

Capacity building of community leaders to promote better community participation in education



A boat when it is ashore needs an anchor to keep it firm, to prevent it from being swept away by the waves of the sea

-Community leader is the 'Anchor'

Capacity Building of Community Leaders

Community Leaders

Community leader is a person who is perceived to represent a community. He holds the trust of the members of the community. He is charged with the responsibility of fulfilling the needs and requirements of the community. The members of the community keep some expectations from their leader. Community leader identifies the needs and demands of the community people and take appropriate steps in meeting the demands of the community.

Therefore, community leader can be defined as 'a person in, for and by the community.' Community leader determines the general feeling within a community. He acts as 'a point of liaison' between the communities and authorities. Community leader is responsible to make his/her community stronger.

Community Leader and Education

Community leader has a major role in promoting education in the community may be urban or rural. Community participation in education can be enhanced with the help of community leaders because they hold the capacity to generate awareness among other community members as they hold a very important and respectable place within the community. Community leaders can mobilize the community to participate for supporting education in community. They can generate awareness among the community members regarding education and can lead them in doing so. The task of promoting education within a particular community can be successfully done with the help of community leaders because they are the person who can win maximum favour and support of the community and are well familiar with all the aspects of the community. They can better analyze the situations in the community and can take actions for it. Community participation has been considered as

a very effective strategy for promoting or restructuring education in any community and this community participation is possible only with the efforts of the community leader. So, community leadership is important for enhancing community participation for education. SSA assigns greatest importance to systemic mobilization of the community and creation of an effective system of decentralized decision making. The success of community based bodies for education such as Village Education Committee (VGC), Parents Teacher Association (PTA), Mothers Teacher Association (MTA), School Management Committee (SMC) are based on the capacity of the community leaders to manage the functions of these bodies. Community leaders can make the environment conducive to the desire of education in the community. They have the capability to heighten the desire in the parents to such an extent that sending children to school can become a norm in the community.

Examples of community leaders

- **Political leaders-**

Every community has its party and groups of political leaders. These are effective pressure groups as people listen to them. Leaders are effective communicators and can facilitate things easily as a result of their own powers and influence. For example, leaders by way of implementing useful employment schemes, can encourage parents to seek work and send their children to school.

- **Village opinion makers-**

These are the 'king makers in a village. Village opinion makers are elders of a village whose opinion matter the most and are listened to by the entire village. Their level of understanding of village issues is very high and if this group can be motivated to speak and do for children's education, substantial results can be achieved.

- **Religious leaders-**

These are amongst the most powerful groups in a village. Moreover, these groups interact directly with parents and have abundance of manpower and resources. Parents can easily be convinced by these groups and to promote education of out of school children, religious leaders form an important tool.

▪ **Elderly women-**

Every community has elderly women of the village who can also play a powerful role for the education of children especially for the education of girls.

These are the examples of some community leaders that can play a major role in the education of children in the community.

Role of Community Leaders

A community leader can do the following functions in promoting and facilitating education in the community:

- Mobilizing community resources
- Creating awareness among parents
- Identifying and addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the community regarding education of children
- Identifying the other related problems that is affecting education of the children in the community.
- Making plans for the proper utilization of the grants
- Providing support to daily functioning of the school
- Discussion and monitoring of the school
- Helping quality improvement
- Utilization of school improvement plan
- Ensuring teachers' regular attendance
- Discussion on other area specific schools
- Making plan for community participation
- Strengthening community based bodies such as VEC, PTA, MTA, SMC, and SDMC
- Encouraging community awareness programmes for promoting education
- Establishing linkages with other authorities to support the community
- Meeting the challenges of the education in community
- Establishing external linkages in order to create 'social capital' for community

Capacity Building of Community Leaders

One of the main responsibilities of community leaders is to enhance the capacity of the community to participate in education as well as in other related activities. Community leaders can best fulfill their entrusted responsibility by having the training that equips them decision making skill, leadership qualities. Quality training allows their views to be expressed and incorporated into future development and planning for education. The new knowledge and skills enhance their effectiveness in addressing issues affecting their communities. Training also helps them to identify opportunities and address crisis in several innovative ways.

Community leaders need the training for the following-

- To identify opportunities and address crisis in the community
- To develop decision-making power in community in conditions of uncertainty.
- To enable them to identify the requirements of the community at individual basis
- To enable them to mobilize resources and support from the community for education process.
- To take correct decisions regarding the community affairs
- To enable to cater the educational needs of the special focus groups
- To encourage micro level planning for education through capacity building of community leader
- To enable them to collect information from the community
- To enable them to successfully implement and monitor educational programmes
- To make them aware of the educational demands of 21st century
- To enable them to resolve the conflicts and complexity arising in the community.
- To enable them to bridge the gap between school and community
- To build capacities to plan at micro levels

Components of training

The components on which the training should be provided to the community leaders are:

- **Identification-**
 - a. to identify the strength and weakness of community
 - b. to identify the opportunities and crisis in the community
 - c. to identify the out of school children and special focus groups
 - d. to identify the needs of schools, teachers and students in the community

- **Guidance-**
 - a. To provide guidance to other community members to participate actively for the welfare of the community
 - b. To provide guidance to the community level structures in order to enable them to perform their assigned role
 - c. To provide guidance for the better implementation of the government programmes or schemes.

- **Decision-making capacity**
 - a. To take decisions in the situation of complexity, conflict or crisis.
 - b. To take decisions regarding the education plans for the community
 - c. To take decisions regarding the role of different members in the community
 - d. To take decisions for managing the education process and activities in the community

- **Awareness**
 - a. Health and hygiene awareness
 - b. Legal awareness
 - c. Awareness towards current issues in the country
 - d. Awareness towards educational programmes, schemes and incentives

- **Sensitization**
 - a. Gender sensitization
 - b. Sensitization towards disability

- c. Sensitization towards social evils like child marriage, dowry, child labour, caste system, untouchability, alcoholism etc
- **Understanding**
 - a. Understanding environment
 - b. Understanding specific issues in country
 - c. Understanding political aspects
 - d. Understanding government policies and programmes
 - e. Understanding technology
 - f. Understanding rights and duties
 - **Skill development**
 - a. Communication skill
 - b. Planning skill
 - c. Skill for monitoring and evaluation
 - d. Skill for implementation
 - e. Team building skill
 - f. Leadership skill
 - g. Emotional intelligence/ social skill
 - h. Technological skill (ICT, e-governance etc)
 - i. Skill for managing conflicts

Contents of Training

The following contents should be incorporated in the training programmes for community leaders:

- Understanding UEE
- Quality issues in education
- Understanding community support and participation
- Improvement of school facilities
- Utilization of grants
- Identification of children with special needs/ Inclusive education

- Parental training and community mobilization
- Attending needs of special focus groups
- Promoting gender equality through community
- Monitoring and evaluation of programmes
- Addressing and solving social problems like child labour in the community
- Academic supervisions of schools
- Teacher training and teacher availability
- Habitation level planning
- Conducting household survey
- Preparing village education registers
- Preparing school improvement plan
- School mapping
- Conducting school readiness camps
- Strengthening the school infrastructure
- School activities and daily functioning of school
- Nutritional needs of children
- Forming children's collectiveness and support groups
- Conducting monthly meetings with parents and teachers
- Convergence with external organizations/skills for collaboration
- Innovation and creativity in school activities
- Understanding other issues that can affect education
- Managing disasters or calamities in community

The story of Suresh 'Sarpanch' (Community leader): A Case of action taken by a community leader

Once not long ago, in a small village of Madhya Pradesh, two children were sent by their parents to work as bonded labour in the neighbouring village. When Suresh Sarpanch came to know of this, he decided to take action. He met the parents of the children and asked them what their difficulties were. On hearing that the children had been sent there to pay the parent's debt, the Sarpanch wrote a letter to the Sarpanch of the other village after

getting the details of the children from their parents asking him to release these children. When nothing happened for a month, the Sarpanch, along with other village elders devised a clever plan to bring these children back. He, along with other men went to meet the Sarpanch of the other village. There he was told of the money owed by the parents of these children. He agreed to pay the loan in 90 days. When Suresh Sarpanch did not pay back the loan he got a letter from the other Sarpanch stating that he had promised to pay him for releasing the children who were working as bonded labour. To this, Suresh Sarpanch responded that it is illegal to hire children for working and if this letter was shown to the authorities, the Sarpanch could be arrested. The parents of the children were made to send them to the government school in their village. To ease the financial problems of the parents the Sarpanch gave them the provision of buying rice at the rate lower than fixed price according to the Antodaya Scheme.
