

## **Partnerships in Education: Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish, Rajasthan**

### **Background**

Education attainments in Rajasthan have been among the lowest in India even till the 1990s. During the period 1991–2001, however, there has been a substantial improvement in the literacy, which was over 75 per cent. Despite such improvements, the enrolment rate in the state was as low as 60 per cent. The proportionate share of girls in total enrolment in the pre-primary and primary level education has been as low as 36.8 per cent even in 1995-96. Another fact is the high drop-out rate of girl children.

### **SKP & LJP Initiatives**

Several measures have been implemented in recent years to improve formal education system, and/or to facilitate access to education. Among these, the Government of Rajasthan initiated two ambitious and innovative education programmes—the Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) in 1987 and The Lok Jumbish project (LJP) in 1992. These projects have developed novel responses to deep-rooted problems of education and have transformed the delivery of education in the state. Both Shiksha Karmi and the Lok Jumbish were initiated as micro-level initiatives and later integrated into state-wide strategies to meet the educational needs of deprived rural communities.

### **1. Shiksha Karmi Project**

#### **Objectives**

Some of the objectives of the SKP were to achieve the following:

- ✚ Universalization of primary education in remote, socio-economically backward villages in those blocks of Rajasthan where the existing primary schools have been dysfunctional
- ✚ A qualitative improvement of primary education in such villages by adapting the form and content of education to local needs and conditions
- ✚ Improvement in enrolment of all boys and girls in the age group 6-14 years
- ✚ Building of a level of learning equivalent to the norms of Class V

The project also strives to bring about a qualitative improvement in the delivery of education

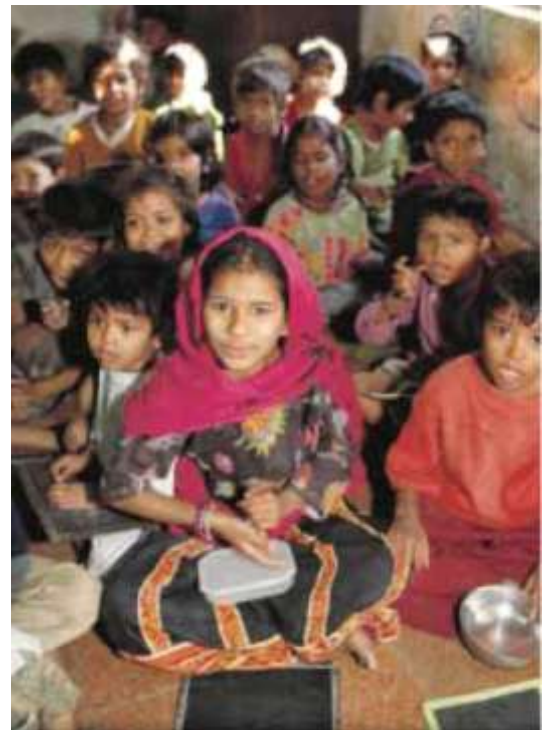
#### **The Thrust**

The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) literally means 'education worker' and aims to transform dysfunctional schools into more efficient ones through the provision of quality education with

the help of locally available youth albeit with lower qualification. The programme was formulated on the basis of a successful project of a non-government organisation (NGO) called the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia in Rajasthan. During a pilot project in 1984-86, SWRC ran three experimental primary schools using local teachers and providing continual in-service training. The curriculum and textbook design related directly to life in a rural environment, and the education outcomes were impressive. When the project was evaluated, these schools compared very favourably with government primary schools.

### **The Strategy**

The project identified teacher absenteeism as a major obstacle in achieving the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). It realised that a primary school in a remote village that has a non-village-resident teacher tends to become dysfunctional, and parents as well as children fail to relate to such an institution, leading to high drop-out rates.



### ***The thrust areas of the project are as follows:***

1. The basic strategy developed by the Shiksha Karmi Project, involved substituting each of these absentee professional teachers with a team of two local staff members. The premise of the SKP was that a change agent, especially in the field of education, can work effectively if he/she belongs to the same locality. Hence, greater preference is given to his/her willingness and ability to function as a social worker rather than only to educational qualifications.
2. Under the SKP teachers with records of absenteeism are being replaced by local teachers who are less qualified but are specially trained to teach primary school children.
3. The Shiksha Karmis or SKs are given intensive training through an induction programme as well as periodic refresher courses.
4. Enrolment of girls and their attendance and retention in primary schools is one of the serious challenges in achieving UEE in Rajasthan. The SKP aims at addressing these through decentralised initiatives involving the community.

5. At the grassroots level, panchayat samitis (block-level administration), Shiksha Karmi Sahyogis, subject specialists of NGOs, SKs and the village community constantly interact with each other to achieve the aims of the project.

### **The Process**

The SKP is initiated by identification of a remote and backward village where a government primary school is dysfunctional. The criteria to verify the targeted village includes factors like, extremely low enrolment, low attendance of children, low retention of boys and girls, low academic attainment among children, pattern of irregular attendance, and absenteeism of teacher resulting in frequent closure of school. The villagers and the SKB, collectively decide on the appointment of a SK teacher for the school.

The SKP has reached its present level of expansion through high level of local participation, allied to strong logistical support. Villages are selected on the basis of requests from the panchayat samiti. Candidates for teacher's training have to qualify through a written and an oral test and must possess knowledge of numbers and basic teaching and learning processes and awareness of hygiene and environment. The selection board comprises representatives from SKB, a local NGO, the Pradhans (members from the local self-government), and the Block Officer of the Government of Rajasthan.

There is also an in-built monitoring process at the village, block, headquarter and state levels. There is a provision of joint biannual reviews by SIDA, the Government of India and the government of Rajasthan and of independent evaluation by teams consisting of national and international experts.

Review and planning meetings are held regularly as support interventions to the SKs at the block level, while at the village level, support is provided by the VEC with respect to monitoring enrolment and attendance rates as well as school mapping and micro-planning exercises. An elaborate monitoring structure is built into this programme on a monthly basis by the SKs themselves and on quarterly basis by the VECs. In addition, monitoring activities are carried out at the regional level by the resource unit and the members of the SKB and at the state level by the executive committee of the SKB. The regional activities are monitored by the SKB and the state level by the executive committee of the SKB.

The structure of the programme is relatively de-bureaucratized, as SKs are not permanent government employees. However, many problems remain to be addressed. Because of traditional society's attitude towards working women, it has proven difficult to recruit female teachers, who still account for only 27 per cent (1999-2000) of total teachers in the state.

The target now is to have at least one female SK teacher in each school. Gender contributed significantly in enabling girls to attend SK schools.

The concept of **Aangan Pathshalas** (courtyard schools) was introduced in 1992-93 to provide effective contextual intervention to encourage sustained participation of girls in primary education. A rural woman, with a minimum education qualification of Class V and willingness to teach girls, is engaged to teach a group of at least 15 girls in the age group of 6-14 years in her neighbourhood.

**Prehar Pathshalas** (PPs) or schools with convenient timings provide educational programmes for out-of-school children who cannot attend regular school due to preoccupation at home. In PPs, a condensed formal school curriculum and simplified learning materials are followed. Angan Pathshalas have proved effective in attracting girls to primary schools.

### **Major Achievements**

***The SKP has been responsible for several tangible achievements, which are:***

- The project was extended in two Prehar Pathshalas (25 learners) phases to cover 300 villages by 1991 and 2,000 remote villages in 140 blocks by 1995. The project now covers 2,715 villages in 146 blocks of 32 districts of Rajasthan and 6,285 SKs provide primary education to 2.16 lakh children in day schools. There are 2,715 day schools and 4,829 PPs.
- In 1998-99, the SKP was functional in 146 out of a total 237 blocks in 32 districts of Rajasthan.
- The state runs 2,600 day schools, 48,229 PPs and 97 Anganshalas. In these schools, 6,213 SKs serve 2.16 lakh children, 40 per cent of which are girls.
- Although retention rates are still low, at 50 per cent between Class I and V, it is an improvement over the 30 per cent retention rate in 1989. Over 40 per cent of the children successfully complete Class V.
- There has been a six-fold increase in the enrolment of children in the age group of 6-14 years (from 37 per cent to 83 per cent) in Shiksha Karmi Schools and Prehar Pathshalas.
- Retention of children in schools increased from an average of about 19 per cent to 65 per cent. Monthly attendance of children in SKP schools has improved from 58 per cent to 84 per cent. Nearly 67 per cent of the children belong to disadvantaged social groups.

- An outstanding achievement is 100 per cent enrolment of children in the age group of 6–14 years in 576 villages, i.e. more than one-fourth of the project villages.
- The SKP has constituted 2,600 VECs to promote community involvement in primary education and encourage village-level planning, supervision and management in improving effectiveness of schools
- PPs have enabled out-of-school children, especially girls in the remote areas, to avail of opportunities for primary schooling at their own pace and with sufficient flexibility. At present, 22,138 girls (who constitute 68 per cent of learners in PPs) are benefiting from this facility.
- *Angan Pathshalas* (APs) have been set up for young children, particularly girls who cannot travel long distances to attend schools. At present, 97 AP centres are in operation with 4,023 children.
- In order to facilitate and increase the enrolment of girls in villages where literate women are not available to work as SKs, 14 *Mahila Prashikshan Kendras* (Women Training Centres) have been set up in interior rural areas where 334 women are being trained.

=====

=====

## 2. Lok Jumbish Pariyojana

The **Lok Jumbish** (People's Movement) programme is a joint initiative developed by the Government of Rajasthan in cooperation with local NGOs. The programme, which has been underway since 1992, is functioning in 13 districts of Rajasthan. It aims at providing elementary education by mobilising the community and soliciting its involvement in the running of local schools.

### Objectives

The primary objective of the **Lok Jumbish** Project (LJP) is to achieve the universalization of elementary education through mass mobilization and the participation of people. It places special emphasis on the education of girls and disadvantaged sections of society and views education as a tool for empowerment. Some of the main goals of the LJP are as follows:

- Providing access to primary education to all children between five and 14 years of age
- Striving to enrol children in regular schools, as far as possible and in *Sahaj Shiksha* centres wherever necessary

- Ensuring that all enrolled children regularly attend school *Sahaj Shiksha* centres and complete primary education
- Improving quality of education by emphasising active learning, child-centred processes and achievement of at least minimum levels of learning by all children
- Creating necessary structures and processes to empower women, making education an instrument of women's equality

### **The Thrust**

The thrust of the programme is to view education both as an end to and means of socio-economic change and transformation, especially with respect to gender equality.

### **The Strategy**

#### ***The core strategic areas of the project are:***

- De-bureaucratisation and the decentralisation of decision-making in the sphere of primary education.
- Creating structures, forums and partnerships between people from the village-level community on one hand and educationists and NGOs on the other.

### **The Process**

The unit of decentralisation planning and administration in the LJP is the village and block respectively. The links between the village and the block are provided by a cluster of 25-35 villages with similar geographical and socio-economic conditions. Each development block is further divided into five to seven compact clusters. The role of the cluster personnel is to translate the ideas of the LJP into action in the villages. The responsibility at the cluster level rests on the Block Steering Group (BSG) or an established the NGO, wherever available.

The LJP aims at establishing a decentralised education system, with VECs taking a central role. Each VEC comprises about eight members who are nominated by community assemblies. In addition to these village-level structures, LJP has established block-level committees, including government, NGO and VEC appointees. These committees, covering 100-150 villages, are vested with the power to open and upgrade schools and to appoint new teachers.

Members of the informal VECs manage the education system in their village. They provide a link between the larger village community and the LJP personnel, help in implementation of the programmes and also assess the requirements of the village and seek to fulfil them.

The next rung in the administrative ladder is the block. At this level there are two main LJP outposts—the BSG and the Block Education Management Committee (BEMC). The BEMC is a powerful decision-making body of the LJP. The BSG is constituted by representatives from the panchayat samitis (elected local self-governing bodies) and officers from the Department of Education, Government of Rajasthan.

The Lok Jumbish Parishad is the headquarters of the whole project. The Parishad is a society registered under the Rajasthan Societies Registration Act, 1958. It is the main coordinating and guiding agency of all the regional offices of LJP. All review and planning meetings at the state level are organised by the Lok Jumbish Parishad.

**School mapping:** One of the most important Lok Jumbish innovations has been the village-mapping exercise. Over 4,000 villages have participated in developing maps, which go beyond identifying the location of schools and road, to establishing the social and cultural problems faced by local communities in accessing schools. Issues of elementary education quality, curriculum relevance, distance and teacher attitudes all figure prominently in this exercise. Women's groups were involved to identify the major deterrents to girls' education.

**Micro-planning:** The Micro-planning process is initiated after necessary education infrastructure is provided to the village. Micro-planning involves family-wise and child-wise monitoring by the teachers and VEC and occasionally by the cluster-level staff. The VEC identifies the child out of school and from the Village Education Register (VER), contacts the concerned families and undertakes relevant action to ensure regularity of attendance and retention of children in schools. The micro-planning process involves three



instruments—(1) Praveshotsav (Festival of Entry), (2) Retention Register, and (3) Village Education Plan. The main objective of the Praveshotsav is to create a positive and creative environment for education among children and develop a sense of responsibility in the minds of the parents to send their child to school.

## **Gender Equality**

The status of gender sensitivity and equity permeates all the programmes and processes in the LJP. Women workers at every level are considered indispensable and appointment of women workers in specific proportion is considered mandatory. The state-level committee 'Samvadika' reviews LJ activities from a gender perspective and provides suggestions for women's development and to weave measures conducive to gender issues in to the content and process of education.

## **Quality of Education**

The activities to improve the quality of education in LJP have been through the introduction of competency-based education or the Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) scheme in 1992. The MLL to be achieved by children at various grade levels then forms the basis of the curriculum development and its implementation in the field. The MLL scheme started in 45 schools in Arain Block (Ajmer) covered 2,096 children. In 1998-99, the MLL scheme has been extended to 5,945 schools employing over 16,905 teachers and covered over 5.4 lakh children.

## **Non-formal Education**

LJP introduced a non-formal education programme: Sahaj Shiksha (SS) in 1993. It was later revamped in 1996 and was equivalent to formal system i.e., it was also linked to a competency-based curriculum and provided a certificate, built the teaching personnel from the community and provided teacher training, back-up support personnel for the teachers and structured the management as resource groups for the SS and formed cluster-level monitoring groups or the *Sanchetan Dals*.

## **Major Achievements**

- Between 1992-98, the initiative had extended to 75 blocks, comprising nearly one-third of rural Rajasthan. About 1,000 elementary and 300 upper primary schools fall under its administration, along with over 1,000 non-formal education centres. The project has developed its own teacher training modules, through which over 2,300 teachers have benefited.
- Over the first four years of the project (1992-1996), enrolment rates in Lok Jumbish villages increased by 24 per cent. Enrolment of girls increased faster than that of boys (from 29 per cent to 59 per cent) narrowing the gender gap, even though enrolment of girls continues to account only for about one-third of total enrolment.



One of the most important concerns identified by women in the mapping exercises was the shortage of female teachers. A Women's Teachers Forum has been established to attract new recruits. Considerable emphasis has also been given to teacher training. Two-week motivational courses are run every year and 900 master trainers provide constant in-service assistance.

### **Lessons Learnt**

- The SKP and LJP initiatives have changed the mechanism of the delivery of education in the state. Their innovative community-centric approach has achieved tangible results making them worthy of replication across Indian states.
  - The programmes illustrate that concerted cooperative action between local communities, NGOs, government and international donors can achieve concrete results. The lessons from these micro-level projects are being replicated at the state level.
  - Another positive feature of the two projects has been the high standard of evaluation carried out by participants in Lok Jumbish and SIDA. These have helped to identify problems and shortcomings, notably in relation to achievement of gender equity in a non-partisan and bias-free way.
  - The two programmes demonstrate that successful approaches to partnerships between the government and local communities are based on cooperation, flexibility, and a willingness to learn in the pursuit of shared objectives rather than a one partner monopoly that develops plans for building partnerships by decree, with local communities used merely as vehicles for service delivery.
-