

Qualitative studies of selected educational initiatives in South Indian States  
(Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh)

Carried out for the project

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Annexure1<sup>1</sup>: List of Institutions, Agencies and Schools visited in the course of the studies.

A. MSK facilitated KGBV and NPEGEL

1. Mahila Samakhya Karnataka State Project Office, Bangalore
2. Mahila Samakhya District Implementation Unit, Koppal
3. Mahila Samakhya District Implementation Unit, Bagalkot
4. KGBV, Mudhol
5. KGBV, Anagawadi
6. KGBV, Koppal
7. KGBV, Gangavati
8. NPEGEL, Mantur Taluk Model Primary School, Mantur.
9. NPEGEL, Ranna Government Model Kannada Primary School, Mudhol Municipality.

B. List of Schools Visited to study the functioning of the SDMCs:

1. Thanneerhole Upper Primary School, Vanahalli Panchayat, Sirsi Taluk, Uttara Kannada District.
2. Guruhalli-Vanahalli Higher Primary School, Vanahalli Panchayat, Sirsi Taluk, Uttara Kannada district
3. Gajanana High School, Vanahalli Panchayat, Uttara Kannada District.
4. Government Higher Primary School, Khasapala, Hulekal Panchayat, Sirsi, Uttara Kannada District
5. Government Higher Primary School, Brahmarakootlu, Tumbe Panchayat, Bantwala Taluk, Dakshina Kannada
6. Mantur Taluk Model Primary School, Mantur, Mudhol Taluk, Bagalkot district
7. Ranna Government Model Kannada Primary School, Mudhol Municipality, Mudhol Taluk, Bagalkot district
8. Government Composite High School, Jammanakatti Village, Badami Taluk, Bagalkot district.
9. Government Urdu Higher Primary School, Koppal Taluk, Koppal District.
10. Government Higher Primary School, Kotagerigara, Koppal Taluk, Koppal District
11. Government Higher Primary School, Kenchandoni, Koppal Taluk, Koppal District
12. Government Higher Primary School, Halageri Gram Panchayat, Koppal Taluk, Koppal District.
13. Government Upper Primary School, Varur, Varur GP, Hubli Taluk, Dharwad District.
14. Government Composite High School, Ramanakoppa Village, Ramanakoppa GP, Kundagola Taluk, Dharwad District
15. Government Higher Primary School, Hosakattte, Ramanakoppa GP, Kundagola Taluk, Dharwad District
16. Government Higher Primary School, Byridevarakoppa, Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation, Hubli Taluk, Dharwad District.
17. Government Higher Primary School, Rayapur, Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation, Hubli Taluk, Dharwad District.

At these schools, Head Teachers, Assistant Teachers and students were interviewed. In addition, in most schools parents and SDMC members were interviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> Internal Document: Not for broader circulation.

C. List of Schools/Offices Visited to study the functioning of the MDMS:

All schools listed in Schedule B. In addition:

18. Gangamma Thimmaiah Government Model School, Shivanagar, Bangalore Urban District.
19. Office of the Joint Director of Public Instruction, Midday Meal Scheme, Bangalore.
20. SSA officials in Bangalore<sup>2</sup>, Bagalkot, Koppal, Dharwad and Uttara Kannada districts were interviewed.
21. The KFCSC Gas Agency, Koppal Taluk, Koppal district.
22. Mallikarjuna Gas Supply Centre, Mudhol, Mudhol Taluk, Bagalkot district.
23. The Akshaya Patra Foundation, Bangalore.
24. The Akshaya Patra Foundation, Hubli

D. List of Offices/Schools/Events visited for the study on ABL and ALM:

1. Office of the State Project Director, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Chennai.
2. Office of the Coordinator, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Chennai.
3. The School, Chennai.
4. Workshop for Block Resource Teacher Educators on Building Life Skills and Value Education into the ALM Curriculum and Pedagogy, Jointly organized by Outreach Team, The School, Chennai, and SSA, Tamil Nadu at Asha Niwas, Chennai.
5. Villivakkam Panchayat Union Middle School – Sector II, Ambattur Taluk, Tiruvallur District.
6. Corporation Middle School, Perambur, New Kamaraj Nagar, Chennai.
7. Kunrathur Puratchi Union Middle School, Padappai Village, Kancheepuram District.
8. Government Primary School, Kadamanaravu, Kodaikanal Block, Dindigul District.
9. Government Primary School, Kadassikkad, Kodaikanal Block, Dindigul District.
10. Government Primary School, Bandhupuli, Palani Block, Dindigul district.

E. List of Offices/Schools visited for the study of Community Owned and Managed Education:

1. Government Primary School, Kadamanaravu, Kodaikanal Block, Dindigul District.
2. Government Primary School, Kadassikkad, Kodaikanal Block, Dindigul District.
3. Government Primary School, Bandhupuli, Palani Block, Dindigul district.
4. Office, Elanjipoo SHG and Udayam SHG, Pachallur Gram Panchayat.
5. Balawadi, Anna Nagar, Aiyalur Special Town Panchayat, Dindigul District
6. Rural Education for Action and Development, Dindigul.

F. List of Communities who participated in surveys and focus group discussions for the study on School Choice and the Urban Poor:

1. Hamal Basti
2. Rajiv Gandhi Nagar
3. Nagamaiahkunta

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<sup>2</sup> This included the doctor deputed from the Department of Health to SSA to oversee supply of micronutrients and deworming tablets.

“The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.”

### **Section I: Introduction**

Article 45 of the Constitution of India is the only Directive Principle of State Policy to specify a time-frame for its implementation. Applying this time-frame, it is clear that the state has cheated nearly four generations of its citizens by failing to fulfil this principle in letter or spirit for all children, as envisaged and laid down by India’s founding fathers and mothers. With all its flaws, most notably that of leaving out children below the age of 6, and from the ages of 15 to 18 from its purview, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2008<sup>1</sup>, which was passed by Parliament on August 4, 2009, and notified as law following presidential assent on September 3, 2009 is, according to the Union HRD Minister Kapil Sibal, the “harbinger of a new era” and represents a “historic opportunity” for the children of the country.

Several aspects of the Act are noteworthy. Unlike earlier drafts of the Bill, which placed the onus for ensuring the child was in school on the parent, and as a corollary, punished the parent for not doing so, the Act holds that it is the duty of the appropriate government or local authority to “ensure and monitor admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child residing within its jurisdiction.” In an effort to get private schools to take on a larger role in educating children from the weaker and more disadvantaged sections of society, and reduce the widening divide between the rich and the poor in terms of access to educational services, they are required to provide free education or education against reimbursement by the government to such children subject to a minimum of 25% of the total enrolment of the school. The Act prevents schools from collecting capitation fees or employing screening procedures like interviews for parents or guardians as part of admitting a child to school. Besides, the Act lays down minimum norms to be followed by schools, with regard to important aspects like the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) and infrastructure, in order to be recognised, and prohibits unrecognised schools.

There is no doubt that real social justice, in terms of ensuring that no child is short-changed by receiving an inadequate or inappropriate education, can be ensured only by a common school system, which nevertheless has the flexibility to devise options for children with disabilities, other special needs, or communities with particular socio-cultural historicities which need to be acknowledged and addressed. Hence, all the windows that have been opened up by the new Act must work as steps towards achieving such social justice. The task of raising the standards of existing schools so that they meet qualitative norms, and establishing new schools according to these norms, is a very complex and daunting one. Hence, there is no doubt that all the stakeholders involved in re-casting education will be looking for relevant qualitative information which will be of assistance in the process. In the next two or three years, it will be of significant importance to collect stories of efforts which have been functioning above par, and critically analyse these to identify principles, practices, systems, structures or actions which can be replicated, or successfully applied in other contexts or locales, in order to raise the quality of the educational experience for children in India.

The Sections II to VI that follow provide a few examples of such stories from southern India, while Section VII describes a small study of school choice in three urban slums, to emphasise the importance

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<sup>1</sup> <http://164.100.24.219/BillsTexts/RSBillTexts/PassedRajyaSabha/right%20of%20children%20AS%20PASSED.pdf>  
Retrieved on November 11, 2009.

of putting in resources, creativity and commitment into providing government school education of good quality.

**Section II:**

**Mahila Samakhya Karnataka-facilitated KGBV and NPEGEL programmes: Using the technical expertise and organisational experience of a quasi-government organisation to promote gender equity in education**

In India, enrolment for girl children as compared to boys is significantly lower at the upper primary levels. Girl children face a number of traditional barriers, including the low value set on girls' education in many traditional rural communities, and the need for their labour for domestic activities, care of younger siblings and to augment family income through wage labour. Lack of proper infrastructure like proper toilet facilities, water supply, and transportation may also serve as structural barriers which cause girl children to drop out of school. The educational experience too is often unequal and different from that of boys. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme of the central government was set up in 2004 in to serve Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) in which the rural female literacy is below the national average, and the gender gap in literacy is above the national average. Under this scheme, residential schools are set up to cater to girl children belonging primarily to Dalit, tribal, OBC and minority communities in such areas or areas with scattered habitations. The National Programme for Education of Girls at the Primary Level (NPEGEL) is designed to provide additional elements of support for the elementary education of girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in EBBs, urban slums, etc. These schemes are implemented through a variety of agencies, including the Mahila Samakhya in states where this programme exists. A national evaluation of the KGBV scheme carried out by the central government's Department of School Literacy found that the programme had received "high priority and political attention" in the 12 states studied, and that the teachers and management showed a high degree of commitment, which was reflected in the confidence of the girls and their happiness at being at school<sup>2</sup>.

Against this context, a small qualitative study was made of the NPEGEL and KGBV programmes implemented by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) to understand the difference that a programme that is already committed to and has extensive experience of promoting gender equity and women's literacy can make to education programmes aimed at supporting disadvantaged girl students<sup>3</sup>. Interviews were conducted with the State Project Director, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, and District Coordinators of Bagalkot and Koppal Districts. Field visits were carried out to four Mahila Samakhya-facilitated KGBVs and interviews carried out with students, parents, teachers, cooks and support staff, as well as the concerned Mahila Samakhya block and area coordinators.

Mahila Samakhya is a programme of the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Conceived as a result of the New Education Policy of 1986, the programme attempts to play a "positive, interventionist role" for promoting women's equality. The structure of the programme drew on a combination of features from government and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ssa.nic.in/girls-education/kasturba-gandhi-balika-vidyalaya/Nat\\_Report\\_20FEB\\_2007\\_.pdf/view](http://ssa.nic.in/girls-education/kasturba-gandhi-balika-vidyalaya/Nat_Report_20FEB_2007_.pdf/view). Retrieved on November 11, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Field visits were made to the MSK facilitated KGBVs in Koppal and Gangavathi in Koppal District, and Mudhol and Anagavadi in Bagalkot District. In addition to interviews with the SSA officials and the district and block coordinators of MSK in these locations, focus group discussions were carried out with students, MSK-appointed teachers and government teachers deputed for the programme.

non-governmental organisations, and in most states, functions through an autonomous registered society working under the guidance of the Education Minister and Education Secretary of the state. Karnataka was one of the first states, along with Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, in which the programme was piloted. Built on the foundation of village-level collectives of women from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds, including Dalit and tribal women, and women in poverty, including wage labourers, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) today works with 60,000 women in 12 districts of Karnataka, of which 9 are in the north Karnataka region which tends to fare rather poorly on many socio-economic indicators, and three are in south-west and south east Karnataka. In addition to education, MSK works in the areas of promoting women's participation in governance, women's health, legal literacy, economic self-reliance, and political empowerment through federating women's collectives.

MSK's approach to make its NPEGEL and KGBV programmes successful is multi-pronged, focusing not only on academic education and residential support (in the case of the latter scheme), but a number of additional inputs for the students, interventions with the family and the community, attention to administrative details and teacher support.

#### *Community level interventions:*

Mahila Samakhya field staff carry out education-specific Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) with the communities from which the students for the NPEGEL and KGBVs are drawn, so that communities are conscientised about what the local education-related resources are, which children are out of school, and what challenges prevent them from attending school. While identifying problems, expert facilitation encourages the communities to pay particular attention to the barriers that prevent girl children from attending school. Larger awareness campaigns, aimed at enlisting community support to put all children in school, called Shikshana Arivu Andolanas, are held. Information sessions on the facilities and benefits of the two schemes are held for children, parents, MSK sanghas (women's groups) and panchayats. In addition, a stringent and effective community monitoring system, consisting of "ōni gumpu" is set up. The community in villages and in slums in cities are divided into neighbourhood groups of 20 houses each. For instance, there were 67 such *oni-gumpus* serving the Mudhol taluk in the villages, and 30 in the small town areas. These groups select leaders from amongst themselves, consisting of one woman and one girl who is between 14 and 18 years of age. They are responsible for ensuring that all children from that cluster of 20 houses go to school, and for helping girl children negotiate the difficulties, including family opposition, that they may face in going to school. If there are larger structural or systemic barriers, the leaders of these groups bring these to the attention of the local government, and advocate for solutions.

#### *Family Level Interventions:*

MSK's community organisers make repeated visits, even in the face of stiff opposition, and sometimes, threats of violence, to families whose children are out of school to persuade them to send their children to school and help resolve the reservations and difficulties that prevent them from doing so. They also enlist the services of the local sanghas and key members in the community to do this. Exposure visits are provided for parents to the NPEGEL and KGBV programmes. For parents of children who are already in the programme, in addition to the visits on the second Sunday of every month, when parents take children for outings, shopping, etc, Parents' Days are organised three times a year. These occasions also help the school showcase ongoing progress among the students. On these occasions, there are games and fun competitions for the parents (like the "Biscuit Eating Competition"), children perform for their parents, there are discussions on relevant issues, and concerns are addressed, and parents also get input sessions on various relevant topics, like legal issues (at which, for instance, age for marriage,



domestic violence, etc. may be discussed), health and hygiene issues, adolescent development, etc. Parents who are resistant to sending their children to the programmes are encouraged to attend on these occasions, so that other parents, whose children are already in the programme, and students in the schools, are able to act as advocates for the programme and on behalf of the children out of school. The economic benefits of admitting the children to the programme are listed, and strategically, the “marketable” skills, both in marriage-related and economic terms, are highlighted to win them over.

#### *Child-Related Interventions:*

Apart from regular academic classes, supervised study time, and tutoring for children who are struggling, the MSK -facilitated KGBV and NPEGEL programmes also include regular opportunities for play. Children are taught how to cycle, (as recommended in the guidelines of the NPEGEL), which improves their confidence and mobility. The girl children, most of whom were either never admitted to school, or were pulled out of school, to assist with domestic work, labour on family land, provide childcare of younger siblings, or work as agricultural labour, learn karate, which gives them an experience of physical culture which is different from the drudgery of hard labour, apart from being a useful skill for self-defence. The girls have taken to karate enthusiastically and it has given them opportunities for achievement and recognition: many of them have represented the school and won prizes at the district, state and national levels. Students also get a range of cultural experiences: apart from learning local folk music and dances, they learn classical music and Bharatnatyam, and receive an exposure to elements of what is termed “high culture”. That old mainstay, tailoring, is a part of the repertoire of vocational skills that the students learn, but breaking the gender stereotypes, girls also learn cycle repair, radio and TV repair, etc. Girls also receive training in a range of hobbies like candle making, sari painting, jewellery making, etc. which they reported enjoying thoroughly. The staff plan regular exposure visits for the girls, to the local bank, post-office, police station, courts, gram panchayat office, etc., so that children at once learn about public amenities, and also overcome the anxiety and diffidence that being female and in poverty usually associates with going to ‘official’ spaces and interacting with officials. Children are also taken to the District Commissioner’s office, where they interact with officials. Such experiences help to create a future orientation for the children, aspirations for the future when they see women working at these offices, and a sense of a larger context, beyond their homes and the work opportunities available in their immediate vicinities. Regular trainings on gender, child rights, and legal issues affecting women provide the students with a capacity to analyse the situations they see in their communities from human rights and socio-political perspectives. Regular picnics and excursions contribute to rest and recreation, and break the monotony of a residential programme. Apart from the major festivals of all religions, the KGBVs celebrate all the small local festivals and feasts, like *hunnime oota* or *beladingala oota*, with the special foods associated with each, so that children are not homesick at these special times. Over and above all of these, the children reported that they were really happy to have the time to study, which chores and family pressures did not allow before they joined the programme.

#### *Teacher-Related Interventions:*

Teachers at the MSK-facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs take part in the gender-related trainings that are an intrinsic feature of the MSK culture. MSK maintains a viable co-operation with the other government agencies associated with education, like the BRC, DIET, the Education Department, and SSA authorities. Apart from the teachers who are deputed from the Government schools for the KGBVs, MSK appoints teachers too. MSK carries out independent assessments of teacher performance in schools run by it. However, the teachers on deputation from government schools are less used to the culture of constant monitoring and accountability, and sometimes accuse MSK of “torturing us”.

#### *Administration-Related Interventions:*

A significant aspect of the administration of the MSK- facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs is that there is hands-on involvement of the MSK leadership at all levels, whether of the Block Coordinator, the District Coordinators, or the State Project Director. These KGBVs do not sub-contract arrangements for the board and other expenses of the students. They rely on a centralised procurement system set up by MSK, so that quality foodstuffs can be obtained in bulk at the most competitive prices. Cooks are drawn from the sanghas, so there is a sense of loyalty to an MSK project, and a recognition that they are working for the welfare of children in their extended community, which increases their commitment to their work. All these features contribute to considerable savings. “Whenever we go for meetings of the KGBVs, almost all the other schools complain that the funds provided by the government are insufficient. But we are able to save, and use the savings to buy our children karate uniforms and sweat suits as sports uniforms.” Meticulous documentation of the programme was evident in the document review carried out at all the study locations.

The MSK- facilitated KGBVs were clearly well run, and the children at these schools had a rich and varied schooling experience. The evaluation team was concerned that recitation lessons at the KGBVs focused on Sanskrit shlokas, though celebrations of festivals focused on all religions. Following a discussion, the MSK staff and teachers felt that the Sanskrit shlokas might be replaced with work from the famous Kannada poets. The NPEGELs, as a much smaller programme, sometimes suffered a little from the fact that a single teacher was supported by MSK staff, but did not have a larger community of peers, or as much of an institutionalised framework, from within the programme as was the case with KGBV. To that extent, it meant that the programme was only as good as the person doing the actual implementation. In other words, the success of the NPEGELs depended more on the personal qualities and capacities of the individual teacher, in a way that was less the case for KGBVs.

Other concerns were more general, not specific to the MSK-facilitated KGBVs; related to separating children from their families, and placing them in institutional care settings. However, the researchers raised this issue repeatedly with the students, taking care not to do so in the presence of administrators or teachers in these programmes. Without hesitation or exception, the students said that they would rather be at the KGBVs than at home. They said that the range of things that they got to learn about, the amount of rest and recreation that they got at the hostel, they could not get at home. Nor could they get the support to study. As one student at a KGBV hostel in Koppal said, “Before my parents pulled me out of the village school, if my grandmother ever saw me with my books, she would get very angry, scold me and my parents, and immediately find some chore for me to do. I am so happy that no one disturbs me here when I study.”

In their report evaluating Karnataka’s KGBV programme, Ramachandran and Alikhan (2007) note that “The MS programme does not seem to have drawn upon its experience of working with women and adolescent girls to enrich the curriculum. Even the songs and creative activities that are popular in MS have not been fed into the KGBV programme.”<sup>4</sup> This was contrary to the experience of this study, which found that the girls were familiar with the conscientising songs of Mahila Samakhya, had received gender and legal literacy training on issues related to women, and had been able to apply the skills they had received through the KGBV and NPEGEL programmes to improve the quality of their own lives as well as those of other children in the community. Examples of such actions had included resisting child marriage themselves, mobilising support through classmates, MS functionaries and school teachers to

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<sup>4</sup> Ramachandran, V. & Alikhan, F. (2007). KGBV Evaluation – Karnataka: Final Report, 27 February 2007. New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Literacy.

help other girls in the community who were being pressurised to marry early and increased mobility. However, these inputs were typically provided to the students directly by functionaries of MSK, rather than mainstreamed through the general curriculum. Thus, there is scope for MSK to function as a resource organisation to the entire KGBV network, ensuring that appropriate and adequate support for mainstreaming gender in the programme is available. By far the two most outstanding qualities of the MSK-facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs were that gender is not an add-on component at MSK but the *raison d'être* of the programme, and that the base of the sanghas on which MSK is built has created a culture of accountability to the poorest of the poor.

### **Section III:**

#### **School Monitoring Committees: Opportunities to Nurture Local Schools through Participation and Partnership**

The new Right to Education Bill places the responsibility of monitoring matters related to the functioning of schools with School Development Committees, 75 per cent of whose members must be parents of children studying in the school. A small study aimed at understanding the functioning of similar bodies called School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) was conducted in a selection of schools in Karnataka. (While the head teacher serves as secretary of the SDMC, the other members are drawn from among the parents of children studying in the school.) Interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire were conducted with members of SDMCs in a selection of government schools in Bagalkot, Dakshina Kannada, Dharwad, Koppal, and Uttara Kannada. At schools at which the SDMC was making significant positive interventions in school functioning in Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada, more detailed interviews were conducted. In all, 17 schools in five districts were visited for the study.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that there was a wide range in the nature and quality of participation and functioning of the SDMCs. There was also a range in the interpretation of what constituted a “good” SDMC on the part of school authorities. SDMCs were differentially described as “good” if the members

- Could be relied on to attend meetings, did not contribute much, but did not oppose work that was being undertaken in the school or “cause trouble”, *or*
- Contributed some time or effort for school activities, or helped to raise funds or contributions in kind for school activities, *or*
- Were able to assist with substantial improvements in school infrastructure, *or*
- Played an active role in persuading the families living in the area to send all eligible children to school, *or*
- Helped to organise comparatively high-profile functions at school like School Day or related to the visit of a dignitary, *or*
- Organised extra-curricular activities, *or*
- Undertook some amount of monitoring (e.g., of the mid-day meals scheme), *or*
- Some combination of the above.

At the same time, there were points of contention. In January 2009, a national newspaper reported an incident in Belgaum district in which SDMC members locked the gates of a government school, contending that “there was no point in running a school when the teachers were not concerned with providing a good education.” The teachers had refused to take responsibility or be accountable at an

SDMC meeting convened on the issue, entering into a “verbal altercation” with SDMC members.<sup>5</sup> Similar attitudes were also found during the study. SDMC members reported that teachers did not feel obliged to attend SDMC meetings, or participate in SDMC initiatives. Often the SDMC members and head teacher were unable to get teachers to endorse or involve themselves with initiatives proposed by the SDMC. In particular, they were resistant to questions or initiatives related to teacher development and academic quality.

The study also revealed examples of SDMCs which had been able to provide leadership and contributions in effort and kind to improve the nature and quality of the educational experience in rural schools. Some of the noteworthy features that SDMCs which function well have displayed include:

*Increased democratisation of participation in the SDMCs*

In Ranipur<sup>6</sup>, the Presidentship of the SDMC used to be filled by the local MLA through the political appointment of one of his supporters, even if the person did not have a child studying in the school. A few years ago, a strong movement by concerned citizens insisted that the SDMC be constituted according to government norms. Regular monthly parents’ meetings were instituted, and on an average, 150 parents attend these meetings. Regular elections are held, and from among the parents of 250 students, nine are elected to the SDMC. These nine members then elect the President of the SDMC. The monthly SDMC meetings take place in conjunction with the parents’ meetings so that there is greater participation. In another SDMC in Uttara Kannada district, initially the membership had been drawn from “whoever had the time”. Later the leadership realised that the student body of the schools was drawn from widely scattered hamlets, separated by thick woods. Accordingly, a conscious decision was taken to ensure that there would be one SDMC member from each hamlet “to ensure good communication and monitoring.” Further, the SDMC began to use the school space more consciously as a community space. Various functions, meetings with the local MLA and MP and celebrations were held in the school, and all members of the community were encouraged to attend. These two decisions led to a greater democratisation of community participation in the school. “We worked to break down the barriers between the community and the school, especially the illiterate members of the community, who were earlier very hesitant to enter the school premises. Now, even illiterate parents feel comfortable about coming to the school, asking about their children’s progress and the activities in the school.”

*Ensuring regular schooldays:*

Widening the scope of the monthly SDMC meetings to parents’ meetings, and encouraging broad-based participation has ensured greater accountability in ensuring that teachers are regular and on time, and take classes. Another SDMC boasted of four graduates from among its members. The President of the SDMC said proudly, “Except for the regular holidays, our children do not miss classes for a single day. When the teachers have to attend trainings or other official events or duties, SDMC members engage the children in lessons.”

*Monitoring academic work:*

At one school, the SDMC actively monitors the academic performances of all the students, and follows up with parents and teachers to get extra help, tutoring, etc. for the children who are lagging behind. In the other school, the SDMC helped to make the boundaries of the school more porous so that parents visited the school often and helped to improve academic expectations from their children.

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<sup>5</sup> “SDMC members lock school gate”. *The Hindu*, Tuesday, January 06, 2009. Retrieved at <http://www.hindu.com/2009/01/06/stories/2009010655260300.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Names of places have been changed.

*Extending the boundaries of academic work:*

Active interest by SDMC members helps to extend the boundaries of academic work for students. At the initiative of one SDMC, the mid-day mealtime was turned into an ongoing learning opportunity – during the meal, teachers give children quick updates on the beneficial nutritive impacts of the foods they are eating that day. At another, the Nirmala Grama campaign of the government was used as an opportunity to extend the scope of the textbook environmental science lessons children were getting in school. SDMC leaders helped school children to design a campaign, and encouraged them to create materials like posters, songs and skits, and undertake an environmental awareness raising “walk and talk” programme to raise the consciousness of the village community to use less plastic. By designing such experiential education projects, SDMC members also contributed to increasing the number of concerned citizens in the community. An informal survey by school children following the campaign revealed that demand for plastic bags in local shops had come down by nearly 40 per cent. SDMCs have assisted some schools to develop gardens of fruit trees, vegetable patches, and medicinal herbs.

At one school, the SDMC recognised that children tended to lose the peer community they had built once they passed out of Standard VII and were forced to go to different high schools away from the village. SDMC leaders encouraged the creation of a memory book and involved the students in all aspects of the production: writing and sourcing content, editing, proofreading, making decisions about budgeting, printing, etc., including minor tasks like choosing fonts and font-sizes. In addition, with the support of SDMC members, children produce a fortnightly wall magazine, which helps to reinforce and apply the reading, writing, art, general knowledge and presentation skills they learn more formally in school.

The intervention of the SDMC had brought about changes in other small but significant ways, even in non-academic aspects. At the instance of SDMC members, the teachers at one school began checking whether children’s fingernails were trimmed and hands were washed prior to the serving of the noon meal. In time, general hygiene and grooming levels of the students improved. “Earlier, parents would send children to school as they were, straight from their sleeping mats. Now our children look neat and tidy, like children who go to city schools.”

*Encouraging extra-curricular activities:*

SDMC members who noted that children in urban areas attended camps which provided creative and exploratory extra-curricular activities tried to create similar experiences for rural children from their schools. Holiday camps were started and children given training in local folk art forms, e.g., *yakshagana*, *pathya sangeetha*, etc. Schools which had dropped school day celebrations re-introduced them, together with competitions to encourage children to sing, dance and act. One school set up a local artefacts museum, collecting tools and instruments which used to be associated with daily living but were fast disappearing, which the children help curate and maintain.

*Improvement of the infrastructure of the school:*

In one instance, the SDMC took the initiative to upgrade the school from a one-room school which served Classes 1 through 4, to a four-room school, serving Classes 1 through 7. In addition, there is also an office for the principal, part of which doubles as a ‘stock room’, a kitchen, and a broad, covered verandah where the children are served their meals. The SDMC followed up with government officials for the necessary permissions, and also sourced local government and SSA funds to dig a covered well, build a compound wall and toilets, and the kitchen. At another school, the SDMC keeps in close touch with the local government to see which government schemes can be used to improve the school’s

infrastructure. Water was brought to the school under the government's Suvarna Jala scheme, a pukka kitchen constructed, and the school building renovated. A state newspaper reports the instance of a school which local citizens had demanded be closed because classes were held so rarely, as teachers found it too difficult to travel for four hours one way from the nearest town to teach at the school, and no accommodation was available locally. An activated SDMC raised contributions from the community and from various government schemes to construct "teachers' quarters." Now the school has six teachers, classes are held regularly, and the school recently won the SSA's "Best School" award.<sup>7</sup>

*Improvement in the financial and functional monitoring of the school:*

At one school, before the installation of an elected SDMC, funds meant for the school were administered by the MLA's crony who was nominated president, and no accountability mechanism existed when these were not utilised for the benefit of the school. After the installation, funds meant for the school are jointly administered by the head teacher and the SDMC President, and regular accounts are presented to the SDMC and to the larger body of parents. At another school too, the SDMC also undertakes good financial management and monitoring – "all resources meant for the school should be used for the school" – and source materials through tenders and make payments based on bills. The SDMCs lay down standards for hygiene levels to be maintained in the preparation and service of mid-day meals, e.g., storage of cleaned food grains in covered plastic bins provided by the SDMC, creation of a covered seating area for all children to be served their meals, etc. In one instance when the rice supplied by the government was held by the SDMC as being of unacceptable quality, they complained to the local government authorities and insisted that the stocks be replaced.

*Getting the community to take responsibility for the school and contribute time, effort and resources to the school:*

"We have created a culture so that the community sees school needs as part of their own needs and are willing to contribute," said the president of one SDMC. To cite an example, "For many things, we need to go to the nearest big town, which is 20 km away. When there is something the school requires, we tell someone who is going to the town for their personal work, and they do what is necessary. For example, when the school ran out of cooking gas, and the delivery of the cylinder was not scheduled for another ten days, we told one of the young men to collect a cylinder and bring it on his motorcycle."

The SDMC inspires the community to contribute milk products like curds and buttermilk, and locally grown vegetables to augment the midday meal provided by the government, and it has increasingly become the norm for private celebrations to extend to the school community so that the special foods associated with them become part of the midday meal. SDMC members are able to convince young people who have been trained in cultural activities like folk dance or music to train students from the school, or hold classes during holiday camps, while community members contribute their courtyards and refreshments during these camps.

The efforts of proactive and effective SDMCs to improve the quality of the school experience is being met with recognition from the community which is voting with its feet in three ways – firstly, increased participation by more members of the community in schooling related matters. Secondly, said one SDMC member, "now, children from neighbouring communities are sent to stay with relatives or family

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<sup>7</sup> Retrieved at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/21252/class-session-madappady.html>

friends in this community so that they can attend this school.” Thirdly, civil society organisations find SDMCs appropriate bodies through which to channelise resources and capacity building initiatives. Examples of such support come from large organisations like the India Literacy Project (capacity building of SDMC members to undertake monitoring of school functioning effectively), Arghyam (assistance with extending safe drinking water by facilitating implementation of the government’s Suvarna Jala scheme), Azim Premji Foundation (improving the quality of the school experience through computer education, independent assessments of student achievement, and performance incentives), etc., as well as hundreds of small, local NGOs and CBOs.

It is clear from even this limited study that SDMCs can prove an effective and creative mechanism to develop and monitor schools according to their stated function. The steps necessary to make such effective SDMCs the rule rather than the exception include creating a climate in which communities are able to overcome the inertia of past ways of functioning that did not allow them viable and vibrant opportunities to contribute to improving the quality of schooling, including overcoming existing vested interests, and identifying suitable change agents and resources within the community. Another important systemic issue that will require attention involves overcoming the lack of interest and cooperation on the part of teachers to attend SDMC meetings. “Teachers feel threatened by any expectations greater than the standard teaching,” said one SDMC member. Simultaneous encouragement of capacity-building as well as demands for accountability will probably be possible only when funds, functions and functionaries related to schooling are transferred to the supervision of local governments, and SDMCs and local governments work in harmony to benefit India’s schoolchildren.

#### **Section IV:**

#### **Activity-Based Learning (ABL) and Active Learning Methodologies: Building transformative pedagogies for government schools through public-private knowledge networking and capacity development**

In recent years, public-private partnerships have been promoted in many fields, and this has been true for education as well. This may take various forms, including ‘school adoption’, and often receives the tacit or explicit approval of government bureaucrats who are either disheartened by the leakages and poor performance of government school systems, or unwilling to put in the energy, will and creativity necessary to transform them. Majumdar has commented on the disturbing caste and class implications of this trend, noting that “the middle classes have ‘watched the decline of the average government school with indifference’ and withdrawn their children from these schools in favour of private schools. Just at a time when the poor and the previously excluded lower caste children have started to avail themselves of subsidized schooling, the latter has begun to decline in quality.”<sup>8</sup>

It is in this context that the efforts of first, the Corporation of Chennai, and later the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Tamil Nadu, to harness private entities for “augmenting the state system’s meagre capacity to innovate”<sup>9</sup> appear exceptionally promising and productive, resulting in the evolution of Activity Based Learning (ABL) for students in classes below Class V, and Active Learning Methodology (ALM) for students in middle and high school. Apart from document reviews, extensive interviews with the State Project Director, Deputy Director and Coordinator of the SSA in Tamil Nadu; extensive interviews with the Coordinator of the Outreach Team of The School, Chennai, observation of training

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<sup>8</sup> Majumdar, M. (2007). Value of Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*. January 27. 42(4): 295-298.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

workshops on ALM for BRTes from all over Tamil Nadu conducted in Chennai, field visits were also conducted to six schools in Chennai district (Perambur Purasawalkam Taluk), Kancheepuram District (Sriperumbudur Taluk) and Tiruvallur District (Ambattur Taluk), as well as Kodaikanal, and Palani taluks of Dindigul district, and classroom observations, interviews and focus group discussions conducted, involving interactions with students, teachers and parents to understand the initiatives of the SSA in Tamil Nadu to improve the quality of schooling.

Mr. M.P. Vijaykumar, currently Honorary Advisor to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, has a passion for education, which saw him search for methodologies that would transform government school classrooms to places of learning, from the time he was District Collector of Vellore. The seeds and principles of the answer for the youngest group of learners currently in government schools, from Classes I through IV, he found in the Rishi Valley Educational Resource Centre (RIVER) in Andhra Pradesh. He deputed groups of teachers and Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTes) to the centre for training. They in turn adapted the materials and activity-based techniques to which they had been exposed to the Tamil Nadu state curriculum to create a methodology called Activity-Based Learning (ABL) for use in their classrooms.

The Activity-Based Learning method dispenses with textbooks. Rather,

- The skills and core competencies that they need to learn through the primary years are presented in the form of “learning ladders” – material in small incremental units on cards, to be completed serially, with self-evaluation cards at the end of each unit. This provides structure to the curriculum while allowing every child to learn at her own pace.
- Learning materials are colour-coded to show class-level, with insect and animal logos for different aspects of the curriculum. They are stacked on accessible shelves. Children help themselves to cards from the set on which they are working, instead of being assigned work by the teacher, increasing independence and engagement with their work.
- A blackboard is provided at the child’s eye level with a specific space for each child to write what he or she has learned that day. By scanning this blackboard, which runs around the classroom, the teacher is able to keep track of what each child is learning.
- Whereas in most classrooms, teachers have a general idea of who are the “bright” students in the class and the ones who are “failing”, with the mass of students falling into an undifferentiated average, ABL provides tools for a more refined understanding of the levels of achievement of each pupil. The teacher’s consolidated progress report, the “Achievement Chart”, takes note of what level the child is performing at for each subject, depending on the sequence of cards being worked on. Hence, a child might officially be in Standard IV, at the Standard II level in English, Standard IV level in Mathematics and Standard V level in Tamil.
- ABL also provides the flexibility for multi-age classrooms, with a government order specifying that classes may be combined in the way that the school considers most conducive to learning. This provides opportunities for peer-assisted learning.

The ABL programme was introduced in the schools under the Corporation of Chennai when Vijaykumar became Commissioner. In the first phase, the programme was implemented in one school each of the ten zones of the City Corporation. Weekly meetings were conducted with the teachers of the thirteen schools where, together with the Commissioner, two supervisors, a lecturer from DIET and a professor on lien from the DTERT, etc., they discussed problems that came up during the application of the methodology in the classroom, looked for underlying causes and came up with pedagogical solutions which teachers could apply the following week.

Feedback from the classrooms was used to refine the cards and prepare the prototypes for printing. Alongside the preparation of the materials, teachers up to Class 3 in all the primary and middle schools were trained to use the materials. When the programme started in June 2004, it did so with learning materials, workbooks and trained teachers in place.



Both independent as well as in-house evaluations of the programme found much to commend it. Advantages included increasing the child's sense of ownership of both the classroom space (with each child having a section of the blackboard) and the learning process (with each child setting the pace for his or her learning, and undertaking self-evaluation at regular intervals) and vanquishing "the *asura* called [the] Annual Exam" (Anandalakshmy, 2007). Further, the method eliminated the ranking system with its potential for encouraging unhealthy competition. There is no room in the programme to accommodate the survival strategy used by generations of Indian students - rote learning. A great advantage of the system was that it generated an intrinsic discipline; that it no longer called for "teachers losing their voices because of their shouting and screaming to keep the children quiet."<sup>10</sup>

When Vijaykumar took over as State Project Director, SSA, he upscaled the ABL pedagogy to cover the entire state in 2007. Realizing that a Government Order cannot change systems that have been in place for decades, he provided for on-site support. He sent ABL trained teachers from the Chennai Corporation who had been working with the method for three to four years already to the districts to help put the new system in place. He personally called the DEOs, requesting them to assist the teacher trainers. "4-5 model schools were chosen, 100 schools in every block, BRTes were trained, and teachers were trained...The system has the capacity – materials reached the schools in 2-3 months...40-50 lakhs is a pittance for the government"<sup>11</sup>. The involvement of large numbers of teachers in the process had a significant impact.

Field visits confirmed that the ABL materials have, indeed, reached schools in remote tribal areas of Tamil Nadu as well. There have been problems with dilution attendant to the scaling up, as all teachers are yet to fully understand the philosophy and practices of the methodology. However, the children are happier even with this diluted version, liberated now from the tyranny of the textbook. Meanwhile, through exposure visits and training workshops, teachers continue to receive opportunities for capacity building at regular intervals.

Krishna Kumar (2008) noted the reluctance of the advocates of privatization to recognize efforts to improve access to and quality in government schools as a model of public-private partnerships, since "their entire focus is on running schools, not improving the system."<sup>12</sup> The SSA experiment in Tamil Nadu suggests that government systems, which several sections of society look upon as inefficient, corrupt, and insensitive behemoths, can transform themselves with inspiring leadership, institutional support, opportunities for creative and fulfilling work, and most importantly, the ability to gauge and adjust themselves to the needs of citizens.

#### *Active Learning Methodologies:*

When the SSA in Tamil Nadu began thinking about extending Activity-Based Learning or finding other appropriate methodologies suitable for the middle school level, the then State Project Director, Mr. M.P. Vijaykumar (currently Honorary Advisor to the SSA) began with a ground level search and research. These led him to The School, a school with a reputation for being an elite institution, run by the Krishnamurti Foundation.

The Outreach Team of The School had, as an offshoot of a life-skills programme it designed for teachers of the Chennai City Corporation Schools in 2003, undertaken some serious research to build a theoretical framework for learning, based on teaching-learning practices already in place in their own

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<sup>10</sup> Anandalakshmy, S. (No date). Activity Based Learning: A report on an innovative method in Tamil Nadu. Unpublished Report. Chennai: Bala Mandir.

<sup>11</sup> M.P. Vijaykumar, (2007). *Personal interview*. September 13.

<sup>12</sup> Kumar, K. (2008). Partners in Education? *Economic and Political Weekly*. January 19. 43(3): 8-11.

school. Both resource persons and school teachers had felt it was important that education should not only stimulate thinking skills, but actively motivate the child to learn. This coalesced into a programme, “Karpavarai Thotruvippom” – which translates, minus the daring and imagination of the Tamil, to ‘evolving the learner’. The goals of the ALM programme for middle schools are lofty; “to evoke in every student an awareness of one’s person-hood and potential, to be responsible for one’s physical, psychological and social environment, and the opportunity and initiative to access and shine in one’s own chosen field or profession.”<sup>13</sup>

The programme was evolved and tested in The School. When the then SSA State Project Director heard about it, he came to the school and sat through classes with the children. He asked them questions, not only about the subject, but meta-questions about the method, “How do you know that you know?” “How do you retain what you know to answer the exams?” Impressed by what he saw, he asked the Outreach Team to give him and his team of Deputy Directors of SSA, a one-day workshop on the methodology of ALM. Vijaykumar had found a method that would build on ABL in the middle schools. Nevertheless, he reminded the Outreach Team that, in the middle schools, they would have to work within the constraints of the textbook and the examination system. After intense preparatory work, adapting the methodology to the different content, and the demands of the government school systems, the first workshop for two Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTes) from each district was organized in the last week of May 2007. By the time schools reopened in June 2007, the programme was ready to be pilot tested.

According to Sumitra M. Gautama, the Coordinator of The School’s Outreach Team and the moving spirit behind bringing ALM to government schools, “The learner-based curriculum takes ABL forward by empowering the learner to break into knowledge systems effectively, whether in the textbook or in the world around. In that sense the classroom is seen as a microcosm of the world.” The methodology recognises that “good teaching does not automatically lead to good learning...The learner-based curriculum places the child’s engagement with his learning at the centre and sees the teacher as a facilitator in the process.” The methodology emphasizes “five essential processes for every child in the classroom:

1. **Reading** ( underlining key words, listing and finding out meanings of words not known), & identifying main ideas/themes in a lesson
2. **Drawing a Mind Map** of the key perspectives
3. **Summarizing** in various ways the key facts
4. **Writing** the answers to questions that appear at the back of each lesson
5. **Having Discussions** based on the lesson in small groups.

A student has to use all these processes in studying a lesson. The student therefore constructs his/her understanding and is not a passive recipient of the knowledge of the teacher.”

(Gautama, 2007)<sup>14</sup>

The template for teacher facilitation shifts the emphasis from the *content* to the *process* of learning, which involves six principles. The teacher introduces the topic (*Introduction*), sets questions for guided reading (*Understanding*), plans, sets and supports the reinforcement activity (*Consolidation*), anchors the discussions (*Discussion*), plans and undertakes the assessment (*Assessment*) and, if necessary, designs a supporting, remedial activity (*Remediation*). Some formats like self study, SQ4R, etc are advocated, incorporating the essential methods of learning for the student and the basic template for the teacher. The teacher can follow these formats or evolve her/his own (incorporating the

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<sup>13</sup> Gautama, S. M. ALM Concept Note. Unpublished planning document. July 11, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

essential elements). All formats include writing answers to questions in the textbook and preparing for examinations.

The workshops and follow up programmes for teacher training and support in ALM were designed to provide support to the teacher so that she could build expertise in the different tasks demanded of her. The workshops had modules devoted to the development of skills & formats used in Active Learning Methodologies in the classroom, understanding the individual learner in his/her learning style and capacities, the basis of material division and preparation of lesson plans, setting time frames, learning to set benchmarks and outcomes for different pieces of work, evolving criteria for assessment and different assessment formats.

The ALM format is perceived by teachers and teacher trainers as necessary, at least in the initial period of implementation. Without a format, the feeling was that the methodology could be too demanding on the teacher, at many levels. It assumes, on the part of the teacher, a thorough understanding of the principles behind the methodology, the concept of child-centred learning, and that of the evolving learner.

In practice, the following features are distinctive of ALM.

- 'The learner' is interpreted as 'every child'. ALM is designed to ensure that every child in the classroom is involved in the process of learning.
- Every child learns at her own pace. ALM provides opportunities for this.
- A variety of different skills are taught, actively learned and practised during an ALM class. This makes for student engagement and interest throughout the lesson.
- As every child learns something in every class, there is a genuine sense of achievement, confidence and pride for her in every class.
- The teacher's role is redefined as that of a facilitator- someone still in charge, but not simply as 'giver of knowledge'. As facilitator, she has a more challenging role, that of creating opportunities for every child to learn according to her ability, and of creating a lesson that caters to differential learning needs. ALM helps the teacher with a basic framework to achieve this.

ALM sees academic learning as merely one "interface" of education. It also looks at "daily contexts of interaction between teachers and students and among peers" and of "academic and psychosocial enrichment activities" that go beyond the textbook. For example, teachers worked collaboratively on a child data form, and other observation formats. Compiling the data reinforces the teacher's knowledge of the child's background, strengths and constraints, and assists the teacher in choosing more sensitive and appropriate ways of interacting with the child. Value Education (including building skills in areas like Resourcefulness, Emotional Intelligence, etc.), Enrichment areas (e.g., Health, Safety, Citizenship, Environment) and the Classroom Activities & Experiments (a minimum of one activity for each lesson) are examples of the latter interface.<sup>15</sup>

### **Transformation in government school classrooms:**

Evidence from other independent evaluators, as well as our own observations in classrooms of schools managed by the Corporation of Chennai as well as in other districts suggests that both ABL and ALM have the potential to transform the classroom and make it full of engaged, interested learners. In interviews with Amukta Mahapatra, a well-known educator and teacher-educator, presented in Mena (2006), students, teachers and parents testified to the transformation that ABL had wrought. Students appreciated teachers sitting with them while they learnt, their sense of autonomy in "taking the cards", the fact that the teacher no longer taught from the textbook and that they did not miss their lessons when they were absent. Teachers said, "In Class One itself they are reading well...Class Three children

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

are able to read the newspaper...We should go further into this method.” Parents regretted a lost opportunity for learning from the time they were in school. “We feel very much that we were not given this opportunity in our days. If the ABL method was in practice a decade ago, we might have studied well.”<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, our observations of classrooms using ALM showed learning happening with a degree of engagement and class participation which we have generally ceased to associate with government schools. In a class on India’s Defence Systems that we observed in Mogappair, the success of the formats of ALM was enhanced by the teacher’s creative modifications based on her intimate knowledge of her class. At almost every step of the learning process, she introduced subtle and significant changes, which made for great class participation in oral and written work in the classroom, as well as presentation skills. The class went well beyond school hours, and when the teacher gently urged them to finish quickly so they could go home, one of the boys piped up, “But we have to ask questions after this, miss!” and indeed, the class went on for a good half hour after that. The whole class was alive with energy.

We saw this happy scenario in three different schools, and were invited by the Tamil Nadu SSA to “go wherever you want” to study the implementation of ALM in the state’s middle schools further. There is no doubt that teachers implementing the system will face challenges, and besides, there will be variability of success in implementation, until the system takes root conceptually as well as practically, even assuming that all necessary and appropriate systemic and structural supports will be put in place and maintained.

For example, at a school in Kancheepuram District, the teacher took the class through all the steps of ALM, the independent reading, difficult words, mind-mapping, and summary, and even taught the class to sing a song that she had composed on the science lesson of the day, the Food Chain. However, when a student asked for the meaning of a difficult word, she said, “This is such an easy word! Ask me another.” The teacher chose the students who would present mindmaps and summaries. No questions were asked, and so there was no discussion, and finally she put up her mindmap on the board, which she had prepared as a coloured chart at home. When we interviewed her after class, and asked her what she thought of ALM, she told us that she had always been “doing these things” and that “this method depends entirely on the teacher”. How true, and yet we could see how the format, which had become teacher-centric instead of learner-centric, had become soulless. Putting thought and effort into how the necessary institutionalisations can occur, while simultaneously guarding against such distortions of transformative methodologies like ALM, is clearly critical.

However, the government machinery appears to be taking the necessary steps for such processes with ABL, with the concomitant improvements. Compared to a baseline study in 2007, a follow-up study in 2008 showed that students in more classrooms (45% compared to 20%) paid attention to the teacher, teachers used more teaching materials (53% compared to 32%) and more teachers supported explanations of learning concepts with clear examples (50% compared to 32%). Alternative teaching methodologies including varieties of groups strategies were observed in 50% of the classrooms in 2008 (18% in 2007) and the learning atmosphere was rated friendly in 71% of the classrooms (26% in 2007). These and other positive changes had translated into an increase of 25 to 29% in average achievement in Tamil, English and Mathematics by 2008, while between 20 and 40% of the children had shifted from the low to the high and excellent achievement categories. There were also significant reductions in the gaps in achievement seen between boys and girls, students in urban and rural settings and between

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<sup>16</sup> Mena, S. (2006). *Activity based Learning Programme of the Corporation of Chennai: A Mid-Term Appraisal*. Chennai: Corporation of Chennai

social groups.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the study by Mahapatra et al. (2008) appeared to prove that increased expectations coupled with transfer of technical expertise and ongoing systemic support can bring about changes in the schooling experience, and leads us to hope that a similar transformation is possible through ALM for the middle and high school grades as well.

When we interviewed Sumitra Gautama, she had expressed some reservation about giving teachers a lesson format, perhaps in the fear that it might generate too much dependence on the format and kill creativity. “I still feel that there is room for other strategies than mindmapping, summarizing, etc.” But when she suggested to the BRTes, during the workshop, that they need not insist on a uniform format, there was an immediate protest. One participant said, “Don’t dilute this, madam”.

However, there are several features of the ALM experiment in Tamil Nadu which give us reason to hope:

- **A keen analysis of the complexities and contradictions underlying the crisis in learning in government schools, and a willingness to acknowledge and address them.** Contradictions such as, “Children learn everywhere and all the time. Give them a mobile phone or a tape player and they figure out how it works in no time. So why aren’t they learning in school?” A further contradiction involves teachers: “Generations of policymakers since independence have blamed the teachers for the poor education in government schools. But all five thousand government school teachers cannot be black sheep.”
- **A strong commitment to education in the leadership:** The then State Project Director personally sought out, attended and evaluated quality educational solutions, and asked anyone who walks through the door of his office, “What can you do for government schools?”
- **Giving teachers and teacher educators equal ownership in the collaboration.** Quick fix solutions from the private partner were not thrust on teachers and teacher educators. After every training, teachers were asked, “Can you use it? How can you adapt this for your children? What supports do you need from the system?”
- **A capacity to inspire teams, and offer access and problem solving skills:** Everywhere we went, government employees at every level: teachers, BRTes, Cluster Resource persons, coordinators, spoke of being respected, their voices heard, their opinions sought, their problems solved collaboratively.
- **An unwillingness to stop at the minimum:** The first workshop for training the BRTes was followed by others on how to make lesson plans that reflect ALM, on how to teach Value Education, and how to develop Enrichment Activities related to the content and to society.
- **Ground level monitoring, evaluation and support for adjustment:** The senior management typically was in the office one day in a week to attend to paperwork, the rest of the time all of them travelled to the nooks of the state, inspiring teachers, persuading bureaucrats in the education department to provide the necessary systemic supports, and winning the support of head teachers and AEOs for the methodologies.

At the time of the site visits, the methodologies had been in place for just a year, and it was early days yet, but already a perceptible difference was reported by different stakeholders within the system. We heard a student ask a headmistress, long after the official close of the school day, “Can’t you arrange for our dinner so we can stay in school?” A teacher said, “I am due to retire next year. Now finally, I feel my life has been fulfilled. Students surround me, and touch me, as they come to get doubts cleared. They are no longer afraid.” Teachers all over the state were reporting that the dreaded Section C of the

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<sup>17</sup> Mahapatra, A., Baker, K.L. & Sahoo, R.N. (2008). *Activity-Based Learning – Effectiveness of ABL under SSA: June 2007-April 2008. A report of baseline and year-end surveys by SchoolScape Centre of Education and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, Government of Tamil Nadu.* Retrieved at [www.educationforallindia.com/evaluation-of-activity-based-learning-of-tamil-nadu.pdf](http://www.educationforallindia.com/evaluation-of-activity-based-learning-of-tamil-nadu.pdf)

middle school question paper, which asked for summaries of lessons, was no longer left blank. Almost all students were attempting the question, and even the ones who struggled were writing two or three points.

The public-private partnership between private schools and the Corporation of Chennai, and later, the SSA, holds out hope that government schools can be places of learning. Apart from the stories of personal engagement and fulfilment, this initiative may hold the key to many other concerns. Studies have shown “[lack of] interest in studies... as the most important predictor associated with dropping out of school” (Choudhury, 2006).<sup>18</sup> In a country struggling with poverty alleviation, it makes sense to inspire children to remain in school when, “Overall for the eight years of schooling in elementary school, every extra year of schooling yields about an additional 5 per cent in incomes” (Bhandari & Bordoloi, 2006).<sup>19</sup> Geetha Venkataraman (2007) bemoaned how schools make no demands on children’s thinking skills, and how this pattern sets how they learn and operate in the world later.<sup>20</sup> Vimala Ramachandran (2006) spoke of the “urgent need to re-imagine literacy and education, overhaul the system and link education to life, livelihood, peace and social justice.”<sup>21</sup> Examining the workshop notes of Gautama, we see that Ramachandran may have been speaking of the goals of ALM. “We see Active Learning Methodologies as the bridge that can help all young people, regardless of class or background, to feel that they are part of one world and one future. ALM is also the link between knowledge and empowerment - it equips the student with the ability to think, to apply and to discover... to negotiate the world of knowledge on his own terms, in his own way, and be a productive and fulfilled citizen.”<sup>22</sup> If ALM can realise these goals, it can go far beyond being an effective pedagogic tool for the teacher in the classroom, to a vision for a new society of learners, for a new democracy. We may all have a lot riding on the success of this initiative.

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<sup>18</sup> Choudhury, A. (2006). Revisiting dropouts: Old issues, fresh perspectives. *Economic and Political Weekly*. December 23. 41(51): 5257-5263.

<sup>19</sup> Bhandari, L. & Bordoloi, M. (2006). Income differentials and returns to education. *Economic and Political Weekly*. September 9. 41(36): 3893-3900.

<sup>20</sup> Venkataraman, G. (2007). Teaching students to think. *Economic and Political Weekly*. August 25. 42(34): 3449-3451.

<sup>21</sup> Ramachandran, V. (2006). Literacy and Education. *Economic and Political Weekly*. August 25. 41(47): 3449-3451.

<sup>22</sup> Gautama, S. M. ALM Concept Note. Unpublished planning document. July 11, 2007.

## **Section V:**

### **Community Owned and Managed Education: Setting up Schools for Tribal Children in Dindigul district**

Sujatha (1999), in her study on the education of Indian Scheduled Tribes in Vishakhapatnam district, described how community schools emerged as a viable option for tribal children living in small, dispersed hamlets in remote forested and hilly areas to get some education. The study describes how, when other options like single-teacher schools failed in the area because of high teacher absenteeism, 926 community schools were developed under a project called the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development Project (APTDP). These schools were set up on a partnership basis between communities and the government, had extensive community participation in resource mobilisation as well as monitoring, served children upto Class II, and worked as feeder schools for residential Ashram schools. While the schools were quite successful in ensuring students' enrolment and attendance, checking teacher absenteeism, and providing education in a culturally appropriate context, they did not function as effectively in terms of either high learning outcomes or effective transition to Grade III.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, the current rate of literacy among the tribal population in the state stands at 27.9%. In this context, it is worthwhile to consider a similar experiment in "Community (Owned and) Managed Education" by traditionally marginalised and disadvantaged tribal communities in Dindigul district. Facilitated by a non-governmental organisation called Rural Education for Action and Development, local community-based organisations set up five primary schools and two balawadis to serve their communities in the Kodaikanal, Oddanchatram, Palani and Vadamadurai taluks. The experiment was different from that expressed in Sujatha (1999) in that the genesis was not from an externally funded project like the APTDP, but emerged out of a particular history, related to the exploitation, and later, the conscientisation of the tribal communities of the lower Palani hills, particularly in the Kodaikanal area. To understand the unique history, challenges, innovations and strengths of this educational experiment, in addition to field visits to three schools, interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with students, community leaders, parents, SHG members and leaders, village education committee members, head teachers, teachers, representatives of tribal community-based organisations like Maavatta Paaliyar Sangham, Maavatta Pazhamkudimakkal Sangham and the District Tribal Association, apart from functionaries and representatives of READ.

As late as the 1990s, hundreds of tribal families, belonging to the Paliyar, Pulayar, Malaivedan, Kattunayakan, Muduvar, Malajar, Valaiyar and Malaipandaram communities, had worked as bonded labourers over generations in the estates in the Kodaikanal and lower Palani hill areas. Their experiences were marked by exploitation through poor working conditions and very poor wages, physical abuse, lack of access to any grievance redressal system, and sexual exploitation of women. Many of these areas were only accessible by footpaths through the thickly forested hills, and the lack of accessibility ensured that these conditions could be maintained without fear of official intervention as late as the 1990s. NGO representatives from organisations like the Rural Education and Action for Development (READ) managed to get information about the tribals in bonded labour to national newspapers like the Hindu and the Indian Express in the mid-1990s. Denials by the state government led to orders from the Supreme Court that an independent team carry out investigations into the newspaper reports. When the allegations were confirmed, the Supreme Court directed that certain reputed NGOs working in the area carry out the identification and enumeration of such families, and file

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<sup>23</sup> Sujatha, K. (1999). *Education of India[sic] Scheduled Tribes: A study of community schools in the district of Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning/UNESCO.

petitions for their release and rehabilitation. In spite of attacks by vested interests, including the thugs of estate owners in cahoots with local politicians, between 1996 and 2002, 1,248 families were released.

The causes for the development of community schools by tribal populations in these areas and the process by which these evolved show many interesting features. These include:

*Developing an appreciation for the value of education:*

Using the meagre compensation that they received from the government, the tribal families released from bonded labour built dwellings for themselves. However, they were displaced from the estates where their families had lived, sometimes for decades or even a century, and more salient, since they had now unionised, they could not obtain agricultural wage labour in the estates where they were formerly employed. They could find menial work, e.g., as hotel workers in the plains, but only at the cost of abandoning the hills and the forests, their traditional habitat and many aspects of their culture. These difficulties related to problems with employability drove home the importance of education. Likewise, the conscientisation process, in which they were assisted by NGOs, also made it clear that the exploitation that they had suffered for centuries was based, to a great extent, on their lack of awareness and education. What was more, their lack of education meant that they had little influence in the administrative system with at the time, as, according to an office-bearer of a tribal organisation, “not even a peon in a government office belonged to our communities.” Consequently, these communities developed an almost missionary zeal to educate their children.

*Lack of initial support from the government:*

The communities sought support from the government to set up schools for their children. Since they had established contacts with the Revenue Divisional Officer, who had undertaken some of the rehabilitation work based on the court directives, they approached him. The officer promised to speak to the Assistant Education Officer and the District Education Officer. However, the stand of the DEO was that even if they sanctioned a school, the hamlets were so small and remote that teachers would not take up the assignment. They suggested that work be undertaken through the Tribal Welfare Department. Accordingly, community representatives, in the late 1990s, met the then Commissioner for SC/ST welfare. He held that a school for 420 children had been sanctioned in Perumparai village, and since the Census showed only 200 tribal families in the area, no more schools could be sanctioned. He refused the community’s contention that there were in fact many more tribal families which had not been covered by the Census, located as they were in very remote, and hilly areas to which no enumerators had come, and demanded that they produce community certificates. The representatives went back to their villages and submitted petitions for 1,200 children to get certificates stating their community status. Revenue officers came to the villages, carried out assessments, and issued 1,000 certificates. When they went back to the Commissioner with the documentary evidence of children who needed schooling facilities, he said that until all 420 seats at the Perumparai school were taken, he would sanction no more schools. He asked the NGO representatives who had accompanied the community representatives, “These are children of nature, they will collect forest produce and live. Why are you making a nuisance of yourselves asking for schools for them?”

*Tribal values of participatory problem solving, community involvement and sharing of resources:*

After extensive consultations to solve the issue, the community then decided to set up their own schools. Class XII graduates were identified from Kodaikanal who served as teachers. Each family contributed Rs. 5 per child being sent to school, and, initially, in 1998-1999, the teachers received a salary of Rs. 300, along with food and accommodation. Members of the community gathered bamboo, forest grass, etc., and built the schoolrooms with the whole village contributing their labour, and even



the children doing their bit. They also built huts so that the teachers could stay in the village. Members of the community took it in turns to provide food for the teachers. In this way, teachers were made a part of the community, and accountability became easier.

*Leveraging of resources from multiple sources:*

The community realised that there were many NGOs working in the area, which would be willing to include the villages in their programmes. Accordingly, they began negotiations with them, asking them for resources that they could contribute to the school. “They would actually bargain, saying “X NGO is giving our school these things. What can your NGO contribute?” Accordingly, NGOs provided slates, books, teaching aids like charts, as well as made contributions towards a noon meal for children. Small grants were also made for improving infrastructure. The NGOs also provided funds to raise the salaries of the teachers to Rs.1,500. The NGOs provided support to ensure that the teachers could attend any in-service trainings or education-related workshops being conducted by the NGO community in the area. The community continues to network with NGOs to secure resources and ensure regular medical check-ups for the school children. Another indirect way in which education was supported was by using the services of NGOs to develop additional livelihood options for themselves, like beekeeping, so that the families did not miss the earnings of children who were no longer working.

*Developing a culturally-appropriate curriculum:*

The community took the support of the NGOs to develop the curriculum for the school in the early days. In addition, tribal leaders and elders of the community sat down with the teachers and worked out slots when the children would learn the traditional musical instruments like the drum and flute, the ritual songs and dances, techniques of hunting and trapping which are part of tribal ritual and culture. Children learn about medicinal herbs, barks, etc., and how to gather and store these. Traditional tribal values related to protection of the forest, conservation of water, etc. were also incorporated into the curriculum. Now, the schools follow the ABL method, and all the related resources are available in the schools.

*Lobbying and advocacy to secure systemic supports:*

Simultaneously, the strong community-based organisations, with NGO support worked to establish contacts and win the support of government systems and secure resources. They obtained permission for teachers from these schools to attend trainings organised by the SSA. They lobbied with the District Collector and got him to visit all the schools. Enthused by the community’s drive to educate their children, the Collector came and stayed with the community over four or five weekends, teaching the children on Saturday and Sunday. He encouraged the community to apply to get their schools taken over by the government, and accordingly, in 2004, proposals for recognition, aid and takeover of the schools were submitted. After inspection by the DEO, the schools were granted approval. The District Collector also included a report on these schools in his annual report to the Centre. Intrigued by the report, a team of 20 MPs, including members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Tribal Welfare visited the schools, and recommended that the government provide land and funds for the construction of permanent structures for the schools. Accordingly, permanent structures were constructed. The local panchayat authorities also supported the community by providing the necessary approvals for construction, water connections, etc.

*Local Monitoring:*

In the early days, members of the community would take it in turns to attend classes at the school everyday to observe and monitor activities. “Even though we are illiterate, we are smart enough to figure out whether the teacher was doing her work or slacking off. We would tell them, ‘You need to

increase the standard. Our children should be able to write well enough to write applications and petitions on behalf of the whole community.” This level of close monitoring continued till 2004, until certain expectations were clearly established. Members of the women’s collectives continue to monitor enrolment and attendance, and if children play truant from school, hold their mothers accountable. “We tell the children, ‘Do whatever you want, but only after attending school.’” Government resources for construction are routed through the Village Education Committees, and community members monitor both the flow of resources and activities like construction, purchase of vegetables for the noon meal, etc. to ensure that all resources meant for the school and the children are used efficiently. The local monitoring has continued even after the schools have been taken over by the government. Preparation and serving of the noon meal are supervised by representatives of the women’s collectives. The teacher and the head teacher, who are no longer paid by the community but by the government, are still expected to stay in the village, and have to apply to the village elders to take a day off. At one school, the village elders said, “The present head teacher’s family stays in Dindigul. The elders have laid down that if he goes home, he has to be back by 7 a.m. There are enough committed members of the community on every committee and no one can siphon off funds. And there are only two buses to our villages, one early in the morning, and another at 5 o’clock, which is always full of locals. It is impossible for the teacher or head teacher to take away any resources that belong to the school.”

#### *Community mobilisation and persistent follow-up:*

One reason why the communities have been successful is that they have had to fight hard for almost all the facilities they have secured, and to counter the various impediments they have had to work collectively, and be persistent. For instance, when they first attempted to set up schools, the local estate owners sent thugs to intimidate them. They were threatened, “Before you send your child to school, repay all your loans”, or “If you send your child to school, we won’t give you work.” In one area, these vested interests even sent men on horseback to destroy the initial thatched hut that functioned as a schoolroom. The community also had to fight against corrupt forest officials who registered false cases against the community, accusing them of stealing sandalwood. After a process of agitation and negotiation, several communities are now involved in Joint Forest Management programmes. After a ten year agitation to get the government to build a road to hamlets for which the nearest bus route was 10-13 kilometres away, a group of 500 women gheraoed the Collector and put pressure on the MLA and MP to get a road built. Said one leader of a women’s collective, who spearheaded this agitation and has now been elected a Ward Councillor in the local government. “Our MP and MLA help us. We go directly to them and ask for what we want, and they do what the community needs.”

#### *Challenges:*

In spite of the progress that has been made, there are still many challenges that continue to act as hurdles for the tribal children. Once they pass Grade V, most of the children are forced to go to schools about 10 kilometres away, or a residential school in Kodaikanal to continue their education, because there are no upper primary or high schools closer. This has proved a major deterrent for children to continue their studies. Many families have still not obtained the community certificates that will enable them to enrol their children in government schools and get scholarships and other benefits. “The administration is unhelpful and we have been fighting for this issue for several years now. Several of us belong to the Malaivedan community, but the administration wants us to accept certificates showing that we belong to the Vedanayakan community. We don’t want those certificates.” Gender issues are also becoming apparent. Girls have been showing greater interest in continuing their education. Boys, after the fifth grade, are able to find work gathering forest produce for six months of the year. Once they start earning money, their interest in going to school drops dramatically. “They say, ‘Send the girls, we won’t go.’” Also, maintaining the tribal cultural practices in the context of the onslaught of more

mainstream popular culture is becoming more of a battle. “The children say, “We don’t want to learn to play the drums. Show us movies.”

In all, five schools, which have grades 1 through 5, and enrolments ranging from 50 to 80 students; and two Balawadis, with about 20 children, have been established through the Community Owned and Managed Education initiative of the tribal communities in Dindigul district. That these marginalised communities, many of whose members are illiterate themselves, are able to play strong and proactive roles in promoting education, locating resources, and monitoring school functioning should give us hope that the increased role envisaged for community monitoring in the new Right to Education Act is relevant and can make a significant difference in helping the state deliver on its commitment to educate all the country’s children.

#### *Section VI:*

#### **Examples of Effective Government and Public-Private Initiatives in the Administration of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Karnataka.**

According to the United Nations World Food Programme, “For a child suffering from hunger, going to school is not important; having enough food to eat is...On empty stomachs, children become easily distracted and have problems concentrating on their lessons. The promise of at least one nutritious meal each day attracts children to school, boosts enrolment, promotes regular attendance, and enhances student performance. In the poorest pockets of the world, this simple strategy can double primary school enrolment in one year.” The WFP therefore supports programmes to feed millions of children in schools in 72 countries. Their formula is simple, “food attracts hungry children to school. An education broadens their options, helping to lift them out of poverty.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Levinger (1986), “Mild to moderate malnutrition, although probably not a cause of primary learning deficits, does appear to alter processes associated with cognitive function. Passivity, apathy, shortened attention span, reduced short-term memory, failure to acclimate to repetitive stimuli, and a lag in the development of sensory-integrative capacity are all associated with mild to moderate malnutrition. These dysfunctions prevent children from taking maximum advantage of their learning environments. Thus, children with protein caloric malnutrition tend to function at reduced levels of cognitive development and academic achievement.”<sup>25</sup>

Researchers like del Rosso (1999) have pointed out that school feeding programmes have a beneficial impact in four major ways: they address and mitigate short-term hunger, both in malnourished and well-nourished children, which in turn has a positive impact on attention, concentration, cognition and learning; increases enrollment and attendance, and helps cut down absenteeism and dropouts; they prevent/make up deficiencies in micronutrients like iron and iodine which directly affect the cognitive ability of the child; and they increase community involvement in schools, with community involvement in preparation and serving of meals creating involvement and monitoring of other aspects of school

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.wfp.org/english/>

<sup>25</sup> Levinger, B. (1986). School feeding programmes in developing countries: An analysis of actual and potential impact. USAID.

functioning as well.<sup>26</sup> A review conducted in October 2007 of school feeding programmes by Greenhalgh, Kristjansson & Robinson looked at 18 studies from five continents that were done over eight decades, to conclude that school feeding programmes improve growth and cognitive performance. Other possible beneficial impacts that they have cited include “long-term correction of nutritional deficiencies”, “children feel valued and looked after”, “improved school diet inspires improved home diet”, and “improved literacy reduces intergenerational cycle of poverty.”<sup>27</sup> Bhatia, Dreze & Prasad have added other possible benefits that may manifest in India: intrinsic educational value related to health and hygiene; fostering social equality by having children from different communities eat together, and particularly if Dalit cooks are appointed; and improving gender equity by increasing enrollment of girl children, improving nutritional status of girl children, providing employment to women in the cooking of the meals, and reducing the burden of providing a hot cooked lunch for working mothers.<sup>28</sup>

These observations have been borne out in the field as well. A pilot school-feeding programme in 23 schools in northwestern Somalia led to a 50 per cent increase in school enrollment, with a 35 per cent increase in the attendance of girl children in school.<sup>29</sup> Many Bangladeshi schoolchildren receive a mid-morning snack of eight fortified wheat biscuits, which contain 75 per cent of the recommended daily allowance of vitamins and minerals, and 300 kilocalories. Researchers at International Food Policy Research Institute found that “by providing the fortified biscuits to schoolchildren, Bangladesh has raised school enrollment by 14.2 percent, reduced the probability of dropping out of school by 7.5 percent, and increased school attendance by about 1.3 days a month.”<sup>30</sup>

### **School Feeding Programmes in India:**

In India, the first mid-day meal scheme was introduced in 1925 by the then Madras Municipal Corporation. By the mid-eighties, a few states, Tamil Nadu in particular, introduced the scheme and by 1990, schemes offering limited nutritional support for children in primary school, funded by the state government or through international assistance or a combination of the two were in place in about a dozen states. The National Programme of Nutritional Support for Primary Education was introduced as a centrally sponsored scheme in 1995 for free supply of foodgrains to children in government, local government and government aided schools at the rate of 100 grams per day per child. The government also provided subsidy for the transportation of foodgrains, contributed to cooking costs and infrastructure for food preparation. However, implementation of school feeding programmes was patchy in most states, and it took litigation from the Right to Food Campaign and the Rajasthan chapter of the People’s Union for Civil Liberties to draw attention to the need for government intervention to address the shameful state of undernutrition that assails more than 50 per cent of India’s children.

Consequently, the Supreme Court issued a judgement in the case of People’s Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India & Ors (Writ Petition (Civil) No. 196 of 2001) ordering state governments to “implement

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<sup>26</sup> Del Rosso, J.M. (1999). School Feeding Programmes: Improving effectiveness and increasing the benefit to education: A guide for program managers. Oxford: The Partnership for Child Development.

<sup>27</sup> Greenhalgh, T, Kristjansson, E., & Robinson, V. (2007). Realist review to understand the efficacy of school feeding programmes. *British Medical Journal*, 2007;335:858-861 (27 October).

<sup>28</sup> Bhatia, V; Dreze, J. & Prasad, V. (October 2005). Midday Meals: A Primer. <http://72.14.235.104/search?q=cache:OEekHz1hpEcJ:www.righttofoodindia.org/data/mdmprimer.doc+midday+meal&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=4&gl=in&client=firefox-a>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=51600>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/newsletters/ifpriforum/IF200407.htm>

the mid-day meal scheme by providing every child in every government and government assisted primary schools with a prepared mid-day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days. Those governments providing dry rations instead of cooked meals must within three months (28 February 2002) start providing cooked meals in all government and government-aided primary schools in half of the districts of the state (in order of poverty) and must within a further period of three months (28 May 2002) extend the provision of cooked meals to the remaining parts of the state.”

In September 2004, the NP-NSPE was revised to provide a cooked midday meal with a nutritional component of 300 kilocalories to children from the Classes of I through V. The guidelines were further revised in June 2006, with an enhancement in the nutritional allocation, as well as allocations for cooking costs, transportation, etc.

### ***The Mid-Day Meal Scheme in Karnataka:***

The Karnataka government was slow to build initial momentum on the school feeding programme. Prof. Seetharamu of the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, cited by Parikh and Yasmeen, noted in 2004 that “Politicians and bureaucrats tend to be lukewarm about the free mid-day meal programme because there are very few rent-seeking opportunities in such low-budget schemes. In fiscal 2001-02 the Karnataka state government spent Rs.35 crore on free uniforms for school children but could spare only Rs.1.06 crore for partial implementation of the mid-day meal scheme.”<sup>31</sup> However, the government introduced the programme of providing a hot cooked meal in seven north-eastern districts of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region in the state in the financial year 2002-2003. On July 1, 2003, the scheme was extended to government schools in the rest of the districts of the state. Meanwhile, three kilograms of free food grains per child per month were provided to children attending government aided schools on the basis of 80% attendance from 2002 to 2004. Starting 9<sup>th</sup> September 2004, the hot cooked meal scheme was extended for children from Classes I through V of government-aided schools as well. Using its own resources, the Government of Karnataka then extended the ambit of the hot cooked meal scheme to students of government and government-aided schools from Classes VI through X.

There were also initial problems of food quality, with children falling ill after untrained cooks were roped in to get the programme off the ground. However, thereafter the programme gained momentum, and with the political will of the government and support of the community and NGOs, the Akshara Dasoha scheme has improved significantly, so much so that the midday meal scheme in the state is one of the best run in the country<sup>32</sup>, although Central government officials continue to have some reservations related to a mismatch between the lifting and utilisation of food grains as compared to the utilisation of cooking costs. To understand some of the important processes and achievements in the implementation of the scheme, interviews were carried out with senior officials of office of the Joint Director of Public Instruction in charge of the midday meal scheme for the state in Bangalore and officers from the Education Department in charge of the mid-day meal scheme in Bagalkot, Dharwad, Koppal, and Uttara Kannada districts. 18 schools were visited in Bagalkot, Bangalore Urban, Dakshina Kannada, Dharwad, Koppal, and Uttara Kannada districts, and interviews or focus group discussions

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<sup>31</sup> Parikh, K.; & Yasmeen, S. (2004). Rising groundswell for mid-day meal scheme. *Education World*, January 2004. [http://www.educationworldonline.net/eduworld/article.php?choice=prev\\_art&article\\_id=18&issueid=1](http://www.educationworldonline.net/eduworld/article.php?choice=prev_art&article_id=18&issueid=1)

<sup>32</sup> *Expert report criticises popular SSA and midday meal scheme*. Retrieved at <http://infochangeindia.org/200805027095/Education/News/Expert-report-criticises-popular-SSA-and-midday-meal-scheme.html> on November 11, 2009.

carried out with Head Teachers, teachers, students, parents, SDMC members, cooks and helpers to understand their perceptions of the working of the scheme. To understand how Karnataka has operationalised the smooth flow of conversion costs to the schools, finance and administrative officials were interviewed at the Koppal District Offices complex. The managers of two gas agencies, one run by a government body, the Karnataka State Food and Civil Supplies Corporation, and the second by a private agency, in Koppal and Bagalkot districts, were interviewed to understand how LPG was supplied for the preparation of the midday meal. Senior administrators of the Akshaya Patra Foundation were interviewed at Bangalore and Hubli, and a field visit was made to the centralised kitchen in Hubli district.

### **The Akshaya Patra Foundation, Hubli: Using Technology and Modern Management in the Provision of Mid-Day Meals.**

In June 2000, the management of the Sri Radha Krishna Temple Complex run by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Bangalore began supplying a hot cooked meal to about 1500 students from five government schools in Bangalore. The food supplied was hot, tasty, nutritious and hygienic. The initiative was welcomed by students and the government. Critics, however, suggested that the non-secular nature of the temple compromised the programme, and was not healthy both for a government programme, and particularly a programme related to education. Consequently, an independent foundation, called the Akshaya Patra Foundation, was formed in October 2001, to specifically raise funds for, implement administer a mass feeding programme. The programme primarily at providing hot cooked noon meals to children in government and government-aided schools, during the academic year, and to prisoners in some limited areas. Today, the Akshaya Patra Foundation is the biggest partner of the Karnataka government in providing midday meals to students six days a week, serving over 5.25 lakh children in four geographical regions of the state. The Foundation augments the material and financial resources it receives from the government with contributions from institutional, corporate and individual donors to carry out the programme in cooperation with the government.

Compared to the administration of the midday meal scheme in most schools, which is usually locally managed, the Akshaya Patra scheme largely makes use of a centralized model in Karnataka. Each geographical area has one or two large automated kitchens, where food is prepared and cooked. The food is then transported to the different schools in customized vehicles, which vary in keeping with the state of the roads in the different geographical areas served.

#### **Food preparation practices:**

The kitchens make use of high-capacity automated cooking equipment, including high-speed vegetable cutting machines, steam cooking equipment for rice, dal and vegetables and conveyor belts. Staff is kept to a minimum. Handling of food by people is also kept to a minimum, and this together with the steam cooking and efficient transportation systems, ensures that the food that reaches school children is hygienic and nutrient rich. In some parts of Karnataka, the programme uses eco-fuel like coconut husk in the cooking process.

The latest kitchens designed by the Akshaya Patra management make use of a gravitational force model. For example at the centralised kitchen in Hubli, on the terrace are huge silos for storage of government supplied and market rice and pulses, the floor below has a cold room where the preparation of vegetables and spices takes place. On a lower floor is the steam cooking equipment which cooks the

food, from where it is transported to the ground floor. Packing and loading takes place on the ground floor, after which the food is transported.

Meticulous attention is paid to details related to hygiene. At the entrance of the kitchen facility, are separate changing rooms for male and female employees and for visitors. Employees have a washing area, lockers to store their personal effects and or street clothes and footwear. They wear overalls, caps and galoshes supplied by the Foundation at work.

At the ground floor level, there are facilities for storage and the first stage of cleaning and grading. There are storage areas for perishable and short-term shelf life foods like vegetables and jaggery, and beyond this, a godown for bulk goods like rice and pulses. The facility uses the First In, First Out (FIFO) system to ensure that no old stocks are maintained.

Close to the godown is the rice-cleaning machine, which has been imported from Spain. The machine is used to clean 600 kgs of rice per operation. The rice first passes through a magnetic field which removes from it any metallic particles. As we watched bags of rice, supplied through the FCI, pass through the machine, nails, screws, lumps of iron about a cubic centimetre in volume, and a significant amount of iron filings, were separated out by this process. Thereafter the rice is sifted by a series of twelve vibrating sieves which removes various agent of contamination like dust, dirt and stones. It also separates the big grains (for example, unhusked paddy grains), as well as broken grains. The same machine can also be used to clean dal and other pulses, after the sieves are cleaned.

Once it has passed through this process, the resultant clean rice travels by a conveyor belt to two storage silos, each of a capacity of 150 tonnes. Once a silo is full, sensors detect this and the lids are automatically activated to close it, and the next silo begins to fill. There are also smaller day silos of 5 and 10 ton capacity to store the day's requirements of bulk foodstuffs, which are also filled by conveyor belts.

The vegetables also go through their first level of grading and cleaning on the ground floor, as outer leaves, husks, etc are removed and the vegetables transported using a service lift to the second floor.

On the second floor is a computerized panel on which the next day's requirements of rice and dal can be pre-programmed. Hence, all that workers coming in to prepare the day's meal need to do is press a big red button, and the day's supply of rice and dal is automatically released. The rice and dal are then thoroughly washed at a washing area, and then transported using wheeled pallets to "dropping points." Here, the washed rice and dal are tipped into chutes directly connected to steam cookers on the floor below.

The vegetables received on the second floor go through a second grading before they are washed and sanitized. They then pass through mechanical vegetable graters/cutters or are hand-cut, based on the dish, and then stored in the cool room. In this processing area are other kitchen appliances like a tamarind pulp extractor, a grinder for spices, etc.

Cooking happens in large steam-heated mechanized cauldrons on the first floor. At the Hubli centralised kitchen, 120 kgs of rice can be cooked in 4 minutes, and 1200 litres of sambar prepared in 45 minutes. Once the rice is cooked, there are valves which allow the starch and water to be drained away. This starch is not wasted, but is used to cook the sambar. A specialized pump which is capable of pumping hot, viscous liquids carries the starch to the cauldrons in which the sambar is being prepared.

A central gallery allows for communication between the second and first floors. When a particular boiler is empty, a worker on the first floor flashes a placard with its number, which leads a worker on the second floor to release the next batch of washed rice down the chute for cooking.

Also on this floor is a section where seasonings for the sambar, grated coconut, etc. are prepared for addition to the cooked sambar.

The cooked food returns to the ground floor before being packed for transportation. The cooked rice is emptied into trolleys through vibrating chutes which keep the cooked rice grains from adhering to one another before being packed into large steel canisters for transportation to the schools. The cooked and seasoned sambar is transferred through ducts to the ground floor, where it is also packed in steel canisters. The canisters are conveyed to the loading bay, where they are loaded on to 32 custom-built vehicles for transporting the food to 790 schools in the Hubli-Dharwad and Haveri districts, some of which are as far as 120 km away from the central kitchen.

Across the loading bay from the kitchen is the boiler room, where steam is produced and piped to the kitchen where it cooks the food.

Also on the ground floor is a dumping area, where chutes from the second floor bring down organic waste like vegetable peel. This waste is then taken to the vermicomposting area on the campus of the Akshaya Patra Foundation.

On the ground floor is also the washing platform. Vehicles returning from their rounds unload the canisters, which are washed by hand by Foundation employees and rinsed and sluiced in three troughs.

#### Management Practices:

As the above description shows, the Akshaya Patra model employs extensive mechanization, which allows for efficient cleaning of ingredients and preparation of food with limited handling by employees. In addition, a number of good management practices are used to ensure that the operation of delivering food to hungry children at 724 schools happens effectively and smoothly. These include:

- Raw materials are sourced according to need and used according to the first in, first out system. Hence, build up of old stocks of raw materials is avoided.
- Excellent cleaning systems for the foods and the vessels and vehicles used to supply the foods.
- A delivery system by which schools are looped along routes is followed. Food is delivered along all the schools in a route, after which the driver and helper have their own lunch. In the afternoon, on the route back, the empty canisters are collected.
- A system of tracking drivers is followed, so that in case of a glitch, the driver closest to the location can be immediately sent to the site to deliver food, so that children do not have to wait for lunch.
- The Foundation has its own garage for regular maintenance and repair of the vehicles to prevent breakdowns.
- In case of a breakdown, drivers access mechanics closest to them to fix the vehicle to minimize delays in supply.
- The foundation keeps drivers on standby, so that a sudden absence by one of the drivers will not delay supply on any route.



- The facility followed practices of water harvesting and vermicomposting.

At the time of the study, the Akshaya Patra initiative in Hubli provided food for the mid-day meal scheme from its centralised, high-tech kitchen to 790 schools up to 120 km away using 32 custom-built vehicles. A total of 15,000 kgs of rice and 26,800 litres of sambar are prepared at the Hubli kitchen. The scheme accessed rice and cooking costs from the government, everything else was bought through donations. The menu consisted of rice and saaru (sambar) and curds five days a week, and a pulao-type flavoured rice and a sweet on one day of the week. One major difference noted between the food supplied by the Akshaya Patra Foundation, was that a different kind of saaru, involving different kinds of pulses like chickpeas, black-eyed peas or cowpeas, was prepared every day of the week, whereas the saaru prepared locally at schools was invariably made with one kind of pulse, yellow lentils (tur dal).

The children of the schools which received food through the Akshaya Patra scheme, and the local community, the school authorities, and the local authorities in these locations, pronounced themselves very satisfied by the scheme. In certain schools, which had shifted from the preparation of food locally to the Akshaya Patra scheme, both school authorities and children said that they preferred the Akshaya Patra scheme. Whereas the school authorities were pleased because of their reduced responsibilities when food was no longer prepared locally, the children relished the improved quality as evidenced in the thicker *saaru* which was supplied. In Bangalore, head teachers of several schools which were being supplied food in partnership with certain organisations other than the Akshaya Patra Foundation, expressed dissatisfaction with the levels of hygiene and the quality of the food supplied, and said that they had requested the government to link up their schools with the Akshaya Patra scheme.

Nevertheless, there have been various challenges. The Akshaya Patra model is very capital intensive, involving extensive expenditure on infrastructure and machinery. Whereas the model has been successful in raising donations in Bangalore, (and according to controversies reported at intervals in the local press, from abroad), it has been less successful in raising local contributions to a significant degree in the North Karnataka region. Unlike in cases where the meal is locally prepared, where there are opportunities for the local community to participate, through contributions in kind, support with monitoring, etc., using a centralised system for preparing and supplying food significantly cuts down on direct community involvement in the mid-day meal scheme, and by extension, in the school itself. Further, in areas where earlier, locally prepared midday meals were replaced by the Akshaya Patra scheme, the people who were employed as cooks and helpers had lost their jobs, and this has led to agitations and representations to the government. There have also been several episodes of friction between the government and the Akshaya Patra Foundation about the sharing of credit, with the government holding that the Foundation does not acknowledge the government's contribution and partnership in the programme sufficiently. The Foundation believes that many of the factors that make the programme distinctive and successful are not paid for by the government, and even the cooking cost covers only a fraction of the costs of the expensive mechanised steam cooking process that the Foundation employs. Publicity materials created by the Foundation to raise funds abroad have also evoked the criticism that it conveys a negative impression about the country's ability and willingness to feed its children. At the time of the study, the partnership between the government and the Foundation was on the basis of three-year long contracts, and for the Foundation, monitoring the political climate to ensure continuity of their work becomes important. Also, sections of the public continue to be uneasy about the Foundation's genesis in a large religious movement.

#### **When food is prepared locally...**

It must however, be noted that, in general, the Government of Karnataka has displayed a combination of political will and effective administrative practices with regard to the implementation of the mid-day

meal scheme, to make the programme one of the better administered ones in the country. While there have been occasional complaints of leakages and poor quality, particularly in Bidar district, the situation in Karnataka is much better than in many Indian states. Some aspects of the implementation programme that are worthy of note in Karnataka are discussed below:

*Timely Disbursal of Funds and Lifting of Foodgrains:*

According to officials of the Government of India, while the mid-day meal scheme has been universally welcomed, and chalked up significant and justified successes in several parts of the country, an area of concern in many states has related to the timely disbursal of funds and lifting of foodgrains.

According to the latest revision of the guidelines for the NP-NSPE, provision has been made for a total cooking cost of Rs. 2 per child per day per school. Of this, the central government contributes Rs. 1.50 while the state governments are expected to contribute Rs. 0.50, in all states and Union Territories except for the north-eastern states. In the case of these states, the central contribution is Rs. 1.80, and the states are expected to contribute Rs. 0.20. Whereas earlier, a reimbursement mode was being followed by the government, this is shifting to the form of a grant paid in advance

Foodgrains too, are required to be lifted from the Food Corporation of India, and further from the FCI warehouses in the state from where it is to make its way through the different tiers of government to the local schools.

However, officials of the Government of India, independent accountability studies as well as media reports suggest that there are several hitches to the timely disbursal of funds and foodgrains in many states. In some instances, states fail to put in claims in time for the share of the cooking conversion costs due from the Government of India, so that these funds can be released in March. Consequently, these funds remain in the consolidated fund, and cannot be released until it is claimed according to procedure in the supplementary budget scheduled in September-October. Once this money has been claimed by the state government, it has to go to the Nodal Department (which varies from state to state); it then has to reach the district local government, the block local government, the panchayat and finally the schools. The state government also has to make allocation within its budget for its contribution to the cooking conversion costs, and sometimes there are delays with regard to this. Within departments as well, files have to travel between multiple tiers of officialdom. Due to all these factors, in more instances than the government is happy about, delays of as many as six to seven months have been reported.

In an accountability study of the mid-day meal scheme in Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan, carried out by CUTS in 211 schools, showed that only 21 per cent of the schools received funds in time every month. The others reported delays ranging from 2 to 6 months, with 12 per cent of the schools saying they received funds once in six months. "During the survey many teachers informally stated that they either take credit from the local vendors or spend from their own pockets to ensure that meals are delivered on time."<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, it is difficult to ensure quality when compromises like these have to be reached. There were also issues with regard to receipt of foodgrain stocks, with no weighing facilities in

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<sup>33</sup> World Bank. (August 2007). Case Study 3: Rajasthan, India – An accountability study of the mid-day meal scheme in Chittorgarh district. Social Accountability Series. Note No. 3. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOCACCEMSEIDEGOV/Resources/Case3RajasthanCUTSSAcAugust2007.pdf>

many schools to check that the appropriate weight was being received, and in some cases, foodgrains not being received at all, leading to the midday meal not being cooked. The survey also revealed at the same time that the amount of foodgrains lifted and utilised by the state has been declining, even as it has been claiming increased coverage of the scheme. "The off take of foodgrains was 67 per cent on an average during the period against the total grains sanctioned by the Centre. The unutilised fund (conversion cost) remaining with the districts had steadily increased."<sup>34</sup>

According to Talukdar (2007), there are significant concerns related to Assam as well. "The central government released only Rs.23.11 crore and Rs.54.61 crore to Assam against its allocation of Rs.54.62.crore and Rs.117.39.crore for the financial years 2005-06 and 2006-07 respectively, according to a report prepared by the Department of Elementary Education (DEE). During this period the state government had released Rs 10.07.crore and Rs.15.68 crore as matching share. While about 60 per cent of the state population lives Below Poverty Line (BPL), only 43.71 per cent of the food grains allotted to the state for the financial year 2006-07, was lifted up to January 2007. It was only 38.40 per cent up to December 2006."<sup>35</sup> The hitches with regard to timely disbursal of funds find echoes in other states too. For example, in December 2006, SHG members responsible for providing midday meals in Anantapuram in Chittoor District in Andhra Pradesh complained of not being paid for three months at a time.<sup>36</sup>

In comparison, Government of India officials report a much better performance from the state of Karnataka. A timely system, less troubled by bureaucratic delays ensures that funds reach most schools on time. According to the Joint Director of Public Instruction in charge of the mid-day meal, while the Government of India guidelines ask that funds reach schools a month in advance, most schools in Karnataka receive these funds up to three months in advance. This was confirmed by interviews with head teachers of schools in Bagalkot, Hubli, Koppal, Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada districts.

Studying how the disbursal occurs for a district like Koppal, a sum of Rs. 1064.47 lakhs was budgeted for the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme for Koppal for the year 2007-2008. Of this Rs. 549.9 lakh was planned to be transferred through the Zilla Panchayat, and Rs. 514.57 lakh was to be transferred through the Taluk Panchayat.

The funds released through the Taluk Panchayat are earmarked for administrative salaries, salaries for cooks and helpers, contingency (fuel and vegetables), and funds for rice for aided schools from Standards 1 to 10, and funds for rice for students of Government High Schools. The funds released through the Zilla Panchayat are meant for salaries, dal, oil, salt, rice for students from classes 6 through 10, stationery, medicines and transport.

There is a clear process for seeking and receiving funds. Once the budget has been prepared for the year, the break-up for each district is submitted every quarter to the Department of Education, Government of Karnataka. For Koppal, the amount due every quarter for the year 2007-2008 was Rs. 266.15 lakhs.

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<sup>34</sup> Midday meal scheme a success in Rajasthan. *The Hindu*. June 16, 2006.  
<http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/16/stories/2006061613280500.htm>

<sup>35</sup> Talukdar, R.B. (2007). Driving up attendance, but penetration poor. From a series of articles on education sponsored by Aide et Action. 7 May 2007. Retrieved at <http://www.aea-india.org/downloads/india-together-article.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Ravi, P. (2006). School meals make slow progress. From a series of articles on education sponsored by Aide et Action. December 5, 2007.

- As this is part of the planned expenditure of the state, there are no delays in transfer.
- 15 to 20 days before the beginning of the quarter, the funds are released to the Accounts Department of the State.
- After the amount for salaries has been deducted, the rest of the funds are put into the joint account of the Chief Accounts Officer and the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Panchayat.
- From this account, payments are made directly to the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation for foodstuffs which are supplied to the schools for the mid-day meal scheme (rice, dal, salt and oil).
- The funds due to each taluk under the different heads (e.g., contingency, fuel and salary of cooks and helpers) are transferred through the bank to the account of the Executive Officer, Taluk Panchayat.
- Again, funds are released from the Executive Officer of the Taluk Panchayat to the joint account of the Head Cook and the SDMC president (in Koppal district). In other districts, the funds may be released to the account of the Head Teacher and the SDMC President, or the Head Teacher and the Head Cook, depending on which system has proved to be most effective in that locality).

Every month, the Head Teacher supplies the utilization certificate for the previous month and indent for the next month to the Cluster Resource Person. This is then submitted to the BEO and further to Executive Officer of the Taluk Panchayat.

In the case of supply of foodgrains, the concerned Deputy Director for Public Instruction (DDPI) of each taluk provides an indent for the month based on previous month's utilization. After subtracting any quantity that has been lifted the previous month, but not utilized, the remaining requisitioned foodgrains are released. The Executive Officer of the Taluk monitors the indents and releases foodgrains as required to the schools following the same procedure. [Total indented quantity for following month – (Quantity lifted current month – Quantity utilized in current month)]

As the political and administrative systems have sent out a strong message that the mid-day meal scheme should function well, by and large in Karnataka, a streamlined process ensures that the funds reach the local authorities in time. In several schools, bills and vouchers were neatly filed and maintained by the Head Cook or Head Teacher. Head Cooks from very remote rural areas reported attending monthly Taluk level meetings convened by an official of the Education Department of the rank of an Assistant Director, for monitoring and motivational purposes.

*Support for creation of necessary infrastructure for preparation of food:*

In the revised guidelines to the NP-NSPE, the Central Government provided for grants (to be given in a phased manner) for the creation of infrastructure, in particular, the construction of kitchen shed-cum stores. This too, has been described as a serious lacuna in reports from many states. For example, the Chittorgarh accountability study noted that “Most schools lack adequate cooking and storage facilities; 95 percent of the schools do not have a kitchen shed, and only 36 percent have a separate store room. Many teachers reported that they stored food in classrooms, further reducing the already limited space available for classroom activities. Of the cooks interviewed, 62 percent said that the mid-day meal was cooked in the open, which is unhygienic, while others cooked meals in verandahs, classrooms, or their own houses. Only 83 percent of the cooks confirmed that they have sufficient utensils for mid-day meal preparation.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> World Bank. (August 2007). Case Study 3: Rajasthan, India – An accountability study of the mid-day meal scheme in Chittorgarh district. Social Accountability Series. Note No. 3. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOCACCEMSEIDEGOV/Resources/Case3RajasthanCUTSSAcAugust2007.pdf>

Even before the Central Government came up with the idea of granting funds for the construction of these sheds, the government of Karnataka looked to the convergence of schemes for this purpose. It encouraged the mobilization of funds from amounts allocated under SGRY, Stamp duty, natural calamity fund, drought relief, 11<sup>th</sup> finance commission funds, SSA, public donations, etc., in addition to releasing other state government funds. It entrusted the construction of sheds to the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department for the rural areas, and the Urban Development Department for the urban areas. By the first quarter of 2008 more than 37,000 sheds had been constructed, while others are in various stages of construction.

For example, in the Vanahalli-Guruhalli Panchayat of Sirsi Taluk, the local higher primary school has a kitchen with a separate store, and a shed where cooking vessels can be washed. Along one side of this shed is a row of taps where children can wash their hands and their plates as well. The Zilla Panchayat contributed Rs. 40,000 for the construction of the kitchen. This was augmented by a personal donation of Rs. 15,000 by another ZP member.

Another Primary School in the same taluk, has a medium-sized, bright and airy kitchen at one end of the school building. In one corner is a grinding stone for grinding rice or masalas. Coconuts sent by families for use in the children's mid-day meals are stored in another corner. A third corner has a drying rack on which the children's plates are washed and stacked so that they can be air-dried.

In the fourth corner is a feature that we did not see in any of the other schools we visited – a custom-made piece of furniture like a meat safe, 8 feet long, 3 feet wide and 4 feet high, with a wooden frame, meshed sides and a metal lid, designed to keep foods fresh and out of the reach of insects and rodents. Within the box, in large blue plastic bins with well fitting lids are stored the cleaned rice and dal for the next day's cooking. Vegetables, and fresh herbs and spices like garlic, ginger, coriander leaves and curry leaves are also stored in this. The kitchen also has a mixer, donated by the SDMC. The kitchen and its surroundings are very clean. There is a covered well from which water is drawn for the cooking and washing.

All the schools visited at random in the districts of Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Bagalkot and Koppal also had closed kitchens, often with a storeroom and a porch or covered area for cleaning vessels and cleaning of food grains and cutting of vegetables. Often the SDMCs had undertaken further improvements at their own initiative, for example, building raised platforms for cooking in the closed kitchens, so that cooks and helpers did not have to squat on the floor, and there was less chance of clothes catching fire, or buying additional equipment like mixies and pressure cookers. Many SDMCs had also contributed or encouraged community members to contribute plates and glasses for the children's meals.

In a new initiative, the government had released Rs. 3,000 for developing school kitchen gardens, which could serve to supplement the funds for buying items like oil, vegetables and salt provided by the government. At the time of the study, a few schools had already drawn on the grant and developed their gardens. The government had also provided a one-time grant of Rs.1000 so that school authorities could prepare a large painted notice giving the details of the entitlements under the mid-day meal scheme, so that parents and students could clearly learn of their entitlements under the scheme, in the interests of greater transparency and accountability.

### *Use of LPG as cooking fuel:*

The NP-NSPE is the largest school feeding programme in the world, catering to over 120 million children. While in most areas, the programme operates during the academic year, in drought-hit areas, mid-day meals are required to be provided during the school vacations as well. Where centralized models of food preparation and distribution are followed, often, cooking gas is used as fuel. However, in most areas where decentralized models are in place, which constitutes the major part, usually, firewood is largely used in cooking. For instance, the Chittorgarh study showed that 76 per cent of the cooks used firewood and dried cow dung cakes as fuel.

The guidelines for the NP-NSPE asks that “special attention be paid” to the fact that “To the extent possible firewood should not be used in the interest of environmental protection.”<sup>38</sup> The Akshaya Patra Foundation, the single largest partner of the government, still provides food only to a little over 800,000 children. Even presuming that 20 million children are provided with food cooked using cooking gas, this still implies that food for 100 million children is being prepared every day of the school year using firewood. Obviously, the environmental impact of the NP-NSPE is going to be felt unless thought goes into designing steps to use more sustainable forms of energy.

For a start, however, the use of cooking gas is a via media option. Since liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is obtained through the refining of crude oil, a fossil fuel, or from natural gas streams in the earth, it is limited. However, given the fact that its use saves trees and it is also a cleaner fuel, currently it is a viable option.

However, most state governments have been slow to adopt it. In contrast, the Government of Karnataka has liaised extensively with Hindustan Petroleum, Bharat Petroleum, and Indian Oil Corporation to ensure that cooking gas is supplied to most cooking centres in Karnataka. Consequently, in Karnataka, 99% of the meals are cooked with LPG. Based on central coordination and directives from the senior management of the gas companies in Bangalore, local gas suppliers collaborate with the Block authorities to supply LPG cylinders to the schools.

For instance, the Mallikarjuna Gas Supply Centre in Mudhol Taluk supplies LPG to 150 schools. Between 450-500 cylinders per month are delivered to the schools. There was a well-established system for the supply of the LPG cylinders. On the first day of the month, the gas agency receives an indent for the gas supply needed the following month from the Taluk Panchayat. The agency uses an auto to deliver cylinders to the schools. An employee of the agency delivers the cylinders, checks whether the cylinders are safe for use, and obtains a signed and sealed delivery report from the person in charge, either the head teacher or the head cook.

Once about 150 to 200 cylinders have been delivered, a bill is prepared and sent to the Taluk Panchayat office with the supporting delivery receipts. The officials at the Panchayat office take between three days to a week to verify the receipts, and the bill is paid. Generally, there was no undue delay in payment. There was strict monitoring of release of funds and foodgrains by the Food and Civil Supplies department, and hence payments were made in a maximum of a week.

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Human Resource Development. (September 2006). National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, 2006. Mid-day Meal Scheme, Guidelines. New Delhi: Government of India.

LPG is supplied to schools at domestic rates, at Rs. 320 per cylinder. The logistics are time-consuming, and result in a loss for the agency. "I have to have an auto solely for doing deliveries to schools, pay its taxes, pay for its maintenance, buy fuel everyday and pay the auto-driver's salary every month. The government pays delivery charges at the rate of Rs. 1.60 per km, but only one way. We have been requesting the government to pay delivery charges both ways, as many of these schools are in remote areas," said the proprietor of the agency. Nevertheless, he sees the government as responsive. The delivery charges used to be less than Re. 1 per kilometre. After our representations, the government has enhanced this.

For the company too, the supply of cylinders at the domestic rate represents a loss, as the actual cost of a cylinder is nearly Rs. 900. "However, the state government insists on this method of cooking both to conserve forest wealth and because it is better for children's health, and we comply. We have also provided training to cooks and helpers in the district on safe handling of cylinders, safe installation, best practices for optimum use of gas etc, to all the cooks and helpers in the districts."

The evidence of political and administrative will in matters related to the smooth functioning of the mid-day meal scheme is evident from the case of Koppal, where earlier the supply of LPG was provided by a private agency. However, supply was erratic and there were complaints from schools. After adequate warning to the agency, when the situation did not improve, the DC of Koppal cancelled the licence of the agency and granted it to a government entity, the Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation (KFCSC).

In eight locations, including Mangalore, Hassan and Koppal, and some areas on the periphery of Bangalore City like Lingarajapuram, Hebbal and Yeshwantpur, the KFCSC has taken on gas agencies. The KFCSC gas agency in Koppal caters to 123 schools. There is a requirement of 545 cylinders per month. Head Teachers submit an indent for the number of cylinders required for the month on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the previous month to the Executive Officer of the Taluk Panchayat. For the Koppal Gas Agency, which is run by the KFCSC, the money for the total indent is paid in advance. In the case of private agencies, the indent is given by the Taluk Panchayat. The agency supplies cylinders and a designated vehicle distributes these on predetermined routes between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. during the working hours of the school. In addition to supplies for schools, the agency caters to 13,000 other customers. "There is no problem, we receive adequate stocks," says Chikke Gowda, office manager of the agency."

The agency submits a bill together with delivery receipts to the Taluk Panchayat office, and, as in Bagalkot, the bills are settled in four or five days' time. Schools reported using as many as 15 cylinders of LPG a month and largely had no problems related to supply. One school said that there might be one day, say once in three or four months, when the school might have to fall back on firewood to cook the meal. This agency too reported providing training in safe handling of gas cylinders, safe installation and economical use of cooking gas as a fuel was to cooks, throughout the district, even in the most remote rural areas, which was confirmed by the cooks in the schools.

#### *Training for cooks and helpers using teleconferencing:*

The urban-rural divide, which is very apparent in India, is particularly apparent in Karnataka when one compares the hi-tech city of Bangalore, a major player in the global economy, with more rural areas. The divide operates at many levels in terms of access to resources and services. However, the Karnataka government has tried to use a strength in the state, namely, its comfort with and access to information and telecommunications infrastructure and knowledge, to bridge this divide in the case of the implementation of the Midday Meal Scheme. Teleconferencing has been used as a means of training

cooks in the other districts on safety and economy, and particularly in safety issues related to using cooking gas. Training cooks of the nutritional value of foods, and how to preserve nutrients while cooking had also happened through teleconferencing, and Head Cooks and helpers from very remote areas had reported attending these trainings. This methodology supplements training modules prepared by the government, and conventional IEC materials related to ensuring safety, preservation of nutrients during cooking and economy.

Apart from initiatives taken by the government, several SDMCs contributed to the improved functioning of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. A number had raised resources for plates and glasses, and several had contributed to buy other equipment like mixers and pressure cookers. In some areas, thanks to the efforts of SDMCs, the community contributed locally grown vegetables and curds to supplement the government meal, and sweets on special occasions. Some SDMCs had also contributed to supplement the salaries paid by the government to cooks and helpers, and laid down standards of hygiene for the preparation and serving of food. They had also laid down how the food should be served in a way that prevented discrimination, and in certain areas, these SDMCs reported that casteism had “come down by about 80% since the children had started eating together.

Nevertheless, there are many potential areas for improvement in the school feeding programme. All leakages need to be plugged. Only recently, the Chairperson of the Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Children’s Rights (KSCPCR) complained that the sambar was much too thin, without enough dal and vegetables, in many schools. Government systems are often not flexible enough to respond to seasonal variations and rises in the prices of food items like oil and vegetables, and often local authorities cut corners and make do. Experts at the National Institute of Nutrition also hold that when poor children eat at home, they tend to largely eat carbohydrates, and that government programmes should focus on ensuring that the mid-day meal programme of the government should increase their focus on the other food groups. Other states like Rajasthan, have been successful in introducing a varied diet as part of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and states like Tamil Nadu provide eggs for additional protein. A similar scheme in Karnataka was scuttled as a result of strident protests from religious leaders, and except for one day in a week, Karnataka’s students are stuck with the bare diet of rice and tur dal saaru.



*Section VII:*

**School choice and the urban poor: a micro-study in Hyderabad**

*Jean Dreze, on government school education in India: "In big cities, it's more or less over. Within 10 to 15 years, government schools will be almost wiped out."*<sup>39</sup>

The Constitution of India provides for free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. State legislations are required to delineate suitable roles for local governments, particularly in school education. Consequently, individual state municipal acts have laid down "the establishment and maintenance of primary schools" as an obligatory function of municipal authorities. This section explores whether the current levels of service provision in these schools are satisfactory, using in particular, the results of a study in three slums in Hyderabad. It also questions the acceptance of a situation in which government schools will be "wiped out", given the increase in distress migration to the cities and the numbers of the urban poor, and the lack of other inexpensive education options for children in urban poverty.

Provision of free education for all by the government was to prove the great Indian equalizer. The National Policy on Education (GoI, 1992) explicitly states in Part III: "To promote equality, it will be necessary to provide equal opportunity for all not only in access, but in the conditions for success. Besides, awareness of the inherent equality of all will be created through the core curriculum."<sup>40</sup> Because the provision of education is an obligatory function for urban local government bodies, it must necessarily be performed and sufficient budget provision made. In practice, provision of quality education through the schools managed by these bodies has had very low priority in urban governance. In this, local bodies reflect the lack of policy priority that is evident at the central government level. While a number of state-specific and target group-specific schemes and initiatives have been launched by the Department of School Education and Literacy, none of them have an urban focus. Both Operation Blackboard and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan helped to improve the infrastructure of schools in urban areas. Nevertheless, as Kaushik (2007) pointed out, "Even their most ardent supporters will admit that both ICDS and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan suffer from an overwhelmingly rural bias – their structures and processes are designed to suit rural situations and are often not relevant to the needs of the urban poor."<sup>41</sup> Kaushik cites the National Institute of Urban Affairs as noting that only 8% of ICDS projects were located in urban areas ("not always in the most needy areas") even though 40% of the population of metros, and 20% of the population of other urban centres lived in slums. Nor does the Ministry of Urban Development appear to coordinate with the Ministry of School Education for productive planning linkages. It appears therefore, that quality public education for the urban poor falls between the two stools of these ministries. It is perhaps no wonder then, that the term "corporation schools" in many cities has acquired pejorative connotations.

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<sup>39</sup> Waldman, A. (2003). "India's poor bet precious sums on private schools." *The New York Times*. Monday, November 15. Retrieved at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E5DD1338F936A25752C1A9659C8B63>

<sup>40</sup> Government of India. (1992.) *National Policy on Education 1986*. (As modified in 1992). Ministry of Human Resource Development

<sup>41</sup> Kaushik, A. (2007). "So, just what does this mean?" *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2006: Provisional*. pp. 4-5. Mumbai: Pratham Resource Centre.

Macrolevel data shows the impact of this neglect. Using state-specific data from the District Information System for Education (DISE), Mehta (2006) calculated the apparent survival rates for students through the primary grades, from I to V, in 2004 and 2005. He found that, in urban areas, about 83 boys and 84 girls, out of a 100 who began together in Grade I, reached Grade V in 2005. (The comparable figures for rural areas were 66 and 62 for boys and girls respectively, reinforcing the urban-rural disparity.) However, a significant detail is that only 58 children out of a hundred reached Grade V in 2005 in Government-managed schools. The equivalent figure for privately-managed schools is 111, which seems to suggest that students are transferring from government-managed to privately-managed schools.<sup>42</sup>

This study, conducted in Hyderabad, aimed at obtaining an understanding of the range of schooling options available to communities of the urban poor, and the choices being made by parents of children of school-going age in these communities. In particular, the study looked at whether government schooling was seen as a preferred option, as compared to private education options available close by. With the support of the Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA), a non-profit organisation working with the urban poor in Bangalore and Hyderabad, an exploratory survey was carried out in three communities of the urban poor in Secunderabad area of the city - Karim Basti, Lakshmiipet and LB Nagar<sup>43</sup> - in early 2008. These are well-established slum communities: the youngest, LB Nagar is about 25 years old; the others are over 50 years old. All are declared slums. A total of 340 households were surveyed, 100 in Karim Basti, and 120 each in Lakshmiipet and LB Nagar.

Over 90 per cent of the population in all three slums was Hindu. However, Karim Basti had a comparatively higher Muslim population of about 7%. Karim Basti had a predominantly SC population (78%), LB Nagar a predominantly BC population (82.5%), while Lakshmiipet had a more even distribution of SC and BC communities (54% and 40% respectively). Most of the families in the three communities seemed to be of the nuclear or extended family type, with 4-6 members in the family.

Daily wage labour (for men) and domestic labour (for women) were the predominant occupations in all three communities. A smaller percentage of both men and women worked at low-end jobs in private firms or ran petty businesses, often small shops selling snacks or vegetables in their own communities. Smaller numbers of men were skilled workers, employed as masons, painters, plumbers, electricians or mechanics, and driving was seen as an easy initial income-earning opportunity for young males. Between 58% and 66% of the families in these communities reported incomes of between Rs.2000 and Rs. 5000 a month, i.e., between Rs. 66 and Rs. 166 a day. Given that this income has to meet the needs of 4-6 family members on an average, we see that these are communities whose incomes barely address basic needs.

The bleak socio-economic situation is further compromised when one adds consumption of alcohol to the picture. In two of the communities, Karim Basti and L.B. Nagar, about 82% reported that at least 1 member in the family consumed alcohol regularly. The corresponding figure for Lakshmiipet is 60 per cent. Between a third and a half of the total families surveyed in these communities reported spending between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1500 per month on alcohol. The real income available for expenditure on basic

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<sup>42</sup> Mehta, A. C. (2006). *Elementary education in India: Progress towards UEE. Analytical Report 2004-2005*. New Delhi: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration.

<sup>43</sup> Names of communities have been changed.

needs, for a family of 4-6 members, thus comes down significantly to the range of Rs. 50 - Rs. 110 per day.

The majority of the parents, both male and female, reported no formal schooling. Within this group, more mothers than fathers reported no formal schooling. Only 9 parents in the sample reported studying at least till the undergraduate level. Further, about a quarter of the sample consisted of female-headed households, with the women reporting that they had been either widowed or abandoned.

The composite picture that emerges of these three communities of the urban poor shows straitened economic circumstances, derived from marginal livelihoods and aggravated by expenditure on alcohol, with no significant history of exposure to education. In spite of this, (or, perhaps, because of this?) what we see is that poor communities believe in the value of education, and are willing to invest significantly to send their children to school.

**School choice and related expenditure:**

The 340 sample households in the three locations reported a total of 571 children between the ages of 3 and 15, when children would be expected to be attending either anganwadi or school. All the 81 children in the 3-5 age group attended anganwadi or private nursery school, and 173 of 174 children in the 6-9 age group (99.4%), 154 of 169 in the 10-12 age group (91.1%), and 95 of 147 in the 13-15 age group (64.6%) attended school.

**Table 1: Showing schooling of children in age group 3-5 years in sample**

Area	Nature of Schooling	
	Government Anganwadi	Private Unaided Nursery School
Karim Basti	01	12
Lakshmipet	07	28
L.B. Nagar	04	29

Most parents who were sending children below the age of 5 to school preferred private, unaided nursery schools, which did not provide a nutrition component, and charged admission as well as monthly tuition fees. The comparative numbers in the anganwadis are an indicator of parents' dissatisfaction. This was corroborated in the focus group discussions. The anganwadis were located within the slum and therefore could have been convenient sources of childcare and educational stimulation from the point of view of the mothers, many of whom were domestic workers. However, they reported that teachers did not open the centres regularly or give the children the attention or educational input they expected. Hence parents often ended up incurring additional expenditures of up to even Rs. 5000 per annum on tuition fees and an equivalent amount on school-related expenditure like books and uniforms. (Table 2)

**Table 2: Showing annual expenditure on education of children in age group 0-5 years in sample**

Area	Annual Expenditure in rupees								
	Tuition Fees				Other- books, uniforms etc				
	10-1200	1201-2000	2001-3000	3001-5000	0-100	101-1000	1001-2000	2001-3000	3001-5000
Karim Basti	08	01	0	0	02	04	02	01	0
Lakshmi pet	02	03	09	07	05	08	05	01	04
L.B. Nagar	12	03	02	02	0	11	07	04	01

**Enrolment and Retention:**

In spite of the expenditure involved, keeping children out of school, especially in the early stages, seems to be less of an option for parents. As Table 3 shows, only 1 child was out of school for the entire sample, and in two areas, Lakshmi pet and L.B. Nagar, no child was out of school, in the 6-9 age range. This may be the result of the increased emphasis on school enrolment consequent to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and is in keeping with recent national trends. However, the number of children who have dropped out or never went to school steadily increases with age, again in keeping with national trends.

**Table 3: Table showing school attendance and dropout for different age groups in the sample**

Area	6-9 years		10-12 years		13-15 years	
	Attending school	Dropped out/Never went to school	Attending school	Dropped out/Never went to school	Attending school	Dropped out/Never went to school
Karim Basti	36	01	35	04	19	30
Lakshmi pet	64	-	53	04	35	04
L.B. Nagar	73	-	66	07	41	18

**School choice and related expenditure for children in the 6-9, 10-12 and 13-15 age groups:**

The differentiation across age groups is also seen when it comes to choice of school. The preference for private schools (whether government-aided or unaided) is evident throughout the sample. However, this preference is much more marked for the 6-9 age group. As children move to higher classes and private education becomes more expensive, the gap in enrolment between government and private schools narrows. This pattern is clearly visible in Table 4.

**Table 4: Showing choice of school type for different age groups in the sample**

Area	6-9 years		10-12 years		13-15 years	
	Type of School		Type of School		Type of School	
	Govt	Private (Govt.-Aided & Non-Aided)	Govt	Private (Govt.-Aided & Non-Aided)	Govt	Private (Govt.-Aided & Non-Aided)
Karim Basti	10	26	12	23	11	11
Lakshmipet	17	36	19	34	15	26
L.B. Nagar	20	51	25	44	18	22

However, families continued to spend scarce resources, even above Rs. 5000 per annum, for children in all age groups. The preference for private schooling in urban communities is borne out by the analysis of data from the DISE. Mehta (2006) found that enrolment in government-managed schools was 41.48 per cent in urban India as compared to 83.16 per cent in rural India.<sup>44</sup>

The evidence is very clear. In spite of having to spend amounts that they can ill afford on expenses at private schools, both for fees and on other accounts, parents in the urban poor communities of Hyderabad are showing a distinct and deliberate preference for these schools over government schools. In focus group discussions, parents and children explained why. They did not want their children to “use their thumbprints”, they wanted them to get a “good education” which would help them “get good jobs” and “earn well”. There was a sense that “Telugu is not enough any more. They must know English; speak, read and write well.” Aspirations included making their children doctors and engineers.

However, there is insufficient empirical evidence that the private schools accessed by the urban poor do provide a “good education”, even if this were interpreted largely in terms of basic literacy and numeracy. Parents were often not explicitly aware whether schools were recognised or not, and the legitimacy of schools was usually inferred from the length of time they had provided services to the community. As Kaushik points out, “many private schools continue to remain outside the scope of the so-called ‘recognised’ system. Several writers have pointed out the lack of reliable and accurate data about the numbers of such schools, particularly in urban areas. Both the District Information System of Education (DISE) and NCERT’s All India Educational Survey (AIES) restrict themselves to collecting information about recognised schools, which means that data about a large number of private unrecognized schools is omitted.”<sup>45</sup>

Many parents also liked private schools because of the “discipline”. At parent-teacher meetings, teachers tell them, “Don’t ‘leave’ them, make them do home work everyday, don’t let them play.” Sudha put her son in S T English School where she paid tuition fees of Rs. 400/-pm, donation of 5,000/- and term fees of Rs. 300/-. The children got lessons in karate, yoga and computers, and swimming in summer. The school had a large playground. She likes the school because “Children are taught and encouraged to speak in English. No ‘bad talk is allowed’ (*galeej baat nahin karne dete*). The education is

<sup>44</sup> Mehta, A.C. (2006). Op. cit. p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Kaushik, A. (2008). “The more things change, the more they don’t necessarily remain the same.” *Annual Status of Education Report(Rural) 2007*. pp. 6-7. Mumbai: Pratham Resource Centre.

good.” However, she noted, “Donation was 10,000/- earlier, so I didn’t put my girls here”. The girls were sent to government aided schools which were cheaper. This confirms Mehta’s (2006) findings at the macrolevel that the enrolment of girls in government-managed schools was higher than in privately-managed schools for the primary, upper primary and elementary levels.<sup>46</sup>

The results of the survey in three slums in Hyderabad do appear to confirm Dreze’s anguished prediction of doom for government schools – clearly, parents with scarce economic resources are voting with their feet: sending their children to private schools, often of indifferent quality, because of their perception that government schools are simply not delivering what they want. “Don’t give our children food,” said one mother. “Teach them.” As Kingdon (1996) said, “It appears that disenchanting parents abandon impoverished state-funded schools, bypassing the free public option for the costlier PUA [private unaided] schools and/or private tuition.”<sup>47</sup> Challenging the Government of India’s position in a national policy paper on education that such parents are “gullible”<sup>48</sup>, Kingdon notes that “the parents’ behaviour appears to be a rational response to a failing public system of education.”

In spite of all this evidence, the question is whether it is viable, or ethical, to write off government schools without an inexpensive alternative in place. Data from DISE suggests that the “majority of schools imparting elementary education (85.27 per cent in 2004) were government-owned schools” and “three out of four students in elementary classes are from the government schools” (Mehta, 2006).<sup>49</sup> Further, unlike many states in India where below one percent to 5 % schools are run by local body managements, the percentage of total schools which are under local body management is as high as 64.42% (54,488 schools) in Andhra Pradesh and 59.2% (27,204 schools) in Tamil Nadu. Andhra Pradesh has a total of 11,715 schools of all types of management in urban areas; of these, 5581 are primary schools, while 2533 are primary with upper primary. Given that a significant number of these are either government-run, or unrecognised or recognised private schools offering sub-standard educational services, there is a case to be made for making education a priority of urban governance, as long as it is a stated obligatory function.

The urban poor are very clear that if the government schools delivered, they would not consider sending their children to private schools. “We are not sending children to private schools because we can afford that!” Parents said that if the government schools could be relied upon to provide free education of a satisfactory quality, the money they saved would be spent on the children’s higher education, or housing improvements. In the Annual Status of Education Report 2006, Kaushik commented, “Public interest in sending children to school has...been stimulated adequately; the reasons why children do not stay in school are what should be engaging our attention now. Greater attention will have to be paid to those factors that result in pushing children out – inadequate infrastructure, insensitive teachers, and

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<sup>46</sup> Mehta, A.C. (2006). op. cit. p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> Kingdon, G. G. (1996). “Private schooling in India: Size, nature, and equity effects.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, December. 31(51):3306–14.

<sup>48</sup> Government of India. (1985). *Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education. Cited in Kingdon, G. G. (1996). Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Mehta, A.C. (2006). Op. cit. p. 107-108.

uninteresting (or irrelevant) curricula. Perhaps the time has come for the focus of our *abhiyan* to shift.”<sup>50</sup>

*Section VIII:*

**Conclusion:**

The data shared from the study in Hyderabad largely serves to confirm at the ground level the picture evident in macrolevel data regarding school choice. Nevertheless, because the neoliberal stance that the government’s major role is to facilitate the market is gaining currency even in the education sector, this data is presented with caution. There is a genuine concern that such data will add grist to the mills of advocates for moves to privatise government schools, who have been gaining in fervour, with the tacit or explicit approval of government bureaucrats.

It is in this context that it becomes all the more critical to collect stories of successful initiatives by the government, and successful collaborations between the government and other actors. Some points which emerge from the small qualitative studies presented in this working paper include:

- ❑ Generalisations about government schools, based on macro-level data, must be balanced with qualitative studies which are able to provide greater insights into the reasons why systems are failing in certain locations, and functioning effectively in others.
- ❑ Since a ‘one size fits all’ model cannot work in a country as diverse as India, successful modifications which work locally, e.g., the efforts of the tribal communities to secure schooling for their children, must be studied.
- ❑ There are committed elements in the bureaucracy who are willing to take risks, apportion resources, and provide systemic support for scaling up proven ideas, as happened with the introduction of ABL and ALM in Tamil Nadu.
- ❑ When the government decides to do so, it can commandeer the resources to successfully implement a good idea. Although provision of LPG cylinders at the domestic rate represents a substantial loss for the companies like Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum, the Karnataka government’s unwillingness to compromise has forced these companies, which make substantial profits, to subsidise this cost, providing a healthier option to firewood in preparing midday meals for school children.
- ❑ Providing spaces for the community to get involved in the education of India’s school children can prove very effective both for harnessing local resources. These resources may come from members of the larger community (e.g., sponsoring of vegetables, curds, plates and glasses for the mid-day meal), local organisations or welfare committees (e.g., medical support to address issues of student health or provision of interim funding for school projects until government funds are released), or tutoring and in-service training support (provided by NGOs in Dindigul)
- ❑ Equally, the community can be the most effective partner for the government in monitoring critical elements like enrolment, attendance, teacher absenteeism or controlling leakages and ensuring effective use of allocated resources.
- ❑ However, enough oversight and handholding support will be necessary initially in many locations while establishing formal spaces for the community to be involved in the school to ensure that these spaces are not hijacked by vested interests.
- ❑ Neither poverty nor illiteracy need be impediments in comparison with the zeal shown by parents to obtain quality education for their children. The commitment of the parents in

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<sup>50</sup> Kaushik, A. (2007). Op. cit. p. 5.

Hyderabad's slums and Dindigul's forests indicate that parents will be willing partners in any efforts to provide children with free, compulsory, quality education.

- ❑ Providing the necessary infrastructure constitutes only the first step to providing quality education. Support must be drawn from successful initiatives, including private schools and educational resource centres, for improving the quality of education in government schools, without handing over these schools to private entities. The support provided by RIVER and The School, Chennai, for the development of ABL and ALM in Tamil Nadu are good examples of such support.
- ❑ In designing quality education, special attention must be paid to diversity education, and well-designed efforts to address issues of social differences and exclusions based on gender, caste, disability, etc. are necessary. Capacities exist in the larger community which can be accessed and applied to ensure that these do not constitute window-dressing, but are substantive efforts, e.g., the implementation of KGBV and NPEGEL with the support of Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, or efforts by SDMCs to work in elements like promotion of folk art, care of the environment, etc., into extra-curricular efforts for children.
- ❑ Efforts to improve the education system will be strengthened if accompanied by a conscientisation programme which empowers communities to demand quality education for their children as the right it has now become, and a sensitisation programme for government officials so that there is a genuine desire to function in a mode which goes beyond that of the lowest common denominator.