

# CITIZEN MONITORING OF SCHOOLS

Making the System Accountable



CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

## THE WRITING ON THE WALL

- Engagement of citizens with the school system can bring about an improvement in its functioning by facilitating the process of transparency and accountability. However it needs a structure and an institutional framework.
- Wide dissemination of information facilitates engagement. An active engagement brings to the fore real issues and helps to set priorities of issues to be addressed, more democratically.
- Monitoring provides an opportunity for citizens to be involved with the school. Rights-holders can achieve the most effective monitoring.
- Bridging the gap between the school and the community by constructively engaging with the teachers, and including their problems along with those faced by children, helps to build trust and create greater space for citizen monitoring.
- Platforms for direct engagement of citizens with the state in a dialogue mode where they can share their experiences and be heard without fear or intimidation is an effective way of monitoring schools and finding local solutions.
- Action must be taken on citizen monitoring shared through the platforms for dialogue redressing or other forums of transparent and open engagement with the state. Setting and following clear timelines for grievances based on their nature and severity, completes the feedback loop.
- Accountability must be fixed within the implementing structures either through government orders or through praxis by local levels of the administration. The latter emerged as one of the outcomes of citizen monitoring, as action is taken through the process of citizen-state dialogue. Using a central law [Right to Education] and/or presence of a National Commission increases accountability in the system.
- Getting citizens to engage is hard work. It requires time, persistence and an extended period of facilitation. The facilitation enables them to build their confidence, and create capacities to engage in a structured manner with the institutions of the state. It allows them to present their monitoring feedback in a systematic fashion as well as pursue with the follow-up to ensure action is taken.



*"Full participation of the society and government is necessary for children to attain complete education"*

# EXPERIENCE OF A PILOT CONDUCTED IN 10 STATES OF INDIA

## WHY WE DID IT?

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) passed in 2009 makes elementary education a fundamental right of every child in the age group 6-14 years. Further the Act mandates the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights [NCPCR] - an independent body - to monitor the implementation of the Act. The Constitutional provision of rights enunciated in the Act and the separation of powers between implementation and monitoring provided a unique opportunity for citizen engagement in monitoring of schools through the linking of citizens with the Commission.

In order to take advantage of this opportunity, a unique pilot was conducted involving citizens as monitors, under the aegis of the Commission's mandate<sup>1</sup>. It was based on the following principles:

- Citizen Engagement works; however it needs institutionalization
- Information increases engagement and establishes citizens' priorities
- Citizens or Rights holders make effective monitors
- Involvement of teachers important to bridge gap between school and community
- Platforms for citizen-state dialogue provide a powerful space for citizen monitoring of schools
- Follow up on monitoring is necessary to close the feedback loop
- Citizen monitoring can help fix accountabilities in the system
- Facilitators are required to initiate and establish citizen-monitoring processes



<sup>1</sup> The RTE Team of NCPCR, that conceived of, coordinated and documented the pilot comprised of Kiran Bhatt, Shreya Ghosh, Priyanka Varma, Sriranjini Vadiraj and Paras Ram Banjara.

## HOW WE DID IT?

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### APPOINTMENT OF FACILITATORS

Facilitators were selected from existing civil society groups working closely with people on the ground. The main criteria was that the group must have an established link with the community and commitment to the project in its entirety

### TRAINING

The facilitators were trained in the use of tools, especially developed for the monitoring exercise. The trainings were conducted over a 10 day period and included a field element involving the use of the tools. This method of learning-by-doing proved to be an extremely effective way training the facilitators.

### SHARING INFORMATION AND AWARENESS BUILDING

- Newsletter in local language developed and used to carry information about the RTE Act and the monitoring pilot.
- Mobile Theatre [Kalajathas] plays developed and conducted.
- Leaflets (Parchas) in 11 languages (Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Assamese, Bodo, Kannada, Telugu, Bundeli, Oriya, Bengali, Manipuri) on the RTE Act developed and distributed in the community. These were also given to school and district level administrations to be displayed and used.
- Wall Writings: Slogans and messages were also written on walls in public areas and in some cases on the walls of people's homes as well.
- Street theatre: especially forum theatre was also used as a way of extracting people's participation in such awareness campaigns.

### COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: STRATEGIES USED FOR INVOLVING CITIZENS

- **Tapping Self-Help Groups and NREGA workers**  
Seeking out people in collectives helped to capture their attention. The facilitators held meetings with women's Self Help Groups, which increased the involvement of women. Workers were contacted at the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) worksites and engaged in conversations on the Right to Education.
- **'Gully' aur 'Ghar' (Street and Home) Meetings**  
One-on-one, conversations were also held with people – at street corners, teashops and in their homes. "Gully"[street] meetings were held in many states and rallies taken out in some. Typically home visits were used to invite people to evening meetings. Sometimes children were told in school to inform their parents of the meetings. In some cases, community meetings were also held at the school.
- **Indirect Approach**  
In some places, the facilitators began their interaction with community members by discussing issues such as NREGA, ration shops, land or water issues and other common concerns. They even assisted families in getting a job card or availing of their rations where such problems arose. Only after they had established a good relationship with them and earned their confidence did they broach the subject of RTE and monitoring.



- **Involving Dropouts**

Often meetings were held near the homes of children who were dropouts. Even the child dropout would be called to the community meetings in order to understand the reasons for dropping out and how the child could be enrolled again.

- **Structured Meetings**

In some states community meetings were in a structured manner involving the local government bodies – the Panchayats. The presence of Panchayat members helped attract more people to the meetings.

- **Public Hearings**

In some states ‘public hearings’ were used to draw people into the process. The public hearings proved a successful means of provoking people’s participation and also resulted in large-scale follow up action. This provided a great deal of motivation to the community and the team of facilitators.

- **Using other networks**

The facilitating group sometimes used existing networks to build synergistic relations with the community on the issue of education. In areas where they had difficulty in getting the community to participate, the team of facilitators got together with members of other networks (forest, livelihoods etc) and focused their combined energies to activate people and stimulate their interest.

## SCHOOL VISITS: OVERCOMING HOSTILITY AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS

In general, the school visits revealed that the situation in terms of implementation of Right to Education norms was very poor. The teachers and the rest of the establishment were grappling with the new paradigm, with little information, training or understanding of how it had changed their roles, job profiles and the manner in which education was now to be delivered. This realization led to a fair degree of resentment and hostility towards the facilitators and the citizen monitors in the initial stages.

What emerged during the pilot was the distance and distrust that existed between the teaching establishment and the community, which was the cause of uneasiness amongst teachers with the idea of citizen monitoring. As a teacher said, “we do not mind if the government team comes to the school, but why must the community members come and ask us questions”.



The adverse reaction revealed the fact that teachers were not accustomed to having parents and community members come to school and question them regarding the entitlements due to their children or the way in which the school was functioning. This new assertiveness from the community unnerved them.

However, over time, the teachers shed some of their defenses and started to respond positively. They became convinced of the positive effects of the monitoring process and ultimately began to turn to the facilitators for help and support on a range of issues including information on the provisions of RTE Act, special trainings for dropped out children etc. In some states the facilitators actively engaged with the teachers on issues of quality and even held classes or provided other inputs for teachers and children. The teachers also relied on the facilitators to act as a medium of communication with parents on issues related to their children's progress in the school. They also realized that the facilitators were raising issues that they were unable to take up with the administration and which benefitted them as well.

## PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND THE STATE

### i) "Shiksha Samvad" [Education Dialogue] at lower levels of administration

**Why?** The logical culmination of an effective monitoring process is response and action from the administration. In order to increase accountability at the lower level of government, particularly at the block level and district level, the Commission recommended conducting Shiksha Samvads as part of the pilot. These were held once a month at the block level and once in a quarter at the district level.

**What?** Shiksha Samvad is a platform for dialogue between the administration and the people on issues related to education and RTE. The objective was to share information, review implementation of education programmes, and find solutions to issues raised. It functioned as a channel that enabled the administration to keep abreast of actual implementation and allowed civil society groups to bring issues to the fore and seek speedy redress. It further strengthened citizen participation and ensured transparency and administrative accountability in redressing grievances locally and speedily.

**How?** During the pilot the facilitators mobilized people to participate in the Shiksha Samvads. Findings of the monitoring process were presented and people raised problems themselves in the presence of the Block administration. Systematic presentations by the community at the Samvad made a huge difference in eliciting response from the administration, as did the continued presence of a core group of facilitators in successive Samvads. Teachers were also present in the Samvads. So that action for or against them could be decided on this collective platform. The venue for the meeting and other logistical arrangements are made by the administration. When convened by the Block Development Office, the Samvads allow for inter-departmental participation providing a much-needed platform for convergence between departments.

**What After?** The monthly Shiksha Samvads at the Block were followed up with quarterly Meetings at the District level, where unresolved issues were taken up. These were convened by the District Collector and attended by representatives of all line departments related to education.



**Advantage:** This process has proven to give a voice to the poorest and provide an opportunity to community members, including civil society groups to establish a relationship with the administration and the community; for both to come together on a single platform, discuss, review and address issues related to RTE found through the monitoring exercise has been a powerful mode for open governance as well as problem solving.

## ii) Public Hearings

Public Hearings was another mode of open citizen-state engagement used during the pilot. The idea behind it was to use this platform of direct democracy to provide a forum for people to air their grievances and to use it to illicit a response on the spot. During the pilot it proved to be a useful strategy in two ways:

- It helped to kick-start the citizen monitoring process by creating an environment among the people through the presence of the state. People's faith in the process increased as they saw that they got a forum to air their grievances and attention was drawn to long pending issues and immediate action taken.
- It was used to present the findings of the citizen monitoring exercise. The issues such as, cleanliness of school premises, including toilets; corporal punishment, infrastructural deficiencies, Midday meals, were discussed at length during the hearing. Some issues were resolved there and then such as the suspension of a teacher, but some were left for later, pending enquiries.

## STATE RESPONSE

Response is an important step in the whole process especially to keep up the motivation of the people and the facilitators. It emerged during the pilot that community participation and State response were linked closely and created a sort of virtuous circle. That is, where people saw action being taken by the government, they were more willing to step out, make time and get actively involved. Over the years, the community's experience of the State has been negative. Despite many community-based associations formed for education such as the PTAs/MTAs [Mother-Teacher Associations], Village Education Committees, School Development Management Committees and so on, real participation of people in them has been low. Elite capture, poorly defined roles of community members or parents, little devolution of power and resources and most crucially, inability to get heard and receive a response from the government have greatly reduced the expectations from these so-called community based platforms and processes. Hence, it came as no surprise when it was reiterated by all the facilitators that State action or the responsiveness of the State was a defining factor in determining not just the success of the project in terms of outcomes but also in terms of eliciting participation of the community.

## i) Grievance Redress

The most important element of state response is grievance redress. Seeing the state take steps towards redressing complaints raised during the monitoring exercise and presented at various platforms is the ultimate object and goes a long way in sustaining the engagement of citizens. The initiation of this process of response in different modes was a huge success of the pilot. In addition to the issues that were addressed during the public hearings and the Shiksha Samvads, the platforms of engagement led to the inclusion of grievance redress as an agenda in the regular meetings of the education department. For instance the meetings held at the Nodal level began to include detailed discussions on the presentations made at the Public Hearings/ Shiksha Samvads. It was these meetings that led to a string of actions improved provision of mid-day meals, reversing teacher deputations, timely distribution of incentives etc.,

Further, officials at the lower levels of the bureaucracy [including the teachers] made attempts to convince the community to bring complaints and other grievances to them directly, rather than raise them in the Public Hearing. One reason for this was that the Block Officials or teachers are unaccustomed to being summoned and made to answer in a public forum. This kind of public accountability rattled them.

In one instance, the Block Education Officers held a meeting with the teachers and asked them to give in writing that they will not make the mistakes brought up during the monitoring exercise.

## ii) Enforcing Accountability

In the absence of an accountability structure, the facilitators attempted to fix accountability in the Shiksha Samvads, by finding solutions to the issues brought up through dialogue. For instance, if the block officer was able to provide transport for children not being able to access school, this became an entitlement for which the block could be held responsible in the future as well. Thus by praxis, accountability was established for a range of issues. In several instances, a demonstration effect was also noticed as surrounding areas began to demand accountability for the same things at similar levels. Being able to enforce accountability in this way was an extremely important consequence of the pilot.

## iii) Getting Government Orders

Several orders were passed during the entire monitoring exercise. Some of these included:

- State-wise orders on holding Shiksha Samvads [extending to all areas even beyond the pilot]
- Developing an accountability matrix to fix responsibilities at different levels for different entitlements
- Banning the practice of sending teachers on deputation
- Appointing RTE Grievance Redress Officer at the block level. The officer was charged with addressing all complaints at the monthly meeting.
- Providing school buses in tribal areas where children had difficulty reaching the school.

Other orders included asking teachers for answers to questions that were raised at the Public Hearing /Shiksha Samvads and to ensuring that improvements in the school take place. The fact that this form of “grievance redress” was institutionalized through orders went a long way in bringing accountability into the system.

## WHAT WE ACHIEVED?

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The pilot exercise covered 10 states and a total of 1262 schools. Listed below are some of the outcomes that emerged while conducting the community monitoring exercise.

### 1. SCHOOL TIMINGS WERE REGULATED

- a. Opening and closing times of schools regulated
- b. Classes begin on time

### 2. TEACHER ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY IMPROVED

- a. Punctuality and Regularity in attendance by teachers began to be maintained; In fact teachers along the entire “route” started coming on time [even beyond the sampled schools]
- b. Cases of teachers either being irregular or coming to school inebriated and sleeping during class hours completely stopped.
- c. Teachers bought bicycles to allow them to travel to interior villages from where they were earlier absconding.

### **3. TEACHING QUALITY IMPROVED**

- a. In Andhra Pradesh weekly meetings with teachers initiated to review progress of each child
- b. In Madhya Pradesh checking of homework started
- c. In Maharashtra teachers began to maintain daily notes

### **4. TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY IMPROVED**

- a. In Maharashtra drunk teacher transferred and others do not come to school inebriated any more.
- b. In MP and Bihar there was a huge improvement in record maintenance by teachers.
- c. Teachers could not take advantage of the lack of awareness of parents and children after this pilot. This was reported particularly in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

### **5. TEACHERS APPOINTED**

- a. In Maharashtra and Odisha deputation of teachers was cancelled
- b. In AP, Rajasthan and TN new teachers were appointed
- c. In Maharashtra teachers began to maintain daily notes

### **6. ESTIMATION OF OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN WAS IMPROVED**

- a. Large gaps in the teacher-conducted Child Tracking Survey identified.
- b. Children With Special Needs that were out-of-school were identified for the first time in the pilot areas.

### **7. OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN WERE ENROLLED**

- a. Scores of out-of-school children were identified and enrolled in school during the pilot.

### **8. CHARGING OF FEES STOPPED**

- a. In Rajasthan, MP, TN and Maharashtra fees stopped being charged
- b. In AP, MP, Maharashtra and Bihar fees were returned, where it had been taken illegally.

### **9. CHILDREN SHIFTED FROM PRIVATE TO GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

- a. Two Private schools shut down and children shifted to the government school in MP.
- b. 203 children were reported to have shifted back to government schools as their functioning improved through the monitoring pilot in AP [150], MP [40] and TN [13]

### **10. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS WERE MADE BY THE SMCS IN 72 SCHOOLS.**

### **11. INFRASTRUCTURE WAS IMPROVED**

- a. In Rajasthan and Maharashtra allocation for toilets was increased
- b. In Odisha, MP, TN, Maharashtra and Bihar toilets were constructed
- c. In Rajasthan and Odisha water filters were installed
- d. In MP and Maharashtra land was procured for new building from forest area and schools constructed
- e. In MP, TN and Bihar boundary walls were built.
- f. In Maharashtra electricity connection was provided and grants given for Libraries, which had never been received before.

g. In MP and Maharashtra new schools were constructed and old ones repaired.

## **12. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT REDUCED**

- a. Awareness about legal ban in CP spread with incidents falling sharply across the pilot areas.
- b. In Odisha threats to induce obedience stopped
- c. In Rajasthan children stopped being asked to clean toilets
- d. In Maharashtra children refused to do the cleaning in schools

## **13. CORRUPTION CAUGHT**

- a. NPEGEL funds [Rs 1, 54,000] recovered from Head Master in Boden Block, Nuapada, Odisha
- b. School building funds recovered from Head Teacher T in Odisha and from Sarpanch in Madhya Pradesh
- c. Rs. 11 lakhs towards house rent allowance given to teachers to stay in the village when they did not actually stay in the village, returned by them in Maharashtra.
- d. In Tamil Nadu, noon meal officer who was pilfering rations transferred.
- e. Chicken and money stopped being taken as part of "guru-dakshina" [teachers' fees] for gaining admission to school in Odisha.

## **14. INCENTIVE SCHEMES IMPROVED**

- a. Books started arriving on time in AP
- b. Newspapers were provided in school libraries in MP
- c. Books and Scholarships distributed in organized manner in Maharashtra
- d. Scholarship accounts opened in Maharashtra
- e. Bus service started for children who were previously unable to access their school in Maharashtra.
- f. Books and scholarships, uniforms, cycles, laptops, which had stopped being given were provided in Tamil Nadu.

## **15. PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS MADE**

- a. A range of provisions were made for CWSN, such as ramps, wheel chairs, appliances, special toilets for girls, hostels and scholarships.

## **16. OTHER**

- a. Non-academic duties of teachers stopped in MP
- b. RTE monitoring Committee was formed at the Panchayat level In Tamil Nadu
- c. Grievance Redress meeting fixed for every Monday at Block office in Odisha
- d. In Bihar, schools stopped taking documents during admission as mandated by RTE.

## WHAT WE LEARNT

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### NEED FOR INSTITUTIONALIZING THE PROCESS:

There is a dire need for some form of institutionalized community monitoring. The role of the community in providing information on the status of implementation is crucial to learn about what is working and what is not. This information is, in turn, indispensable for informing the policy and planning processes, so that it addresses the real needs of the people. The pilot revealed that the community is eager to participate in the process but requires facilitation and formal spaces for engagement.

### NEED FOR ESTABLISHING A SYSTEMATIC METHODOLOGY:

There is also a need to have rigorous and systematic methodology and set of tools that allows the community to collect, collate and present findings to the administration for action. While local specificities and contextual flexibility must be built into the process; rigour and a clear enunciation of data is an important requirement.

### NEED FOR FACILITATION:

For community engagement to be sustained it will require facilitation for some time to come. There is therefore a need to build a clear and systematic role for facilitators into the institutional design for citizen monitoring.

### NEED FOR PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE:

Creating common platforms for interaction between the people and the administration came out as a strong means of giving effect to the citizen monitoring process. These platforms and spaces for interaction must build on a dialogue mode at local levels and be linked to higher levels of government for action, where needed.

### NEED FOR CLARITY IN ROLES:

For institutionalizing citizen monitoring, the roles of all the agencies involved, i.e., the government, citizens and facilitators need to be clarified. For the government, their role in putting into place platforms of engagement and a robust response mechanism are critical. For the citizen, continued participation and involvement at different levels starting from the school will be important. The facilitators can provide awareness and information, deliver training to the citizen and citizen-based groups, facilitate the dialogue process, enable collection and presentation of data and assist in follow-up activities.

### NEED FOR NETWORKING:

Building a strong network of facilitators can help in conducting collective advocacy and also in learning from their shared experiences.

### NEED FOR FUNDING:

Adequate funds need to be allocated for this process. A standard has already been set in other legislations [like the NREGA] where 1% of funds are set aside for transparency, accountability and monitoring purposes. However, in the absence of State funding, other funding agencies can come forward to support such initiatives and create models for future integration by the state machinery.

## PEOPLE'S VOICES

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**Facilitator:** “I realized that we as citizens could monitor RTE”.

**Parent:** “I go to the school and check whether the teacher has come or not and whether he is teaching properly or not. The teacher should teach for 6 hours and if he is teaching just for 4 hours is not right. We put absent to the teacher who has not come. This way proper monitoring happens.”

**Teacher, Primary school:** “Officials rajnitik dabav mein kaam karte hein, lekin community nahi. To unka role bahut bada hai” (*officials work under political pressure but not the community and thus their role is much greater*)

**Head teacher, Upper Primary School:** “Samudayeke hi bachchay jooday hein, to woh hi pooray samasya ko samajh saktehein” (*The community's children are at stake and hence the community can also understand the problem in its entirety*)

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5. Apeksha Homoeo Society, Maharashtra
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