

ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL EDUCATION OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: The issue of dropout, out of school, poor attendance is a very common problem in school education. The involvement of community members in the school education can improve the scenario to some extent. The present study has observed that VECs perform differently in four selected gram panchayats of West Bengal. The socio-economic condition of villagers to a great extent is responsible for child labour and hence poor attendance in schools. However a cohort study shows how the active VECs solves such issues at its own level. It has also explored the possible relationship of head teacher's education level and activity level of VEC.

Keywords: school education, community participation, village education committee

Introduction: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Government of India to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) covering the entire country in a mission mode. SSA has been launched in 2001-2002 in partnership with state Governments & local self-governments. It is known as "Pashchim Bangyo Sarva Shiksha Mission" in West Bengal which monitors all the activities related to the implementation of SSA. The SSA has clearly mentioned VEC mandatory for community ownership of school-based interventions through effective decentralization.

Objectives:

- To study the role of VEC in improving school enrolment, reducing drop outs and never enrolled/out of school children.
- To understand the processes and linkages involved in activity level of VEC with the help of cohort studies.

Study Area: The following table shows the selection of study area at district, block, gram panchayat and village levels

Table 1.1 : Selection of Study Area

Districts	North 24 Parganas		Murshidabad	
Blocks	Basirhat II	Basirhat I	Berhampore	Hariharpara
Gram Panchayats*	Kholapota GP	Gotra GP	Bhakuriz GP	Hariharpara GP
Cohort Schools in village	Gobindopur Titumir	Lakshmanakati	Gakunda	Hariharpara

*All schools within gram panchayat have been studied.

The Activity Level of VEC in the Study Area: The activity level composite index of VEC has been computed based on frequency of VEC meeting, re-enrolment of dropped out & never enrolled hh in enrolment drive. The activity level index shows that Murshidabad has more highly active (7 highly active VEC) VECs as compared to N.24 Parganas (3 highly active). Since the motive of VEC is more of reducing

drop out and out of school children therefore the index has used indicators like frequency of meeting, re-enrolment of drop out and never enrolled children and it shows that the Gotra GP has the maximum number of poorly active VEC (4 poorly active). The Kholapota GP doesn't have any poorly performing VEC. All the three GP except Gota GP shows that mostly the schools have moderately active VEC.

Table 5.19: Activity Level Index of VEC

Activity level*	Kholapota GP	GotraGP	Bhakuriz GP	Hariharpara GP
Total VEC	8	8	10	12
Active VEC (1.0 - 0.8)	1	2	4	3
Moderate VEC (0.7 - 0.5)	7	2	5	7
Poor VEC (0.4 - 0.1)	0	4	1	2

Source: Field survey 2011

*Based on composite index (indicators: frequency of VEC meetings, re-enrolment of dropped out & never enrolled hh in enrolment drive)

Cohort Study of Active, Moderately active and Poorly active VEC: The Gram Panchayat level

activity of VEC in re-enrolling drop outs, never enrolled children has been so far studied, which gives

us a quantitative picture of highly active, poorly active VEC. Therefore now we need to understand the processes that are moving beneath the superficial structure of the committee, which can be achieved with the in depth qualitative study of the schools, head master’s role, enthusiasm of community members, co-operation of anganwadi workers, serious door to door enrolment drives, the checks and balances of inspectors and role of CRC. Therefore to begin with let us study the village characteristics first to understand the situation of community members.

Characteristics of Workforce in Cohort Villages:

The total worker is maximum in Lakshmankati village which is above 50 percent. The main worker is above 90 percent in Gobinapur Dhokra and Hariharpara, which shows that villagers have got more than 6 months of work in a year. Tarakpur shows above 80 percent are main worker, Lakshmankati shows less

main worker. The following are the chief occupation of field cohort study:

Bidi making belt, Migrating labour - Lakshmankati village

Household garment tailoring belt - Gobindapur Dhokra village

Brick making industry- Tarakpur (Gakunda) village

Agriculture, fishing – Hariharpara village

The field study shows the problem of migrating labour and domination of household Bidi making industry in the villages around lakshmankati primary school. Gobindopur has a dominating household industry as per Census which has been confirmed and it is household tailoring belt supplying stitched wholesale garment to the urban region of Kolkata. Hariharpara is more dependent on agriculture, fishing and Tarakur has dominating Brick Kiln industry where most of the villagers work as labourer.

Table: Workforce Characteristics of Cohort Villages

Villages	Total.W	Total Worker		Main Worker			
		Main.W	Marginal.W	Cultivator	Agr. Labourer	Hh Industry	Others
Lakshmankati	58.7	54.8	18.5	47.2	10.8	6.3	11.5
Gobindapur Dhokra	32.8	94.6	35.5	84.0	21.9	16.4	10.2
Tarakpur	31.1	84.9	15.1	17.4	25.6	2.3	39.7
Hariharpara	29.5	92.1	7.9	27.1	34.4	2.1	28.5

Source: Computed from Primary Census Abstract, Murshidabad & N.24 Parganas, 2001.

Re-Enrolment of Drop Outs, Out of Schools by the VEC: The most common problem in the school is absenteeism, drop out, out of school children. Hence VEC efforts to re-enrol the dropped out students can be seen to be varying in both the better performing VEC schools and the lesser performing VEC schools. In the better VEC performing schools of Titumir and Hariharpara both the schools had small number of dropouts and it had re-enrolled 100 percent of the dropped outs.

In the lesser performing VEC the Lakshmankati primary school had re-enrolled 30 percent of the drop outs whereas Gakunda primary school could enroll only 20 percent of the drop outs. The VEC of Gakunda primary school didn’t visit all the drop outs and said that it was not possible to give individual attention as drop outs were large in number. Thus Gakunda p.s could not enrol 78 percent of the drop outs as it didn’t put effort in interacting with the community.

Table 5.34: Drop out and Re-Enrollment

school	Drop out	Re-enrolled	% Re-enrolled	Didn’t not enrol
Titumir	5	5	100	0
Lakshmankati	9	3	33.3	66.7
Gakunda	18	4	22.2	77.8
Hariharpara	2	2	100	0
Total	34	14	41.2	58.8

Source: Cohort Field Survey 2011

Poor Attendance and VECs efforts: It is observed during field survey that VEC members conduct enrolment drives twice a year to enroll students and in the process they visit some households to enquire about poor attendance. The emphasis towards re-enrolment is there but no effort is put by VEC to

check absenteeism. In Gakunda the enrolment drive was not conducted door to door it was mainly done by informing parents therefore out of 61 absent student on the day of my visit none of the households were knocked to enquire the reason. This shows a poor role of VEC, this has resulted into poor

community-school and teacher linkage. There exists a gap between community and teachers also which is difficult to bridge. It should be noted as

compared to the absent students on the day of visit the VEC visit to the household is very poor.

Table 5.37 : VECs Effort and Absenteeism of Students

VECs effort	Titumir	Lakshmankati	Gakunda	Hariharpara
Absent student on day of field visit	31	55	61	6
HH visited for poor attendance	13 (41.9)	19 (34.5)	0	2 (33.3)

Source: Field survey 2011

Relationship between Head Teacher and Activity level of VEC: The relationship of highly active and poorly active VEC with that of the educational level of Head teacher above H.S has no significant relationship as found in the Chi Square Test. However it is observed that there is a significant relationship between the moderately active VEC and education level of Head teacher which has 5 % level of significance.

List of Indicators for Chi Square Test:

1. Mediumly active VEC (dependant variable)
2. Highly active VEC (dependant variable)
3. Poorly active VEC (dependant variable)
4. Educational level of Head Teacher above H.S (independant)
5. Educational level of Panchayat members above H.S (independant)

Table: Chi square Test among Mediumly Active VEC & Educational Qualification

Chi Square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Significance
Head Teachers Qualification	3.650	1	0.056*	Significant 5% level
Panchayat member Qualification	.3910		0.532	Not significant
N of Valid Cases	38			

Conclusion: The major problem observed in the present study is poor attendance, drop outs and out of schools children. The VECs are observed to be moderately functioning. In Bhakuri 2 GP of Murshidabad majority of actively working VEC were observed among all the 4 GPs. The Gotra GP of North 24 Parganas has the majority of poorly performing VECs. The Cohort study has further investigated the activity details of the VEC to the grass root level. It is observed that the economic activity prevalent in the cohort village are mainly bidi making, migrating labour, household garment tailoring, agriculture, fishing, brick making. Therefore a huge number of children are engaged in these activities and they drop from the school. The effort of VEC has brought back many children to the schools. In the better VEC performing schools of Titumir and Hariharpara both the schools had small number of dropouts and it had

re-enrolled 100 percent of the dropped outs. In the lesser performing VEC the Lakshmankati primary school had re-enrolled 30 percent of the drop outs whereas Gakunda primary school could enroll only 20 percent of the drop outs. The re-enrollment is mainly due to different level of serious door to door enrollment drives which varies from school to school. This effort to re-enroll dropped out students and talk to parents of poor attending students varies from school to school which to some extent is dependent on the head master of the school. A further analysis of data to understand such relation shows a significant chi square value of 0.056* among qualification of head teacher and moderate performance of VEC. Thus it can be said that the education level of head teacher has a relation with the community participation through VEC.

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