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105

**PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONAL
STRUCTURES IN DECENTRALIZED
MANAGEMENT OF
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
IN KARNATAKA**

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PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES IN DECENTRALIZED MANAGEMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN KARNATAKA^a

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Abstract

Grassroots participatory institutional structures in decentralized administrative educational reforms are intended to promote greater accountability of the school system to the community. This paper looks at the structural composition and functions of one such participatory institutional structure, the Village Education Committees in Karnataka. Analysing the field data gathered from 52 committees, the paper raises some important issues relating to strategies of capacity building for the newly inducted members to make these committees more dynamic and vibrant grassroots administrative units.

Introduction

Emerging literature in development administration and political decentralization increasingly suggests that political and administrative decentralization, coupled with increased local level participation, can lead to increased public sector efficiency and accountability in the production and provision of goods and services (Andrew, 1993; Oates, 1995; Pinkney, 1994; Peterson, 1997; Prud'homme, 1989, 1994; Nagel, 2000; Burns, 1983; Rondinelli et.al, 1983; Jonathan & Aranda, 1996). The human development paradigm also supports the view that decentralization can help ensure human development, through enhanced access to basic social services for expanding citizens' capabilities and functional skills (Sen & Dreze, 1989; 1995; Haq, 1998). Education being one of the critical inputs for development, the need for adopting decentralized management strategies assumes larger significance especially in the context of the failure to universalize basic education in most developing countries including India.

Decentralization is currently a worldwide phenomenon observed in all kinds of countries and economies across Asia, Europe, Latin America

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and Africa. It essentially involves shifting of powers and responsibilities from the national and state governments to local level smaller units of government with an emphasis on reducing the overloading of central government functions and improving access to decision making and participation at lower levels of government. The support for decentralization comes from the fact that it provides better local public services, which can adjust to the many-faceted demands at different levels and at a much reduced cost of time and resources. More importantly, decentralization is expected to promote better monitoring and accountability mechanism for provision and utilization of public services (Prud'homme, 1989).

Even in educational management discourse, there are strong arguments, which underscore the importance of decentralization, particularly in developing countries for improved service delivery, improved economies of scale and more appropriate response to different needs and finally for generating more representativeness and equity in educational decision making (Caldwell, 1990; Maclure 1993). However, there are scholars who question the basic genuineness of the move towards decentralization as a means of empowering sub-national and local communities (Slater 1989; Rondinelli, et al 1984; Wunsch, 1991; Bray, 1987; Weiler, 1983).

Decentralized Governance and Primary Education in India: An Overview

The Panchayat Raj (PR) system and decentralized governance in education is not a new concept. The basic philosophy of PR is vesting power with the people, with a view to universalizing access to resources and inputs for development. Grassroots political organizations have played a significant role in primary education even before India attained independence. Local political bodies were accorded greater control over primary education in different parts of the country until a few years before the country was declared independent. Even prior to independence, the Hunter Commission Report (1882) had recommended entrusting education to local self-government units. Following this a Local Self Government Act 1883 was adopted in which education was entrusted to municipalities in urban areas and to district boards in rural areas.

In independent India, the vision of Mahatma Gandhi for Gram Swaraj was articulated in the Constitution itself through Article 40, which made provision for establishment of village panchayats as units of self-government with adequate powers and authority. In 1953, the Kher Committee appointed by the Government of India (GOI) recommended decentralized governance and management of education. After this, in 1959 primary education was entrusted to Panchayat Samitis (middle tier of three-tier PR system) in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and other states

based on the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta's Committee. After 100 years, in 1993, the 73rd Constitutional amendment placed primary education under the control of village panchayats with the recognized principle **'what can be done at a given level should be done at that level alone and not at a higher level'**.

In the State of Karnataka, where the present study is located, the local bodies have off and on been playing a vital role in the development of primary education. Periodical constitutional amendments have resumed the control of primary education under Panchayat Raj institutions during the early sixties and late eighties. There have been certain landmarks in the development of PR experiences in education in the State. In the erstwhile princely State of Mysore, many measures were introduced to establish institutions of local government. As a part of this, two statutes were enacted-Mysore Village Panchayat Regulation and the Mysore District Boards Regulation of 1926, both of which remained in force until after independence. After independence, following the recommendation of the report on local governance by Venkatappa & Chandrasekariah Committee, the Mysore Village Panchayats and District Boards Act 1959 came into being. This report recommended a three-tier PR-Village Panchayats, Taluk Development Boards and District Development Councils. This Act remained in force till 1984. The PR got a big boost with the enactment of legislation in 1983, which was basically an improvement on the Ashok Mehta Committee Report. The Act provided for transferring powers to ZPs and MPs, and came into force in 1987. The latest is the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act in 1993 for elected three-tier structure-village, block and zilla. The Act incorporated changes mandated by the 73rd Constitutional amendment.

Thus, in the spirit of decentralized political framework, strengthening community participation has been one of the important consideration for fostering a sense of ownership of the school among the community. Establishment of Village Education Committees (VEC) is an effort in this direction. Although VECs have been established in most parts of the State, concerted efforts to activate and empower them is largely seen in districts coming under the World Bank-sponsored programme of District Primary Education Project (DPEP). The VECs in these districts are entrusted with the supervision of primary education in the village. They are also made responsible for creating awareness about the importance of education in the community. They are being involved through micro planning activities and training in motivating parents to send children to school, evolve strategies to reduce the drop-out rate, mobilize local resources to support schools and prepare and implement action plans for the development of education, including adult and non-formal education in the village. The VECs under this programme are also financially empowered through operation of a joint school improvement fund in collaboration with the head teacher of a primary school.

The VEC is an important feature of administrative decentralization reforms in school education with the underlying goal of enabling the public to influence the quality or volume of service through some form of articulation of preferences or demand. Such a 'voice' not only makes the public agency more responsive, but increases accountability as well (Hirschman 1970; Paul, 1991). It is in this context that VEC is considered to be an important strategy for ending the inefficient public sectors and also for the emergence of responsive local-level leadership to provide more effective service to local clients.

In the Indian context, emerging concern for direct public participation through local self-government stems from the fact that the country has the dubious distinction of having a large number of illiterates as well as out-of-school children. One of the reasons for the continued non-participation of children in primary education has been attributed to alienation of the school system from the local community. Hence, the establishment of Village Education Committees as a part of the decentralized governance experiment in educational administration is not only seen as a means to strengthen ties between the educational system and the community, but also as a management strategy for improving the functional efficiency of the education system.

Primary Education in Karnataka

The paper, being an outcome of a larger study conducted by the author, has used primary and secondary data gathered from the field for the study through interviews and content analysis techniques respectively. The study has been located in Karnataka State, one of the southern states of the Indian subcontinent, known for its fast pace of urbanization and modernization in industry and technology. In recent years the State has earned the distinction of being the Silicon Valley of India with its flourishing computer industries, high-tech industries, multinational giants and electronic and software industries and international standard information technology park, etc. Further, the State has the reputation of housing the country's premier higher education and training institutions, the highest number of general degree as well as professional colleges and other centres of excellence and world class research centres. Yet, the state draws flak if one looks at its literacy attainments, particularly in the rural areas, which gives cause for concern.

The State records an overall literacy of 56.0 per cent and 44.0 per cent literacy for female population according to the 1991 census. The rural female literacy is as low as 35.0 per cent. The State has the dubious distinction of having an educationally backward district, namely, Raichur, with a literacy as low as 22.1 per cent for female population. Deodurga taluk in this district has a female literacy of just 9.0 per cent. The girls' participation in primary stage is abysmally low. The State follows the

4+3 pattern of primary education with four years of lower primary and three years of higher primary as against the national 5+3 pattern. It has a fairly large primary education system with over 46,900 primary schools, nearly 0.2 million teachers and a total student enrolment of over 8.2 million in 1998-99.

The number of out-of-school children in the State is estimated to be as high as 2.6 million comprising 27.7 per cent school age children. Further, backward districts such as Raichur and Mysore reveal as high as 43.8 per cent and 35.5 per cent of out-of-school children in 1996. Even though drop-out rate has declined over the years at the lower primary stage, the State still has around 16 per cent drop-out and the phenomenon persists to the extent of 35.0 per cent at the higher primary stage (HD Report 1999).

The National Policy on Education (1986) and Decentralized Management of Education

Considering the poor progress made in universalizing primary education (UPE), which incidentally is an essential input in development, the National Policy on Education (1986) has given unqualified priority for achieving UPE by 2001. The Programme of Action (POA) 1992 for the National Policy on Education, 1986 gives priority to the process of micro planning in order to design a child-wise and family-wise plan of action for ensuring regular participation of every child in the community in the primary education programme. The POA (1992) has suggested creation of village-level structures in the form of Village Education Committees apart from block-level and district-level institutional structures for planning, monitoring, managing and development of primary education. The VEC's role assumes crucial significance in the context of the ongoing national intervention like District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) project in enabling the community to own and sustain primary education in the years to come. Following the Policy recommendation and the POA guidelines, the Central Government constituted a committee on decentralised governance in 1993, popularly known as the CABE (Comprehensive Access to Basic Education) Committee. The CABE Committee (1993) under the chairmanship of Sri M Veerappa Moily, the former chief minister of Karnataka, has formulated detailed guidelines regarding VEC's structure and composition, roles and functions, powers, funding support and organizational and administrative support. In this context the committee has also proposed training for VEC members along with teachers and head teachers of elementary schools. The CABE guidelines with respect to powers, functions and training are annexed separately at the end of this paper.

The process of VEC formulation has been initiated through orders of the state governments. Along with the creation of these structures,

there has been simultaneous effort on the part of the State to build capacity among the members of such newly constituted structures. Training modules and training literature have been developed for the trainers and the members using a cascade approach ie, initial training of the Master Trainers at the State level, followed by district-level trainers and finally the VEC members at grassroots levels. The VEC training has been implemented across the State and the new incumbents have been trained for carrying out their role effectively. At this crucial juncture, it is now to be seen to what extent the VEC's role has been facilitating effective management of primary schools and in curtailing the phenomenon of dropout, irregular and out-of-school children in the community. It is also significant to see to what extent the VEC training has sensitised the members and enhanced their capacities to effectively monitor the village primary school. This paper examines some of these aspects. The paper is an outcome of a recently concluded research study sponsored by the government of Karnataka. The analysis is based on the field data gathered from a multi-stage, stratified, representative sample of 52 VECs, 497 VEC members and 491 community members selected from different regions of the state. While primary data have been collected through interviews of the VEC members, the primary school head teacher and the community members, the secondary data have been gathered from school records, VEC registers, minutes of the VEC meetings, etc.

Effective Management of Schools by VECs

To begin with, regular conduct of the VEC meetings and members' attendance and participation therein are adequate reflection of the VEC's effective management of schools. Prescribed guidelines indicate at least one VEC meeting per month to discuss various issues relating to school improvement. Considering the number of meetings conducted in a year, it is noticed from Table1 that a large majority of the VECs across the State have conducted only one or two meetings during the year under reference, which is apparently far below the norm of 12 meetings a year. Considering the average number of meetings per year, while none of the VECs in any of the sample districts has adhered to the stipulated norm, the VECs in Mysore district appear to reveal a relatively better performance with an average of more than 3 meetings per year. Besides, the district also records the highest number of VECs (5 out of 8) conducting an average of four and five meetings per year. The VECs in Chitradurga district have performed poorly with an average of just over one meeting per year.

The irregularity of VEC meetings is cause for serious concern viewing from the point of view of effective management of schools. One notices both systemic and motivation factors underlying this phenomenon of irregular meetings. While the HT laments that members never attend meetings in spite of sending repeated notices, the members report that they have to forego their daily wages if they have to attend the meetings.

Table 1: Number of VEC Meetings held in 1999

District	NA/ None*	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Average	Total No. of VECs
Chitradurga	2	3	2	1	—	—	1.25	8
D.K.	—	2	3	1	2	—	2.38	8
Dharwad	2	4	4	2	—	—	1.5	12
Mysore	1	1	—	1	2	3	3.4	8
Raichur	3	2	1	—	1	1	1.62	8
Shimoga	1	1	4	2	—	—	1.8	8
Total	9	13	14	7	5	4		52

[* The VEC meeting data were not made available to the researcher. Hence, it was presumed that no meeting took place in these VECs during the year under reference].

Some of the members also report that the timings of the meeting are inconvenient to them. It is noticed that the VEC meeting is conducted during school hours, which apparently is more suitable to the HT rather than to the members, taking into account the 'daily commuting habit' of a large majority of primary school teachers in rural areas. While teacher absenteeism and late coming are routine features of Indian rural schools, teachers adjusting the school timings to their bus convenience is an equally notorious phenomenon when teachers commute daily to schools. Incidentally, in more than 90 per cent of the schools in the present study, the HTs were found to be commuting daily to school.

In Deodurga of Raichur district, the most backward taluk, many members of the socially and economically deprived sections have reported that they have to forego their one-day wage if they attended meetings. In fact they have expressed the desire to attend the meetings if they are conducted during the time they are free from their wage-earning activity. Having created space for these people in the participatory structures, it becomes even more necessary to create positive conditions for promoting their favourable participation. One of the ways in which it could be done is to schedule the meeting time that is convenient to them. Otherwise, the voices of such marginalized people who are roped in as VEC members will never get a chance to be heard in decision-making processes, which might eventually affect the fate of their children's education.

As regards the regularity of attendance of the members at the VEC meetings, it is noticed that barring the three districts, D.K., Mysore and Dharwad, in the remaining three districts, the members' response has been mixed (Table 2). It is noted that a large majority of the people who cannot attend meetings are daily wage earners and casual labourers belonging to the poorest of the poor households. Interestingly, these are the newly inducted members of the deprived sections.

Table 2: Regularity of Attendance in VEC Meetings as Reported by Members

District	Yes	No	NR	Total
Chitradurga	45	24(34.8)	-	69
D. K.	36	-	1	37
Shimoga	46	34(42.5)	-	80
Raichur	57	42(42.0)	1	100
Mysore	96	-	1	97
Dharwad	112	-	2	114
Total	392	100 (20.2)	5	497

(Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage)

VEC and Women

Another set of people who cannot attend the meetings are the women who are burdened with multiple responsibilities relating to housekeeping, children, farms and livestock. Before looking into women's participation in the VEC meetings, it is necessary at the outset to examine the extent to which women figure in the composition of VECs. In the Indian context, the process of decentralization has been initiated with a clear-cut focus on gender. The amended Constitution mandates one-third representation for women in the grassroots political institutions (the village panchayat or grama panchayat). Even the CABE committee reflects this concern and is unequivocal in its emphasis on gender representation in VEC composition. Accordingly, the norm stipulates that one-third of the VEC members should compulsorily be women. Thus, the composition of VECs in the study is observed to be as follows: There are about 35 VECs in the sample, which reveal less than 33 per cent of women on their committees. This means that more than 67.0 per cent of the VECs across the State flout the reservation norm of 33 per cent for women (Table 3). The proportions of VECs that adhere to the stipulated 33.0 per cent reservation policy, constitute a mere 32.7 per cent. That is to say, even taking all VECs together, the total women's representation does not reach the stipulated figure of 33.0 per cent. One of the reasons for this could be that these institutional structures are not statutory bodies and therefore do not invoke any punitive action for flouting the norm. Nonetheless, such a phenomenon is a clear indication of marginalisation of women in a patriarchal societal order in the absence of legal bindings. Strangely,

Table 3: Women's Representation in the VECs in Sample Districts

Proportion of Women in VEC	Chitradurga	D.K.	Dharwad	Mysore	Raichur	Shimoga	Total
Less than 30%	3	6	3	5	1	5	23(44.2)
30%	1	1	5	1	3	1	12(23.1)
Just 33%	2	—	—	—	2	—	4
More than 33%	2	1	4	2	2	2	13
Total	8	8	12	8	8	8	52

both D.K. and Shimoga districts, which record higher female literacy attainments, reveal the highest proportion of VECs comprising less than 30 per cent women, thereby flouting the reservation norm for women. Interestingly, the VECs of low literacy districts like Chitradurga and Raichur fare relatively better in adhering to 33.0 per cent reservation of women in the VECs than their counterparts in the other districts.

As said earlier, women consider attending VEC meetings as an added burden. It is noticed that the reasons for irregular attendance at the VEC meetings reveal the complex nature of the socio-cultural milieu of Indian society (Table 4). Most women have reported that they are too busy with their routine chores to spare time for any kind of meetings. This is more so in low literacy taluks, where women are poor illiterate wage earners and belong to the deprived categories. For women, attending meetings appears to be an added work as they are always engaged in household chores. This implies two things. Firstly, the timing of the meetings should be such that it is convenient to the large majority of them. Secondly, they need a lot of encouragement and persuasion from their spouses to cultivate the habit of attending meetings. This suggests that the VEC training should also address the issue of developing a positive and supportive climate both inside and outside the households so that women can gradually take part in the developmental activities.

While one of the women members has reported that she sends her husband to attend the meetings, another has reported that she will not be allowed by her husband to attend the meetings. Both these women belong to Deodurg taluk of Raichur district. By and large, women members from this region have said that they do not know why they have become

Table 4: Reported Reasons for Not Attending VEC Meetings Regularly

Reasons for not attending VEC meetings	Chitradurga	Raichur	Shimoga
Daily wage activity	2	3	1
Household chores	2	6	3
Agricultural/farm related work	3	5	5
Personal problems - (ill health/old age)	1	2	1
Family problems	—	1	1
To attend VP work/meetings	1	—	1
Official work/Business	2	5	3
Low self - perception	—	2	1
No meeting held since VEC formation	1	—	1
Ignorant about VEC meeting	1	—	1
Others (proxy, lack of quorum, quarrel in meetings, not allowed by husband, residence of other village, cannot forego brisk arrack sale)	2	5	2

members of the VEC; as they do not understand anything about education, they remain silent in the meetings. Strangely, most of these women have already undergone VEC training. This again raises an important question as to the efficacy of training in sensitizing these women. For women, when caste deprivation dimension is added, the result is still worse. This is evident in Easuru VEC in Shikaripura taluk of Shimoga district, where not a single meeting has been held since its formation in 1997. This Village Panchayat is a reserved constituency for women. As such, there are six women members, each of whom has become the president of the GP by rotation for ten months. The current president of the GP does not know that she automatically gets to become the president of VEC as well. And she has not undergone VEC training. This suggests that the HT, as the member secretary of VEC, has not been adequately discharging his duties. Although the HT has been in this village school for more than two years, he has neither undergone VEC training nor seems to be interested in the functions of the VEC. These women also feel that they are incapable of discussing issues relating to education, as they themselves are illiterates. Thus, eliminating such poor self-perceptions ought to be at the top of the agenda in the capacity building programme.

Reasons such as simultaneous scheduling of meetings of VP/GP reflect the lack of care on the part of the member secretary (HT) in calling meetings. It is necessary that the member secretary ascertains these matters before scheduling VEC meetings. One member has even reported that he does not like to attend the meetings as invariably the members end up quarreling. There is another interesting reason for not attending VEC meetings regularly, as reported by a member in Bhoomanagunda village of Deodurga taluk in Raichur district: due to brisk sale in his arrack shop, he cannot close his shop to attend the meetings. Strangely, this person has undergone VEC training and one wonders as to what message was passed on to him during the training!

Thus, the reasons for irregular participation in VEC meetings point to the attitudes and mindsets of people. In particular, the members from low literacy taluks, as in the case of Deodurg or Shikaripura, need to be adequately sensitized. Perhaps more intense VEC training together with rich contextual experience might go a long way in developing positive attitudes.

Exercise of VEC Powers

In regard to exercise of powers by the VEC members, the VECs draw flak in terms of awareness. The members do not know that they can report about irregularity of teachers, children, irregular functioning of the school, changing the school calendar, recommending the annual budget for the school, etc. It transpired during interviews that the VEC members compare themselves with the members of the Village Panchayat (the latter enjoying

both financial and political powers) and feel powerless in the context of lack of control and access to powers. They feel that the VECs are mere ornamental structures in the village. Ironically, the VECs have still not come out of the dependency syndrome as members felt that the government should provide adequate financial resources for the VECs as well. Under these circumstances, one needs to re-examine the philosophical underpinnings of the self-governing or community-owned school concept.

School Visits by VEC

Another indicator of effective school management by VEC is its regular contact with the school and the teacher. The VEC members have the onerous responsibility of regularly visiting the school and interacting with the teachers so as to strengthen the linkage between school and community. This, in the long run, is expected to facilitate and hasten the process of UEE. Alternatively, the school teacher is also expected to provide the VEC members with updates about school affairs. In this connection, it is noticed from Table 5 that while VEC members in Mysore district seem to visit the school once a week and to a certain extent even daily, at the other end of the spectrum are districts like Shimoga and Chitradurga, where a large majority of VEC members are found to visit the school once in a while. Perhaps community mobilisation activity under DPEP intervention in the former could be responsible for such a favourable trend. However, the same does not seem to hold good for other DPEP districts such as Dharwad and Raichur, which reveal less frequent visits to schools by the VEC members. There are also instances where VEC members have reported that they never visit the school. Surprisingly, a high-literacy district like D.K. reveals this phenomenon to the extent of 25.0 per cent, which needs further probing. In Chitradurga, D.K., Raichur and Shimoga districts the members report that they generally do not visit the school unless there is a meeting or any such function in the school.

Alternatively, if a teacher's behaviour with respect to meeting the VEC members is considered, it is noticed that only in the case of Mysore and Dharwad districts teachers are found to maintain regular contact with the members through their weekly meetings (Table 6). Otherwise, they meet with the VEC members only once a month, as in the case of the other districts. In Chitradurga, D.K. and Raichur districts, considerable number of teachers do not feel the necessity of meeting the VEC members, which is serious cause for concern. Reciprocal visits and meetings are basic elements in the successful functioning of the participatory institutional structures. Besides, such behavioural tendencies on the part of the teachers reflect the mindset and apathy of teachers towards the Village Community. Perhaps the VEC training should focus more on this aspect so as to build a positive climate for the integration of VEC into the school system.

Table 5: Frequencies of School Visits by the VEC Members

Frequency of visit	Chitradurga	D.K.	Dharwad	Mysore	Raichur	Shimoga
Daily	1	1	--	20(20.7)	1	--
Once a week	4	4	--	65(67.0)	7	1
Once a fortnight	--	--	--	9(9.3)	4	5
Once a month	24(34.8)	13(36.1)	108(96.4)	3	45(45.0)	2
Once in a while	28(40.6)	9(25.0)	4	--	24(24.0)	43(53.8)
No visits	12(17.4)	9(25.0)	--	--	14(14.0)	19(23.8)
NR	--	1	2	--	5	10
Total	69	37	114	97	100	80

Table 6: Frequency of Teacher Meeting with VEC Members

	Chitradurga	D.K.	Dharwad	Mysore	Raichur	Shimoga
Daily	--	--	1	19(19.6)	--	--
Once a week	4	4	84(75.0)	66(68.0)	5	1
Once a fortnight	2	2	--	10(10.3)	4	10(12.5)
Once a month	38(55.1)	18(50.0)	24(21.4)	--	44(44.0)	38(47.5)
Once in a while	--	--	--	--	10	18(22.5)
Not necessary	25(36.2)	12(33.3)	--	--	35(35.0)	7
NR	--	1	2	2	2	6
Total	69	37	114	97	100	80

Resource Mobilization by VEC

An important function of VEC is to mobilize resources from the community for school improvement. These resources could be both in terms of physical assets and human resource, which could possibly be used for enhancing infrastructure facilities, academic equipment, quality of teaching-learning and motivation of teachers and students. The ultimate goal of resource mobilization is to make the school less dependent upon the government and promote the concept of a self-managed school system.

The extent to which the VEC has been able to carry out this function is an important element of effective school management. It may be noticed from Table 7 that some kind of resource mobilization has occurred in all the VECs excepting in the case of Raichur district. The highest resource mobilization has been reported by the VECs in Dharwad, D.K. and Shimoga districts. While Mysore district reveals fairly good performance in terms of equipment, cash prizes for the talented, incentives for sports, and celebration of national festivals, Chitradurga district VECs are better in terms of equipment and incentives for sports. Dharwad tops the list in mobilizing equipment, drinking water facilities, and celebration of national festivals. Similarly, D.K. tops the list in the area of cash prizes for students.

Table 7: Percentage of VECs Reporting about Various Kinds of Resource Mobilization

Districts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Chitradurga	63.77	10.14	56.5	71.01	49.28	10.14	7.25	69
D.K.S	89.19	2.7	89.1	2.7	62.16	5.41	86.49	37
Dharwad	94.74	96.49	78.9	80.70	73.68	0.00	2.63	114
Mysore	75.26	30.93	76.2	55.67	57.73	23.71	27.84	97
Raichur	3	3	3	6	6	0	0	100
Shimoga	63.75	82.5	82.5	86.25	36.25	36.25	98.75	80

1. Equipment
2. Drinking water facilities
1. Cash prizes for the talented
2. Incentives for sports
3. Celebration of national festivals
4. Provision of equipment for physically handicapped
5. Identifying donors for mid-day meals.

Shimoga VECs seem to be active in identifying donors for mid-day meals, drinking water facilities, incentives for sports and provision of equipment for physically handicapped. The VECs in both Shimoga and D.K. districts have been active in mobilizing resources for the school from the community owing to historical traditions as well as greater awareness among the community about primary education. As a matter of fact, VECs in D.K. district have been addressing the issue of teacher shortage in primary schools through raising resources from the community to pay remuneration for local teachers appointed on an ad-hoc basis.

Outcome of VEC Resolutions

An important indication of VECs' successful functioning is the kinds of resolutions passed in the VEC meetings and the follow-up action initiated. In this connection, an attempt has been made to ascertain the kinds of resolutions that have been passed by the VECs and the kinds of follow-up actions that have been taken by them. The data for this are drawn from the minutes of the various VEC meetings. It may be noted from Table 8 that the various resolutions passed by the VECs in the sample districts have fixed responsibility more on the VECs themselves, suggesting the self-initiative nature of VECs in general. However, further analysis reveals that the VECs have not been able to strengthen their lateral linkage with the grassroots political institutions (VP/ TP), or the education bureaucracy

Table 8: Resolutions Passed in the VEC Meetings

Resolutions passed	Chitra-durga	D.K.	Dhar-wad	My-sore	Rai-chur	Shi-moga
To contact parents	2	-	3	3	10	4
To discuss in the GP/TP meet	3	-	1	-	-	-
VEC to arrange programme	2	4	1	5	5	4
To approach BEO/Edn dept.	1	2	-	1	-	-
To approach community	1	1	-	4	2	5
VEC to initiate action	5	5	7	3	17	12
VEC to auction	-	5	-	-	-	4
VEC to make purchase	3	4	2	2	5	3
VEC to make payment	-	2	-	1	3	2
Others(youthclub/artisan)	-	-	-	2	-	-

for effective integration of the school management functions. Only in the case of VECs in D.K., Dharwad and Mysore does there seem to be some kind of follow-up action initiated by the VECs following the resolutions

passed in the VEC meetings. However, in Chitradurga, Shimoga and Raichur, the majority of these resolutions were not found to be followed up. Regretfully, issues relating to irregularity and drop-out cases came repeatedly up for discussion in the subsequent meetings, indicating that the VEC failed to act on the earlier meeting resolutions.

Drop-out Phenomenon among Children of the VEC Members

It is said that charity begins at home. If VEC members are expected to monitor the attendance and regular participation of every child in their community, they would certainly be expected to begin with children from their own families. Otherwise, it would amount to darkness under the lamp. Hence, an exercise in assessing the educational situation of their own families is crucial. Primary data collected from the VEC members with respect to the number of children who are attending school, irregular at school, dropped out and never enrolled in schools within their own families make interesting revelations (Table 9).

Table 9: Number of Irregular/Drop-out/Non-Enrolled Children and School- Attending (5-14) among VEC Members' Household

District	Out-of-School Children			School-going			No. of VEC H.H
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Chitradurga	2	2	4	29	21	50	69
D.K.	1	-	1	17	14	31	37
Dharwad	24	20	44	162	113	275	114
Mysore	3	1	4	32	21	53	97
Raichur	8	9	17	34	28	62	100
Shimoga	-	1	1	23	18	41	80
Total	38	33	71	297	215	512	497

The sample showed that there was no irregularity in school attendance among children to VEC members' families, but drop-outs and non-enrolled were found to be present. While VEC members from Dharwad and Raichur districts reveal the highest number of school-going children, they also reveal the highest number of dropouts from schools. Further, Dharwad also reveals a higher number of girl drop-outs than Raichur. Non-enrolled children have been found to be present among the VEC members' families of all the districts except Mysore. Raichur district reveals

a large number of non-enrolled. This is disturbing and reflects on the negative impact of the DPEP intervention. Thus, the persistence of drop-outs and non-enrolled children in the VEC households point to the negative attitude of VEC members towards primary education. Under such circumstances, one wonders whether it is too much to expect from them to monitor attendance and participation of community children, considering that they are unable to monitor regular participation of their own children in the schools. Perhaps such an irony springs from the fact that these members having themselves been deprived of education benefits, fail to see the benefits that can accrue to their children. In fact, the overall illiteracy among VEC members stands at 15 per cent, and if the 5 per cent literacy (without any formal educational attainments) is added to this, a grim picture emerges. Thus, VECs assume all the more significance in averting the disaster of their children following in their footsteps. It is here that the capacity-building programme should play a powerful and much stronger role in instilling a positive attitude among the incumbents. Adequate exposure to the concept of 'good' education and its benefits through concrete illustrations should essentially form an integral component of the VEC training programme.

Drop-out Phenomenon in the Community

While the drop-out phenomenon among VEC members' families is disturbing, the prevalence of out-of-school children in the village is a sad reflection on the monitoring efficiency of the VECs. An analysis of the primary data gathered from the community members chosen across the sample villages reveals the ubiquitous nature of the 'out-of-school children' phenomenon either in terms of non-enrolled or drop-outs (Table 10). One notices again that Dharwad and Raichur districts reveal the highest number of drop-outs and the latter also reveals the highest number of

Table 10: Prevalence of Out-of-School Children (5-14) among Households of Community Members

District	Dropout			Non enrolled		
	B	G	T	B	G	T
Chitradurga	-	-	-	4	-	4
D.K.	-	-	-	3	-	3
Dharwad	12	16	28	2	1	3
Mysore	3	2	5	-	-	-
Raichur	18	11	29	10	12	22
Shimoga	-	-	-	3	-	3
Total	33	29	62	22	13	35

non-enrolled children. Thus, the prevalence of negative school participatory trends among VEC members' families as well as in the community suggest the failure of the VEC training in effectively sensitising the members. More importantly, this also points to the need for addressing the basic psychological issues relating to attitudes, perceptions and motivations of the VEC members.

Findings and Conclusions

The paper makes a modest attempt to understand the role played by the VECs in the effective management of primary schools. It is seen that VEC, as a participatory institutional structure, is yet to integrate itself effectively into the decentralized educational administrative set-up and make its presence felt in the village. Lack of statutory powers is one of the reasons cited for its lackadaisical role. Irregular meetings, poor attendance of members, indifference and apathy characterise VECs. The basic question that emerges is, how to make VEC a powerful instrument of changing the prevailing negative educational scenario into a hopeful and promising one in every village? The prevalence of drop-outs and non-enrolled children within the VEC members' households points to the risk of education deprivation that their own children face if preventive efforts are not undertaken.

Considering the representation for women as stipulated by the guidelines, it is observed that over 67.0 per cent of the VECs across districts flout the reservation norm for women. The proportions of VECs that adhere to the stipulated 33.0 per cent reservation policy, constitute a mere 32.7 per cent. That is to say, even taking all VECs together, the total women's representation does not reach the required figures of 33.0 per cent. Strangely, both D.K. and Shimoga districts, which record higher female literacy attainments, reveal the highest proportion of VECs having less than 30 per cent women, flouting the stipulated reservation policy for women.

On the aspect of regularity in attendance at VEC meetings, it is noted that a large majority of the people who cannot attend meetings are the wage earners/labourers who belong to the poorest of the poor households. This has wider implications for timing the VEC meetings according to the convenience of the large majority, as otherwise, those marginalized people who are roped in as VEC members will never get a chance to take part in decision-making processes, which might affect the fate of their children's education. Another interesting reason for not attending VEC meetings regularly, as reported by one member in Bhoomanagunda village of Deodurga taluk in Raichur district, is that due to brisk sale in his arrack shop, he cannot close his shop to attend the meetings. Strangely, this person has also undergone VEC training, which seems to have made no impact on him.

Marginalisation of women in VEC composition and poor self-perceptions of women to participate in the VEC meetings all point to the need for creating a positive climate for their effective participation. For women, attending meetings appears to be an added work as they are always engaged in household chores and other family responsibilities. This implies that the VEC training should also address the issue of developing a positive and supportive climate both within households and outside the community so that women can gradually take part in all the developmental activities of the village. Thus, the reasons for not attending VEC meetings regularly point to the attitude and mindsets of people. In particular, the members from low literacy taluks, as seen in the case of Deodurg, need to be adequately sensitized. Hence, the need for strengthening VEC training. More than anything else, it is the HT who needs to play a much more dynamic role in activating the VEC.

So far as the nature of participation of members in the VEC meetings is concerned, it is seen that a considerable number of members across Dharwad, Raichur and Shimoga districts are just observers. The majority of these members, being illiterates, feel that they are not capable of discussing anything as they know very little about education. Chitradurga district reveals a considerable number of disinterested members, which is cause for concern. In fact, VEC training, as a strategy for capacity building, should aim in the first place to develop a positive image about oneself.

In regard to exercise of powers by the VEC members, the VECs draw flak, either due to lack of knowledge regarding the same or due to the fact that they do not enjoy any statutory powers of controlling schools, teachers and students. For instance, the prescribed powers like checking attendance and other registers, recommending the annual school budget, reporting on regularity of students, teacher attendance and school functioning, and framing the school calendar do not seem to have been exercised by any. The VECs basically compare themselves with the VPs, which enjoy both financial and political powers and feel that they are only ornamental structures in the village. While the government is making all-out efforts to entrust the ownership of schools to the community, the VECs have not shed their dependence on the government for financial support.

Several factors compound the problem of school education in rural areas. Certain deficiencies in the school system itself perpetuate inefficiency in the schools. These factors come in the way of achieving the desired educational outcomes. For instance, the low-literacy taluk in Shimoga district is beset with teacher absenteeism and tardiness, as reported by many VEC members. Also, the district reports the highest frequency of teachers wasting time on daily commuting. One could possibly relate teacher absenteeism and tardiness to daily commuting phenomenon. Chitradurga and Raichur districts also have this incidence, to a lesser extent. D.K., Dharwad and Mysore districts are absolved from this kind of

dubious distinction. Dharwad and Shimoga also have reported about the problem of more than one class being taught by one teacher, suggesting the possibility of two-teacher schools reverting to single-teacher school status. The one-teacher-one- classroom syndrome still prevails in Chitradurga and D.K. districts. Both Dharwad and Raichur districts reveal lack of playgrounds and basic facilities of drinking water and sanitation. This is a matter of serious concern as these districts are currently covered by DPEP intervention.

Implications of the Study

The efforts of the governments in establishing participatory institutional structures at the grassroots level are no doubt laudable as they have created opportunities, especially for the hitherto marginalized sections of the population to voice their opinions. However, the prevailing complex social, economic and political arrangements do not seem to provide an enabling environment for the vulnerable sections to effectively participate in the decision-making processes. The persisting illiteracy in backward regions of the State, particularly among the deprived castes and women, and their perceived low status, and poor participation in VEC meetings all point to the need for empowering these sections through appropriate interventional strategies.

The present study points out that the major issue is one of democratizing grassroots participation for educational development. The most crucial element in the process of democratization of grassroots participation is the strategy of capacity building. The issues that merit discussion are the lessons that one can learn from several of the on-going capacity-building programmes, which are on the anvil following Constitutional amendments relating to decentralization and whether these capacity-building programmes have been able to develop the required capacities and skills to manage and oversee the performance of a village primary school, or an adult education or a non-formal education centre. Although one cannot expect the members to carry out any kind of academic/technical supervision of the school/ centre, one can possibly expect these members to oversee the regular functioning of the school, punctuality and regularity of the teacher and the student, which are basic pre-requisites for enhancing accountability of the school system.

The philosophical underpinning of the entire capacity-building programme is to generate positive attitudes, develop individual capabilities and skills for self-managing and owning the school. The VEC training in the present study points out that the community, particularly the vulnerable sections, are yet to develop a feeling of ownership of their village school. Over the years, one can see a perceptible change in the attitude of the community from saying 'no' to primary education to 'yes'. However, the fact remains that the existing formal school system is still incapable of

retaining children from the vulnerable sections, such as the deprived caste groups, the tribes, single-headed female households, temporary wage earners/casual labourers, migrants, minority, etc. These children run the risk of primary education deprivation if they do not participate in the formal schooling process. The prevalence of 'out-of-school children' and more so among the VEC members themselves in the present study points to the need for evolving alternative strategies of imparting primary education to children at risk.

By the time this study was completed, the VECs have been replaced by the School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMC) in Karnataka State, which seem to carry some statutory powers. A significant feature of this is that it is only meant for parents of school-going children. Hence, it is pertinent to ask what would happen to people who cannot send their children to formal schools for obvious reasons, and whether the State is trying to absolve its constitutional obligation of providing free and compulsory education to children up to 14 years in the context of market forces. Why is the SDMC excluding the marginal sections? Does this not amount to educational discrimination and denial of a basic fundamental right? These are some of the questions that merit deeper analysis.

No one can deny the spirit behind such institutional interventions and the continued need for enhancing community participation through them. Besides, the capacity-building programme for the members of the grassroots institutions is a vital ingredient for realizing the goals of education for all. Obviously, one cannot undermine the need for enhancing functional capacities of the members of the newly constituted SDMC as well. Therefore, the outcomes of the present study need to be analysed from this perspective and the experiences gained from this study should serve as a pointer to increasing the efficiency of the newly replaced institutional structures.

It is also necessary that the capacity-building programme should in the first place aim at educating the members about the concepts of good education, a good school, a good teacher and a good learner. This becomes important in the absence of any model school for the majority of the villagers who only have a picture of a typical rural primary school, which does not seem to evoke any kind of enthusiasm towards building facilities, teachers and functional performance.

Another significant gap noticed is the lack of horizontal and lateral linkage between VECs with the VPs and other parallel structures, which may have a negative impact on the spirit of decentralization. Similarly, the interaction of the VECs with the educational administrative units is almost nil, thereby indicating the isolation of the VECs.

ANNEXURE

CABE Guidelines for VEC

The Powers of VEC

1. To visit educational institutions.
2. To check attendance and other registers.
3. To enquire and report to the authorities on educational deficiencies and requirements in the village.
4. To recommend annual budgets of schools and other educational activities to the authority concerned.
5. To undertake construction and repair work.
6. To report on regularity of students, teacher attendance and school functioning.
7. To frame the school calendar under the guidance of the appropriate authorities.

The Roles and Functions of VEC

1. Supervision of adult education, Early Childhood Care and education, non-formal and primary education.
2. Generation and sustenance of awareness in the Village Community ensuring participation of all segments of population.
3. Promote enrolment drives in primary schools and persuade parents of non-attending children to send their children to schools.
4. Help to reduce drop-out rate in primary schools by initiating measures and services for retention.
5. Assist in smooth functioning of primary schools.
6. Mobilize resources and help schools to have water supply, urinals, playgrounds and other facilities.
7. Prepare plans and proposals within their resources for development of educational activities in the village to attain total literacy and universal primary education.
8. Present reports and proposals to mandal and district bodies and make periodic self-assessment of progress of committee's efforts.
9. Co-ordinate with other social service and development department and committees for mutual support besides coordinating various educational programmes in the village.

Objectives of VEC Training

1. To understand and articulate the spirit and objectives of decentralized and participatory role of Village Community in managing its institutions and activities.
2. To understand the objectives, functions and powers of Village Education Committees.
3. To acquire administrative and managerial abilities required for effective functioning as member of Village Education Committees.
4. To acquire strategies and techniques of social mobilization including resource mobilization.
5. To acquire the ability to communicate effectively and forge linkages with the other relevant institutions and agencies.
6. To acquire ability for data management and documentation.
7. To understand broadly the curriculum and learning resources required in various educational activities at the village level.

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