalo Abhiyan and other means of awareness generation among community members. In the beginning, activities were few but over the years, strategies and activities increased. VEC in general is a 4-5 member committee. While Gram Pradhan is the president and headmaster is secretary, the rest two or three are from local community. In the context of ten primary schools from Auras and Sumerpur, all the VECs were constituted in the year 2007-08 but varied in size i.e. bigger in Sumerpur and small in Auras. Status of training illustrates that members from all the VEC had received three-day training at Block Resource Centre. Members had been sensitized on eleven broader areas related to civil works, mobilization and awareness generation, management of centers, recruitment of teachers,

Analysis of VEC register shows that women in general are absent from many of the meetings. When asked such women members replied that the secretary never informed them about meetings. Similarly, many members from SC community also blamed the headmaster or pradhan for not informing them about meetings. The response from headmaster or gram pradhan, on the issue of information about meetings, was totally different. They blamed such members for not taking any interest on school related issues. Since many of the schools had improper and incomplete VEC registers, it was difficult to conclude anything meaningful regarding the meetings.

Auras is not a developed block in terms of literacy. Except Parasaha, all the four VECs were reported to be having a very weak relationship with civil works activities. Majority of members had no idea of maintenance register on civil works issues. A close scrutiny reveals that enrolment drive used to be largely an affair of the headmaster and the teachers. VEC members at Inayatpur and Parasaha primary schools were more active and had better notion of mobilization strategies. Management of centers like EGS/AIE and Shiksha Ghar has been envisaged in SSA documents but reflections from empirical situation illustrates that such centers were very few in Auras and not being managed by VECs. Data on recruitment of teachers in AGS/AIE and Shiksha Mitra in primary schools demonstrate a sordid tale of affairs.

During informal discussions the fact emerged that recruitment was a hush affair monitored by the Gram Pradhan. Many parents when asked revealed that recruitment had never been impartial. According to them many qualified candidates could not manage a job of para-teachers because they were from opposition group nor had no money for bribe. Micro planning, school development plan and village education plan had never been made by VEC members or local community but were reported to be a domain of the headmaster. Very few VECs like, Parasaha were involved in micro planning but surprisingly VEC members had failed to check drop-out rate. School activities are very complex in nature and monitoring of activities requires training. It is a time consuming process also. In most of the schools, performance of VEC members was reported to be average or weak. It was good in some schools also.

Mid-Day- Meal is an important intervention to ensure food during day time in the schools. It was learnt that MDM was not being provided in Dakauli and Utara. The reason was purely political. Since the gram pradhans had not appointed cook for one or some other reasons, children in primary schools were not getting MDM. Utilization of SIG was found to be affected by leadership quality of the headmaster. Schools with active head had high utilization record as compared to their counter parts with less active headmasters. Better utilization had been illustrated from Adampur and Parasaha primary schools. Records on local mobilization of resources appeared to be discouraging as none of the VECs had really contributed anything on their own for betterment of existing structure. Convergence activities of almost all the VECs were found to be nil. On the basis of above discussion on functioning of VECs in Auras, it could be concluded that VECs in majority of cases were average in functioning. Except a very few, it was difficult to find a good VEC with regular meetings and having 'influence' on school activities.

## Section IV

### **Community Mobilization and Participation: A Comparative Analysis**

Auras and Sumerpur are two rural blocks of Unnao but both are different in terms of literacy. It has also been mentioned earlier that Sumerpur is more literate than Auras. One of the reflections of better literacy was reflected in the realm of VEC formation and awareness of VEC members about the education programme. When discussed with the VEC members from Auras, majority of the members did not have clear understanding. In many places, VEC formation had been done mechanically following the typical administrative measures. It was never an affair of community mobilization and awareness before the process of VEC formation. Many women members were not aware of DPEP/SSA and they had not familiar with the terms. A lot of discrepancies were seen between the official version of VEC formation and the empirical situation. Many of the community members had expressed the view that formation of VEC had been done by the gram pradhan and the head master as one was the president and other was secretary of VEC. Situation was reported to be better in Sumerpur. VEC members from majority of the schools had heard the term SSA were aware about its' broader goals. Except some female members, all of the VEC members had better exposure on their roles and responsibilities regarding the school.

The process of VEC formation was different and was less mechanical in the sense that VEC members were selected with their consent and it was held in the meeting with villagers and gram pradhan. It demonstrates that Auras was far behind in the civil works activities, which includes construction of new school building and major/minor repairing. Mobilization and awareness generation was found to be average in Auras but it was good in Sumerpur. Planning includes micro planning, formation of Village Education Plan and school mapping exercises. Not only planning but monitoring of school activities was found to be far better in Sumerpur than Auras.

In terms of functioning of VECs, situation at Sumerpur emerged better. Though many of VECs members were found to be involved in activities like, civil works, mobilization and awareness generation and school activities, they had not the same interest in management of daily school activities and planning and utilization of school grant. Resource mobilization and convergence activities were found weak for all the VECs. It means most of the VECs have not been able to generate resources and have not gone for convergence and interface with PRIs and other programmes. VECs namely, Patan I, Patan II and Dubai had clear idea of civil

works including major and minor repairing. Record keeping and management of civil works activities were found to be up-to-date. VEC members explained that meeting were regular phenomenon with active participation of members. VECs at Diwankheda and Kakrari had same president but less active for education related matters. Meetings of VECs were not frequent at both the villages. VEC members were not much aware about civil work activities and awareness generation activities. Such a situation might have resulted into weak or average performance of both the VECs. Recruitment of Para teachers appears an important issue in the context of primary schools at village level. Baring Dubai, all the VECs had an average performance regarding recruitment. It means shiksha mitra or Guruji in Shiksh Ghar had been recruited by the gram pradhan with consent of secretary i.e. headmaster. But the case was different at Dubai. VEC at Dubai had received many applications for Shiksha Mitra and it selected the most deserving candidate on the basis of merit ignoring other unjustifiable considerations.

Monitoring of day-to-day activities inside the school, planning for educational development and formulation of plan etc. are another area of VEC involvement. Data on such an issue indicate that it was good response from Patan I, II and Dubai but was weak for rest of the VECs. During school visit, some of the VEC members from Patan I and II were spotted checking quality of MDM and ensuring its distribution among the student. It was also learnt that such VEC members stayed very close to the primary schools and it had been a regular practice by them. This fact was cross checked from the headmasters of both the schools. Sometimes, Health Department of Uttar Pradesh organizes health check up camps for school children. Contribution of VECs in such activities was found to be very limited and it was applicable to almost all the VECs. VEC members had a poor track record for contribution in health check up programmes.

Comparative analysis of Auras and Sumerpur blocks strongly reflects that community mobilization and participation is positively correlated with the functioning of VECs. Cutting across blocks and schools, it was found that local communities in general and marginalized communities in particular were more aware and active where VEC members had clearly communicated and approached them on school related issues. Though it was confined mainly to a few issues like enrolment drive, sending wards to schools, monitoring of teachers attendance and distribution of mid day meal.

## **Conclusion**

Auras and Sumerpur are two rural blocks of Unnao but both are different in terms of literacy. Mobilization and awareness generation was found to be average in Auras but it was good in Sumerpur. Not only planning but monitoring of school activities was found to be far better in Sumerpur than Auras. Comparative analysis of Auras and Sumerpur blocks strongly reflects that community mobilization and participation is positively correlated with the functioning of VECs. Cutting across blocks and schools, it was found that local communities in general and marginalized communities in particular were more aware and active where VEC members had clearly communicated and approached them on school related issues. Though it was confined mainly to a few issues like enrolment drive, sending wards to schools, monitoring of teachers attendance and distribution of mid day meal. Quality issues which are academic in nature are yet to be become a part of community mobilization and participation in Auras and Sumerpur blocks.

Contextualization of what has been envisaged regarding community mobilization and participation under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan depicts an abysmal picture of the process of community participation at the grass root level. It is assumed that community mobilization and participation is positively correlated with the functioning of VECs but very few VECs from two blocks of Unnao were found fully functional in the actual situation. Cutting across blocks and schools, it was found that local communities were aware about importance of education but official support and stereo type system of the educational bureaucracy had been proved to be less sensitive towards local people. It emerged as one of the crucial issues badly hampering mobilization and awareness generation activities. Though community participation in very limited sense had been observed in some of the schools, it was confined mainly to a few issues like enrolment drive and distribution of mid day meal. Quality issues which are academic in nature are yet to be become a part of the community mobilization and participation in Unnao.

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