SUMMARY

Oxfam India has been part of a nation-wide processes to improve the delivery of public education system by improving the space for community’s role in monitoring of Right to Education Act and government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan etc. It has engaged in working to influence the mainstream education by reaching out to the most marginalized like Dalits, tribals, Muslims, urban poor and girls. At the same time it has also engaged with the schooling system to create opportunities for creative, learning environment for the children. It has also been part of a national network to bring in larger policy reforms through a call for greater accountability of state, greater investment through a regular budget tracking and build a constant pressure for an equitable Right to Education for all.

The current Programme Implementation Plan (PIP-2010-15) on education is aimed at increasing people’s access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in the mainstream public education system. It also seeks to ensure accountability of public education system through innovative modeling and community empowerment while building pressure for a greater investment in education by the government. Therefore, community participation and community empowerment is one of the key strategies adopted in achieving the above goal.

With education being a fundamental right now, after the passage of Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, Oxfam India has emphasized through its rights based programming on citizen engagement to ensure accountability in the provision of free and compulsory education. From building capacities of the community, empowering them with knowledge and information to strengthening collective voice around issues of education has lead to communities taking ownership of schools and being actively involved in monitoring performance against RTE indicators.

Therefore in the above context, this practice note looks at the different strategies adopted by Oxfam India’s partners in various regions of the country that encourage effective community participation in ensuring education for all. Experiences and learning of three Oxfam India partners- EFRAH in Delhi, Bodh in Rajasthan and MARG in Odisha have been documented in the subsequent chapters for larger learning and replication.

Some of the achievements of Oxfam India and its partners on community participation in education are given below:

- Strengthened community groups taking up the issue/ agenda of education in their communities
- Empowered community by raising awareness on issues of education, thereby encouraging citizens to ask questions and seek solutions
- Parents and community members taking ownership for their children’s learning in line with the RTE Act, particularly as it brought impact measurement, objectivity and high visibility into the capabilities developed in children.
- Legal empowerment of community through development of a cadre of community justice workers, who are voluntary participants from the community.

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1 Oxfam India Education PIP 2010-15
2 RTE Act mandate on parents’ right to know their children’s learning status
INTRODUCTION

One of the most successful and common strategies used in not only education but in most development programmes/projects is community participation and community empowerment. The important role community plays in strengthening education is widely acknowledged and its significance in improving access and quality is well known.

Though community participation is a commonly understood term, it would be helpful to look at some of the explanations provided by various experts. According to Zenter (1964), community is a group structure, whether formally or informally organized, in which members play roles which are integrated around goals associated with the problems from collective occupation and utilization of habitational space. Second, members of the community have some degree of collective identification with the occupied space. Lastly, the community has a degree of local autonomy and responsibility.\(^3\)

The term “participation” can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context. Sharffer (1994) clarifies that they could be different degrees or levels of participation and provides seven possible definitions of the term, including:

- Involvement through the mere use of a service (such as enrolling children in school or using a primary health care facility);
- Involvement through the contribution (or extraction) of money, materials, and labor;
- Involvement through ‘attendance’ (e.g. at parents’ meetings at school), implying passive acceptance of decisions made by others;
- Involvement through consultation on a particular issue;
- Participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors;
- Participation as implementers of delegated powers; and
- Participation “in real decision making at every stage,” including identification of problems, the study of feasibility, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Sharffer stresses that the first four definitions use the word involvement and connote largely passive collaboration, whereas the last three items use the word participation instead, implying a much more active role. R. Govinda and Rashmi Diwan in their book, express their apprehension with international literature stating that it considers the issue of community participation in a somewhat simplistic manner.\(^4\) Participation is an experience felt differently by different people in different circumstances, even in similar situation. Community participation is much deeper and complex than it is generally perceived and presented in the available literature. They further state that participation has to be orchestrated in such a manner that the benefits are equally disturbed among all sections of the community.

Vinod Raina has aptly put it as “Participation has to go hand in hand with safe guards for the poor and marginalized, which often is a political task requiring active and sustained intervention of the State.”

WHAT DOES COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION MEAN?

Various forms of community participation in education have been identified by many studies, explaining the specific channels through which communities can be involved in children’s education. Colletta and Perkins (1995) illustrate various forms of community participation: (a) research and data collection; (b) dialogue with policymakers; (c) school management; (d) curriculum design; (e) development of learning materials; and (f) school construction.

Further, community participation in Education has a diverse history in India. It can be traced back to the early years of independence, where it was viewed and promoted as part of the liberation rhetoric. Moreover, a school or any kind of education set up was an integral part of the community, as per Gandhi’s scheme of education. It was community that had operated the education system, not the State.

However, this changed post independence and the concept of large-scale State-run universal education systems a relatively new concept, come into existence. Its growth coincided with efforts towards universalization of education. But this taking over of schools by the government alienated the community and gradually decreasing their interest and participation in education. It was again during the mid-1980, that concept and practice of community participation took off again creating an additional mechanism for views of ordinary people to inform locally relevant decision-making and development\(^5\). The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 (which was subsequently revised in 1992), recommended only not only promoting community participation but also as a process of empowering local communities to take major decisions\(^6\). This was further supported through the

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3 Community Participation in Education: What do we know? (1999), Mitsue Uemura, World Bank
4 Community Participation and Empowerment in Primary Education- R Govinda
6 Community Participation and Empowerment in Primary Education- R Govinda and Rashmi Diwan.
decentralization process and with the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Panchayati Raj Institutions were given the power and functions to plan and implement schemes for socio-economic development including primary and secondary school education as per the Article 243 G (11th Schedule) of the Constitution.

One of the important milestones in the above process was the formation of Village Education Committees, recommended by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) committee as one of the elements in the broader framework for managing education. The committee was expected and had the power to check attendance registers and report on, among other things, regularity of students, teachers’ attendance and the overall functioning of the school. Subsequent to this, a number of programmes like DPEP (District Primary Education Programme), Bihar Education Project, Shiksha Karmi and Lok-Jumbish projects in Rajasthan, Mahila Samakhya Project and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project gave a major thrust to promotion of community participation. Though the experiences were mixed, it was taken forward in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the national flagship programme of universalization of primary education, assigning the highest importance to systematic mobilization of the community and creation of an effective system of decentralized decision-making. As a result, almost all states/union territories constituted VECs, PTAs, SDMCs, MTAs (Mother Teacher Associations), SMCs, VEDCs etc. Though the nomenclature and degree of empowerment varied from state to state, these committees and bodies have helped institutionalize the process of community participation.

On the other hand, some studies have argued that these government-sponsored institutions do not live up to their expectations. It further states that merely informing the community about the status of delivery of services is not enough, organizing effective community participation is a time intensive task. (Banerjee and Duflo, 2008, Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos, 2011).

Despite the above, importance and relevance of ensuring community participation especially in the rural and marginalized communities cannot be ignored. Education becoming a fundamental right in the country with the introduction of ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009’, has provided further impetus to this notion. One of the most important provisions under the Act, was the formation of School Management Committees (SMCs) with parents comprising 75% of its members. SMCs have the responsibility of overlooking the functioning of the school and to chalk out a School Development Plan (SDP) documenting the plan and requirements for the school.

WHY COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION?

Active community participation has been widely recognized by the educational policy makers all over the world, as an effective means of promoting primary education. One of the main objectives of community participation is to involve the community, mostly parents and family of children in the process of education so that there is an improved access to education. It also helps build ownership among the community, which in turn is a step towards sustainability. There is a lot of research, which emphasizes on the rationale and need for community participation in education. Given below are a few advantages of the same:

- Better understanding of the local context and issues
- Effective use of limited resources
- Promotion of girls education
- Enabling suitable environment for children at home
- Improved relationship between school and community
- Building linkages between different stakeholders
- Decentralization of education process
- Enhancing accountability
- Building sustainability

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RTE ACT

Community participation has been a critical factor in planning, implementation and monitoring interventions geared towards universal elementary education. SSA framework has emphasized towards enhancing participation of the community, parents, teachers and children by awareness generation and interventions for community mobilisation. The same importance is given in the RTE Act. Without people’s support and ownership, it would be impossible for RTE and SSA to succeed. The RTE mandate for age-appropriate admission of every out-of-school child, special training for each child to enable her to cope in school, promoting child-friendly child centered and activity based learning processes, which is free of anxiety, trauma and fear sets the agenda for proactive community participation. To facilitate such a massive mobilization and solicit active participation, there is a defined role laid out for active civil society.7

LIMITATIONS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Many studies analyses the ‘community’ as if it were a homogenous group of people, devoid of power relations within it, implying a vision of ‘community’ as a network of shared interests and concerns. In reality, however, a community is unlikely to be a homogenous group with a common voice and shared set of views. In India, the issues of caste, religion and ethnicity are important determining factors. By emphasizing common knowledge, the promotion of community participation can fail to acknowledge the ways in which local power is reinforced (Wolf et al, 1997; Mosse, 2001). This is particularly important for considering the extent to which gender dynamics are influenced by innovations seeking to promote community participation. Moreover, it is difficult for community members especially those live on sustenance to be able to give time and attention to larger issues of the community. There is also limited decision-making power vested with the community.

7 SSA- Framework of Implementation – accessed online
Oxfam India’s partner, Empowerment for Rehabilitation, Academic & Health (EFRAH) is a Delhi based NGO which has been working with Oxfam since 2004. The organisation is currently working on a project titled ‘Promotion of Rights-based Education of the Poor in Madanpur-Khadar’ (PREM), South-East Delhi for two successive periods, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Community participation is a central element to the project, which specifically aims to:

- Facilitate RTE compliance in MCD schools of Madanpur Khadar J.J Colony
- Strengthen and empower community groups including adolescent groups for collective action on social and educational entitlement.

Community participation is one of six primary strategies of the PREM (others being networking, capacity building, consolidation, outreach and mainstreaming).

Community participation of EFRAH → Formation and strengthening of community actors and groups through regular meetings, training and awareness.

EFRAH works with multiple groups at different levels:

- **Adolescent groups** – These were formed with the youth in the area. In line with the programme’s focus on women and girls, four adolescent groups of girls were formed with 25 members each. Groups were created in four blocks (one group for each - A1, B1, Kachchi Colony, and C). The groups meet regularly and take up various activities. For instance, awareness raising is conducted on diverse issues including gender, leadership, RTE, domestic violence, sexual harassment and other issues. Training is also carried out to instill confidence in girls on how to talk to parents, teachers and police. They are also instructed on how to share knowledge with the community. The awareness and training efforts are then multiplied as adolescent groups who go out on the streets to raise issues, talk to girls and encourage parents to send their children to schools.

- **Angan Samooh (women groups)** – Initially started as a micro-finance initiative, over time these groups identified the need to address deeper issues such as education. Today these groups focus on some of the same issues as adolescent groups, but from a different perspective. EFRAH strives to create a sense of ownership among community women towards their children and create a space where women can take responsibility for their daughters. Women in these groups are directly linked to School Management Committees (SMCs) and act as connection between communities and schools. Group members receive awareness and training on education and the RTE Act, in addition to other important topics (e.g. gender equality, health, water and sanitation). These women are also encouraged to advocate for improvements to or creation of schools in their communities. In addition, the leaders of angan samoohs conduct school visits as part of a community based monitoring (CBM) initiative.
Some of these women, who are also parents of the children studying in the community schools, also become members of SMCs and use their training from EFRAH and position influence in the committee to continue their school improvement and monitoring efforts.

One particular issue on which angan samoohs are particularly active is dropout/enrolment. They work to identify students who are out of school or at risk (especially among underserved communities) to understand the scale of the problem and to address it.

Community Resource Management Groups - At the community level, CRMGs are organized with participation from community actors such as leaders from Angan Samoohs, adolescent groups and SMCs. Among the activities taken up by these groups, CRMG leaders address the resources of schools and denial in admission by private schools.

In addition, campaigns and events are organized to raise awareness and to effect change on various issues. For instance a rally against sexual harassment and its impact on female retention in education was held in June 2013. Another rally was held on enrolment. These events serve to raise awareness, advance discussion and change cultural norms.

Moreover, EFRAH understands that school enrolment, attendance and performance of students (with special focus on girls) is impacted by multiple factors both inside and outside of the school - for instance, distance of the school from the homes, sexual harassment of girls on the way to school or within school premises, lack of supportive environment at home, teachers’ behavior towards the students, presence of a facilitative environment in the schools. Thus, through these community groups, EFRAH addresses all these and other indirect factors located within the community to impact students’ participation and performance in the classrooms. For e.g., harassment of girls on the way to school is an issue that has received a lot of attention by the adolescent groups; they have worked to bring up the issue and make movement of girls safer so as to encourage more number of girl students to enrol and attend schools.

THE IMPACT OF THESE INTERVENTIONS HAS BEEN DIVERSE AND IMPRESSIVE. MOST NOTABLY:

- The pressure created by the community through women and adolescent groups led to the opening of two schools - one primary and one secondary.
- Initiatives by community groups have led to infrastructural changes within schools. Examples have included: improved sanitation, acquiring desks and chairs instead of darries [carpets] for children, etc.
- A significant reduction in dropout rate has been observed, especially among girls. In fact, according to EFRAH, there are now more girls in senior classes than boys. Girls are not only continuing schooling, but many are manifesting aspirations of working outside in the community.
- SMCs have been regularized and improved and many women members of the Angan Samoohs (around 20) are also members of SMCs.
- Police have become more responsive and cooperative on issues related to girl and women safety. For example, after meeting with adolescent groups, police agreed to patrol school gates during closing hours to combat sexual harassment that had negatively affected girl students’ educational experience earlier.
- EFRAH works to strengthen, inform and empower community groups, but also acts as an effective link with schools and government authorities.

“I AM AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF AN ADOLESCENT GIRLS GROUP FROM LAST 2 YEARS AND AM INVOLVED IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES INITIATED BY EFRAH. FROM THE TIME OF JOINING I GOT INTERESTED IN THE ISSUES RELATING TO WOMEN’S RIGHTS. I HAVE ALSO BEEN A PART OF THE TEAM, WHO HAD VISITED AND INTERACTED WITH DELHI COMMISSION OF WOMEN AS PART OF AN EXPOSURE VISIT. I HAVE ALSO RECEIVED NUMBER OF TRAINING ON GENDER RELATED ISSUES THROUGH EFRAH. THESE TRAININGS HAVE ENCOURAGED ME TO WORK FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN WITHOUT ANY FEAR AND CONSEQUENCE. IT IS ONLY DUE TO THESE GENDER INITIATIVES THAT I ALONG WITH FEW OF MY FRIENDS WAS ABLE TO STOP A CHILD MARRIAGE IN OUR LOCALITY. NOW I CAN VISIT TO A POLICE STATION WHEnEVER SITUATION ARISES WITHOUT ANY HESITATION. I ALSO ENCOURAGE MANY OF MY FRIENDS TO JOIN THESE GROUPS SO THAT OUR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING ON VARIOUS ISSUES CAN BE DEVELOPED.”

Damini, a 15-year-old girl studying in Class 9, J.J Colony, Madanpur Khadar, Delhi.
Bodh Shiksha Samiti (commonly known as Bodh), based in Jaipur, Rajasthan is known as one of the pioneer in the field of education for marginalized communities living in the urban areas. However more recently, the organisation has expanded its activities and expertise into rural areas as well. Bodh has established itself as a resource agency imparting training and other support on aspects such as child centred pedagogy and community involvement in education. The overarching goal of the Oxfam supported project is to empower and mobilize community based groups (SMCs, PRI, communities) in rural Rajasthan to exercise ‘active citizenship’ and participate in educational governance for realizing universal, equitable and quality education within the framework of the Right to Education. Bodh places an emphasis on learning from diverse community settings and classrooms. This process of learning is supported by its network of Bodhshalas9, and their work with the government schools.

**JANPAHAL: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVING**

9 Bodhshalas are community schools initiated collectively by local communities and Bodh. There are currently 40 bodhshalas across the blocks of Thanagazi and Umrein (in addition to others in urban areas). The bodhshalas have evolved into institutions with substantial community participation, high rates of enrolment and retention.

**EDUCATION THROUGH EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Bodh’s “Janpahal programme” through which it aims to pool-in community participation to ensure quality education is functioning in a rural setting. The socio-cultural context of the program is important and should also be mentioned. The two blocks where the program is conducted, Thanagazi and Umrein are predominantly tribal areas. In addition, the main means of livelihood are labour-intensive (e.g. agriculture and cattle rearing) and education has historically been neglected. In addition, the status of women is far from equal to men, societal norms and early marriage for girls continue to oppress women and lock them into a situation of continual oppression. These conditions make interventions such as the Janpamhal programme essential, but challenging.

In conceptual terms, the programme seeks to raise awareness and to encourage citizens to ask important questions, such as: “What is the importance of quality education?”, “What are the different aspects of quality education?”, “How can quality education be achieved?”, “What is the role of the wider community in bringing about educational transformation?” Rather than simply providing
answers, Bodh plays a role of facilitator and empowers communities to answer these questions themselves.

Janpahal is based upon one of Bodh’s fundamental ideas that “schools are community institutions and hence families, communities and schools must be seen as interlinked sites of learning”.

CONTINUOUS COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION (CCE) PROGRAMME

In 2010, Bodh instituted a CCE programme in collaboration with UNICEF, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Government of Rajasthan. A pilot model was implemented in 40 rural schools from two intervention blocks in Alwar (Thanagazi and Umrein) and 20 schools in Jaipur.

Bodh began this initiative by developing relevant CCE modules for primary and upper primary levels which comprised of a highly detailed curriculum and syllabus. Simultaneously, teacher training modules, modules for planning and discussion, grade-wise reference books for primary level children were developed. Teachers were instructed and provided guidelines for developing portfolios for each child. The portfolios contained subject-wise completed class work, artwork, crafts, etc. Parents have access to their child’s portfolio and can see progress at regular intervals and during parents’ meetings. In action, Bodh supported teachers visit each school twice a week and worked directly with teachers during and after classes. In-class support was provided to explain the process of evaluating children to teachers.

After the relatively successful pilot period that included improvements in both academic performance and enrolment, the CCE programme module is in its second phase and has been scaled up to include 3059 schools from 178 blocks in Rajasthan. Bodh now plays a role of technical support agency.

Sarvajanik Moolyankan (Public Assessment) was initiated under Bodh’s Janpahal program. This exercise, led collectively by the community - including parents, PRI members, SMC members as well as youth, aimed at assessing or evaluating the learning levels of children in primary schools (Std. III, IV and V). The tests were held once every year around March-April (that is the beginning of an academic year) for two subjects Hindi and Mathematics in every year around March-April (that is the beginning of an academic year) for two subjects Hindi and Mathematics in 40 rural schools from two intervention blocks in Alwar (Thanagazi and Umrein) and 20 schools in Jaipur.

Bodh supported teachers visit each school twice a week and worked directly with teachers during and after classes. In-class support was provided to explain the process of evaluating children to teachers.

A few successes from the above initiatives are:

> Bodh’s approach of community empowerment through regular dialogue, meetings and trainings for SMC members has 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 impart 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.

“THIS SCHOOL THAT YOU SEE TODAY WAS BUILT BIT BY BIT THROUGH COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS. THE ROOMS, DOORS, WINDOWS, EVEN THE CHAIRS THAT THESE TEACHERS SIT ON HAVE BEEN PURCHASED USING OUR MONEY. WE TAKE PRIDE IN THIS SCHOOL AND FEEL IT IS OUR TREASURE. WE FEEL HAPPY THAT OUR CHILDREN ARE LEARNING HERE AND BODH HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH US THROUGH THIS JOURNEY.”

Parent, during school level parent’s meeting in school, Kushalgarh, Thanagazi Block

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10 RTE Act mandate on parents’ right to know their children’s learning status

11 Adapted from An end-term review of Bodh Shiksha Samiti’s Janpahal Program, conducted by Oxfam India
Oxfam India’s partner Multiple Action Research Group (MARG), is a Delhi based NGO working towards legally empowering the vulnerable and marginalized communities. MARG core belief is ‘Justice through Legal Empowerment’ as a good way to ensure justice is to legally empower people to demand it. They achieve this through a four-fold approach involving legal awareness, legal assistance, legal implementation and policy development.

With support from Oxfam India, MARG is working on the legal implementation strategy, ensuring better implementation of the Right to Education Act, in the state of Odisha. In addition to this, MARG produces a wide range of legal literacy materials, one example is the RTE Manual developed in English at the National level to equip activists as well as laypersons with techniques to secure better implementation of RTE. The manual has been translated into Odia and Hindi subsequently. MARG also conducts legal awareness workshops for activists and the community, as well as train state functionaries on legal provisions and procedure. They are engaged in the provision of legal assistance through its network of lawyers and community justice workers in various parts of the country. In their efforts to build legal capacity for good governance they works towards building legal capacities of communities and organisations so that they can act as catalysts for improved governance in their areas.

Their Oxfam Education project includes work along 3 levels:

- Community empowerment- through development of a cadre of community justice workers i.e. community members trained on legal empowerment strategies.
- Institutional linkages.
- Development of legal literacy materials.

**ABOUT THE MODEL**

RTE Justice Workers is a cadre of voluntary participants from the community who are mainly empowered in two ways to help in the legal implementation of the RTE Act:

- knowledge of the law.
- skills to use the law.

The justice workers are trained on the RTE Act with a thorough understanding of the paralegal aspects within the act, so as to be equipped to identify the gaps and violations in its implementation within the community, and be able to demand and support for its redress. MARG conducts awareness programmes for the larger community on the importance of education and the Right to Education Act with a focus on the Muslim community. A RTE mela (fair) for the purpose of highlighting issues of education of Muslim children is also one of their strategies to reach out to the community. It is through these awareness programmes that MARG identifies its volunteers for RTE Justice Workers.

The justice workers are first given an understanding on law and legal structures in the country, along with the governance structure involved in the formulation and implementation of the law. Within this broad understanding of the legal framework in India and the power the citizens have in using these laws, they are given a specific understanding of the RTE Act. The importance of engaging with state agencies to demand accountability and the need for building institutional linkages is stressed. The RTE Justice Workers work closely with Education Department officials, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the Odisha State Legal Services Authority.

Some of the justice workers are not literate and yet are well versed with all the minute aspects within the Act. They both understand as well as rote-learn all the provisions so they can quote them at the school or with the officials. They are provided with a booklet with the provisions of the Act by MARG, which they carry with them. They also carry an ID card, to give them a sense of identity as an “RTE Justice Worker”. It will also act as an incentive to these workers who were hitherto not been taken seriously by the school or state authorities, and will give their arguments some amount of authority and authenticity when they visit the schools since all the schools within the agency’s project area is aware of the work being done by the NGO with regard to RTE and RTE Justice Workers. They have become the “change-agents” and “know-hows” in the community with respect to Education, and monitor the implementation of the RTE Act in the schools of their community.

The justice workers, many of whom are the parents of children going to the government schools in their area, are also encouraged to be part of the School Management Committees (SMCs) in these schools. MARG, initiatives with the RTE Justice Workers and SMCs, focus on community empowerment and mobilization. During the selection procedures, MARG encourages that some of the parents who are Justice Workers to become members of the SMCs, so that they can monitor and influence the school administration and functioning both as a Justice Worker, as well as an SMC member, widening their impact. While the SMC members focuses their attention in one particular school, the RTE Justice Workers, monitor and take ownership for the education needs of their entire community (which includes more than one school).

**SOME OF THE SUCCESSES HAVE BEEN:**

- There have been various successful interventions
where in RTE Justice Workers assumed an important role. In schools where discrimination against certain minority children was a norm, these workers have advocated for and ensured inclusive nature of enrolment in the schools. They have also demanded for and succeeded in receiving infrastructural and resource allocations (e.g., boundary wall, mid-day meal, uniforms and text-books) from the Government that is provided for as per the RTE Act but had been neglected in the past.

- The RTE Justice workers in rural and urban Cuttack have also been facilitated by MARG to play a key role in preparing and submitting resolutions during SMC meetings regarding the identified problems in their respective schools.

- Further in rural Cuttack, at Gujjarpur School (rural Cuttack), the Justice Workers were able to get a grant of six lakh rupees from the Government for the renovation of a school where classes were being even after the school building was declared unsafe after the damage suffered in the 1999 Orissa cyclone. The construction of a new building is presently underway. The RTE Justice Workers from urban and rural Cuttack undertake regular exposure visits and follow up of this problem. The workers have been found to be more driven and participative in rural Cuttack as compared to those in urban Cuttack; this, as per MARG, may be due to the already existing sense of ‘community’ in the rural areas because of which it is easier for the agency to motivate the workers to take ownership for the schools and education within their villages.

The following case study illustrates the kind of grass-root level everyday struggles these workers participate in and the changes they are able to achieve.

**CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS**

All the three partners experience documented above highlights that for effective realization of any act, its monitoring and implementation need to be taken up by the primary stakeholders. The RTE Act that has come into force primarily due to peoples’ demand and pressure and therefore community has the largest stake in its proper implementation. Community participation and support are crucial for the effective implementation of the Act. Further the idea is linked with the principle of decentralization on one hand, and empowerment of people on the other hand. But decentralization is meaningless, if the communities are not active participants of the process.

Although the setting and characteristics for these programmes are different, some important lessons are common to all. There has been some significant learning which are given below:

- Awareness and information are prerequisite to community participation. The community cannot be expected to demand or access their rights and entitlements if they do not know about them. All three partners have made significant efforts through various means to educate and inform community members (from all age groups and backgrounds) about the importance of education and their entitlements under the RTE Act.

**EMPOWERED ZARINA BIBI – AGENT OF CHANGE**

ZARINA BIBI, A HOME MAKER FROM CUTTACK, ODISHA, PARTICIPATED IN AN AWARENESS PROGRAMMES ON THE RTE ACT ORGANISED BY MARG. ZARINA BIBI FELT MOTIVATED AND ENCOURAGED AFTER THE AWARENESS PROGRAMME AND VOLUNTEERED TO BE TRAINED AS AN RTE JUSTICE WORKER. SHE PARTICIPATED IN MARG’S 3 DAY TRAINING ON RTE ACT WITH FOCUS ON LEGAL PROVISIONS. THE TRAINING HELPED INCREASE HER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE RTE AND BUILT HER CONFIDENCE TO BRING CHANGES IN HER COMMUNITY.

BUILDING ON THIS TRAINING, ZARINA BIBI HAS ACHIEVED MANY POSITIVE SCHOOL LEVEL CHANGES IN HER COMMUNITY. ONE OF THEM BEING, GETTING MUSLIM CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL. THE TEACHERS WERE ANTAGONISTIC AND DIDN’T EVEN LET HER IN THE SCHOOL IN THE BEGINNING, BUT SHOWING HER TRAINING CERTIFICATE, WHICH EARNED HER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF AUTHORITY, SHE WAS ARGUED ABOUT THE PROVISION FOR FREE, AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN UNDER THE LAW. THE TEACHERS HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ENROLL THE CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL. THIS HAS INSPIRED OTHER COMMUNITY WOMEN TO COME FORWARD AND TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILDREN IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. ZARINA BIBI WAS FACILITATED AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN RECOGNITION OF HER EFFORTS AND PARTICIPATION DURING OXFAM INDIA’S REGIONAL OFFICE PARTNERS MEET IN BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA.

12 Year 1 - Stocktaking Report RTE Forum
Confidence and trust are important factors in community participation. Community members, especially women must be informed and empowered so that they feel their opinions and perspectives are worth sharing. At the same time, trust must be built among the different actors and institutions involved. For instance regularity of schools, activities and meetings is a crucial factor that can seriously impact the effectiveness of intervention.

Moreover motivation and empowerment through trainings and programmes initiate community ownership of social issues. Since the community have traditionally been kept out of the decision making and monitoring process of even policies with direct bearing on them, understanding their right to know, raise voice, advocate and bring changes to the social systems requires a complete change in age-old rooted mindset. Thus, it requires some focused attention by third-party groups to change the outlook of the community, build their awareness and skills to understand, monitor and impact the systems in place.

Organising communities at the grassroots helps in emergence of new leadership and in process of decentralization. Experiences have shown that the dynamics of power at the community changes with promotion of new leadership. It also helps in ensuring participation of marginalized communities who have traditionally been kept away from taking up responsibility and authority.

Individual learning partner wise include:

**EFRAH**

- Adolescent groups have a major impact on educational outcomes, especially for girls. Both academic performance and enrolment improved as a result of EFRAH’s efforts. The factors that affect educational outcomes are diverse and go well beyond the school, so it is important to expand the approach to find solutions. For instance, because sexual harassment and security issues have a negative impact on retention rates of girls in schools, girl adolescent groups were informed on the subject and were empowered to seek help from the police and governments who, in turn, have responded positively.

- Both boys and girls have important, but different roles to play in issues related to gender-based discrimination and its relation to education. Without isolating and alienating them, EFRAH works separately with boys and girls. They organize adolescent groups for both in order to hear their perspectives and concerns, and to educate and empower them to play their part in fighting gender-based discrimination.

**BODH**

- In addition to other community participation activities like monitoring, support and advocacy, communities can actually take part in education evaluation/assessment. Bodh’s innovative ‘public assessment’ allows parents, PRI members, SMC members and youth to participate in an annual exercise to gauge students’ learning levels. This activity serves to: give an accurate picture of the educational status of children, make teachers and schools more accountable, increase the sense of ownership among the community and raise awareness and enthusiasm about education.

- Efforts must be made to keep education a top priority on the agenda of community issues, for instance at Gram Sabha meetings and within Panchayati Raj Institutions. Education is often overlooked for more popular and tangible development activities, such as infrastructure and water/sanitation. Bodh participates regularly in these meeting to ensure that the importance of education remains clear to everyone.

- However, focusing on education alone is not enough. The quality of education must be a priority for the community and a major target for community participation efforts. When local authorities or government do intervene in the area of education, they usually focus on tangible concrete actions such as building structures, providing materials, etc. While this is important, the less tangible aspects related to quality such as regularization, academic performance and advancement couldn’t be neglected.

- The CCE programme increased parents’ interest and engagement in their children’s learning process and their participation, which could be seen in their recorded comments and responses to individual child portfolios.

- By instilling the concept of ‘shiksha mein jan-bhagidari’ or ‘community participation in education’ deeply in the minds of teachers and head teachers, they begin to talk about it as their own philosophy and agree that parent must be empowered and that they should be full participants in the schooling and education process. A similar effect was noted among PRI members as well.

- Community participation can also translate into monetary contribution as well. In many instances, Bodh observed that community ownership increased and one of the indicators was financial contribution to ensure that schools function properly.
MARG

MARG’s programme demonstrates the specific need and importance of legal awareness and empowerment within the broader community empowerment programmes. In a country that is known for the large number of progressive policies in place on paper that fail to be implemented on ground, empowering the community with specific legal know-how and skills is important. Not only is the common person unaware of these policies that have been passed for his benefit, he is also significantly clueless on the equally great number of ways made available to him (on paper) through which he can avail those policies and advocate for their implementation in case they are not been implemented effectively.

Community participation and empowerment needs to be a continuous process can’t be a one-time awareness and skill building exercise. Since most of the trainings and awareness building exercise provide information far removed from the daily life and belief structure in which the community lives, it’s easy to forget the learning from them once they get back to the daily struggles of their life, in which they often feel far from “empowered”. As such, it’s important to where they are reminded of their rights, their capacities, and their skills and efforts are done to re-build or sustain their sense of confidence to bring change in and ownership of social issues.

To conclude, it is a well-established fact that the role of community is imperative in the process of education, though the level of community participation may varies across states and regions. It is only with the true participation and involvement of the communities that the goal of education for all be attained. It is also important to work towards the sustainability of innovations so that learning can be disseminated for replication. Community participation and subsequent empowerment should lead marginalized into a political change. Finally, to quote renowned educationist Vinod Raina, “If community participation is to advocate the social empowerment of the poor, it must also therefore, advocate their political empowerment”.

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This learning note is prepared based on Oxfam India’s partners EFRAH, Bodh and MARG experience, processes and lessons learned by undertaking various initiatives with regards to effective community participation to ensure education for all for wider sharing. It was documented by Ms. Shirin Naseem during August 2014 to October 2014. We would like to thank the entire Essential Services team and Oxfam India’s Education partners for their inputs given during the process of documentation.

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