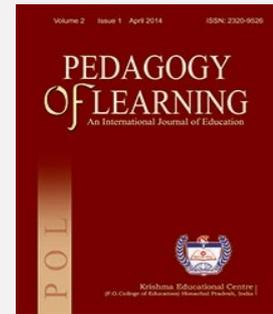


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## **Functioning of School Management Committees in Tribal districts of Odisha**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Constitution of school management committees and their capacity building to effectively discharge their functions has been the core idea behind decentralised governance at school level. The Right to Education Act 2009, in its section-21 has clearly made this special provision outlining the process of its composition and functioning as well. For a state like Odisha where 22% of population are tribal, it becomes imperative to ensure this principal platform of community involvement is constituted and functions effectively, so that people of this section are meaningfully engaged and mainstreamed in the developmental process. The present study was conducted in 20 randomly selected schools of Thuamulrampur block of Kalahandi district with the objective to study the status and process adopted in the field towards the formation and functioning of the SMCs. Also an objective was to assess the kind of change made by the School Management Committees ensuring access, equity and quality parameters at the school level. The study found that in all the schools SMCs are formed and members have heard about the 'RtE Act-2009'. But in majority of cases the SMC members are not very much aware on different dimensions of access, equity and quality parameters. It also observed that there was huge gap in the training provided to them and transforming it into action. Further the study found that in 30% schools the monthly meeting minutes is not recorded. Invariably the duration of SMC meeting differs from less than one hour to more than two hours. It was also

reported that 45% of SMC chairman were not satisfied with the way of functioning of their respective SMCs. All those factors indicate how effectively SMCs are functioning in succeeding the larger goal of Universalization of elementary education in decentralised governance at school level in the tribal areas.

**KEYWORDS:** School Management Committee, Tribal Area, Decentralized Governance, Right to Education Act 2009

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## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The School Management Committees or SMCs are the principal platform of community involvement as defined in the section-21 of the Right to Education Act-2009. It is an arrangement to the previous body known as the Village Education Committee or VEC as an affect after the enactment of the Right to Education (RtE) Act-2009. The broader idea of this move is to enhance the scope of community involvement in the education system as a whole and ensure community participation. It can further be viewed as a strong step towards implementing the principle of decentralised governance and ensure quality at large. In this context the International bureau of Education, UNESCO says, “governance is about the culture and institutional environment in which citizens and stakeholders interact among themselves and participate in public affairs. It is more than the organs of the government.” The proposition becomes more significant in case of tribal areas, where historically they have remained away from the system and mainstream developmental process. It is now explicitly recognized that attempts have had only marginal impacts on their socio-economic conditions in spite of various welfare measures and constitutional protection. However it must be noted that, the history of tribal during the last 65 years is filled with stories of forced displacement, land alienation and increasing marginalisation, eruption of violence and counter-violence by the State. Going by any parameters of development, the tribal’s are also always figure at the tail end. The situation of the communities that have been pastoral or nomadic is still worse. Tribal communities continue to face economic deprivation and lack of access to basic services, including education.

In this backdrop, proper formation and effective functioning of the SMCs in tribal areas bear’s great significance for the success of the Right to Education Act-2009 in particular and success of decentralised governance in general in true sense of letter and spirit.

### **Policy provision about the constitution of School Management Committee:**

The Right of children for free and compulsory education (RCFCE) Act’2009 in its section-21 has clearly outlined the detail about the process of formation and activities to be performed by the school management committee. It says as follows:

- Formation of SMC with elected representatives and parents (At least 3/4 of members of such Committee shall be parents or guardians)
- The School Management Committee shall perform the following functions :
  - i. monitor the working of the school;
  - ii. prepare and recommend school development plan;
  - iii. Monitor the utilization of the grants received from the appropriate Government or local authority or any other source.
  - iv. Perform such other functions as may be prescribed.

To facilitate the above process smoothly the Act further recommends that there shall be the formation of Parents Teachers Association (PTA) prior to the creation of the School Management Committee and it has suggested for empowerment of its member at regular interval.

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It is needless to point out that this bottom up approach is designed to call for active participation of grass-root level institutions in the operational structure. And ensure every citizen to be a part of the governance system owing the responsibility and accountability as well.

## **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

Different studies have been conducted from time to time to explore how effectively the SMCs are functioning in different parts of the country and actively they are engaged in the decision making process of the school. Few of them are refereed here to build an understanding about the nature and process of functioning of SMCs in the different parts of the country. The studies are broadly classified into three major dimensions of access, equity and quality parameters. Dr. N Srinivasu in his book titled 'Community Participation in Elementary Education' has reviewed and referred few of such studies conducted by different institutes and individuals that tried to examine the status and functioning pattern of SMCs across the country. Few of them are as like.

Ed. CIL (2002) in its study on 'role of family, community and school factors in improving retention and achievement level of disadvantaged children' observed that VEC members motivation to work for enhancing enrolment and retention of disadvantaged children enhanced highly by the training imparted to them. Dash and Panda (2009) highlighted that most of the Village Education Committees performed well for the overall development of their primary schools in the district of Nabarnapur in the state of Odisha. They took care and satisfactorily managed their primary schools by creating different awareness program and bringing attitudinal change among village people. Those efforts resulted in reducing the drop-out rate and retention of children in the schools. Nayak (2009) undertook a study in eight villages across two districts of Odisha to explore the role of community in planning, management and organisation of school activities. The study found that the working of the SMCs was not encouraging. The meetings were either not held or if at all held they were very occasional and the quorum was even not fulfilled. Further the study observed different social restrictions and factors like caste feeling, gender biasness and political influence played crucial role in the effective functioning of the school management committees.

Institute of Rural Research and Development (2010) in its report on capacity-building needs of Village Education Committee in Villages of Mewat district in the state of Haryana explored the effectiveness of the VECs to a great extent in influencing the access and quality issues of 13 villages in the district. It also observed that there was non-involvement of VEC members in any of the activities whether budget tracking or planning. More than half of the members were even not informed about their role and responsibilities in the committee. At the same time there was hardly any regular meeting or discussion among the members towards any developmental aspect of the school. Mishra and Gartia (2013) studied the perception of VEC members towards their role, responsibilities and involvement with respect planning and involvement in the improvement of quality education in four districts of Odisha namely Bhadrak, Nayagarh, Puri and Jagatsinghpur. It observed that only 37% of respondents said that they do take part in the different educational activities of the school like preparation of study aids and 63% agreed they do not perform or involve in such kind of activities. Singh and Sood (2016) in their study explored the reflections of elementary school teachers regarding the functioning of the SMCs in elementary schools of Himachal Pradesh. It observed that the school teachers opined the SMCs members in their schools are moderately aware of their role and responsibilities and they are not enthusiastic to take part in the different affairs of the school. Shrivastava (2018) conducted a study on the awareness level of school management committee members on their roles as per RTE Act 2009. The study found that majority of the SMC members were not aware of their roles although more than half of the presidents were aware and knowledge about the SMC. However, 85.19% SMCs defined their role as to monitor teaching learning, while according to 79.01 % their major role was working for development of school.

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Thus, it could be summarised that mere having presence of the school committee was no where the purpose of the Act. Rather the active and effective participation of the members only could yield some transformative change in different aspects in the functioning of the school. Therefore awareness and understanding of members on their own role and responsibilities and most importantly shouldering ownership in the process could only ensure the effective functioning of the school. But as observed in most of the studies those aspects were not addressed and the link between community and school was missing to a great extent.

### OBJECTIVES

The study was carried out with following objectives:

1. To study the status of formation and process adopted in the field towards the formation and functioning of the School Management Committees in tribal areas.
2. To assess the kind of change made by the School Management Committees ensuring access, equity and quality parameters at the school level.

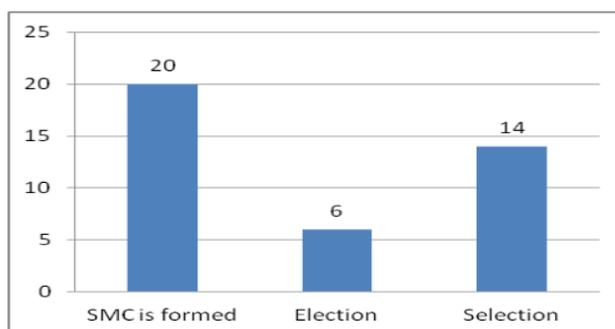
### RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey design under descriptive method of study was adopted for the study. For both the objectives, an observation format was developed. Similarly a set of questionnaire was developed and an interview schedule was administered with the head teachers and SMC chairman. A focused group discussion was exclusively conducted with the SMC members for first objective only. The target population for the study was all the 117 primary Schools of 17 clusters of Th. Rampur block of the Kalahandi district. But for the study the investigator has randomly selected 20 Schools from 5 different cluster resource centres of the block as sample. The data collection process was done by personal visit and administration of self developed tool. Later on collected data and information was analysed through percentage, content analysis technique and interpretation.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Formation and Functioning of the School Management committee*

It was found that, in all 20 schools the School Management Committees were formed but the processes adopted in its' formation was different.



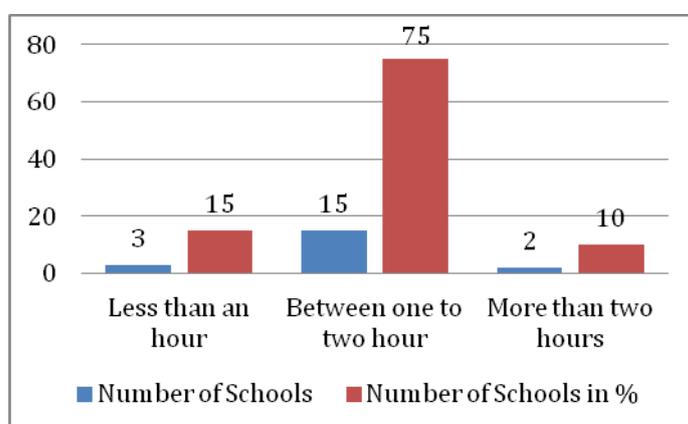
(Chart-1-Process adopted for formation of SMCs)

In 30% schools (6 in numbers) the members of the SMCs were elected whereas in 70% schools (14 in numbers) the members were selected on the basis of mutual understanding process among the members of the Parent Teacher Associations (Chart-1). The good part of the process was that, in all the 100% schools the members were chosen after the formation of parent teacher association, which was mentioned in the RtE-Act as well. And likewise in all the 100% schools the training of SMC members has taken place.

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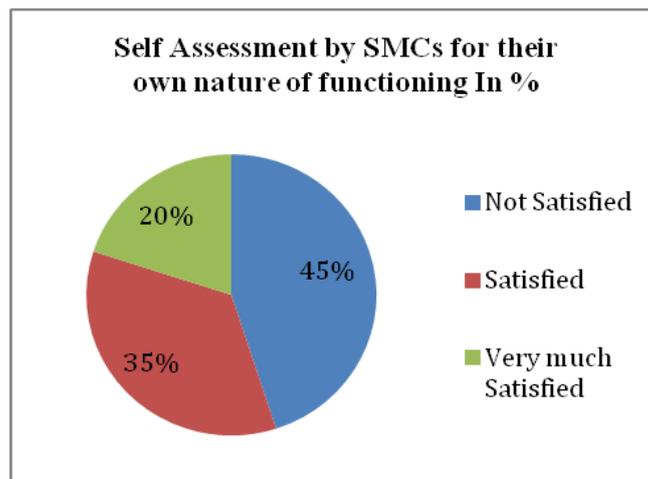
But it was also observed that in only 60% schools the meeting was held on monthly basis followed by 70% schools where the meeting minutes were recorded through a resolution copy popularly known as ‘meeting khata’ in local language, i.e. meeting register. In rest of the 40% schools organising the monthly meeting, mostly depends on the urgency of the matter and availability of the members as reported. However, in all sample schools the meeting flows with a pre-decided agenda. It was reported that the agenda mostly get prepared by the headmaster in consultation with the SMC Chairman before one or two days of the meeting. The common points of discussion in the agenda centres around the financial expenditure, infrastructure development, quality of MDM and any other issues or challenges depending on the situation. During the interaction with headmaster and SMC chairman it was observed that there is hardly any specific or detail discussion happens on quality of teaching learning. If at all anything happens it is mostly an opinion seeking activity or agreement on the value of quality education. But the related ideas or contributing factors (such as monitoring the school during class hours, sharing of practical knowledge by community people through invited talk, support from parents while the students return to home) are missed in the SMC meeting.



(Chart -2-Duration of the SMC meetings.)

Further it was found that the duration of SMC meeting varies from SMCs to SMCs. As it was found that in 75% schools the SMC meeting happens to be from one to two hour whereas in 15% schools the duration is less than an hour and in 10% schools it is more than two hours. At the same time the RtE Act-2009 has recommended for the regular capacity building exercises for the SMC members that could empower them to function effectively at the school level. But it was found that 45% of SMC chairman were not satisfied with their own way of SMCs functioning as it should have been. 35% were quite satisfied and only 20% were very much satisfied. This shows that nearly half of the SMCs chairman felt that somewhere their involvement was not up to the level as a matter they were not able to function effectively.

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During the focused group discussion, the SMC members shared that the communication and capacity building activity organised by the administration was neither suiting to their timing nor interesting. They also said that, since it is done once in a year, they mostly forget the contents or points told to them during the training. Therefore, in the meeting they mostly discuss the matter related to finance and any other if the head teacher or chairman proposes.

Thus, it may be concluded that, though the SMCs are formed in the schools but their effective functioning is still a question mark, as most of the members in the SMCs are either not properly trained or even if they are trained, the nature of engagement in the process is not comprehensive and complete enough to ensure the broader goal of Universalisation of quality Elementary Education. It also indicates the weak engagement of SMC members in the monthly meetings. All these contribute to the slow functioning of the SMCs on the whole. And above all the poor grounding of decentralised governance mechanism in the field level area.

### ***Change made by the School Management Committees ensuring access, equity and quality parameters at the school level***

#### **Access dimension**

In order to access the nature and level of change made by the SMCs ensuring access, equity and quality parameters in school an observation tool was used. As far as the access dimension is concerned, it was observed that 40% schools have a road connected to the school and in 70% schools there is a boundary wall / green fence / wire fence. Likewise in 80% schools there is a gate. It shows that there is awareness among members regarding the safety and security of children but on the other side where involvement and attitude of the SMC members could have yield better performance but have not exhibited proactive response. This could be seen as only 6% schools have been able to beautify their school environment through the different enrichment programs like plantation in school campus and in 20% schools only there was safe drinking water facility available within the campus.

Thus, one may conclude that, though the SMCs are aware about few of the provisions in the act that ensure access in one or other form but in most of the critical aspect they still do not have any idea or interest. Further it must be noted that, those areas where they have shown proactive engagement or awareness are mostly financial activities only.

#### **Equity dimension**

As far as the equity dimension is concerned it was observed that in no schools SMCs have been able to ensure any facilities that meet the requirement of children with special needs (CWSN).

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Those are like separate toilet, rail and ramp in proper condition, sports material, teaching learning materials available for CWSN children etc. In 30% Schools members have ensured the school has separate toilets for teachers / staffs, although it's a common toilet for both male and female staffs. Similarly in 55% schools SMCs have been able to ensure availability of separate toilets for girls' students and in 35% schools separate toilets for boy's students. However, in 100% schools the SMCs have been able to ensure complete enrolment of all the children in the age group of -14 years. As a result there is no out of school children in the age group of 6-14 years in the respective villages as informed.

It can be said that, although the SMCs have been able to enrol all the children in the school but they have to be aware and work accordingly to address the need of each children is fulfilled as a matter of equitable education provision as specified in the RtE Act 2009.

### **Quality dimension**

In respect to the quality dimension, it was found that in 80% schools SMCs have not coordinated with any other organisations particularly with the Anganwadi centres as a result the linkage and transition from pre-primary to primary schooling is somewhere not being prioritised among them. Continuing their awareness on quality aspect further it was found that none of the SMCs have ensured the school time table is displayed, though it could be seen on the table of the head teacher only. During interaction it was also noticed that the SMCs members were not aware of that. Similarly, neither any of the schools maintained students' portfolios nor they monitor record of each child's pupil's progress. Inside the classroom only 5% schools have ensured availability of a reading and TLM corner. The same percentages of schools have ensured lesson dairy is maintained and used by the teacher. However there is a slight increase in terms of other indicators, as 20% schools have ensured there is availability of useable blackboard in the class and 15% have assured blackboard is used by the children but when it comes to review on coverage of courses / studies, only 5% could see do that in their schools.

So, it can be concluded that, SMCs are not much aware on the quality dimensions and have not entered into the classroom teaching. It may be because of their own limited education and restriction in engaging themselves in teaching learning activities. But the fact is, they have not discussed on quality issues during the SMCs monthly meeting.

### **CONCLUSION**

The schools cannot and in fact should not operate as a separate entity within the society. Both school and society have to collaborate, coordinate and contribute each other. In a country like India with vast diversity, decentralization is the best strategy to govern and gear up the developmental process. And to translate this proposition it requires active participation of people involved in the process. But the SMC members in most of the schools have been noticed with limited information and awareness about their roles and responsibilities. If at all they are informed and aware, it is restricted to certain schemes or provisions like mid day meal, uniform distribution, free text-book etc. Which is not sufficient to address the broader issues related to access, equity and quality aspect of education. Thus, it is high time to rethink and reflect on the input such as training content, process adopted and support provided in the functioning of SMCs. Based on the observation and findings from the study few concrete strategies have to be drawn especially in tribal areas. For example the training of SMC members must be planned in consultation with the members that suits to their availability and participation process. Further the content of the training must be context specific and appealing to them, so that they can relate themselves and enjoy the training. Some kind of appreciation mechanism can also be planned to encourage their participation level. Above all, the training process should not be an isolated activity just meeting the statutory compliances rather

continuous efforts should be made to so that, they remain motivated and take ownership of the school. If done so, the true spirit of decentralised governance policy can be reflected and realised in practice.

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