



## Community Participation and Empowerment in Elementary Education: A Study of Uttarakhand State

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**Abstract:** The role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in promoting quality elementary education of children indicates that the community has a strong resolve to achieve education for all- goal 4 of the UN Agenda for sustainable development. Community participation and empowerment meaningfully brings the point to fore that schooling system partnering with the local community can provide solutions to many intricate issues. The present paper argues that community (School Management Committee) is an effective instrument to empower the marginalized to voice their grievances and come up with solutions and have a say in decision-making. The study establishes, that SMCs are aware of the policy issues and fault lines therein but their major concern is immediate i.e., to enroll all children, retain them in school and improve the quality of learning. The parents of children find difficult to provide academic support to children as they are pressed by the drudgeries of livelihood along with low level or no education. Therefore, in SMCs meetings they insist on improving school effectiveness, and for the improvement in the classroom, processes are the key to quality education. Thus, in improving access, enrolment, retention of children in schools and the overall monitoring of schools, the SMCs are playing significant role. However, more concentrated efforts are required to improve the classroom processes- resulting in better quality of learning.

**Key Words:** School Management Committees, Community participation, Sustainable Development

### Introduction

It has been conclusively established by numerous empirical and theoretical research that education, especially elementary education, is crucial in the process of capability creation, developing a responsive citizenry, and fostering growth. In the process of growth, education contributes in multiple manners ranging from developing human capabilities, forming skills to giving people the voice to articulate, assert, and resists the infringement of human rights (Dreze and Sen, 1995 Banerjee at el 2006 Banerjee, 2010). Therefore, the delivery of basic services like - education, health, water, sanitation are integral to sustainable development, as these activities are a source of many positive externalities. This wisdom, form the cornerstone

of UNESCO's Goal -4 Education for Sustainable Development , which emphasizes the need for quality education that is inclusive and equitable, one that promotes life-long learning opportunities for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2015, 2016) For inclusive and sustainable development - engagement of the community in education specially elementary education has always been viewed as an important concern of public policy in India and elsewhere. The 'Directive Principles of State Policy" enshrined in the constitution of India (article 40) suggests a decentralized pattern of governance. Accordingly, the Government of India took several steps in this direction, and eventually, the government of India got the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments (1992)



passed in the Parliament. These constitutional amendments, inter-alia, empower the State legislatures to devolve powers necessary to enable institutions of local self-governance - collectively referred to as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), functioning in the villages and urban areas (Govinda R and Mudhmita Bandopadhyay, 2011).

### Material and Methods

To examine how School Management Committees – expected to be an effective vehicle of community participation are functioning to strengthen the elementary education system – to ensure quality education in the region in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 2030. Therefore, 24 School Management Committees (SMCs) which are constituted under Right to Education Act, Government of India, 2009 were studied. The survey was conducted in 2019 in the months of October-November and sample SMCs were selected from six sample districts of Uttarakhand State, namely Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Tehri Garhwal, Bageshwar, Champawat, and Nainital. Twenty four SMCs, each from the 6 sample districts was selected following – random sampling techniques and 70 members – around three members from each of the SMC were selected for detailed and in-depth discussion. The representation of female members and other marginal community members (Schedule Caste /Schedule Tribes) was also given due weight. To find out the community participation, ownership and empowerment, members were requested to share their views and opinion on the process of education-related decision making. Three questionnaires – seeking information about the school, teachers, and functioning of SMC were administered. Besides, open-ended interviews were also held with the members of SMCs.

Efforts were to access the quality of community governance by soliciting the response of sampled SMC members on the five-point scale. The gathered information/ perceptions were put to factor analysis. Focus group discussions and participatory rural appraisals were also carried out to ascertain the community perception of various issues related to empowerment of community.

### Study Area

The Uttarakhand region is located in the north western part of India in Himalayan ranges between 28<sup>0</sup>-43'N to 21<sup>0</sup>-27'N latitude and 77<sup>0</sup>-34' E to 81<sup>0</sup>-02 E longitude and spread over a 53483 square kilometers, with a population of around 10 million (*Government of India, Census 2011*). This Himalaya region has a rich tradition of community participation and public action, especially in managing the common property resources. The Popular Chipko Aandolan (Tree Hugging Movement, lead by Smt. Gaura Devi) of community governance of forest conservation of the region acclaimed internationally. This community owned unique model has triggered a series of environmental debates and changed the discourse of public policy on environment and ecology at the national level, the impact of which often reverberates, in various ecological movements across the globe (Guha Ramchandra, 1999). In this Himalayan region, soon after the independence of India in 1947, the presence of primary schools gradually become ubiquitous. However, direct involvement of the community in the governance of elementary schooling, owned and managed by the government in the region came through the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) launched the six low female literacy districts of the region viz Champawat, Bageshwar, Haridwar, Pithoragarh, Tehri Garhwal, and Uttarkashi and later followed by SSA and Right



to Education Act (Government of India, 2000 and 2009). As per the provision of the Right to Education Act 2009, the State Government constituted a School Management Committee (SMC) in every school and devolved powers to parents of children to deliver good governance of elementary education (Boradia, A. 2010). The School Management Committee regularly organizes cultural and other co-scholastic activities to encourage parents to enroll and mainstream out of school children. To widen the scope of the intervention unlike Plight of Dreams (Sapno ki Udan), SMCs synchronize the calendar of local fairs (*Melas*) with activities - like Mother-Daughter Fair (*Ma-Beti Mela*), innovative aptitude of children (*Bal-Shodh Mela*). These activities provide an interactive platform for children to share their learning experience, innovative talent, and how mother and daughter are the catalysts of educational development. Congruent to these activities are Health Education Camps organized by the Health Department in collaboration with SMCs (*Government of Uttarakhand, 2010*). There are examples in the state indicating that the community- including the teachers posted in the schools, endeavor to address the deficiency in the infrastructure and availability of teachers. The government too realizes that SMC- an important and integral agency in the bottom-up approach of educational development, is crucial to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) with good quality, social equity and gender parity.

### Results and Discussion

In the development of literacy, Uttarakhand has made tremendous progress to the extent that eight districts of the state have literacy rates of more than eighty per cent. Male literacy is either very close to ninety per cent or more than ninety per cent. This achievement of the state could be attributed to the big strides that it has taken

towards the universalizing of elementary education. As per the Human Development Report of the Uttarakhand, there are 15642 primary 4285 upper primary schools in the states. About 100 per cent of habitations had primary school or Education Guarantee schools either in the habitation or within less than half a kilometer. 99.2 per cent of the state had upper primary schools within less than three kilometers. This expansion of schooling facilities has facilitated enrollment to the extent that the state is at the threshold of achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE) as far as access and enrolment is concerned. The net enrolment ratio (NER) is about 100 percent in the age group of 6-11 years (primary level) and 99.48 percent in the age group 11-14 years (upper primary level) with very little difference across district and gender. The data of learning achievements of the students studying in class IV highlights learning abilities in Language (listening, recognition of words, and reading comprehension) and in Mathematics (numbers, basic operations, measurements, data handling, pattern, money and geometry) shows that 72 percent of language items and 63 percent of mathematics questions answered correctly by students and the performance was found above the national average in both language and mathematics (Government of Uttarakhand, HDR, 2019, NIAR, 2003 and 2005). The data shows that the School Management Committees are performing well in enrolling, retaining and contributing in learning of students in schools. These data raise the hope and expectations by 2030 the state of Uttarakhand will be close to the SDG -4 in ensuring free and compulsory primary and secondary education to all girls and boys with quality i.e. relevant and effective learning outcomes. The detail of the progress of elementary education in study area is presented in Table-1.



**Table 1: Details of GER, NER and Learning Achievement**

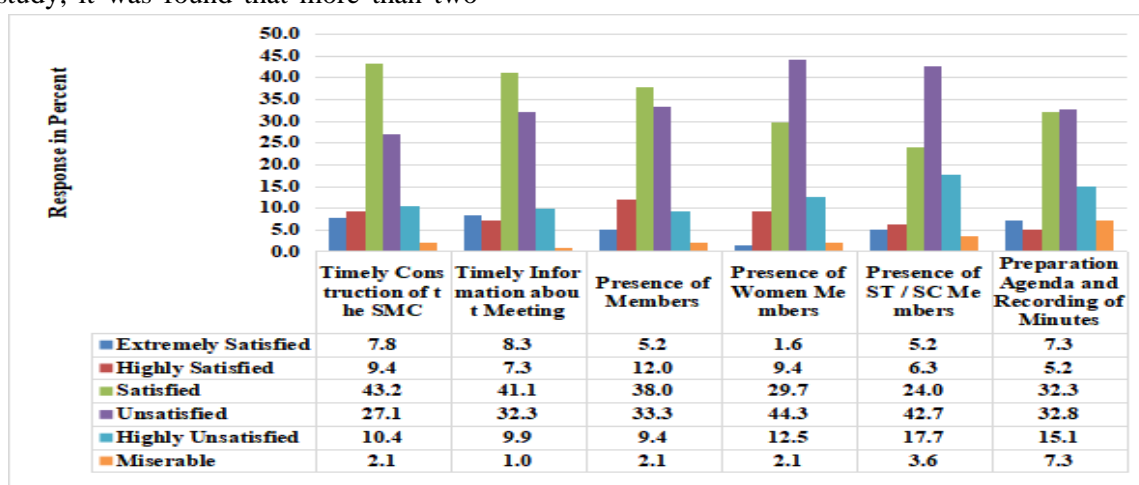
Year	GER Primary Level	GER Upper Primary Level	NER Primary Level	NER Upper Primary Level	Learning Achievement Class II (Mean Score)		Learning Achievement Class IV (Mean Score)	
					Language	Maths	Language	Maths
2005-06*	119.89	89.88	98.48	62.23	53.59	39.41	47.67	39.85
2017-18**	99.29	86.69	100.00	99.48	68.55	64.54	72.18	63.45

Source: \* NIAR, Base line Study Reports, Study conducted from 2003 to 2005, \*\* Human Development Report Uttarakhand, 2019.

### School Management Committee: Concern and Performance

A key concern in community participation has always been the representation of the vulnerable sections of society, in the case of India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women. As per the sample of the study, around 40 per cent of members of the SMCs are women and 21.4 per cent belonged to the SC/ST community. Another important issue has always been the active participation of the members in the deliberations and decision-making process. In the study, it was found that more than two-

thirds of members of SMCs are generally present in the meeting and participate in discussions. In six-point scale as depicted in Fig 1, about 55 per cent of members are satisfied and more than satisfied with the presence of members in the meeting. However, the satisfaction level of stakeholders is much less about the presence of women and members of SC/ST in meetings. The figure also reveals that less than fifty per cent of members are satisfied with the preparation of the agenda and the recording of the minutes.



**Fig 1: Perception of SMC Members about the Effectiveness of Organizational issues of SMC (N=70)**



The issues discussed in the meetings of the School Management Committee can be taken as indicative of the participation concerns at the grassroots level. The issues discussed by SMCs are detailed in Table 2. Perusals of the data given in Table-2 indicate that that the SMC members – who are also parents, are more concerned about the day-to-day performance of children and rarely accord high priority to policy issues or organizational issues. The prime concern of SMCs is to improve the learning outcomes and, for it, they focus on inputs – like classroom process and learning environment. Focus on these issues – especially on the availability of textbooks, scholarships, has to be seen in the context that most of the students in the government schools belong to poor households and the cost of education – monetary

and opportunity, is an important issue. Likewise, their emphasis on improving classroom practices- especially teaching of Mathematics and English is because of the low-level education of most parents, hence children rarely get domestic support. The SMCs feel that the deficiency in the learning of children arising due to lack of or poor domestic academic support must be taken care of in the school itself. About 50 to 60 percent of members opined that the classroom processes more often than not are the focus of interaction in the meetings. These other issues that often come up for discussion are methods of teaching and insisting on simple and interactive teaching, difficulties faced by children in learning English and Mathematics, textbook availability, and the performance of the children in the class.

**Table -2 Details of issues discussed in SMC meetings** (Source: Primary data collected for the study)

Issues	Total (N=70)	% to total
<b>1. Issues relating to class room process</b>		
Method of teaching/ teaching in simple way	44	(62.85)
Difficulties faced by children in learning English	24	(34.28)
Difficulties faced by children in learning Mathematics	24	(34.28)
Text Book availability to children	44	(62.85)
Performance of the child in class	36	(51.42)
Child interaction with peer group/teachers	46	(65.71)
<b>2. Management Issues relating to class room</b>		
Lack of Teachers/appointment of para teacher	44	(62.85)
Lack of Trained Teachers	24	(34.28)
About regularity of attendance of children	24	(34.28)



Home Work and Class Work checking	44	(62.85)
<b>3. Quality of Education</b>		
Requesting teachers to teach extra time/take remedial classes/to cover the course	46	(65.71)
Regarding meetings of various committees like PTA/MTA/Village Education Committee	44	(62.85)
About celebrating national festivals like independence day/Republic day/Some local festivals	44	(62.85)
<b>4. Facilities available</b>		
Scholarship	24	(34.28)
Sports and co-curricular activities	44	(62.85)
<b>5. Infrastructure</b>		
Maintenance of school buildings/ facilities of toilets/drinking water and other facilities	46	(65.71)

In the classroom, related management issues-like appointment of para teacher, lack of trained teachers, regular attendance of children, and correction of homework and class work by teachers and parents inspecting the notebooks are also discussed. The SMCs regularly insist on appointing para teachers so that teachers may be available in all classes and the teaching learning process goes on regularly in the school. Around 65 per cent of members of SMCs opined that issues regarding requesting teachers to teach extra time, remedial classes, coverage of syllabus and celebrating national and local festivals were also discussed in the meeting. The availability of different facilities, importantly, like scholarship, is also an important concern of SMCs. Maintenance of school buildings, providing facilities of toilets /drinking water and other physical infrastructure facilities in school

often comes up for discussion in the SMC meetings. The interaction on the infrastructure-related issues needs to be seen in the context that private elementary schools –with much better infrastructure – buildings, transport facilities and types of equipment like computers, the central places of the cluster of villages or market places are coming up. Parents living in rural hinterlands feel that these private schools are not affordable to them and they must not lag in providing a decent learning environment to children, They insist on SMCs on these issues.

#### **Implementation Status of SMC Decisions**

The SMC representatives were also asked to confirm how many of the decisions taken in the SMC meetings were implemented. The details is given in Table 3. Perusal of the Table reveals



that the overall perception is that only 28.57 per cent of members of the SMC members feel that the decisions taken are fully implemented. About 47.14 per cent of members opined that decisions are partially implemented and 24.28 per cent of members said that that the decisions are not implemented at all. The implementation

issues are crucial in the whole context of community ownership over the teaching-learning process in the schools. It seems that specific guidelines are needed to be issued in which accountability be fixed for non-implementation of the decisions concerned with school governance.

**Table-3 Status of implementation of the decisions taken in the meeting of SMC**

Implementation Status	Total (N=70)	Percent to total
Fully	20	(28.57)
Partially	33	(47.14)
Not at all	17	(24.28)
Total	70	(100.00)

Source: Primary data collected for the study

**Perception of SMC Members regarding their contribution**

The majority of respondents opined that SMCs are contributing to universalizing elementary education. Members reveal that they regularly discuss the issues related to the enrollment of children, attendance of the students and ensuring regular attendance of teachers is every meeting of SMC. The SMC functionaries thereafter shared their perception about of devolution of powers to SMCs. Table -4 shows that more than

70 per cent of SMC functionaries believe that they need more powers to manage elementary education. The SMC members are of the view that being the grassroots level organization the SMC comprehends the problems of schooling system (about 65 per cent) vis-à-vis others. The other important argument in favour of devolution of powers to SMCs, as per the perception of more than three fourth respondents, is that SMCs, utilize funds in transparent and efficient manners as compared to the bureaucracy.

**Table- 4 Reasons for Devolution of powers to SMC for management of primary schooling**

Reasons	Total (N=70)	% to total
Proper and regular inspection of teacher/ School	50	(71.42)
Help in Infrastructure and development	48	(68.57)
Improve the amenities like water, toilet, electricity)	47	(67.14)
Proper utilization of grants	54	(77.14)



Better knowledge of the problem of the area	46	(65.71)
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Source: Primary data collected for the study

### Community Participation and Governance in Quality of Education

The factor analysis was carried out on the data of perception of the different stakeholders of elementary education, obtained on a 6 point scale (0 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) on various (26) aspects of the effectiveness of SMC governance. Each of the five factors has been detailed, with the variables and factor loading in Table -5.

A perusal of the table reveals that, by and large, the SMCs are more successful in creating demand for education. In other words, these institutions have made people internalize the fact that education is necessary for life. In this

endeavour, these institutions are more effective in community mobilization in enrollment and retention, whereas SMCs have been contributing significantly in infrastructure development, especially construction of school buildings, play ground, boundary walls and toilet facilities in the school. These institutions concentrate their attention in provision of TLM and other non-conventional teaching-learning types of equipment as these organizations are well aware of the necessity of these aids in improving quality.

**Table 5 : Factor Analysis of Community Participation in quality Education**

Factors/ Variables	Factor Loading
<b>I Community Mobilization for Enrollment and Retention</b>	
Enrollment of children 6-11 years	0.771
Enrollment of children 11-14 year	0.771
Ensuring Regularity of Students in school 6-11	0.846
Ensuring Regularity of Students in school 11-14	0.842
Reducing Dropouts 6-11 years	0.843
Reducing Dropouts 11-14 years	0.842
Encourage Education in Muslim community	0.803
Encourage Education of Scheduled Caste girls	0.841
Encourage girls Education	0.840
Encourage Education among migratory labor	0.792
Ensure proper delivery of mid day meal	0.560
<b>II Augmentation of Resources</b>	
Electrification of school	0.603
Provision of play ground	0.652
Construction of Boundary Wall	0.504
Arranging Computer	0.699
Establish /Develop school library	0.532
Proper UpKeep of the School Building and Field	0.402
ENSURE quality of construction	0.733





Provide sports material	0.781
<b>III Ensure Quality Use of Resources</b>	
Ensure regular use of library	0.598
Ensure Proper Use of laboratory	0.677
Ensure proper use of computer	0.670
Ensure teachers use maps and charts and an abacus	0.882
Ensuring Regularity of Teachers	0.866
<b>IV Provision of TLM/ and non conventional teaching - learning equipment</b>	
Provision of Charts /Maps/ abacus etc etc	0.883
<b>V Infrastructure Development</b>	
Construction school building/, playground, boundary wall and toilet facilities	0.828

Source: Calculated from collected primary data

The availability and use of these materials has emerged as an important determinant of the quality of education-defined narrowly as cognitive learning of students. In this sphere too, the performance of School Management Committees was also found significant in quality use of the resources i.e. regular use of library, proper use of computers, teachers using maps-charts and abacus, and regularity of teachers. The reason possible could be better community pressure on the schooling system - because, in the absence of non-available or very less availability of private schools, coupled with low affordability of the cost of education, parents across sections have no choice but to enroll children in the government schools and keep on insisting on improvement.

### Conclusion and Policy Implications

Community participation and empowerment in education in the context of the School Management Committee not only develops ownership feeling but also empowers communities to take important decisions concerning the future of children. It has been proven that when parents get involved in the education of their children, children are motivated and perform better. Moreover, it

ensures the sustainability of the processes adopted and innovations undertaken. It is evident from the present study that the policy changes about community participation in universalizing quality elementary education have brought a sea change in the Uttarakhand state of Indian Himalaya region. The school management committees constituted under the Right to Education (RTE) Act in this Himalayan State have played a significant role in access, enrolment, retention of children in schools, and in the overall monitoring of schools. However, there are still challenges concerning the committees' role and influence on classroom processes and learning achievement of students. The joy of learning– unlearning – relearning and sharing, constitutes the opportunities of transforming community governance to children's parents for achieving optimal social choices through public policies is one of the core constituents in fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goal 42030, education for life- long learning.

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