INTRODUCTION

The ‘Janpahal’ program for community participation in education management has been supported by Oxfam (earlier Oxfam Novib and now Oxfam India) and implemented by Bodh Shiksha Samiti, for over a decade.

Bodh Shiksha Samiti is recognized as a pioneer in the field of education for the urban deprived with growing expertise in the rural domain as well. It has also gained the stature of a resource agency for providing training and other support focusing on aspects such as child-centered pedagogy, community involvement in education etc. Its key strength lies in its emphasis on learning from varied community settings and classrooms. Bodh Shiksha Samiti is engaged in program implementation (in urban slums and rural habitations), evolving and refining teaching learning processes, professional development and other stakeholder trainings, research and documentation, networking and policy advocacy. It reaches out to more than 26,000 deprived children (urban and rural) through its Bodhshalas (Schools run by Bodh Shiksha Samiti) and government schools in Jaipur and Alwar districts, Rajasthan, India.

One of the underlying principles of Bodh’s Janpahal Program, is to get the community to question ‘the importance of quality education’, ‘different aspects of quality’, ‘how can quality education be achieved’, ‘what is the role of the wider community in bringing about educational transformation’. As a part of the program, several initiatives have been undertaken with a focus on driving community participation and high quality education. The over arching goal of the project was to empower and mobilise community based groups [School Management Committees (SMCs), Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Communities] in rural Rajasthan to exercise ‘active citizenship’ and participate in educational governance for realising universal, equitable and quality education within the framework of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

This review study of Bodh’s Janpahal program was undertaken with the purpose of understanding Bodh’s approach of working with communities as part of their strategy around engagement with Government schools in rural Rajasthan. The review should be viewed primarily as a ‘process documentation’ of the various approaches used by Bodh since they began working with rural communities in Rajasthan as early as 1999-2000.

It is an exercise towards understanding Bodh’s community-oriented strategies, challenges faced along the way and the approach taken to address these challenges. This exercise also aims to document key learnings that have emerged over the years and highlight best practices adopted by Bodh.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

► To facilitate empowerment of the wider community and parents groups across 30 villages in participatory educational governance by developing their personal and collective ‘agency’ to impact change and to understand their significant role in the realization of universal, equitable and quality education.

► To capacitate School Management Committees (SMCs), local self-governance bodies i.e., Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and civil society networks at the district levels like Kshetriya Shiksha Samitis (KSS) and Panchayat Shiksha Sabha to use the Right to Education Policy framework as an effective tool for child development and education to exercise their power to ensure school transformation.

► To create an environment in which public authorities and school systems respond to the demands of universal, quality education as articulated by people’s groups such as SMCs, PRIs and wider community specific to their local contexts.

► To develop Bodh Shiksha Samiti as a resource center or technical partner for facilitating a systematic engagement and dialogue for the realization of children’s right to education. Bodh Shiksha Samiti and the RTE Consortium would play a critical role in strengthening and identifying the gaps within the existing policy framework.
METHODOLOGY

The review exercise was designed to be a participatory case study research with the purpose of capturing “voices and experiences from the field” and the processes of change, from all the different stakeholders including the Bodh team. The Developmental Evaluation (DE) approach was used for the review to “attempt to make sense of what emerges under conditions of complexity, documenting and interpreting the dynamics, interactions and interdependencies that occur as innovations unfold.”

DE provided the context to systematically structure the various levels of the Janpahal program. Hence what finally appears is a layered case study design as demonstrated in the figure below:

The study attempts to assess the involvement and opinions of people involved in every layer above through a participatory qualitative approach where people’s responses were captured through In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs).

A stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The sample was made up of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Sample</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School level</td>
<td>A mix of primary and secondary schools in both the intervention blocks in Alwar. FGDs with teachers and individual interviews with headmasters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent community in villages</td>
<td>At least 3 randomly selected households (HHs) in every village; total 30 HHs from 10 villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village community</td>
<td>FGDs with SMC members, Meeting village Sarpanch and other PRI members; meeting members of Kshetriya Shiksha Samiti (KSS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodh level</td>
<td>Meeting implementing officers, field personnel from Bodh.</td>
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1 Developmental Evaluation is an approach articulated by Jamie Gamble and Michael Patton
The layered case study design method allowed for a preliminary organization of data by ‘layer’. This means that information gathered in each ‘layer’ was recorded according to a unique label. ‘Coding’ and ‘pattern identification’ methods were used to draw interpretations. For the purpose of coding, a combination of in-vivo and broad-brush coding methods has been used. Final interpretations have been drawn after linking the broad nodes appearing in each layer, and analyzing the relationships between various stakeholders in the Janpahal program.

KEY FINDINGS

THE SCHOOL LEVEL- EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS

Good practices established by Bodh in schools are:

► Bodh’s child-centered teaching methodology and classroom practices (sitting together in a circle and working, studying in groups, using Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) for stories and demonstrations, using arts such as songs, dance and crafts while teaching) have appealed to the teachers in all the schools where Bodh worked. There is evidence to show that such approaches have been continued even after Bodh teachers discontinued their work. There is still a high demand for ‘Bodh’ teachers in every school.

► Bodh’s rapport building both with teachers in schools and parents in the village communities is of an intense kind. They have invested ample time in going door-to-door, holding community level meetings and discussing the importance of education.

► Bodh team has inculcated the concept of ‘shiksha mein jan-bhidari’ or ‘community participation in education’ so deeply in the minds of teachers and headmasters that even they talk about it as their own philosophy and agree that parents must be empowered and be full participants in the schooling and education system.

“We might say ‘Bodh’ teacher, but they never make us feel they are an outsider. They work like any other teacher and are very much part of the school system. That’s the beauty of their approach. Also, the efforts they take in connecting with the community are highly commendable. When they started working in my school, they used to daily go door-to-door to talk to parents. This personal touch is essential and the community connects very well as a result of their approach. Personally, this is something I have learnt from them”.

– Kalyan Saiji Verma, Headmaster, Upper Primary school, Doodhi ki Dhani, Thanagazi Block, Alwar.
Community-level good practices set up by Bodh are:

► Bodh’s approach of community empowerment through regular dialogue, meetings and trainings for SMC members have together created an environment where education is now discussed and taken seriously. In all the schools where Bodh has had a longer association, the effect of their work continues to be visible. The SMC meetings in those villages are held regularly and parents willingly take up issues and come up with concrete action plans to address them.

► In keeping with Bodh’s key objective of empowering the wider community in participatory educational governance by developing their personal and collective ‘agency’ to impact change, Bodh has succeeded in giving the villagers a ‘voice’. During the school-level parents’ meetings, villagers talked about critical issues related to children’s development processes with great clarity. At one such meeting in Kushalgarh Upper Primary school, a parent requested us to provide a teacher for the pre-primary level as according to him “it is at that level that children’s foundation is being laid and if good inputs are provided at the early childhood level, children easily get into the schooling process at a later stage.” This is an indication of how well the community understands the educational processes and is concerned about it.

► Yet another instance of good practice emerges in Bodh’s ‘public assessment’ (Sarvajanik Moolyankan) exercise initiated specifically under the Janpahal program. Villagers in almost all the villages that were visited were enthusiastic in sharing their experiences of that. The exercise is not only a way of knowing children’s level of learning at the beginning of every new academic session, but also an effective tool in the hands of communities to make schools responsible and answerable. Moreover, this exercise is in keeping with RTE’s mandate of parents’ right to know their children’s learning status.

“EARLIER THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL HERE HAD A BODH TEACHER. THEY TAUGHT VERY WELL AND IN FACT MY SON CAME FIRST DURING THE PUBLIC ASSESSMENT EXERCISE. HE TOPPED THAT TEST. BUT EVER SINCE THAT TEACHER DISCONTINUED, I PUT HIM IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL AS THE QUALITY OF TEACHING HAS GONE DOWN IN THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS. ALSO, THE SMC MEETINGS ARE NO LONGER HELD THE WAY THEY USED TO BE. BODH’S TIME WAS DIFFERENT, WHEREVER BODH WILL REACH ONLY GOOD WORK WILL HAPPEN”.

– Kamruddin, Parent SMC Member, Akbarpur Village, Umrein Block.
THE PANCHAYAT LEVEL: EXPERIENCES OF PRI MEMBERS, SARPANCHS AND THE KSHETRIYA SHIKSHA SAMITI (KSS)

Some good practices emerging from Bodh’s work with PRIs/KSS are:

► Bodh’s strategy has involved an intense rapport building process with the PRIs ever since they started working in these blocks. The effects are visible in PRI members’ interest in educational issues and the way they passionately talk about the successes in their respective regions. Bodh, through its trainings has succeeded in inculcating in them a sense of responsibility as the representatives of people. The PRI members feel accountable and want to be known for the ‘good work’ they have done in their respective regions.

► The formulation of a unique and lively group as the Kshetriya Shiksha Samiti (KSS) has proved to be another successful strategy. This forum puts together some key people who are also active at higher levels of policy-making and have proved helpful in moving decisions at the District level. Bodh is regularly in touch with them and holds quarterly meetings where intensive planning on issues related to education takes place.

“BODH’S SUCCESS IS IN WHAT YOU SEE. WE HAD SEEN THEIR WORK IN THANAGAZI BLOCK MUCH BEFORE THEY STARTED WORKING IN UMREIN BLOCK. IT WAS INSPIRING TO SEE THAT CHILDREN WERE COMING TO SCHOOL EVEN IN SUCH INTERIOR AREAS, WITH MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN. INITIALLY, WHEN THEY BEGAN WORKING IN THE SCHOOLS IN AKBARPUR VILLAGE, THEY RECEIVED CRITICISM FROM THE TEACHERS. THERE WAS A BRIEF PERIOD OF INITIAL TUSSEL. HOWEVER, IT IS INTERESTING TO SEE HOW LATER MOST OF THEM STARTED COOPERATING AND WORKING WITH THEM. FROM A TIME WHEN THERE WERE HARDLY 100 CHILDREN IN AKBARPUR’S PRIMARY SCHOOL, THE TOTAL ENROLLMENT HAS GONE UP TO 250 CHILDREN AND THERE IS A SPACE CRISIS THAT WE HAVE TO NOW ADDRESS.”

– Mahesh Patel, PRI and KSS Member, Akbarpur Village, Umrein Block, Alwar.
BODH LEVEL- EXPERIENCES OF BODH FIELD TEAM AND TEACHER- RESEARCHERS

Key strengths of the Bodh team:

► The Bodh field team is a group of highly motivated and positively oriented people who are committed to the cause of bringing about change in the education scenario of Rajasthan. Being locals, these people are perfectly tuned in to the socio-cultural context and hence have the vision to understand issues in that perspective.

► The entire team sees great value in the work they do in schools and derive immense satisfaction despite the harsh realities and challenges they sometimes face along the way. One gets the feeling that it is in their positive outlook that half the work is done. The team has a great rapport with the local communities at all levels - schools, households and even the PRI system. People admire and acknowledge their work by virtue of which they proudly enjoy their position of belonging to the ‘Bodh’ team.

Some challenges shared by team members:

► Despite Bodh’s rapport with the community and reputation in the area, the team members often face flak and criticism from schools where teachers continue to remain unsupportive. The real challenge for the team members is to continue working with a positive outlook even within a hostile environment as the case sometimes is.

► The socio-cultural environment is not always conducive to garnering community support. One of the biggest challenges faced by the team is to talk about sensitive issues such as domestic violence, women beating, using abusive language at home etc. as some of the tribulations in the home environment for children. The community while acknowledging the presence of these evils is not always supportive in their outlook.

► Working with government school teachers is also a big challenge. Sometimes the challenge is in trying to convince the teachers in using the Bodh methodology for teaching and learning purposes.

“The complete community ownership of schools by people is still missing. They come for the meetings and even listen to what ‘guruji’ say, nod their heads and go back. In practice, they are still away from the system and while meetings are attended, there is still hardly any participation. We feel we still have a long way to go.”

– Prabhu Dayal, Bodh CCE teacher-researcher, Gowri village, Thanagazi Block, Alwar.
RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of review and analysis of the secondary and primary data, following recommendations were made for consideration:

SCHOOL LEVEL

► Bodh’s direct work with schools through academic support and teaching inputs by Bodh teachers has been acknowledged well by both the teachers as well as the larger community. There is widespread demand among community members and government teachers, for Bodh’s methodology of teaching. In some schools where Bodh has engaged for a longer period of time, the impact is still visible. Most importantly, children enjoy being taught through that methodology and learning becomes fun for them. While at present, some kind of hand holding support is being provided to teachers through Bodh’s current work with Government schools under the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) program, there is a need to consolidate the positive outcomes of their previous work. It is therefore recommended that Bodh put some thought on how best they can engage with teachers beyond the CCE program. Much more intense and prolonged work with teachers either through trainings or intense onsite support modeled along the lines of their past work, can help consolidate the impact of their present work.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

► Bodh’s work with the community has been intense. They have invested significant resources in ensuring that people are aware and empowered enough to understand and discuss issues about education. However, with Bodh’s gradual withdrawal from the villages, there has been a weaning off effect even on the community members. This is particularly true for women, who have largely continued to stay at the peripheries. Their participation is also only from the margins despite their presence in SMC bodies and PRIs. It is therefore recommended that separate and intense interventions with women be undertaken to ensure that they are empowered to an extent where they can freely voice their opinions even in the presence of men. Bodh needs to consider this aspect seriously and devise specific methods to educate and empower women. Women’s success stories can be highlighted at the community level so that they feel respected and motivated. Women could be engaged for conducting sessions during SMC trainings. In this context, the need for girl’s education and evils of early marriage should also be reiterated as in many places they still continue unabated.

► While there is agreement among villagers and Panchayat members on the importance of Gram Sabha meetings, it was commonplace to find that such meetings rarely take place. It is therefore recommended that Bodh supervises the conduct of Gram Sabha meetings and should provide on-site support wherever needed. There is a need to hold active conversations with village Sarpanchs so that such meetings move beyond mere signing of attendance registers. Bodh needs to employ some of its earlier methods of intense canvassing, going door-to-door for ensuring that such gatherings actually take place and have a set agenda.
The provisions of the Right to Education (RTE) Act were hardly known even at the higher levels. It is recommended that Bodh employs certain measures to make sure that all community members are at least aware of the basic provisions of the Act. There is also a need to constantly reiterate the provisions on all active forums, SMC trainings, Gram sabha meetings, teacher trainings and so on.

**SMC/PRI LEVEL**

Bodh’s networking with PRI members has been intense and due to the unique KSS forum, meetings with them also take place regularly. However, there is still a need to engage more intensely at the Sarpanch level. It is recommended that while continuing their regular work with KSS members, they also bring in other PRI members into that fold so that there is a common understanding on educational issues at the higher level.

**BODH LEVEL**

Since Bodh has done extensive work with the villagers at various levels, there are many good practices and stories of change in the villages where they work. However, at the level of documenting these stories Bodh has admittedly lacked behind. It is recommended that Bodh takes up some kind of documentation where the stories of change can be recorded and shared at different forums for purposes of cross-learning. Documentation is especially required for capturing stories of change in women (mothers, sisters, women SMC members) so that these stories are highlighted in their training sessions and other women present there can learn from such experiences.

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