The School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) are a hallmark of decentralised governance under the Right to Education Act in India and implemented through the national programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This is an effort to universalise elementary education by community-ownership of school system. This programme seeks to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. It is a response to the demand for high quality basic education all over the country. This emerged in line with the second Millennium Development Goals (MDG) related to achieve universal primary education.

Karnataka has been a pioneer in establishing the participatory governance model through SDMCs formally mandated by its Gazette notification in 2006. However, even after adoption of this model, the state has not achieved all its targeted outcomes. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Karnataka through its leadership, commitment and learning is collaborating with the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) to foster community participation in the governance of schools through the SDMCs. This collaboration primarily focuses on improving social accountability; developing capacities on both the supply and demand sides at the last mile to improve the quality of education development services; promote evidence based and data driven research to build knowledge and learning; help mobilise collective action to encourage local innovations in school governance institutions to improve school enrolment, reduce dropout rates and enhance learning outcomes; and to develop a grievance redress mechanism for strengthening SDMCs.

PAC collaborates with SSA, GoK to undertake an evidence-based and community engagement driven project to help improve outcomes of policies and programmes of SSA; enhance governance in and the quality of services of the institutions tasked with delivering school education services; undertake the Citizen Report Card and Community Score Card surveys to evaluate the network of government and private schools and enable capacity building in the delivery of services with an emphasis on vulnerable and excluded population.

To gain a greater grass root level insights and facilitate extensive field work, PAC has partnered with District Level Partner Organisation (DLPOs) and NGOs, which have been working in the realm of elementary education in different districts in Karnataka. The organisations that partnered with PAC are: SEVAK (Belgaum), Spanadana (Shimoga) BGVS (Raichur) Vishala (Bijapur), Janjagriti (Mysore) and Chiguru (Bangalore).

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Government of India's flagship programme aims at universalisation of elementary education in the country, provides innumerable platforms and new vistas for state governments to enhance children's educational accomplishments and improve learning outcomes. The Government of Karnataka has taken this milestone to a new high by introducing School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs) that allow communities to participate and manage school development at various levels over the last few years. At the behest of SSA, the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) undertook an extensive study of SDMCs in 2018-2019 to understand if communities are effective in ushering in change. The project research spread across 17 districts, added new insights on the varied yet significant gaps in the implementation and functioning of SDMCs. PAC considers the issue of (elementary) education as a significant contributor in building people’s capabilities and hence, achieve a decent standard of living. As an active partner in achieving India's SDGs, PAC focuses on education, particularly elementary education which is constrained by various grassroots level factors, including implementation of SDMCs and lacks much needed impetus and support from both the communities and other private stakeholders. In this regard, PAC considers this project as a step towards understanding the nuances of problem on the ground to help look at evidence-based interventions to bridge the gap.

The sample size of 1020 population size is distributed among SDMC members, Head masters, Asha and Anganwadi Workers.
Interview

Dr. M T Reju, IAS
State Project Director Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan

What is Samagra Shikshana programme?

Samagra Shikshana Karnataka, is the new integrated programme of erstwhile programmes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyann (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamika Shiksha Abhiyian (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE). Even though it is a centrally sponsored programme with 60:40 sharing of financial support between the Centre and State, most of support comes from the Government of Karnataka. The new scheme covers grades from pre-primary to higher secondary and includes a variety of interventions that ensures the quality of learning, teaching processes in schools.

In your opinion, has there been any innovation/break through in the education programme in Karnataka?

There have been systematic and conscious efforts to improve the learning levels of each and every child in the schools of Karnataka. Guruchethana – choice based teacher training modules, State Achievement Survey that measures the learning levels of every student from 4th to 9th class and the generation of reports cards for individual student and each school, Viswas Kirana – remedial teaching, Ganitha Kalika Andolana – customised programmes for teaching maths in 4th and 5th standards, Odu Karntaka – intervention ensuring the expected numeracy and literacy levels in upper primary classes, Prerana – student motivation programme, TALP – Technology Assisted Learning Programme for digital education, creation of a comprehensive database of students – SATS (Student Achievement Tracking System – Shikshana Kirana), start of Karnataka Public Schools, recruitment of 3900 new graduate teachers, revision of Nali-Kali, piloting of teaching English in Nali- Kali method, development of activity and work books for different grades etc. are some of the interventions. There are a number of specific and customised interventions at the school levels too. All these efforts have yielded very good results. Even though the general image of Government/public education system remains unchanged in public domain, the number of schools offers good quality curricular and co-curricular support for students are increasing fast.

How is the PAC-SDMC project helping the government in the policy making process?

Every school need more support in terms of financial and technical resources. In turn, schools need to be more accountable and ready to be monitored. The School ecosystems have many stakeholders now. SDMC being, an important institution that can support individual school, department is keen to understand the levels and quality of participation of SDMC members in various parts of the State. We are keen to improve the awareness and interest of SDMC members in school activities. SDMC members can reach easily to bigger platforms like Grama Panchayats, CSR divisions of the Companies and NGOs. SDMCs can play a major role in pooling the resources for infrastructure improvement of schools. I hope PAC’s SDMC project will help the department to improve the engaging process of SDMC members, increase the quality of interactions with SDMC members & interaction among SDMC members and motivate the SDMC members to increase their awareness and competency levels. We are also hopeful that the study will help us to understand how the SDMC as an institution and SDMC members as concerned individuals work with other institutions/stakeholders related with the Schools.

Do you have any Roadmap that can better improve the relationship of Government and organisations like PAC?

As an organisation located in Karnataka, we hope, PAC will help us to understand the ecosystems better and will help us to find out optimal solutions in capacity building. I really wish organisations that are ready to work with Government had more dedicated people with them spreading across the districts. It is not for entrusting burden on them or for education department officials including teachers to retreat to behind the curtains, but to manage the newer challenges which are very new to us. The credibility of an organisation, commitment to work with the government and capacity of the organisation to meet their own expenses and technical resources will be crucial in defining the relationship. I hope, the State of Karnataka in general and the Education department in special will have more support from these kinds of organisations in future so that Government efforts will be better targeted, monitored and presented.
It was the bankruptcy of education system that triggered off our project on value oriented education. This programme was launched in April 1993. Once the team was recruited, the first few months were spent in getting a general orientation to education especially to education in primary schools. We concentrated on documenting the articles we had collected on primary education and the situation of education in India, child psychology, community and rural psychology. On the basis of the materials available and collected from various institutions and from the government, a study was conducted in South Kanara and Udupi district. The objective of the study was to understand the relevance of curriculum to the family background of students. The outcome of the study reaffirmed our belief that the curriculum and the reading materials available for the students were not in relation to their day to day living and the materials were insensitive to address the social issues of today.

Instead of exhorting the teachers to introduce values and more child-oriented methodologies into their teaching, we believed it will be more practical and acceptable if we provide them with aids to introduce these values and methodologies. This was phase 1 of our organisation, in Phase 2 we worked on textbook guides from 1996-1999. Thereafter we launched our Resource Centre (RC), which was our Phase 3. Phase 4 of our growth we specially focused on gender mainstreaming, community participation, child rights, ownership etc. Our RC was strengthened by our four Community Education Centres (CECs) which consisted of teachers, parents, Community Based Organisations, Panchayat Representatives and other NGOs. In our next phase we concentrated on promoting school atmosphere that was value based, gender sensitive, health and education conscious, child rights assertive through the community-based network in Grama Panchayat Blocks. The 6th phase of PADI saw our 4 extended Educational Resource Centres (ERCs) which were well functioning and were Centres that were empowered to raise the voice for development and changes in both education and protection of children.

We had two Registered District Federations that were resourceful and capacitated to work independently. Child protection systems such as CWC, JJB, CWO, SJPU, District Child protection unit, Child Right Clubs at schools, Anti Child Trafficking Committee at Panchayat level, the state commission for child protection was activated and strengthened at state/District/Taluk and Grama Panchayat level. Today PADI has intervened in 24 schools and has effective functioning child right clubs and SDMC model. The Panchayats in D.K and Udupi have become more sensitive towards children needs.

**As a noted child rights activist and the President of the Dakshina Kannada Child Welfare Association, how important is it to involve the community while ensuring active SDMCs?**

Education plays an important role in every child's life especially and SDMCs in the schools have a vital role to play in school development and Protection of child rights. There are cases of school drop outs, child marriages, children in conflict with law all these cases when they come to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), I feel that the SDMC and the teachers have missed out or not understood their importance in protecting child rights. So if safe childhood is to be provided to every child, the responsibilities lies on the shoulders of school development Committee specially drafting the child protection policy, monitoring the attendance of the children and the performance of education. So I feel an active, strong in objective and dedicated SDMCs are an instrument for sensitising communities and ensuring the protection of child and reduction in children's problem.

**What according to you are the reasons why SDMCs in some places are inactive?**

Some of the reasons why the SDMCs in some places are inactive are because of ignorance. Some have no clarity on their roles & responsibilities and in few cases, there is no guidance or information imparted by the line Departments (Panchayats, WCD, Education, Law & Order). In some instances, there may be internal dynamics that are at play, in others financial constraints can play its part and also aspects such as lack of dedication and fear among the teachers.

**What kind of a role can civil society play in strengthening educational institutions to help improve learning outcomes among children?**

Civil society members can help strengthen educational institutions to help improve learning outcomes among children in diverse ways firstly by showing concern and attitude of giving back to society by way of volunteering, sharing their knowledge, their skills or even through donations. They can also participate and take active interest in both scholastic and actual development of schools. Furthermore they can be the advocates on the ground in ensuring complete implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

**What was your experience while working with a not for profit think tank like PAC?**

PAC has taken an initiative to collaborate with the Government to strengthen the community ownership of schools for effective School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs). This initiative is extremely important especially if we want to improve school outcome. PAC, with its team of experts and development professionals equipped with in-depth knowledge has been of great support to us. They have shared their knowledge and thereby strengthened our efforts in districts like Udupi and Dakshina Kannada Districts.

**Please share a brief background and the journey of Padi your organisation that works on welfare of children**

Mr. Renni D’Souza Founder, Padi

**YEARS**
“Even a construction worker takes pride in sending his child to private schools, which, he feels, in turn, lifts his personal status in society. If we make our school on par with private ones, why we need expensive schools? With SDMCs we hope to try bring that change...”

Hunumantaiah, SDMC President, Ramnagara District

“With the help of my new role as an SDMC member, I, as a woman and Schedule Caste category member have an opportunity to understand school affairs and check that mid-day meals are prepared and served properly.”

Netravati, SDMC member, HPS, Banasandra, Turuvekere Taluk, Tumkur District.

"Very impressed visit to the campus, the researchers are very eager to know new things. Growing of trees and other progressive steps taken by the management is very appreciable!"

BS Arun, Associate Editor, Deccan Herald, 10.10.2018

"It’s been a privilege to come to PAC the last 4 years, great bunch of people to work with. I wish you the best of luck with your exciting future!"

Dr. Seema Bhatia, Senior Program Officer, IDRC, 30.10.2018

“Awesome begin here at PAC with friends at PAC and love to be associated with an organisation that stands with social justice!”

Dr. Akkai Padmashali, Founder, Ondede, 05.11.2018
Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement

M.C. Gangadhara, Joint Director, Department of Food and Civil Supplies spoke on the digitisation and grievance redressal in the Public Distribution System (PDS) system at the Public Affairs Centre Training of Trainers (ToT) programme for the PDS Karnataka in Bangalore, India.

The Planning Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu invited Public Affairs Centre to make a presentation on the methodology and findings from the #PublicAffairsIndex2018.

G Gurucharan, Director, Public Affairs Centre at the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)- Partners Meet on Transforming India: Empowering Youth for inclusive growth in New Delhi, India.

Dr Annapoorna Ravichander, Head, Policy Engagement & Communication and Training interacts with 108 newly appointed Karnataka Tehsildars at Administrative Training Institute, Mysore.

G Gurucharan, Director PAC India at the Global Think Tank Summit 2018 in Brussels.

PAC team at the International Open Data Conference, 2018, Argentina.

PAC team at the Think Tank Initiative Conference, Thailand.

Outreach

- 32 Publications
- 3 Conferences attended
- 3 Workshops attended
- 5 Stakeholder presentations
- 90 Special Gram sabhas conducted
- 5 Stakeholder interviews conducted
Visitors

Kanchan Mani Dixit and Pushkar Prasad Acharya from Institute for Social and Environmental Transition - Nepal (ISET-Nepal) visited PAC on possible communication collaborations.

A delegation from Citizens’ Charter National Priority Program me, Afghanistan the senior management team at PAC campus to share and learn our experiences at the ground level.

Interactive Session

B S Arun, Associate Editor, Deccan Herald had an interactive session on Writing Op-eds, the do’s and don’ts, and audience expectation.

Meetings

Harpreet Bhullar, (National Project Coordinator, EU-India Cooperation and Dialogue on Migration and Mobility, ILO DWT for South Asia and Country Office for India) along with Dr Annapoorna Ravichander & Ajai Hegde met Mr Kapil Mohan (Director General, Administrative Training Institute) & V. Bhagyalakshmi (Joint Director, ATI), Mysore for a discussion on Organising Training Activities.

Good Reads

**School Education in India: Market, State and Quality**

Authors:- Manish Jain,, Archana Mehendale, Rahul Mukhopadhyay, Padma M. Sarangapani, Christopher Winch

Publisher: Routledge India

**Right to Education: The Way Forward**

Authors:- Vinay Rai, Narendra Kumar

Publisher: Haynes Publishing Group

Recognition

PAC Programme Managers Varsha Pillai and Hari Dilip Kumar were among the 24 chosen Young Leaders as part of the OTT-TTI fellowship.

From the Editor’s Desk

Public Eye will be published in January, May and September. Do send us your comments/feedback to pec@pacindia.org. If you wish to unsubscribe please click here.