Imposed Participation?

The State and the Community in Educational Governance in India – Evidence from five Case Studies in Madhya Pradesh.

vorgelegt von

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In Memory of my Dad

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Abbreviations and glossary

anganwadi	government day-care centre for children below the age of 6
assistant teacher	teachers employed for primary and middle schools under the Department of Education
BEO	Block Education Officer, administrative officer at block level
BPL	below poverty line, BPL-status entitles households to access the Public Distribution System for subsidised goods and benefits from poverty reduction policies
CEO	Chief Executive Officer, secretary of the block and district panchayats
cluster	administrative unit comprising of 11-15 schools
Didi	Lit:older sister, teacher for pre-school children age of 3-6 years
DEO	District Education Officer, responsible for disciplinary action in all schools within the district
DIET	District Institute of Educational Training, responsible for educational research and teacher training
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme, World Bank and OECD
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education, pre-school component of SSA financed programme for expanding the primary education system in selected district all over India, now integrated into SSA
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme, programme for demand-driven extension of the government primary school system in MP launched in 1998
GOI	Government of India
GoMP	Government of Madhya Pradesh
GP	*gram panchayat,* local government body at village level
GS	*gram sabha,* village assembly consisting of all registered voters in a *gram panchayat* constituency
guruji	Teachers employed under EGS
Indra Awas Yojna	Central government housing programme und which BPL-listed families are provided with a fix sum for house construction
INR	Indian Rupee
JP	*janpad panchayat,* local government body at block level (administrative level below district)
JPSK	*janpad shiksha kendra,* academic and financial management of all primary and middle schools under SSA in the block
jan shikshak	cluster resource person, academic
JSA	*jan shiksha adhiniyam,* People's Education Act
JSK	*jan shiksha kendra,* academic and financial supervision of all primary and middle schools in a cluster
JSKC	*jan shiksha kendra* coordinator, financial management

JSN	Jan Shiksha Niyam, subordinate legislation to the People's Education Act
JSS	*janpad shiksha samiti,* Education Committe of the *janpad panchayat*
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
panch	elected member of *gram panchayat*
Panchayat	lit: council of five; traditional local body composed of five senior males of a village or caste community to resolve disputes and monitor the adherence to rules and codes of conduct
PDS	Public distribution system, distribution of subsidised goods to poor households and welfare schemes such as the midday meal
PR	*panchayati raj,* lit: rule of the panchayat
PRI	*panchayati raj* institutions, panchayats and their sub-committees at village, block and district levels
PTA	Parent-Teacher-Association, statutory body entrusted with school governance under JSA
RGM	Rajiv Gandhi Missions, bureaucratic agency founded to design and implement policies in the public sectors of education, health, watershed, and food security
RGSM	Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Rajiv Gandhi Education Mission, education branch of the Rajiv Gandhi Missions
RSK	*Rajya Shiksha Kendra*, merger of the State Project Office SSA, the RajivGandhi Shiksha Mission, and the Department of Public Instruction
sankul	administrative unit (teacher salaries) between cluster and block
sankul kendra	secondary school serving to distribute teacher salaries for all teachers in the *sankul*
sarpanch	president of *gram panchayat*
shala shiksha kosh	school account in which community-raised resources are kept
SK	*shiksha karmi,* teacher employed under DPEP
SSA	*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, Education for All Programme, Central Government education policy
Upsarpanch	vice president of g*ram panchayat*
VEC	Village Education Committee, education sub-committee of the *gram Panchayat*
ZP	*zilla panchayat,* local government body at district level (administrative level below state)
ZSK	*zilla shiksha kendra,* District Project Office, academic, financial and administrative management of all primary and middle schools under SSA in the district
ZSS	*zilla shiksha samiti,* Education Committe of the *zilla panchayat*

Abstract

Problems of accountability and inefficiency associated with traditional modes of public service delivery through centralised bureaucracies have led many countries to experiment with decentralisation, in an effort to increase control of service beneficiaries over the quality and quantity of service provision. In the context of developing countries, common proposals include decentralisation of service delivery to local governments, community participation, direct transfers to households (social funds), and contracting out delivery to private providers and NGOs, within a wide range of infrastructure services, such as water and sanitation, electricity, telecommunications, roads, and social services, including education, health and welfare programmes. Most of these proposals are associated with the 'paradigm' of participatory development, emphasising the importance of 'empowerment', and 'participation'. However, empirical research in many public service sectors has shown at best mixed results in terms of the success of these new modes of service delivery concerning both the quality and quantity of the services, equality in access, and ability to generate local and inclusive participation.

In India, social service sector reform has been approached through a combination of decentralisation of the polity below the state level, and the delegation of state and central social service scheme implementation to both sub-state level local government institutions (LGIs) and lower tiers of the bureaucracy. In addition, many of the central schemes operate through state, district and block level implementation societies staffed with civil servants.

Educational governance at the local level in all states is a joint exercise of the village council education committees and school-based committees such as the school management committee (SMC) and/or the Parent/Mother-Teacher-Associations (PTAs/MTAs). Madhya Pradesh has been one of the states which has been marching ahead in terms of the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, and belongs to those few states which at an early stage have devolved considerable powers to *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs), and more recently, PTAs.

This study aims to assess a) how the institutional setup distributes competences and regulates interaction between the different levels and agencies of governance, and b) how these interactions materialise at the local level, and if they fulfil expectations of improvement in efficiency and accountability in local public service delivery.

To tackle these questions, an institutionalist approach to collective decision-making, which allows for both rational and normative motivations for participation (E. Ostrom), is combined with the concepts of capability and opportunity structure as developed by Amartya Sen, in order to extrapolate formal and informal institutional barriers to participations which individuals face in the context in which they operate.

The case studies of five government primary and middle schools, located in the institutional context of a single block and district administration, were constructed around one central (PTA functioning) and three embedded units of analysis (institutional context, individual participation choices, and involvement of local governance institutions).

The analysis of the data collected during field study, including numerous guideline-interviews with different stakeholders at different levels of governance, school-level data on student and teacher performance and PTA proceedings, and government orders, reveals that decentralisation in elementary education is strongly biased towards devolution of implementation against a lack of financial and planning autonomy. This systemic constraint is complemented by a lack of participation in local educational governance on part of parents due to a widespread lack of parental capabilities rooted in low socio-economic and educational status, a lack of congruence between the desired outcomes of parent involvement in schools on part of parents and teachers, and the inability of local level school governing bodies to enforce sanction in the event of deviance of any party involved in local educational governance.

Zusammenfassung

Mangelne Effizienz und Verantwortlichkeit der Leistungserbringer bei der Versorgung mit öffentlichen Gütern und Sozialtransfers durch zentralisierte Bürokratien haben Regierungen in vielen Ländern zu einer fortschreitenden Dezentralisierung veranlasst. Ziel ist es, die Kontrolle der Leistungsempfänger über die Qualität und Quantität der erbachten Leistungen zu erhöhen. In den Entwicklungs- und Schwellenländern wurde das Streben nach Effizienz und Verantwortlichkeit oftmals kombiniert mit der Absicht, den Zugang benachteiligter Bevölkerungsgruppendie und ihre Teilhabe an Entscheidungs-prozessen zu erhöhen. Dies sollte mittels unterschiedlicher Strategien wie der Übertragung der Verantwortung für die Erbringung öffentlicher Güter an die Kommunen, Bürgerbeteiligung, direkte Transfers und Haushalte, und die Auslagerung der Leistungs-erbringung an Privatunternehmen und NROs in unterschiedlichen Sektoren wie Gesundheit, Bildung, soziale Sicherung, lokaler Infrastruktur etc. erreicht werden.

Empirische Studien haben jedoch gezeigt, dass Reformversuche bestenfalls gemischte Ergebnisse hervorgebracht haben, sowohl in Bezug auf Qualität und Quantität der Leistung an sich, als auch bezüglich der Fähigkeit, Verteilungsgerechtigkeit und lokale Teilhabe zu generieren.

Die Reform des Soziastaats in Indien besteht aus einer Kombination von politischer Dezentralisierung unterhalb der Landesbene als auch der Delegation von Kompetenzen bei der Implementierung zentral- und bundesstaatlicher Sozialpolitik an die so entstandenen Distrikt-, Block- und Dorfräte und die unteren Ränge der Verwaltung.

Lokale Bildungsgovernance ist gemeinsame Aufgabe der Schulkommittees der Dorfräte und der Schulgremien, so beispielsweise Management-Kommittees und Eltern-Lehrer-Vereinigungen. Madhya Pradesh ist einer der Bundesstaaten, die vergleichsweise schnell und erfolgreich bei der Dezentralisierung des Bildungssektors vorangeschritten sind, indem eine ganze Reihe von Kompetenzen per Gesetz und Verwaltungsverordnungen an die unteren Instanzen abgegeben wurden. Ziel der empirischen Studie war, herauszufinden wie a) die Kompetenzen innerhalb des institutionellen Gefüges verteilt sind und welche Mechanismen die Interaktionen zwischen unterschiedlichen Ebenen und Akteuren regulieren, und b) welche Formen diese Interaktionen auf lokaler Ebene tatsächlich annehmen und ob sie die unterstellten Effizienz- und Governance-Erwartungen erfüllen.

Um sich diesen Fragen analytisch anzunähern wurde ein institutionalistischer Ansatz gewählt, der sowohl rationale als auch normative Handlungsmotivationen zuläßt (E. Ostrom). Dieser wurde mit Amartya Sen's Capability-Ansatz kombiniert, um sowohl formale und informelle Barrieren bei der Teilhabe an Entscheidungsprozessen, mit denen sich Individuen konfrontiert sehen, zu erfassen. Die fünf Fallstudien, staatliche Primar und Mittelschulen innerhalb einer gemeinsamen Block- und Distiktverwaltung, beinhalten eine zentrale Analyseeinheit (Funktionsfähigkeit der Eltern-Lehrer-Vereiningung als zentrale Instanz der Schulgovernance), und drei eingebettete Eineheiten (institutioneller Rahmen, individuelle Partizipations-entscheidungen, und Kooperation mit den Dorfräten). Die Analyse der während der Feldforschung gesammelten Daten, die zahlreiche Leitfaden-Interviews mit lokalen ‚stakeholdern' auf den unterschiedlichen Governance-Ebenen, schulspezifische Daten zu Schüler- und Lehrerleistung und Protokollen der Sitzungen der Eltern-Lehrer-Vereinigungen sowie Gesetzestexte und Verwaltungsvor-schriften umfassen, hat jedoch deutlich gemacht, dass der Dezentralisierungsprozess im Elementarbilungssektor einseitig auf das Auslagern von Implementierungsaufgaben auf die unteren Ebenen der Governancestruktur ausgerichtet ist, bei gleichzeitiger Vernach-lässigung der finanziellen Autonomie und der Planungs- und Entscheidungskompetenz. Diese systemische Einschränkung wird ergänzt von einer weit verbreiteten Partizipationsunwilligkeit der Eltern und lokaler Amtsträger. Demzugrunde liegen Faktoren wie der Mangel an ‚Capabilities' innerhalb der Elterngemeinschaft aufgrund des niedrigen sozio-ökonomischen Status und mangelnder Bildung, dem Mangel an Übereinstimmung bezüglich der Ziele von Elternpartizipation zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren, und der Unfähigkeit der beteiligten Gremien, Sanktionen gegen regelwidriges Verhalten an der Schulgovernance beteiligter Akteure durchzusetzen.

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Introduction

1.1 Decentralisation, Participation and Development – Background to the Research

Problems of accountability and inefficiency associated with traditional modes of public service delivery through centralised bureaucracies have led many countries to experiment with decentralisation, in an effort to increase control of service beneficiaries over the quality and quantity of service provision. In the context of developing countries, common proposals include decentralisation of service delivery to local governments, community participation, direct transfers to households (social funds), and contracting out delivery to private providers and NGOs, within a wide range of infrastructure services, such as water and sanitation, electricity, telecommunications, roads, and social services, including education, health and welfare programmes. Most of these proposals are associated with the 'paradigm' of participatory development, emphasising the importance of 'empowerment', and 'participation' (cf. Pritchett/Woolcock 2003, Bardhan/Mookherjee 2006, Devraja/Shah 2004).

However, the unbroken optimism towards the utility of decentralising public services and allowing citizens to participate in governing their provision during the last 15 years appears somewhat unwarranted. Empirical research in many public service sectors has shown at best mixed results in terms of the success of these new modes of service delivery (concerning both the quality and quantity of the services, equality in access, and ability to generate local and inclusive participation)[1]. Despite of this, there seems to be an unbroken belief in their magic among policy-makers, not only in the Indian debate.

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[1] Collins et.al. (2000) found that decentralisation of health services in Brazil reinforced the existing inequality in access between regions and sections of the population. Similarly, Blair (2000) in a study of six countries (Bolivia, Honduras, India, Mali, Philippines, Ukraine) found that while decentralisation may increase participation and even representation of marginal groups, it does little for empowering these vis-à-vis powerful ones, and even less to ensure an equitable distribution of benefit from services or reduce poverty.
Bossert/Bauvais (2002) for Ghana, Zambia, Uganda, and the Philippines, show that the quality of health services provided under decentralisation often declines rather than increases due to the lower skills of sub-national personnel in planning and provision. Hildyard et.al. (2001), in the context of Joint Forest Management in India, point out that community participation is often reduced to a formality for legitimising decisions taken elsewhere, resulting in community members viewing participation exercises merely as an option to maximise short-term gain or prevent loss. Similar observations are made by Khan/Begum (1997) in the context of social forestry in Bangladesh, and Kollavalli/Kerr (2002) in the context of watershed management in five Indian

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In India, social service sector reform has been approached through a combination of decentralisation of the polity below the state level, and the delegation of state and central social service scheme implementation to both sub-state level local government institutions (LGIs) as well as lower tiers of the bureaucracy. Many of the central schemes in addition operate through state, district and block level implementation societies staffed with mostly civil servants.

In the wake of political and economic instability at the beginning of the 1990s, in the aftermath of India's balance of payment crisis, the central government pushed the constitutionalisation of a decentralised system of governance below the state level, which resulted in the amendment of the constitution[2]. The 73rd and 74th amendments oblige the states to establish and regularly hold elections to three tiers of local government institutions, called panchayats.

To avoid previous failures to establish panchayats as functional units of government[3], some policy areas in which powers and resources must be devolved to lower levels of government were determined in the 11th schedule of the constitution. These include the implementation of government programmes in education, health, common resource management, and public infrastructure. Further, it became mandatory for state governments to devolve some taxation powers to the panchayats (cf. Kumar 2006, Chaudhuri 2006). The system of government thus established is commonly referred to as *panchayati raj* (rule of panchayats).

While the structure of sub-state local governments is the same all over India, the extent to which state governments have actually devolved funds, functions and functionaries[4]

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states. Veron/Williams (2006) found that decentralisation of the monitoring of poverty alleviation schemes has led to 'decentralised corruption' in eastern India. Singh et.al. (2003) find that development funds targeted at the poor are distributed highly inequitably and serve the purpose of nurturing patronage of elected representatives more than benefiting the local poor. In education, Bray et.al. (2002) find that community participation in a decentralised system has little impact on the quality of education in the absence of community members' ability to judge what constitutes quality education.

[2] While there is considerable debate about whether decentralisation of the polity coincided with or was caused by structural adjustment, which accompanied the loans obtained from the IMF in the balance of payment crisis of 1990, it must be noted that the provisions of the decentralisation amendments well suited many of the social service sector reforms on which the loans were conditional (for a very critical view of the conditionality of loans and its impact on social sector reforms see Sadgopal 2004c). Chaudhuri (2006) has argued against causality between loans, adjustment, and political decentralisation, pointing out that the crisis situation enabled the Government of India to push for reforms that had been in the pipeline for quite some time, but were difficult to realise due to political resistance.

[3] The pre-amendment history of panchayats will be discussed in some detail in chapter 4.

[4] Three types of decentralisation are commonly distinguished in the literature, namely deconcentration (or administrative decentralisation, this refers to functionaries), fiscal decentralisation (funds), and devolution (or democratic decentralisation, functions). To enable local government bodies to work effectively as units of self-

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varies considerably (for a detailed discussion of inter-state differences see Chaudhuri 2006). These variations necessarily impact the implementation of central and state government social service programmes.

Devolution in the Indian context has created quite some enthusiasm about the prospects of "unleashing energies" that will "bring prosperity and equity to Indian villages"[5] throughout the 1990s. In recent years, the disillusionment with panchayats' record in promoting equitable development at the local level among researchers in the decentralisation has trickled down into the public debate.

As McCarten and Vyasulu (2003:4) point out, state governments in India have advocated decentralization for at least four reasons: 1. To increase local level political commitment to governing political parties; 2. to off-load high-cost programs by providing a local partner to contain costs; 3. to ensure more effective service delivery through accountability and responsiveness to local preferences; and 4. to provide a counterweight to unresponsive state and union bureaucracies.

Decentralization has also provided a justification for a two-track strategy that expands social service coverage with radically reduced unit costs under the decentralized track, such as the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in Madhya Pradesh. Thus, the underlying rationale to decentralisation was much more utility-based (reducing transaction costs and principle-agent problems in social service delivery through the state bureaucracy, while at the same time expanding services under reduced unit costs) than the empowerment rhetoric accompanying it would suggest.

One important factor for the effective allocation and utilisation of resources in social service provision through panchayats appears to be the extent of budgeting autonomy and taxation powers. Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006) find that in systems where panchayats depend primarily on central or state government grant transfers, allocation tends to be most distorted, because accountability to state government agencies is weak due to high monitoring costs. In systems where panchayats are given significant revenue-raising powers, accountability is directed towards tax and user fee payers, which leads to more effective allocation and utilisation of resources - even though this may

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government, a balance between the different types of decentralisation is considered necessary (cf. Manor 1999 4ff, Bardhan 2002, Blaser et.al. 2003).

[5] Cited from a speech of the Minister of Panchayati Raj, Mani Shankar Aiyar, held at Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University on 13 April 2005, available at http://panchayat.gov.in/viewContentItem.do?View=viewItem&ptltid=3321&itemid=3038&folderid=Type.Speeches, last accessed October 2008.

imply higher costs to poor beneficiaries, as they automatically subsidise access of wealthier citizens to services, as well.

It is precisely this latter fact that leads Harriss (2001), Crook/Manor (1998) and Tendler (1997) to caution against local autonomy in resource allocation. The potential mismatch between the relatively large share of the tax/fee burden on the poor and their weak representation in local bargaining processes leads them to favour earmarked funding of local government bodies in service delivery, to ensure that resources are not diverted away from services disproportionately benefiting the poor, while at the same time making them paying the bill for those services disproportionately benefiting the affluent.

The mixed records of panchayat performance in service delivery does not exclusively relate to the ways in which fiscal decentralisation has accompanied devolution. Successes and failures depend on numerous other factors such as the extent of social hierarchy and inequality (particularly in relation to patterns of land ownership and tenancy, formal poverty rights, and full citizenship, cf. Johnson 2003:4). In the context of village panchayats, the following failures have been widely observed:

- Lack of regularity of village assembly (*gram sabha*[6]*)* meetings and inequitable participation of different groups (cf. among others Narayana 2005; World Bank 2005; Johnson 2003; Kumar 2004; Behar/Kumar 2002; Alsop et. al. 2000)
- Lack of awareness about participation opportunities and rights of the *gram sabha* vis-à-vis the *gram panchayat* (Behar/Kumar 2002; Deshpande/Murthy 2002; Narayana 2005, World Bank 2005)
- Tension between the *gram sabha* as a body of the people and the *gram panchayat* as a body of elected representatives (cf. Johnson 2003; Srivastava 2005)
- Intransparency in decision-making, corruption (Johnson 2003; Srivastava 2005; McCarten/Vyasulu 2003, Kumar 2002)
- Inequitable access to information (Williams et.al. 2003, Behar/Kumar 2002)
- Prevalence of upward networking over service to the benefit of the community (Srivastava 2005, Harris 2001)
- Tension between local elected bodies and bureaucracy (Behar 2003; Behar/Kumar 2002; Kumar 2006)

Failures resulting from the above mentioned distortions of panchayat functioning are attributed to different combinations of lacking capacity-building, social conventions

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[6] The *gram sabha* is the general village assembly comprising the entire locally registered electorate. The *gram panchayat*, as a body of elected representative with executive power, is accountable to the *gram sabha*, and decisions of the latter are binding on the *gram panchayat*.

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related to hierarchical social structures (most notably caste), which undermine participation on par with dominant groups of actors, the prevalence of patronage systems, and distorted monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms.

The literature on panchayat performance in elementary education, one of the service sectors in which panchayats are mandated to be involved in by the 11th schedule, reflects the general shortcomings of panchayat functioning as depicted above.

Educational governance at the local level in all states is a joint exercise of the panchayat education committees and school-based committees such as the school management committee (SMC) and/or the Parent/Mother-Teacher-Associations (PTAs/MTAs).

There is agreement in the literature that in most states in India neither panchayat institutions nor SMCs/PTAs have been endowed with sufficient authority and control to effectively serve as governance institutions in local education provision (cf. Raina 2003, Govinda 2003).

The general picture across states is that these committees - where they actually existed – have remained rather inactive. The following observations were made in a number of research studies:

- Elected panchayat members as well as parents of children enrolled in local schools lack information about the existence and functions of panchayat education committees, school management committees, and Parent/Mother-Teacher-Associations (PROBE Team 1999, Banerjee et.al. 2006, Chaurasia 2000)
- Often the existence of education and school committees is a mere formality, with designated members occasionally not even being aware of their membership in such committee (Banerjee et.al. 2006, Leclercq 2002, Samarthan 2002, Chaurasia 2000)
- Meetings of both education and school committees are held irregularly, and participation in them is erratic (Kantha/Narain 2003, Leclercq 2002)
- Women and members of marginalised groups are underrepresented in committees, and cannot participate beyond physical presence due to social conventions and economic dependencies (Srivastava 2005, Leclercq 2002, Behar/Kumar 2002, Ramachandran 2001, Chaurasia 2000)
- Local committees, even where they exist and meet regularly, are concerned first and foremost with infrastructure and neglect issues related to student attendance and achievement, as well as teacher performance (Mukundan/Bray 2004).

With the launch of SSA, however, panchayat committees have become more active in many states where they were not functional previously (e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar,

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Madhya Pradesh[7]), due to the extensive upgrading of infrastructure which is at the heart of the policy. The extension of the midday meal programme to all primary and middle schools in the country has equally resulted in increased panchayat involvement in the provision and distribution of resources for the meals. Furthermore, panchayat involvement in the distribution of resources which are channelised through different programmes have lead to documented cases of resource misappropriation to the detriment of schools. Such evidence is anecdotal, but can be found in many studies on panchayat involvement in educational governance (e.g. PROBE Team 1999, Leclercq 2002, Drèze/Goyal 2003, Kumar 2006:265ff, Acharya 2002).

Most of the studies mentioned above have dealt with local educational governance either as a sub-theme to the more general assessment of the status of access to and quality of elementary education in India, often in the context of the implementation of specific policies such as the District Primary Education Project (DPEP) or the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), or have focused exclusively on the performance of panchayat committees. This study aims to contribute to a more systematic assessment of the forms and scope (both qualitative and quantitative) of involvement of local community members and elected representatives in the governance of schools, including all types of bodies set up for the purpose.

The state of Madhya Pradesh constitutes a particularly interesting example for the purpose for several reasons. Madhya Pradesh belongs to one of the backward states of the northern Hindi-belt, characterised by low levels of human development (most notably in health and education indicators), a strong social stratification, and virtually non-existent political movements of lower castes and other disadvantaged groups (cf. Kumar 2006:77ff).

In spite or because of these rather unfavourable preconditions, Madhya Pradesh has been one of the states which has been marching ahead in terms of the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, and belongs to those few states which at an early stage have devolved considerable powers to *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs).

Further, the state government decided to expand some central social services (education, watershed, health and food security) by means of creating a separate institutional structure, the Rajiv Gandhi Missions, which diverted the larger part of planning, implementation and monitoring of state and central programmes in these sectors away from government ministries and line department bureaucracies into the hands of highly qualified and politically loyal administrators (cf. Srivastava 2005:6ff).

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[7] This refers particularly to panchayat constituencies that were not affected by the EGS, but had schools opened under the Department of Education operating within their areas of jurisdiction.

The Shiksha Mission has also absorbed the State Implementation Society of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), launched by the central government in 1992 in 44 districts of 7 states, which constitutes the largest intervention of its kind in India to date. Both DPEP and EGS have induced major changes in educational governance and administration, essentially representing parallel structures to the schools run under the Department of Education.

One of the most important tasks of the central Education for All Programme (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, SSA) launched in 2002 was the integration of parallel streams (formal-non-formal, department-project) into a coherent system of government provided education. This essentially involves the harmonisation of teacher employment across different educational streams, and the integration of governance processes, particularly at the lower levels.

The present study persues two objectives: Firstly, it aims to assess the institutional structure of educational governance from the school level upwards, and the rules and regulations which determine the distribution of competencies between institutions and actors in them at different levels. This is particularly important because several amendments to the State Panchayat Act as well as the People's Education Act and its subordinate rules (Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, JSA) have induced continuous change in these structures during the last five years, which have not yet been sufficiently appraised in the literature on Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh. Further, and more importantly, the political processes and experiences which have induced these changes in the governance framework call for assessment and analysis.

Secondly, it aims to analyse how the system of educational governance actually functions at the local level. The focus is on individual schools in their village settings, because it is here that 'community participation' is to materialise, and where the operation of governance institutions hits local diversities to which it needs to be adjusted. Of particular concern is the perception of the central actors, namely parents, teachers and elected representatives of the panchayats, of their role in educational governance, whether they embrace or reject that role and why, how they act (or refrain from doing so) in the system as a result, and how this affects the functioning of the individual school, as well as responses of higher levels of governance.

The value of this approach is anticipated to lie specifically in the triangulation of perspectives on the issue. Focusing on the perceptions - and the values, norms and experiences underlying them - of both direct stakeholders (parents and elected representatives) and providers (teachers and administrators) is expected to shed light on the effects of congruences and contradictions between the institutional framework and

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involved actors on one hand, and between different types of actors, on the other, both of which are likely to impact the effective implementation of education programmes through local bodies and committees.

I take an essentially institutionalist approach, concentrating on key indicators as informational constraint, expectations of benefit (personal utility), the value attributed to the subject of decision-making (school education), and the value placed on participation in collective decision-making in general. Further, I introduce the concept of capabilities into the analysis of individual participation choices, assuming that factors such as time spent on subsistence activities, income security, educational status, and membership in formal institutions affect participation choices (this is discussed at length in chapter 2).

The assessment of the institutional framework of educational governance involved an analysis of the relevant state legislation (People's Education Act & Rules, Panchayat Act) as well as the national education policy framework (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) and its structure of project implementation.

The analysis of governance practise was located at different levels, namely district, block, cluster and school.

Data collection has included official records and planning reports (student and teacher attendance, student achievement, PTA meeting minutes, cluster education plans) on one hand, and a large number of guideline-aided interviews with local stakeholder groups.

Field level research has been designed as a multi-case study of five schools (2 primary, 2 middle and one EGS school) located in two school clusters in Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh. The central unit of analysis was the functioning of Parent-Teacher-Associations as the primary locus of community participation in the current educational governance framework in Madhya Pradesh.

Embedded units of analysis were the institutional context above the school level which to a large extent determines the scope of action PTAs can take (viz. project administration and lower level bureaucracy), involvement of *panchayati raj* institutions in school governance, and, last but not least, individuals' participation choices.

Field research was conducted February through April 2006. Additional interviews at the state level were taken in September 2007.

Theoretical assumptions underlying the study, their operationalisation, the choice of the research location and the methods chosen for data collection and analysis will be discussed at some length in chapters 2 and 3. The following section provides and overview of the educational scenario in India in general, and Madhya Pradesh in particular.

1.2   Public Education and Development in India

Development in India, whether defined narrowly in terms of economic development and increase in per capita income/GDP, or broadly in terms of human development, has been extremely uneven. Imbalances are striking not only between states and regions, but also within them, women and members of the traditionally disadvantaged sections (particularly scheduled castes and tribes) being significantly more deprived in terms of health, income, access to education, and political representation than other sections of the population.

Access to public education is widely assumed to be one of the decisive factors for the uneven development of different parts of the population in different regions of the country. While there is considerable disagreement in the empirical literature about the scope and nature of causality between expansion of education and increasing wage levels, GDP growth and levels of employment, there is broad consensus that on the individual level education significantly reduces a number of primary deprivations (particularly related to health), which in turn have a positive impact on other human capabilities, thus reducing absolute deprivation (cf. Hannum/Buchmann 2004:341f[8]).

Further, many authors hold that education enhances informed citizenship, and as such has the potential of levelling social inequalities in the long run (e.g. Benavot 1996, Drèze/Sen 2002:143ff). However, the role access to formal schooling plays in this process heavily depends on the quality of education provided in formal schools, as well as numerous other factors outside education, and empirical studies indicate that expansion of education, while significantly reducing absolute deprivation, may not reduce inequality between different social groups, at least not in a short term perspective (cf. Hannum/Buchmann 2004, Pritchett 1996).

What does emerge clearly from the empirical literature is that education has the strongest immediate effects on the individual level, while there is a considerable time lag in its effects on the macro-economic level, which is not sufficiently accommodated in most studies of the effects of education on economic growth (Hannum/Buchmann 2004:348). Furthermore, on the individual and household level, education triggers positive developments exeeding the individual who attains education and, especially in the case of females, is immediately beneficial to the well-being of children in terms of health, nutrition, and their access to and achievement in school (ibid.:347, Sen/Drèze 2002:38ff).It is this potential of triggering a 'virtuous cycle' of mutual enhancement of individual capabilities and opportunities which leads authors such as Drèze and Sen to

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[8] Hannum and Buchmann provide a good overview of empirical studies on the nexus between education and development and critically accesses some of the popular assumptions about the impact of education expansion on economic, social and political development.

speak of basic education as the most essential tool for successfully participating in the modern economy and society (cf. ibid.:143).

While the potential of education to reduce social and economic inequality has been acknowledged by political leadership after India's independence[9], the failure of post-independence politics across many states on the basic education front has been striking[10], and resulted in persistent exclusion of large sections of the population from the benefit of access to formal primary education until the beginning of the 1990s.

Fig. 1: Literacy growth in India 1901-1997
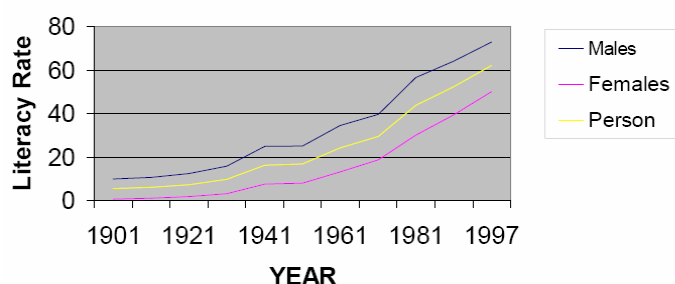
Source: Planning Commission of India, 2001

Growth in literacy, as the figure above indicates, has accelerated after independence, but remained around 10 % per decade and crossed the 50% mark only in the 1980s, with female literacy remaining substantially below male literacy. These figures conceal the enormous inter-state variance in literacy rates, which in the beginning of the 1990s was as low as 37.49% in Bihar, and as high as 89.81% in Kerala.

The difference in literacy growth between states until 1991 lie firstly in the level of literacy with which the states were released into independence, and secondly in the level of decadal growth after independence, which was almost stagnant until 1971 except in Maharashtra and Kerala.

Decadal growth made a leap forwards in a number of states in the 1990s, most notably in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, two of the notoriously backward states, which have introduced a number of innovative and ambitious education programmes from 1996 onwards. As a result, literacy increased by 22% in Rajasthan, and 19% in Madhya Pradesh.

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[9] The Directive Principles for State Action in the Indian Constitution spell out the goal of ensuring universal elementary education within 10 years, a deadline endlessly postponed until India embraced the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

[10] Perkins observed that in societies that have highly stratified and unequal social structures education policy tends to focus on ensuring that elites can obtain the highest possible levels of education, resulting in a focus on tertiary education, to the neglect of mass elementary education (Perkins 1994:657). This goes a long way in explaining the focus of national education policy, especially in terms of allocation, on higher education. The divergence in the performance of states in terms of elementary education, too, is consistent with the extent to which the population has historically been stratified along the lines of caste, class and gender.

Table 1: Literacy rates 1951-2001 – selected states

States/Union Territorries	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Bihar	13.49	21.95	23.17	32.32	37.49	47.00
Uttar Pradesh	12.02	20.87	23.99	32.65	40.71	57.27
Rajasthan	8.5	18.12	22.57	30.11	38.55	60.41
Andhra Pradesh	—	21.19	24.57	35.66	44.08	60.47
Orissa	15.80	21.66	26.18	33.62	49.09	63.08
Assam	18.35	32.95	33.94	NA	52.89	63.25
Madhya Pradesh	13.16	21.14	27.27	38.63	44.67	63.74
Karnataka	—	29.08	36.83	46.21	56.04	66.64
Haryana	—	NA	25.71	37.13	55.85	67.91
West Bengal	24.61	34.46	38.86	48.65	57.70	68.64
Sikkim	—	NA	17.74	34.05	56.94	68.81
Gujarat	21.82	31.47	36.95	44.92	61.29	69.14
Punjab	—	NA	34.12	43.37	58.51	69.65
Tamil Nadu	—	36.39	45.40	54.39	62.66	73.45
Himachal Pradesh	—	—	—	—	63.86	76.48
Maharashtra	27.91	30.08	45.77	52.24	64.87	76.88
Delhi	NA	61.95	65.08	71.94	75.29	81.67
Mizoram	31.14	44.01	53.80	59.88	82.26	88.80
Kerala	47.18	55.08	69.75	78.85	89.81	90.86
ALL INDIA	**18.33**	**28.30**	**34.45**	**43.57**	**52.21**	**64.84**

Source: Government of India: Economic Survey 2007-08, table 9.4

Growth in literacy has not only been unimpressive in most states, it has also been highly inequitable. The table below shows the gender gap in literacy rates, which is notably low in the state of Kerala (6.33%), and very high in the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, representing the so-called BIMARU[11] states of the Hindi-belt.

Table 2: Gender-gap in Literacy – selected states

State	Literacy Rate (%) 2001 Census			gender gap (%)
	Total	Male	Female	
Kerala	90.86	94.2	87.86	6.33
Punjab	69.65	75.63	63.55	12.08
Assam	64.25	71.93	56.03	15.9
West Bengal	68.64	77.58	60.22	17.37
Tamil Nadu	73.45	82.33	64.55	17.78
Maharashtra	76.88	86.27	67.51	18.76
Karnataka	66.64	76.29	57.45	18.84
Andhra Pradesh	60.47	70.85	51.17	19.68
Gujarat	69.14	80.5	58.6	21.9
Madhya Pradesh	63.74	76.8	50.28	26.52
Bihar	47.00	60.32	33.57	26.75
Uttar Pradesh	57.27	70.23	42.98	27.27
Rajasthan	60.41	76.46	44.34	32.12
INDIA	**64.84**	**75.96**	**54.28**	**21.68**

Source: Census 2001

Large gaps are also observable between the literacy levels of the general castes and the scheduled castes and tribes: Literacy rates among women from the scheduled castes in rural Bihar are as low as 13.33% according to the 2001 census, while it is 67.14% for

[11] Acronym for **Bi**har, **Ma**dhya Pradesh, **R**ajasthan, **U**ttar Pradesh. *bimar* in Hindi means 'sick'.

urban males, and can be expected to be significantly higher among the upper castes.This means that a girl belonging to the scheduled tribes in rural Bihar has only 20% of the chance of going to school that a boy from the general castes in urban Bihar has.

Table 3: Rural-urban gap in literacy in Indian states

SL.NO.	STATE/UNION TERRITORY	LITERACY RATES								
		RURAL			URBAN			TOTAL		
		Males	Females	Person	Males	Females	Person	Males	Females	Person
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	65.35	43.50	54.50	83.19	68.74	76.09	70.32	50.43	60.47
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	57.65	36.94	47.83	85.19	69.49	78.26	63.83	43.53	54.34
3	ASSAM	68.22	50.70	59.73	89.74	80.24	85.34	71.28	54.61	63.25
4	BIHAR	57.09	29.61	43.92	79.94	62.59	71.93	59.68	33.12	47.00
5	CHHATISGARH	74.09	46.99	60.48	89.39	71.11	80.58	77.38	51.85	64.66
6	GOA	87.37	71.92	79.67	89.46	78.98	84.39	88.42	75.37	82.01
7	GUJARAT	74.11	47.84	61.29	88.34	74.50	81.84	79.66	57.80	69.14
8	HARYANA	75.37	49.27	63.19	85.83	71.34	79.16	78.49	55.73	67.91
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	84.51	65.68	75.08	92.04	85.03	88.95	85.35	67.42	76.48
10	JAMMU & KASHMIR	61.65	36.74	49.78	80.00	61.98	71.92	66.60	43.00	55.52
11	JHARKHAND	60.94	29.89	45.74	87.03	69.96	79.14	67.30	38.87	53.56
12	KARNATAKA	70.45	48.01	59.33	86.66	74.12	80.58	76.10	56.87	66.64
13	KERALA	93.63	86.69	90.04	95.94	90.62	93.19	94.24	87.72	90.86
14	MADHYA PRADESH	71.70	42.76	57.80	87.39	70.47	79.39	76.06	50.29	63.74
15	MAHARASHTRA	81.93	58.40	70.36	91.03	79.09	85.48	85.97	67.03	76.88
16	MANIPUR*	77.31	56.95	67.29	88.71	70.01	79.28	80.33	60.53	70.53
17	MEGHALAYA	59.24	53.24	56.29	89.05	83.50	86.30	65.43	59.61	62.56
18	MIZORAM	84.93	77.26	81.27	96.43	95.80	96.13	90.72	86.75	88.80
19	NAGALAND	67.58	57.52	62.79	87.44	81.42	84.74	71.16	61.46	66.59
20	ORISSA	72.93	46.66	59.84	87.93	72.87	80.84	75.35	50.51	63.08
21	PUNJAB	71.05	57.72	64.72	83.05	74.49	79.10	75.23	63.36	69.65
22	RAJASTHAN	72.16	37.33	55.34	86.45	64.67	76.20	75.70	43.85	60.41
23	SIKKIM	74.45	58.01	66.82	87.81	79.16	83.91	76.04	60.40	68.81
24	TAMILNADU	77.15	55.28	66.21	88.97	75.99	82.53	82.42	64.43	73.45
25	TRIPURA	78.40	60.50	69.72	93.21	85.03	89.21	81.02	64.91	73.19
26	UTTAR PRADESH	66.59	36.90	52.53	76.76	61.73	69.75	68.82	42.22	56.27
27	UTTARACHAL	81.78	54.70	68.07	87.05	74.77	81.44	83.28	59.63	71.62
28	WEST BENGAL	73.13	53.16	63.42	86.13	75.74	81.25	77.02	59.61	68.64
29	A & N ISLANDS	84.14	72.26	78.70	90.65	81.47	86.57	86.33	75.24	81.30
30	CHANDIGARH	80.98	66.37	75.58	86.78	77.40	82.64	86.14	76.47	81.94
31	D& NAGAR HAVELI	64.50	30.83	49.34	90.84	74.54	84.36	71.18	40.23	57.63
32	DAMAN & DIU	84.83	59.33	75.83	91.12	73.41	82.31	86.76	65.61	78.18
33	DELHI	86.60	67.39	78.05	87.39	75.22	81.93	87.33	74.71	81.67
34	LAKSHADWEEP	91.49	78.27	85.04	93.77	83.13	88.62	92.53	80.47	86.66
35	PONDICHERRY	83.50	64.38	73.98	91.18	78.57	84.84	88.62	73.90	81.24
	INDIA	70.70	46.13	58.74	86.27	72.86	79.92	75.26	53.67	64.84

*- Excuding Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur

Source: GOI, MHRD, selected educational statistics 2004-05

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At least as impressive as the gender gap in education across India is the rural-urban gap. It is notable that in the conservative, upper caste dominated states of the north and northwest (Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh) the rural gender gap is much higher than the urban gender gap.

Furthermore, the rural-urban gap among females is much higher than among males. This typically reflects partriarchal social structures in conservative rural areas.

In Bihar, in contrast, there is no difference between rural and urban gender gaps (about 17%), however the rural urban gap is very large for both males and females at around 22%. This reflects the utter lack of access to educational facilities in rural areas in the state.

There is notable congruence between educational indicators of states and other indicators of human development, particularly those related to health, life expectancy and mortality.

Table 4: Basic Health Indicators - Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and India

State	Life expectency at birth (2001-2005)			Infant mortality rate (per 1000 life births, 2006)			Birth rates (per 1000)	Death rates (per 1000)	Prevalence of anemia in children	Maternal mortality (per 1000 live births)*
	male	female	total	male	female	total				
Kerala	71.3	76.3	73.9	14	16	15	14.9	6.7	44.5	4.98
MP	57.8	57.5	57.7	72	77	74	29.1	8.9	74.1	1.95
India	62.3	63.9	63.2	56	59	57	23.5	7.5	69.5	4.00

* data from Indian Council of Medical Research (2003), includes 16% and 5% sampling error for Kerala and MP, respectively
Source: GOI, Ministry of Finance: Economic Survey 2006-07

Madhya Pradesh shows the worst record on most health indicators, even though there has been considerable educational expansion. This is related to the time lag in the effectiveness of education for affecting a person's quality of life, which is located in the future when the 'first-generation learners' enrolled from the mid 1990s onward have grown up. Expansion of elementary education, especially for girls, is expected to yield significant positive effects on health indicators.

However, there are two serious obstructions to the positive dynamics of education for well-being and raising the quality of life in Madhya Pradesh. These are the low quality of education in government school and the lack of other public infrastructure, most notably access healthcare from qualified providers, sanitation and roads.

Lacking healthcare and public infrastructure, especially sanitation, have severe negative impacts on health indicators which may counterbalance positive effects of educational expansion in Madhya Pradesh. In conjunction with the still exceedingly low female literacy rates in rural areas, which have devastating impact on child mortality rates, because mothers simply don't know about good feeding practices, how to feed their children when they have diarrhoea, and signs of dehydration. Furthermore, lacking sanitation causes numerous water-borne diseases.

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Lack of qualified health personnel and high absence rates in public health centres lead to lacking pre-, peri- and post-natal care, resulting in high maternal and infant mortality rates.

With respect to the quality of education, Hanushek and Wößmann (2007) point out that the *quantity* of education (increased enrolment and longer retention in schools) cannot simply be assumed to lead to increased individual and macro-economic returns to education under conditions where the *quality* of education is so low that children do not acquire basic skills in literacy and numeracy. It is the *skills* children learn, rather than the number of years in school, which enable them to make better use of labour market opportunities, participative decision-making structures, and social and legal entitlements. Further, in an environment where access to primary education becomes the norm, and inequality shifts from the primary and upper primary to the secondary and tertiary levels, and private schools at all levels outperform government schools, the *relative* level of educational deprivation of the formerly illiterate sections of society may well remain stagnant.

The quality of government provided education is sobering in most Indian states. The internal efficiency of the school education system is low, as indicated by high repetition and low transition rates.

Table 5: Enrolment, repetition, drop-out and transition rates in elementary education, Madhya Pradesh/India

	primary stage (class I-V)					upper primary stage (class VI-VIII)					
	GER	NER	retention rate	repetition rate	drop-out rate	GER	NER	retention rate	repetition rate	drop-out rate	transition rate prim. to up.prim.
MP	129.76	94.22	95.50	16.26	9.81	71.28	46.86	55.32	16.93	n.a.	70.54
India	103.77	84.53	71.01	18.47	9.96						82.24

Sources: State Report Card 2005-06, Mehta (2007)

While at primary level most indicators for Madhya Pradesh compare favourably with India as a whole, it should be noted that aggregation of data conceals the weak spots. For instance, the drop-out rate in grade 5 is high at 20.2%[12], and repetition rates are kept low by the fact that students throughout the primary cycle are automatically promoted to the next higher grade, at least in Madhya Pradesh. This reminds us that statistics always need to be handled with caution.

Furthermore, retention and repetition rates are silent about what children learn in schools. There are no standardised achievement tests available in India as yet, however

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[12] In the Analysis of student flows at primary level by Arun C. Mehta the figure based on 2005-06 data is as high as 31.71 (cf. Mehta 2007:44, table 19).

the Annual Status of Education Report conducted by Pratham is increasingly used by government agencies for evaluating student achievement and the quality of government schooling. There is no space here to reproduce details of the ASER reports here, however the following example from ASER 2006 shall serve as an illustration:

Fig. 2: Reading ability of children standard 3-5, rural India

INDIA RURAL

Std. III-V Reading

Statewise map showing % of children in Std. III-V who can read Std. I text or more
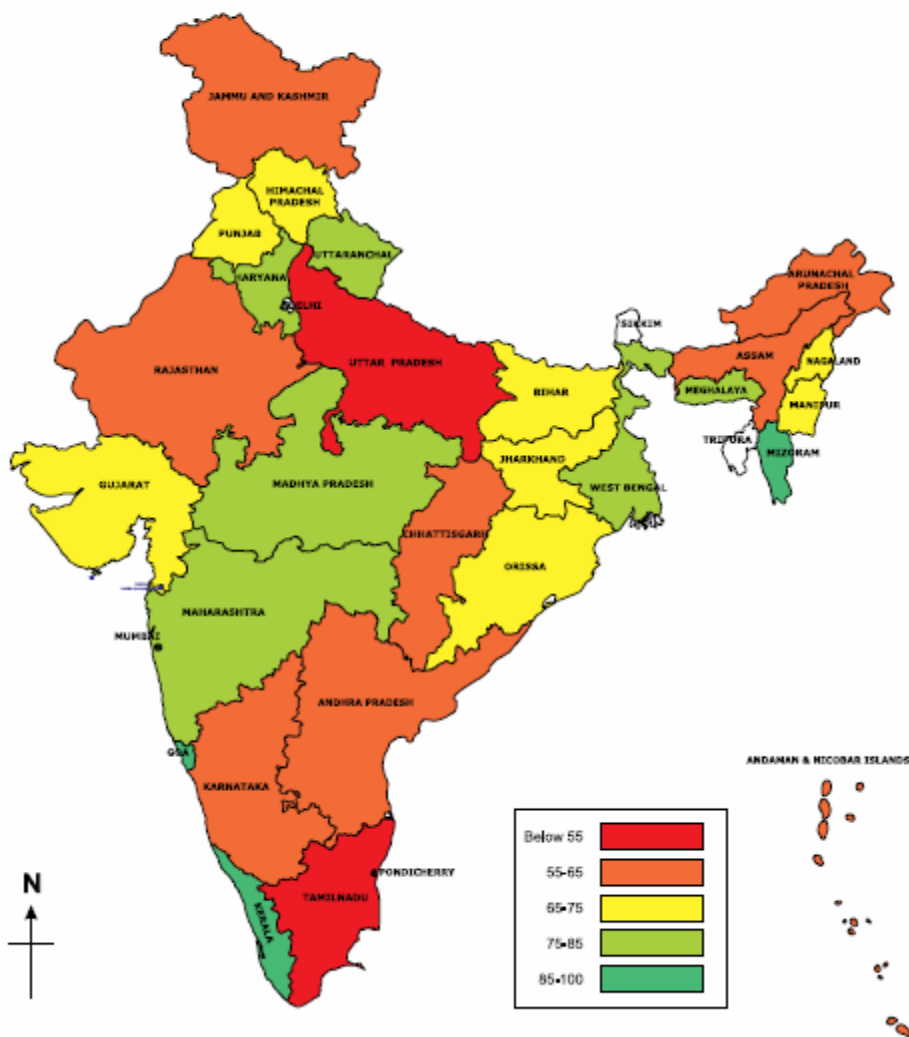
Source: ASER 2007

While on first sight this figure tells us that Madhya Pradesh figures comparatively well in terms of student achievement, consider that what is depicted here is the ability of children on standard 3-5 to read a standard 1 text or more. This means that in rural Madhya Pradesh between 15 and 25% of students in standard 3-5 *cannot* read a

standard 1 text. Thus while Madhya Pradesh seems to do well relative to other Indian states, school effectiveness still is deficient in absolute terms.

It is fairly clear from these cursory observations that unless there is a leap in the quality of education and the learning levels of students, and a more comprehensive approach to improving the quality of life taking into account the reciprocal effects of interventions in public health, infrastructure development, education, and labour market policy, the benefits of expanding formal education will be restricted.

1.3   Chapter Outline

The dissertation is devided into eight chapters. The introduction located the research project in the context of decentralisation of service delivery as a dominant approach to development, outlined the main research questions, and provided an overview of the status of elementary education in India and Madhya Pradesh.

The second chapter discusses the key theoretical concepts and central questions to be addressed by empirical research. Being concerned with local educational governance, the genesis of the term 'governance' and the discourse about how to organise governance in the context of decentralisation is discussed. Departing from the observation that governance is achieved through collective action in institutionalised settings ('rules of the game' for collective decision-making), I present two prominent approaches to explaining individual action through institutions (rational choice and normative) in the 'New Institutionalism', and derive from them a set of questions to be answered by the case studies. Further, I introduce Sen's concepts of 'capability' and 'social opportunity', which I find useful to establish indicators for detecting factors impacting individual participation choices in specific institutional setups, and develop a framework for the analysis of community participation in educational governance.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the case study approach taken in this project. I provide an overview of the ongoing discussions about the value of case studies in social science research, the problem of case selection, and within-case analysis strategies. Further, I discuss the process of case selection, the definition of the cases and their units of analysis, and the methods applied for data collection (guideline-aided interviews and 'hard' data) and analysis (qualitative content analysis based on Gläser and Laudel).

In chapter 4 I outline the role of *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs) in public services in India (4.1) and in Madhya Pradesh (4.2). Chapter 5 provides an assessment of the structure of decentralised provision of education as institutionalised by central and state education policies (5.1-5.3), and the legal framework as laid down in the People's Education Act (Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam) and Rules (Jan Shiksha Niyam), and integrate the provisions of the different regulatory frameworks into an ideal type of local level

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educational governance (5.4), which serves to facilitate comparison between educational governance as observed 'on the ground' ('rules-in-use', Ostrom 1999) in the cases and what has been envisioned by the state and central governments (prescribed rules).

In chapter 6 the evidence from the cases studies is presented. After providing an overview of the socio-economic profile and status of education in the district (6.1 and 6.2), I discuss each case in a similar progression, starting with an assessment of village characteristics in terms of population and public infrastructure, indicators of school functioning, composition, scope of activities, and participation in the Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) of the local government school, and involvement of panchayat institutions (6.3). In chapter 7 the cases are compared systematically in an effort to identify different types of conditions impacting effective educational governance through PTAs and PRIs are identified.

Chapter 8 reflects insights from the case studies and congruences/deviances with respect to the theoretical propositions underlying the framework of analysis (8.1), and concludes reflecting some issues reaching beyond the scope of this study (8.2).

**Governance, Institutions and Capabilities: Theoretical Considerations for
Examining Participation in Decentralised Public Service Provision**

2.1 From Government to Governance: The decline of the primacy of the state in steering society

The promotion of different forms of 'community' participation, in elementary education as elsewhere, is tightly interwoven with the process of decentralisation, growing scepticism towards the ability of centralised state agencies to efficiently deliver services, and the shift of perspective from 'government' to 'governance' in economics and political science from the 1980s onward.

This shift marks a turning away from an interventionist approach to government, perceiving the 'state' and its organisations (government, bureaucracy) as the primary actors in a "concept-orientated shaping of society by political authorities" (Mayntz 2004:3). While the government perspective is actor-centred, the governance perspective focuses on the processes through which different actors, state and non-state, negotiate desired collective goals. Consequently, 'steering' in its traditional sense cannot be done by state actors alone, because steering requires a normative statement on what is to be achieved by it, and this decision, from the governance perspective, is taken by many different actors jointly. Similarly, the process of implementation is not necessarily a domain reserved to the state and its agencies, but may be delegated to non-state actors (such as private enterprises or corporations).

Having gained popularity in economics in context of transaction cost theory[13], the term governance referred to the existence of rules and their enforcement in economic processes (ibid:4; Benz 2003:18). 'Market' and 'hierarchy' were depicted as the basic contrary types of rules operating in the economy, which are efficient under different conditions (Williamson 1975). Later on, the market-hierarchy–dichotomy was broadened

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[13] Transaction cost theory is based on Ronald Coase's work (most notably his two articles "The Nature of the Firm" (1937) and "The Problem of Social Cost" (1969). Its main proposition is that transaction costs (search and information costs, bargaining and decision costs, policing and enforcement costs) can make it more efficient for an entrepreneur to produce certain goods or services himself by contracting labour on longer terms (thus establishing a firm), rather than going for exchange in the market. How high transaction costs are depends crucially on the amount of information available on potential transaction partners, and the type and enforceability of rules governing transactions (cf. Fritsch et. al. 1996:6f and 46ff).

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to include other types of structures such as clans, corporations, and networks, extending the term governance to all observable forms of coordination of collective action. According to Mayntz, this was the point when the concept of governance spilled over into political science, catalysing the adoption of an institutional perspective on public policy (Mayntz 2004:4).

The economic roots of the concept however remained strongly tangible in its use in political science, essentially because it gained so much popularity in the discipline of public administration, which is at the intersection of economics and politics and largely determines political practise.

Peters and Pierre (2000:5) state that in the 1990s,

> "[…] the main governance problem has become how to redefine the relationship between the political and administrative branches of the state in order to allow for market-based models of administrative reform."

The emerging strategies of the 'New Public Management' are theoretically founded in Public Choice Theory[14] and the New Institutional Economics (including most prominently Transaction Cost Theory, Principal-Agent-Theory, Property Rights Theory and the Resource Based View, cf. Hill/Hupe 2002:90).

Hill and Hupe trace the popularity of the 'New Public Management' approach in the discipline of public administration to the fundamental shift in public service provision under Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US[15].

Both of these political leaders have, in essence, popularised the perception that centralised state agencies and their modes of functioning have created government failure (es:with respect to cost efficiency in the provision of public services), and should be replaced by the modi operandi as well as the norms and values of the private sector (viz. private business corporations).

Decentralisation has been one strategy to cope with the decline of public confidence in national governments' capacity to steer, and moving public services closer to citizens' demands by decentralising service provision and introducing market competition

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[14] Public Choice Theory belongs to Rational Choice Approaches, which assume that individuals act to maximise utility (their own perceived benefit), reflected in the popular term 'homo oeconomicus'. The same tools that economists use to analyse individual and collective behaviour in the market place are used to explain problems located in the field of political science (i.e. the study of interest groups, elections, behaviour in legislatures, coalitions, and bureaucracy, cf. Dunleavy, 1991). The ideas of Public Choice Theory are closely related to other theoretical approaches such as Social Choice Theory (esp. Kenneth Arrow), which addresses the question how collective action can lead to collectively desirable outcomes under conditions of individual utility maximisation of participating actors.

[15] They relate to the concept of 'corporate government' as introduced by Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, and the 'retrenchment philosophy' of the Reagan administration in the US (cf.Hill/Hupe 2002:91).

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accommodated the realisation that output legitimacy is an important source of public confidence in governments' steering ability (ibid:3).

As a result, governments in these countries reduced their own service delivery capacity to a minimum by contracting out most operational activities. Similar to the functioning of strategic units in the private business sector, the function of government bodies was shifted towards 'retaining system integration skills', while the distance between government and the services it provided increased by layers of civil society organisations functioning as operative units in the process of service delivery (cf. Hill/Hupe 2002:93).

By sourcing out implementation to executive agencies which operated largely in line with business methods, a new set of policy goals - effective public service delivery under containment of costs, in short: efficiency - has been introduced. This also resulted in a new performance measurement for public policy. In many countries this lead to a more or less stringent structural separation of political responsibility from executive responsibility (cf.ibid:91f).

Dunsire stresses that this separation induced new patterns of legitimation and accountability in public services:

> "Empowering the 'consumer' of public services creates new forms of controlling also the middle and lower ranks of public bureaucracy, while at the same time it disempowers the 'citizen' as participant in collective decision-making at the macro-level."(1995:31)

This means that accountability towards the citizen as a *consumer* was delegated to the bureaucracy (or whatever kind of implementation agency in place) as a *provider* of services in a contract manner, away from the ministries which are politically responsible for the content of the service, and on whom the citizen by means of entitlement to vote can excert active influence (Stoker (1995:19) calls this the 'purchaser-provider-paradigm').

This fundamentally touches the issue of legitimacy. Beetham suggests that the exercise of power is legitimate if three conditions are given: the conformity to established rules, the grounding of these rules in shared beliefs, and the explicit consent of the majority of subordinates to the established relations of power (Beetham 1991:19). Steering as an interventionist exercise of power requires such authoritative legitimacy, which in modern nation states has been vested with the government.

Governance however in essence focuses on those mechanisms which do *not* rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government. Here, the boundaries between private and public sectors, government and non-government actors become blurred (cf. ibid:1). In multi-actor and multi-level governance processes, many of the actors involved have no basis of direct electoral legitimation, and are beyond any control on part of the

citizens, yet they may excert exceeding influence on policy making in a corporate decision-making structure[16].

Grindle points out that the definitions of governance (in scope) and 'good' governance (in normative content) offered by scholars as well as international agencies differ significantly. A narrow perspective on governance refers to the processes by which authoritative decision-making takes place in a society. The broader perspective includes all processes (authoritative as well as deliberative or other) by which individuals and organisations (private and public, state and civil) manage their common affairs[17].

'Good governance' as a normative qualification to the concept embraces features which were deemed necessary to increase the legitimacy of the processes of governance in the eyes of those governed, precisely because governance processes lack the "simplifying legitimising 'myths' of traditional perspectives" (Stoker 1998:21) which equated governance with the actions of elected governments.

Grindle provides an overview of exemplary definitions of the terms 'governance' and 'good governance' by different scholars and agencies which is reproduced in appendix 4.

The most commonly included features of 'good governance' are voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectivenes, transparency, rule of law, and control of corruption (cf. Grindle 2007:556f).

In the developing countries, 'good governance' has often entered domestic politics as a condition to loans from international development agencies. The introduction of 'good governance' as conditionality for loans was itself a process of learning from some of the failures of structural adjustment during the 1980s.

The structural adjustment policies introduced in many countries of Latin America in the aftermath of depth crisis focussed on economic reform including budgetary discipline, removing price controls and state subsidies, cutting social expenditures, devaluation of currencies, trade liberalisation (lifting import and export restrictions), and privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Social sector reform, in accordance with what had happened in

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[16] In the development context, a classical example of this is the influence of donor agencies and NGOs on policy decisions. The term 'democracy deficit' as found in the discourse on European Integration refers to the same problems (cf. Beetham/Lord 1998). It should be noted however that while these institutions are not endowed with direct democratic legitimacy, as compared elected governments, they may have an indirect legitimacy basis, either by being authorised by democratically elected state governments (e.g. IMF or other international organisations), or by virtue of representing a group of people's interest with their direct consent (e.g. local NGOs). For a useful discussion of different perspectives on the problem, see Symon 2003).

[17] Other authors have arranged modi of governance on a scale ranging between authoritative and self-governing (e.g. Koimann, who categorises systems as hierarchically governing, co-governing and self-governing, cf. Koimann 2003:235f)

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the US and the UK some years before, focussed on 'shrinking' the state, its services, and public expenditure (through privatisation and contracting out), as well as shifting power in society from governments and the public sector to private organisations, individuals and groups (cf. Hewitt de Alcántara 1998:108).

One of the problems of structural adjustment was that restructuring of the public sector was politically unpopular – especially because it was conditional to loans and thus beyond political deliberation domestically – and thus not fully implemented by national governments. This caused failure in the system of public service provision, mainly because incentive and sanctioning mechanisms were distorted, and accountability mechanisms relied on the tool of user fees in a competitive setting, which often did not exist (cf. Manor 1999:5). This seriously challenged the legitimacy of interventions in the eyes of the public and mobilised considerable political opposition.

Structural adjustment programmes have been heavily critisised for their monodimensional focus on economic policy and their lack of concern for the social and ecological consequences in the debtor countries. The argument was that it was mainly the developed market economies who profited from the reduction of trade barriers, currency deflation, investment in local economies (FDI) and the ability to exploit local labour, while changes in the regulatory framework severely diminished concerned state governments to deal with the social and ecological impacts of reforms.

Partly in response to adverse effects that structural adjustment often had on states' ability to govern, and particularly on the well-being of vulnerable groups who had depended on this ability (however limited it had been), conditionalities were shifted from depth-reducing and stability enhancing measures to poverty reduction and 'good governance' from the mid 1990s onward (cf. Grindle 2004:528).

However the artifical dichotomy between 'the state' and 'civil society', as Hewitt de Alcántara points out, and the assumption that the latter can be flatly associated with 'good governance' while the former produces only 'bad governance', as often suggested by international development agencies, led to a further erosion of national bureaucracies and public sector agencies because of the monodimensional support to private providers and organisations.

Decentralisation in this context served to overcome the proclaimed distance between 'the state' and 'the people' by promoting internal structures which are suitable to protect disadvantaged and minority groups through the devolution of powers that guarantee a say in decision-making to all groups in society (cf. Hewitt de Alcántara 1998:108).

This view has been adopted widely by grassroot civil society organisations concerned with the rights and opportunities of minorities and so-called vulnerable groups (e.g. women and children), and by political parties concerned with 'deepening democracy' by means of the devolution of decision-making authority to local and intermediate levels of

government, so as to ensure that policies mirror the needs and aspirations of the groups targeted by them.

Manor stresses that the expectations which different groups of people attached to decentralisation led to considerable ambiguity in goals and purposes attached to it (Manor 1999:36ff).

2.2   <u>Operationalising Governance through Decentralisation</u>

In agreement with what has been discussed above, Manor pointed out that the process of decentralisation with its emphasis on strengthening non-government actors in the process of governance, has been a result of widely perceived government failure[18] in providing public goods and promoting economic development (ibid:32f). Government failure has been pinpointed precisely in the apparent inability of governments to turn investment into the public sector into satisfying outcome in terms of provision of public goods such as infrastructure and social services (e.g. education, health, social security), which had resulted in ever growing public expenditure in many countries. These deficiencies were often traced to principal-agent problems such as patronage and corruption, which increased transaction costs and diminished efficiency (cf. Hall/Hupe 2002:91f). This failure has increasingly served to delegitimise government regulation of market interaction, including the public sector. It has given rise to the perception that market mechanisms are supreme to mechanisms of government regulation in public goods and service provision.

Thus decentralisation came to be seen as yet another 'one-size-fits-all' solution to governance problems in developing countries[19].

While it seems to be quite clear that almost nowhere decentralisation has been a result of concrete popular demand[20], the motives and expectations that drove governments to decentralise the polity in one way or the other - especially when such decisions were not directly induced by loan conditionalities - were mixed.

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[18] 'Government failure' is the public choice analogy to 'market failure' in Keynesian economics (cf. Winston 2006:2). While Keynes held the opinion that in case of market failure (i.e. emergence of monopolies) the government can effectively intervene, Public Choice theorists find that governments can also fail, and in these instances, the market must step into the breach.

[19] Pritchett and Woolcock (2004) point out that the propagation of '*the* solution' to all development obstacles in all countries is one of the main reasons for recurrent failure of international development agencies' policies to promote economic development and good governance.

[20] Manor (1999:37) names South Africa, Namibia, some Indian states (e.g. Karnataka and West Bengal in the 1980s), the Philippines and Bolivia as some of the rare exceptions where popular pressure has influenced governments' decision to decentralise.

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Brosio[21] points out that these motivations are located in a spectrum ranging from 'citizen-regarding' to 'self-regarding'. The aims of the former are summarised as a) bringing public services to so far neglected areas, b) achieving a more equitable distribution of public services, c) increasing popular participation in policy choices.

At the 'self-regarding' end, governments have viewed decentralisation as an opportunity to reduce the burden of the inescapable structural adjustment programmes by offloading the responsibility for public services on lower level governments (Brosio 2000:2), and sometimes as an opportunity for political leaders to extend their influence more directly (without a huge central bureaucracy getting in the way) to local levels (Manor 1999:12).

There may also have been something of a 'bandwagon' effect, by which political decision-makers have felt compelled to embark on some kind of decentralisation project, hoping that it will benefit their popularity (Brosio 2000:2).

As indicated by the different aims that have fuelled measures to decentralise in different states under very different conditions, 'decentralisation' has many facets which correspond to different goals.

Thus flatly looking at decentralisation as the solution to a lack of legitimacy in decision-making as well as efficiency in the provision of public goods runs the risk of ignoring that both issues may require very different approaches to decentralisation, and in that light Manor among others has rightly observed that decentralisation need not coincide with democratisation (Manor, 1999:4ff).

If for instance financial resources and planning competencies are devolved to lower levels of administration, that may greatly increase the efficiency of public service provision or policy implementation, but it does not automatically imply participation of people or their elected representatives in local governments, which is considered necessary for filling the legitimacy gap in governance processes. Democratisation depends on a multitude of factors, including the institutional setup of local government and administration, the degree of activity of civil society and its organisations (political culture), and also the amount of real powers (i.e. taxation, budget autonomy) available to those organisations involved in governance at the local level.

Manor distinguishes between three types of decentralisation (cf. ibid:5-7), namely administrative decentralisation, fiscal decentralisation, and democratic decentralisation.

Administrative decentralisation refers to the delegation of administrative competencies to bureaucrats located at lower levels (e.g. in local offices of state agencies). This process of deconcentration is important with respect to the often cited devolution of functions and

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[21] Brosio 2000, available at http://internationalmonetaryfund.com/external/pubs/ft/seminar/ 2000/fiscal/brosio.pdf., accessed September 2006.

functionaries, viz. the availability of capable personnel to execute the functions delegated to lower levels.

Democratic decentralisation refers to the creation of elected local bodies in which people's representatives take politically legitimate decisions within the frame of powers state governments devolve to them.

Fiscal decentralisation refers to the devolution of resources downwards in the decentralised polity. It can take different shapes, such as endowing sub-state levels with decisive tax raising powers, and/ or autonomy in the use of the resources which are provided by the state. Fiscal decentralisation is crucial for democratic decentralisation, as the functioning of local government bodies essentially depends on the adequacy of the resources available to fulfil the functions devolved to them.

Which type (or mixture of types) of decentralisation has been followed by different regimes is according to Manor largely contingent on the mix of motives behind political leaders' decision to embrace this strategy (which are often very remote from the more theoretical/ideological considerations inspiring them, cf. ibid:7).

While these three categories are common in the decentralisation literature, some authors also include privatisation and delegation (e.g. Blaser et.al. 2003).

It seems conceptually more clear however to see privatisation and delegation as specific functional structures of decentralisation which are usually associated with one of its three types. According to Work, deconcentration and delegation are commonly found in the context of administrative decentralisation, devolution is the form mostly associated with democratic decentralisation, and divestment and privatisation are practices used in fiscal decentralisation (cf. Work 2002:20).

Manor is critical about the value of privatisation and delegation as functional structures for decentralisation, because privatisation (in the context of public service provision) can also mean a shift from a centralised government to a centralised private provider, and delegation refers basically to select implementing powers given to para-state agencies by state governments, without changing the basic patterns of decision-making (Manor 1999:4). He refers to such processes as 'flawed decentralisation'.

In India, as in many other countries, the decentralisation project is a mixture of deconcentration, devolution, and (to a much lesser extent) fiscal decentralisation, and the composition of elements varies from state to state.

However there is a commitment to democratic decentralisation in all states which is induced by the mandatory devolution of powers to the three-tier local government institutions (LGIs), called panchayats, laid down in the 73nd and 74th amendments to the Constitution.

Nonetheless state legislation diverges in terms of the nature and amount of powers devolved to lower levels. Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal governments (all belonging to the so-called first- and second-generation panchayati raj states[22] have made sincere efforts to empower local government institutions (LGIs) and to ensure people's participation through extensive mobilisation and campaigning ('people's movement'). In contrast, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Punjab have dragged even the establishment of local bodies (cf. Chaudhuri 2006 and Kumar 2002, 2006). The reasons behind different responses of states to the constitutional amendments will be elaborated in more detail in chapter 4.

Having briefly discussed some of the theoretical issues underlying the concepts of governance and decentralisation, it is necessary to scrutinise explanations theory offers for institutional change (because that is essentially what decentralisation is about) and individual action through institutions.

'Institutional design' has been a major concern to policy makers in India in the aftermath of the decentralisation of the polity following the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution. There has been an almost unlimited enthusiasm about creating new types of organisations, associations, and committees, ranging from local government bodies to user and self-help groups.

Expectations raised towards these bodies related to rational as well as more normative goals: On one hand, opening up 'spaces' for participation of targeted groups of people followed the rationalist logic that individuals will realise that they can best achieve certain goals through institutional action (cf. Srivastava 2005:3), and therefore will happily usurp such spaces for benefit maximation.

On the other hand, the inclusion of ever larger parts of the population in political decision-making was ascribed normative value, the 'deepening of democracy' being perceived as the solution to the legitimacy crisis of state and national governments. While this normative perspective dominated the discussion about the role of elected bodies in the provision of public goods and promotion of local development (process), the 'empowerment' rhetoric spilt over to those central government programmes which were mainly concerned with the managerial problem of how to increase efficiency in the social service sector (outcome).

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[22] In the Indian literature on Panchayati Raj, states are often categorised according to their experience with local governments into three generations. Maharashtra and Gujarat belong to the first generation, West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to the second, and Madhya Pradesh to the third (cf. Kumar, 2002, Mathew 2004).

As will be discussed at some length in the next section, both normative and rational choice approaches offer potential to explain the genesis of and change in institutions, as well as individuals' motivation to act through these institutions.

2.3   Individual Agency and Collective Action: Assumptions about agency in 'The New Institutionalism'

Despite the almost unmanageable diversity of institutional theories in different disciplines like sociology, economics, political science and psychology, there seem to be some features of what we call institutions that would be acceptable to all (cf. Peters, 1999:18; Brinton/Nee 1998:3ff):

1. Institutions are a structural feature of any society

2. Institutions constrain individual behaviour by sanction and incentive and thus create predictability of individual behaviour in complex interaction processes

3. Sanction and incentive as structuring features are based on shared norms and/or goals among the members of an institution

The body of the New Institutional Theory in different disciplines offers a variety of explanations regarding the impact of institutions on individual as well as collective actors, on individuals' motivation to accept or reject institutions, and on the way members shape institutions.

Peters in his discussion of the new institutionalism in political science has distinguished six approaches to institutions within the discipline[23], which differ in the level of collective action they are primarily concerned with. While normative and rational approaches focus on individual action within structures of collective action, other approaches deal primarily with organisations (states, governments, interest groups) in different actor constellations (states in the international system, public-public or public-private constellations).

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[23] Normative Institutionalism focuses on the role of institutional norms for understanding how institutions shape the behaviour of individuals. Rational Choice Institutionalism focuses on institutions as systems of rules and incentives to behaviour, in which individuals seek to maximise personal utility. Historical Institutionalism argues that the functioning of institutions can only be understood by taking into account initial policy choices and the resulting institutionalised commitments, termed 'path-dependency'. Empirical Institutionalism is concerned with the impact of the structure of government on policy choices and processing, usually analysed in comparison of parliamentary and presidential democratic systems. International Institutionalism focuses on the impact of structure in international relations to explain the behaviour of states. Societal Institutionalism is concerned with institutionalised patterns of interactions between interest groups and the state, (cf. Peters 1999).

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Thus for a micro-level analysis of participation in local organisations concerned with elementary education, both the rational choice and the normative offer most potential.

In addition, there is a rich body of literature concerned with 'participatory development' and 'social capital', which also touch the relation between individuals and structures of collective action, although with different foci.

The literature on participatory development is primarily concerned with the technical procedures of building capacity among poor rural populations to engage in decision-making and implementation of development projects that are largely shaped by state or non-governmental organisations. Incorporation of local needs and values into project design is perceived to be necessary for enhancing sustainability and generating legitimacy of such projects. Participatory development approaches have roots in the empowerment concept of Paolo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' and Liberation Theology. The major concern is that suppressed and marginalised people need to be empowered to analyse the sources of their oppression and develop strategies to overcome it. The strong emphasis on the reciprocity of the learning process between local people and facilitators in the writings of Robert Chambers and others, and on the empowering effects of this process, has its roots in this conceptual background[24].

The social capital approach focuses on the vertical and horizontal networks of individuals and collectives, which is seen to be crucial for the development of mutual trust and cooperation. These in turn are regarded central for ensuring equitable benefit of collective action through social and political institutions. Social capital can be distinguished by several criteria, and the literature offers different dichotomies such as formal/informal, thick/thin, inward-looking/outward-looking, and, most prominently, bonding/bridging. It is important that social capital is not 'a good thing' per se, but depending on the mixture of qualities can be a merit as well as a liability (patronage would be an instance of such liabilities, cf. Putnam 1993, Putnam/Goss 2002; for a critical account see Harriss 2001 and Fine 2000).

While both above outlined strands of the literature offer valuable insights into the dynamics of collective action within organisations governed by 'crafted' institutions, they rarely offer explanations for individual motivations to join and act in institutions, or

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[24] cf. Chambers 1994, 1997; Blackburn/Holland 1998; Chambers/Gaventa/Blackburn 2000; for a critical reflection of the 'paradigm' of participation see Cooke/Kothari 2001 and Mohan/Hickey 2004.

change in institutions (e.g. changes in the regulatory framework of an organisation, or differences between rules prescribed and 'rules-in-use'[25]).

For this reason, I would like to focus on a discussion of the normative and the rational-choice approaches to institutions, because they focus on individuals' motivation to join and act in institutional contexts, which is a major concern to this research.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to stick to Douglas North's distinction between the term institution as 'the rules of the game', and organisation as the entity in which individuals get together for the purpose of collective action (cf. North 1990:5). In this sense, institutions may be more diffuse because they are not necessarily connected to formal membership in an organisation, especially in case of traditional norms and values (or what North calls informal institutions).

The basic assumption of the normative approach to institutions as brought forward by James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (largely as a reaction to the spill-over of utilitarian assumptions on individual agency from economic theory into political science from the 1960s onwards) is that institutions matter because a) most post important political activities are collective rather than individual in nature, and b) individual and collective behaviour is strongly determined by the norms and values within organisations as central units of collective action (March/Olsen 1989).

The authors argue that political actors reflect the values of the institutions they are associated with, rather than an individualistic strive to maximise personal utility (es:given the narrow definition of utility as wealth maximising in most rational choice approaches). Since individuals in complex modern societies are part of multiple institutions, they need to chose between competing institutional loyalties and interpret the meaning of different institutional commitments. This process of adjusting behaviour to institutional norms is what March and Olsen call 'the logic of appropriateness': Rather than focusing on the outcome of action ('logic of consequentiality' as laid down by the utility-maximising approach), individuals are assumed to act in accordance with the norms of the institution of which they are a part (ibid:118ff).

This however is not to say that behaviour is never driven by the 'logic of consequentiality'. March and Olsen have distinguished two types of processes in organisations that largely indicate the motives of an individual to join them: aggregative and integrative processes. The former refers to a contractual form of organisations in which individuals participate largely for personal gain. The latter denotes a value-based form of organisation in which individuals participate because they are committed to the

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[25] The term 'rules-in-use' originates from Elinor Ostrom (1999) and has been adopted among others by Lowndes et.al. (2006).

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goals of the institution, or because they accept the *legitimacy* of the claims for commitment of the institution.

Rational choice approaches in contrast look at institutions rather narrowly as systems of rules and inducements to behaviour in which individuals attempt to maximise their own utility[26]. Institutions constitute a frame for 'bounded rationality': they establish a 'political space' in which many interdependent political actors can function, realising that their aims can be achieved most efficiently through institutional action (Weingast 1996, cited in Peter, 1999:19f). Thus actors rationally decide to have their behaviour to an extent shaped by the rules governing these institutions. What legitimises 'bounded rationality' in institutions is that all other members are constrained in the same way in terms of their scope of utility maximation, and the set of rules within an institution creates predictability and a regularity of outcomes that benefits all participants or even society as a whole.

Rational choice institutionalism assumes that institutions can produce a collective rationality from rational individual actions by channeling them through a system of inducements and rules (institutions). Collective decisions are viewed as the aggregate of individual decisions.

Douglas North dismisses the functionality of a narrowly defined utility-maximising proposition prevalent in rational choice theory for the explanation individuals' behaviour, because it cannot explain many facets of human behaviour, most obviously those that are altruistic or otherwise contrary to an individual's immediate benefit. Instead, he points out that there are two factors determining human behaviour other than maximising wealth, which are 'motivation' and the 'deciphering of the environment' (North 1990:21ff).

Motivation is determined by an individual utility function that may alter significantly from that of other individuals (because utility includes factors such as norms and values, and the composition of maximising and normative components varies), thus making these functions less predictable to others.

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[26] The term utility is highly problematic here. In classical Rational Choice Theory in Economics, utility has been defined as maximising material wealth. This narrow definition has raised much criticism, and most authors within rational choice approaches to institutions have acknowledged that individuals have more than a single utility function (i.e. Margolis 1982, North 1990). Sen (1999) has pointed out that even if we do lay down the accumulation of wealth as primary utility, we must not take accumulation of wealth as an end in itself, but rather as a means for achieving something else, because wealth (or even narrower: income) has the convenient feature of being able to fulfil different kinds of desires (i.e. to donate for a cause that is valued, a classical altruistic action).

The second factor, deciphering the environment, is important because reality shows that values are not consistent over time and between individuals. Because individuals will make sense of the environment according to the information available and their means of computation, that is the ideas, norms and codes of conduct that shape the individuals perception of reality, we must distinguish between objective and subjective reality (ibid.:23).

Departing from a similar critique of the restrictive and simplifying assumptions of the rational egoist paradigm, Amartya Sen, in the larger context of conceptualising development as increasing the substantive freedoms people enjoy[27], suggested to conceive people's motivation to individual and collective agency as aiming to achieve 'the life one has reason to value' (Sen, 1999:74). If the notion of utility is broadened in this sense, two factors enter the scene, namely 'reason' and 'value' (and I perceive these to be highly congruent with North's concepts of 'motivation' and 'subjective reality' in an individual's effort to 'decipher the environment'). Sen has further argued that the chances to achieve what a person values largely depends on individual capabilities and structures of social opportunities, both being in a reciprocal relationship. I will return to the concepts of capability and social opportunity in the last section of this chapter.

There is abundant empirical evidence to support both the normative and the rational-choice approach, and to a great extent scholars on both sides have acknowledged that excluding the respective other may be too narrow a focus to adequately explain the dynamics between individuals and institutions.

Elinor Ostrom, one of the leading theorists of the rational choice approach to institutions, has made some significant contributions to the integration of both approaches. On the basis of an evaluation of countless empirical studies and experiments, she comes to the conclusion that the assumption that individuals act as rational egoists, which underlie all rational choice approaches, bears valid explanations of behaviour in what she calls institutional 'action situations'[28] only in very specific settings. She terms these 'open competitive situations', which are defined as situations in which a) individuals do not face significant information constraints, b) they enter the situation voluntarily to compete for

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[27] The basic merit of Sen's approach to development as freedom and poverty as capability deprivation is that it offers a framework for analysing the phenomenon of poverty in affluent countries and contributes to a broader understanding of what causes poverty in different political and economic environments.

[28] "[…] an action situation refers to the social space where participants with diverse preferences interact, exchange goods and services, solve problems, dominate one another, or fight (among the many things that individuals do in action arenas)." (Ostrom 2005:14)

valued objective outcomes, and c) they place primary value on the immediate outcome of the action situation (cf. Ostrom 2005:4).

Situations that do not fulfil any one of these conditions are labelled 'social dilemma situations'[29]. These are typically characterised by considerable informational constraints (e.g. about benefits that can be expected or the motives of other actors in the action situation), by compulsion to join (e.g. by means of unexcludable membership or social pressure), and by different preferences of individuals concerning the outcome of collective action (cf. ibid:131f).

Under such circumstances, there can be no uniform assumption concerning individuals' motivation to act in and institution. Rather, it should be assumed that participants hold multiple values ranging between the poles of the rational egoist and the normative altruist. The behaviour of individuals in such an action situation additionally depends on the rules structuring behavioural options (sanction), on the individual ability of computation of the available information about the action situation, and on the dominating norms and values of the environment in which the action situation is embedded.

Concerning the question why individuals follow rules, Ostrom states that there are different motives. A strong motive is the fact that rules are enforced effectively and the cost of breaking them will be much higher than the cost of following them – or, to put it positively, the benefit from following them will be larger than the benefit from breaking them.

When participating in an action arena voluntarily, however, individuals usually share a sense that the rules governing the situation are appropriate (note the proximity to March/Olsen's 'logic of appropriateness'). Compliance to the rules in such situations is rooted in values rather than in an expected benefit from compliance or cost from non-compliance. This shared agreement on the appropriateness of rules is necessary because otherwise the costs of enforcement in voluntary activities would be too high, and maintaining predictability almost impossible.

By acknowledging different motivations of individuals to join institutions and comply to their rules depending on the nature of the action situation, Ostrom has somewhat reconciled the rational choice and the normative approach to institutions.

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[29] "Social dilemmas occur whenever individuals in interdependent situations face choices in which the maximisation of short-term self-interest yields outcomes leaving all participants worse off than feasible alternatives. In a public good dilemma, for example, all those who would benefit from the provision of a public good […] find it costly to contribute and would prefer others to pay for the good instead. If everyone follows the equilibrium strategy, then the good is not provided, or is underprovided. Yet, everyone would be better off if everyone were to contribute." (Ostrom 1998:1)

Assuming that parent and community participation in elementary government schools resembles what Ostrom calls a 'social dilemma' situation rather than an 'open competitive' situation, her definition of these situations points to several important factors that need to be analysed, namely informational constraint, voluntariness/compulsion, and outcome preferences.

Since the institutional setup in which the provision of education takes place has been changing significantly throughout the last 15 years, and continues to change, it is also important to ask some questions about institutional change. If the rules and routines structuring an organisation are adapted (or re-designed), how will the new set of rules be received by individual members? Will the old routines internalised by individual agents undermine the new set of rules? These questions are particularly important if we assume that institutions evolve at least partly on a normative basis, rather than a purely functional one.

Douglass North has made some important observations concerning these questions.

North has observed that change in the rules and procedures of institutions may occur over night, but that it usually takes much longer until these changes actually affect the behaviour of individuals (cf. North 1990:6).

To explain this observation, he has differentiated between formal and informal institutions, which is especially helpful when looking at traditional and culturally diverse societies like India. He distinguishes between formal (laws, rights and rules applying to different domains of public life) and informal (social conventions and codes of conduct) institutions, which may be and often are mutually contradicting. In the incidence of institutional change, conflict may arise not only between formal and informal institutions, but also between old and new institutional structures and norms. In this case, it can be assumed that members of institutions will in some way or other try to reconcile these conflicting norms, with potentially unintended results in terms of the behaviour anticipated by the institution (cf. ibid).

There are many formal institutional norms in the Indian legal system that can be easily detected as running counter to more traditional norms, such as the legal age of marriage being 18 years, norms relating to the treatment of widows, compulsory schooling, representation of women and disadvantaged groups of citizens in governance etc. The fact that many of these legal provisions are systematically violated in many parts of the country despite of 60 years of democratic governance, supports the notion that there are strong informal institutional undercurrents eroding them.

While formal institutions may change at a rapid pace (by changing legislation, a process that may take between a couple of months and some years), informal institutions usually

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change at a much slower pace, even resist change. North perceives these as cultural constraints which explain why institutional change is incremental rather than discontinuous. It is these cultural constraints which account for the widely divergent paths of historical change in institutions[30] (ibid.:6).

The interplay of formal and informal institutions seems to be particularly important in context of the Indian decentralisation experience. As Srivastava (2005) pointed out, the success of institutional change in terms of its intended outcomes depends to a great extent on the convergence of old and new institutional structures, or more precisely, whether actors in organisations embrace new institutional norms or reject them and stick to the old institutional norms

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that these rules are not only, or not at all, binding for the organisation which has designed the rule (e.g. a government cabinet, or a donor agency), but for persons outside of the organisation who are governed by these rules without having approved of them (e.g. 'the people', project beneficiaries)[31].

What I have mentioned above is particularly important when looking at local governance in India. As will be discussed in detail in chapter four, the decentralised polity is a conglomerate of old (bureaucracy) and new (LGIs and stakeholder committees) organisations governed by very different rules, and, departing from above assumptions, considerable friction can be expected between old and new rules governing actors in these bodies.

Further, members of such organisations are not at all included in the processes of decision-making considering the rules governing their organisations ('games about rules'), and this becomes particularly important for the extent to which people are motivated to participate and abide to the rules in settings that are not characterised by the features of the 'competitive market setting' as defined by Elinor Ostrom.

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[30]The concept of 'path-dependency' in 'historical institutionalism' (cf. Krasner 1984, Hall 1986, Steinmo/Thelen 1992) points to the fact that formal institutions may also manifest as constraints to institutional change. Path-dependence denotes the dependence of the development of a policy over time on the initial policy choice and the corresponding institutional commitments. In other words, initial institutional structures tend to persist even though there may have been institutional changes due to the failure of the original setup to achieve the desired results. In this view, institutions spend a great deal of time with solving the problems they have created by inappropriate choices, and the effects of the latter have a continuous influence on the institution even after change has been induced.

[31] Stoker (1998:22) distinguished collective action in different forms of partnerships in governance processes as 'games about rules' (the process of crafting the rules which govern insiders as well as outsiders to the involved organisations) and 'games under rules' (processes of collective action which are subject to those rules which emerged from the 'games about rules')

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In this context I would like to return to Sen's conception of capability and social opportunity. The term capability, in the sense in which Sen has used, it denotes the ability of an individual to achieve what (s)he values. Social opportunity, on the other hand, to a large extent determines a persons capabilities, and the link between the two are the formal and informal institutions (or structures and processes) which shape and are being shaped by a society.

2.4   Capabilities and Social Opportunities as Determinants of Participation

"Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. Not only do institutions contribute to our freedoms, their roles can be sensibly evaluated in the light of their contribution to our freedom." (Sen 1999:142)

The concepts of capability and social opportunity have emerged in the larger context of the perceived limitations of a narrow conception of development as economic growth, viz. growth in per capita income in mid 1980s. The economist Amartya K. Sen has criticised the focus of development economics on per capita income as an indicator for development on the grounds that a) it does not capture distributional effects, especially on the micro-level (e.g. intra-family consumption patterns), b) it cannot capture impoverishment in more affluent societies, c) it assumes that all individuals will be able to reach the same standard of living with a similar 'commodity bundle' (which he rejects), and d) that income deprivation is only one among many forms of human deprivation, which perpetuate or even cause each other (i.e. illiteracy as a primary capability deprivation can be a cause of income poverty, cf. Sen 1999:20ff).

From the perspective of 'development as freedom', Sen suggests to depart from the narrow growth perspective on development[32], and rather look at development as enhancing the substantial freedoms people enjoy (cf.ibid; 1985). His notion of freedom, and the closely related concept of capability as the ability of a person to achieve what he or she values, goes back to Aristotle and his analysis of 'human flourishing' (eudaimonia). The life of a person can be seen as a sequence of things a person does, or states of being (s)he achieves. The term capability denotes a person's ability to achieve certain functionings. A functioning again is the real achievement of a person: what a

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[32] How prominent the focus on per capita income and the lack of concern for distributional issues still is becomes clear from a World Bank report on governance, where it is concluded that there is 'overwhelming evidence that good governance is crucial for *successful development, as measured by high per capita income*. Per capita income is a strong predictor of poverty rates, infant mortality and illiteracy, suggesting that good governance improves the well being of the poor' (World Bank 2000:175, emphasis added).

person manages to be or do. The functionings a persons strives to achieve depend on what a person values doing or being. While 'value' may be a highly individual category, there are some basic functioning which can be reasonable assumed to be of value for humans in general, such as a healthy body, sufficient food, participation in social life (which depends on a person's ability to meet social norms, for example concerning appearance in public).

Material impoverishment is only one factor influencing human achievement, other forms of impoverishment (such as exclusion from social processes) influence the range of human achievement as well (cf. Drèze/Sen 2002:36).

Using the perspective of freedom, deprivations which we would usually subsume under the label 'poverty' can be disaggregated into different forms of unfreedom which may prevail to different extents in very different societies. These are hunger/undernutrition, lack of health care, lack of functional education, lack of gainful employment, lack of economic and social security, and lack of political liberty and civil rights (Sen 1999:14).

Obviously, the measurement of income would not capture many of these unfreedoms or deprivations, and especially the last factor goes beyond the economic assessment of poverty and deprivation. In addition, these unfreedoms are mutually reinforcing and may be cause as well as effect of income poverty.

While income is an important indicator for measuring freedom, because income is the most universal means to achieve the things one values, it is not the only means, and lack of access to social life or lack of political freedoms may be as impeding on human flourishing as material poverty (even though admittedly less immediately threatening to survival).

Central to this study is the assumption that people's motivation to exert individual and collective agency in organisations of local self-government is grounded in the desire to reach a certain preferred outcome, or in Sen's words, to achieve something one 'has reason to value'. I assume that outcome preferences are stronger drivers than compulsive factors (such as sanctions in case of non-participation) because India is a democratic polity, and participation in LGIs is generally voluntary (even though at the individual level compulsion may play a significant role, as we shall see in the case studies, but this compulsion is external to the rules governing the body itself.)

Sen has argued that the chances to achieve what a person values largely depend on individual capabilities and structures of social opportunities, the latter being largely shaped by formal and informal institutions.

Social opportunity has a process and an access aspect, and both need to be seen in relation to each other. Processes such as voting procedures, representation in elected

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bodies etc. only have value to individuals if their opportunity to make use of these processes is not restricted, for instance by barriers to access such as exclusive membership or social norms, or by the lack of basic capabilities (skills such as literacy and numeracy, a healthy body, free time besides organising subsistence, cf. Drèze/Sen 2002:6ff). Thus any initiative to enhance individual or collective participation through formal processes (be it in the economic, political or social sphere) should be measured against a) the opportunity of different groups of individuals to access these processes, b) the capabilities to make effective use of them, and c) the individuals' perception of the usefulness of a certain form of participation for reaching the desired outcome. The latter can either reinforce or discourage future participation (cf. Sen 1999:17ff).

An analytical challenge here is how to conceptualise the participation of groups of individuals in structures of collective action. As the term 'community participation' indicates, it often happens that participation is not conceptualised to benefit individuals, but rather certain groups of individuals that share one or the other common characteristic (such as being female or belonging to the same caste group).

It is then assumed that this group of people shares a common interest which can be pursued by having a number of representatives participate in certain collective decision-making processes. Some of the problems arising from the equation of group characteristics with group interest, and the debate in they have triggered in the participatory development discourse, will be discussed in the next section.

2.5   'Community' and 'Participation' – Preliminary Remarks on Contested Concepts

In the literature on the advent of participation in development discourse, and its absorption into mainstream development thinking, one often comes across what Trevor Parfitt (2004) has called "the means/ends ambiguity". He argues that the concept of participation has very different implications depending on whether it is regarded as a *means* to achieve measurable development outputs (efficiency), or as an *end* in itself, leading to empowerment of people in the development process – that is in *defining* goals and measures to achieve these goals.

Participation of people in development processes, so the argument goes in some of the critiques[33], runs the risk of being a mere formality needed to lend legitimacy to policy decisions essentially taken elsewhere. The wide-spread use of increasingly standardised

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[33] These include the articles contained in Cooke/Kothari (2001), Mohan/Hickey (2004), and Kapoor (2002).

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participatory techniques (such as PRA, RRA, and many others) in planning, and the routinised set-up of formal committees with more or less exclusive membership, makes participation a mechanical process of 'ticking off' certain exercises with a defined group of 'community' members, irrespective of the value of the outcome for these participants. This results in a 'bureaucratisation' of the process that is astonishing, considering that increasing people's participation was at least partly meant to defeat the shortcomings of development carried out through central state bureaucracies[34].

Calling this apparently inherent conflict between efficiency and empowerment a means/ends ambiguity is more confusing than helpful. Rather, it seems that there is a tension between different ends that are assumed to be achieved by means of participation, efficiency and empowerment being two of them.

To avoid the normatively charged debate about whether or not efficiency has less value for lending legitimacy to an action (or policy) than empowerment, I find Sen's distinction between the instrumental and the intrinsic value of participation (cf. Sen 1999:36ff) useful. The intrinsic value lies in the act of participation as an expression of social recognition. The instrumental value lies in the ability to reach a certain desired outcome.
Sen emphasises that the instrumental and the intrinsic value of participation are not contradictive (as the dichotomy of efficiency and empowerment in the development discourse often suggests), but rather mutually supporting and reinforcing.
If people participate in collective action, but are unable to reach the outcomes consensually defined as desirable, then the exercise of participation has little instrumental value to them (even though they may find it socially desirable to be included in decision-making).

If the intended outcome of participation does not reflect the outcome preferences of participants (whether because desirable outcomes have been defined elsewhere, or some participants do not agree to the outcome of interest aggregation), then participation has neither intrinsic nor instrumental value, and may be less desirable to people than non-participative determination of desirable outcomes which happens to reflect their own preferences more adequately. The important point is that the generation of legitimacy of processes of collective decision-making depends on both form and substance, and placing one above the other has little conceptual value.

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[34] cf. among others Cooke (2003), Cornwall (2002), Cleaver (2001), Mosse (2001), Kothari (2001), Heller (2001), and Craig/Mayo (1995).

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The issue of formulating goals by means of participative processes raises the critical question who should be included in the process. In the context of participatory development, there is frequent reference of participation of certain groups of individuals. These groups may be delineated by geography, by ethnicity, religious denotion, gender, or, in case of India, caste.

The reference to collectives rather than individuals in the debate about 'community participation' in the development discourse has created a fierce debate about the implications of assuming that groups can be depicted as an entity with a particular homogeneous interest, as it often happens, particularly in the 'empowerment'- debate[35]. Conceptualising participation primarily as a concern for enhancing group interest bears the threat to blind out the diversity of interests within groups, and the creation of 'winners' and 'losers' within groups produced in the process of interest aggregation. The commonly observed phenomenon of self-enrichment of so-called disadvantaged groups' representatives to the detriment of the wider group (cf. Srivastava 2005; Behar/Kumar 2002) is indicative of this problem.

To avoid the normative charging and implications of internal homogeneity often connected to it, I use the term 'community' in two distinct ways:

a) To denote the residents of a geographical entity. Thus when I speak of the village community, I refer to all sections of the population residing in this village. Similarly, if not qualified otherwise, I understand and use the term 'community participation' with reference to the participation of residents of a defined geographical area.

b) To denote function. Communities by function would include the teacher community, the parent community, a particular caste community, or a religious community.

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[35] For a discussion of the uncritical use of the terms 'community' and 'participation' in the Indian educational context see Saxena (2003). Mosse (2001) extensively discusses the homogenising effects of 'community participation' where there is no homogeneity in the context of a farming project in East India. The problematic effects of glossing over difference and power relations within 'communities' (however defined) is discussed extensively in Cooke/Kothari (2001) and Hickey/Mohan (2004) and Cornwall (2002). Mohan and Stokke point to the unduly homogenising effects of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as one of the dominant tools of participatory development, which is due to its emphasis on consensus rather than confrontation, and somewhat mirrors the 'harmony model of power' which Mohan and Stokke (2000:249) claim to be characteristic of the 'neoliberal' view that empowerment of the powerless is possible without significant negative effects on the power of the powerful.

Whether I speak of a geographical or a functional community, I understand that this community is no homogeneous entity, rather I assume that all 'communities' are internally heterogenous, and that any aggregation of interest within a defined community in the process of generating collective action produces winners and losers.

As a consequence, in this study participation is conceptualised departing from the individual, her interests, values, motivations, and perceptions of potential benefit, rather than from an assumed more or less homogenous group interest.

2.6 Institutions, Participation and Capabilities: A framework for analysing community participation in government provided elementary education

Summing up what has been discussed above at some length, the central assumptions underlying this study are:

1. Participation denotes individual agency in structures facilitating collective action
2. Collective action takes place in situations framed by formal (e.g. legislation, contract) and informal (e.g. heritage norms, social codes of conduct) rules that are (to differing extents) binding on groups of individuals
3. Individuals behave in response to the incentive and sanctioning mechanisms within the institutions governing an organisation
4. People have different motivations to join organisations (e.g. .norms, values, expectations of benefit)
5. People face different constraints in entering and acting in organisations (e.g. excludability of membership, lack of individual capabilities)

Since the study puts the focus on how people perceive their own role in the education of their children against the backdrop of what the Government of Madhya Pradesh assumes their role to be, the relation between capabilities, value and reason (or in North's terms 'motivation' and 'deciphering the environment') are of central interest.

The combination of individual capabilities, values, and structures of social opportunity, which are shaped by formal and informal institutions (and the freedom to access them or opt out of them), form the framework in which people's participation in decentralised management of elementary education will be assessed.

Fig.3: Framework for the analysis of community participation in educational governance
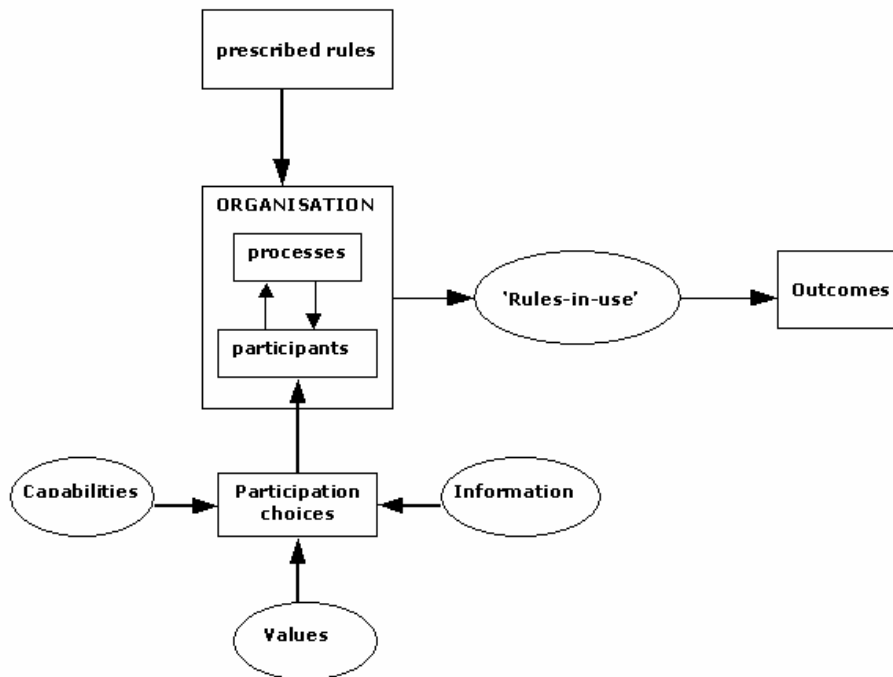
Source: own

Departing from these assumptions, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the formal rules (legislation, government orders) structuring collective action in PTAs and PRIs with respect to school education, and how are these embedded in broader social/institutional norms?
2. What is the scope of action of the bodies, and what are they expected to achieve?
3. What incentives and sanctions are in place to ensure compliance to the prescribed rules, and what does this mean for the rules actually in operation?
4. Who is eligible to participate in these bodies, who does actually participate in these bodies?
5. What motivates people to (not) participate in these bodies?
6. What are the constraints faced by different people to act and achieve desired outcomes through these bodies, and what, generally, are desired outcomes?

The first three of these questions distinctly refer to the institutional framework in which participation in government provided elementary education takes place.

Here, it is necessary to look at a) the rules and regulations laid down for community participation in the relevant legislation, b) the translation (or reinterpretation) of these requirements into practice by the concerned bodies, and c) the mechanisms to reward good performance and sanction malperformance of these bodies.

Two pieces of legislation are central to the analysis of the institutional framework, namely the People's Education Act (*Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam*, JSA) and its subordinate rules (*Jan Shiksha Niyam*, JSN), and the State Panchayat Act (*Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam*).

It should be noted in advance that all of these acts and rules are subject to more or less frequent change in the form of amendments and government orders. Amendments to the Panchayat Act have been followed up until the end of 2005. Amendments to the JSA/JSN have been followed up until the end of 2006, when the latest amendment was passed in the legislative assembly.

There is a virtual flood of government orders from both the Panchayati Raj Department and the School Education Department. Some of these are available online, but generally these are not thematically filed (not even in concerned government offices, where they are stored by date), so including and making sense of all of them is a research task on its own. Consequently, government orders have not been included systematically in the analysis.

What has been included are training manuals and information material for PTA members published by the Directorate of Public Instruction (Rajya Shiksha Kendra), as they pin down the major tasks and expectations towards decentralised educational planning, management and decision-making, and potentially represent the information that trickles down to the communities.

Questions 4-6 deal with the perspective of individuals regarding their choice to (non-) participation in PTAs and PRIs.

At the centre of interest is the nature and scope of participation by members of the village community, including parents and local PRI members. In accordance of what has been said above about the importance of 'reason', 'value' and 'capabilities', it needs to be assessed a) who participates and who does not, b) what is perceived to facilitate or constrain participation, c) what value is attached to school education relative to other family concerns, and d) what is the perceived effect of participation in terms of valued outcomes.

Since it has been assumed that individual capabilities influence people's ability to join and act in institutions, and to reach valued outcomes, it has been necessary to determine what capabilities should be included.

Sen himself has rejected the claim that there should be something like a 'core' list of capabilities that applies to all human beings in any setting. In fact, he regards the openness of the concept of capabilities as one of the greatest advantages of this

approach (cf. Sen 1999:77, 2002: Clark 2005:5f), because what substantial freedoms and capabilities necessary to achieve them are crucially depends on individual valuation, and prescribing an authoritative list results in imposing values on individuals that may not be shared by them (cf. Sen 2004).

However, he emphasises two enabling factors which he perceives to have substantial impact on the ability of a person to achieve a 'valued functioning' with the given 'commodity bundle' (income and other material assets) at hand, namely education and health. Sen ascribes five distinct ways in which health and education contribute to people's freedom: a) by virtue of being valuable in themselves, b) because of their instrumental personal role for achieving other valuable functionings (e.g. getting a job, participating in public life), c) because of their instrumental social role for facilitating public discussion on collective demands, and holding politics accountable, d) by virtue of their instrumental process roles, e.g. the reduction of child labour through compulsory schooling, and e) because of their empowering and redistributive role, for instance organising politically to get a fairer deal (empowerment), reducing gender inequality, accessing publicly provided social benefit (cf. Sen 2002:38f).

While health is instrumental at the personal level, education is also an important enabling factor for collective processes and decision-making, and is closely related in the Indian context to gender-, caste- and class inequality. Given the tight interlinkages between educational status, socio-economic status and caste/class membership in India, I have focused on capabilities relating to these factors.

Indicators used for income-related capabilities were the amount of income per month (individual/family) relative to the size of the household, sources of income, and working hours (as a proxy for time available for activities besides organising subsistence). Education-related indicators were the number of adult literates in the household and level of education they have obtained, and the number of school-going children in the family.

As a proxy for social status, caste/religious/ethnic community and membership in any organisation (present or earlier, indicating social connectedness) have been used.

These data were collected by means of a small survey section preceding the interviews.

This survey part was only applied to stakeholders on village level, viz. parents and panchayat members, because these are the target groups for the mobilisation of 'community' participation in education.

Interviews of teachers and administrators focused more on the institutional setup, the professional background of respondents, and their professional perspective on the virtues and pitfalls of 'lay' participation in government provided elementary education. Thus

interviews were less concerned with the capabilities and motivations of the respondents and more concerned with their perception of the impact of community members' capabilities for achieving the desired outcomes of participation, as well as the perceived motivation of community members to actively participate.

Interview guidelines for this group of respondents centred around the assessment of the actual scope of community participation against what is prescribed by law, their perception of the goals of community participation and the appropriateness of the institutional setup to reach these goals, the perception of their own role in participative processes, and the responsiveness of the system to problems being fed back by professionals at different levels.

Indicators for the development of the interview guides and interview guides are provided in Appendix 2 and 3. A detailed description of research methods, proceedings in the field, and data analysis will be provided in the next chapter.

Methods and Strategies for Case Study Research and Data Analysis

3.1 Case Study Research: The comparative method and within-case analysis

There are an impressive number of studies dealing with the effects of decentralisation on the education sector in India, especially in the context of the District Primary Education Project, which has in many ways been a model for administrative decentralisation in the sector[36]. However, most of these studies focus on management aspects, or, where democratic decentralisation has been of concern, on the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), as in most states (including Madhya Pradesh until very recently) PRIs were the main addressees of the devolution of functions in elementary education.

Because of the transfer of significant input management competences at the local level from panchayats to Parent-Teacher-Associations (PTAs) in the years 2005 and 2006, the latter have become central for the functioning of government elementary schools in Madhya Pradesh. Due to the recency of these developments, little has been published about the role of PTAs in educational governance so far[37].

The functioning of PTAs and PRIs involved in educational governance, even where their setup is mandatory and the concerned bodies are statutory, is beyond the scope of data collection done by education departments. Annual reports on the progress of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which are compiled from district level upwards, so far are not concerned with the functioning of these bodies beyond their nominal establishment and election of a president, vice president and working committee. This lack of larger data

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[36] The anthology 'Community Empowerment in Elementary Education in India' (2003) edited by R. Govinda and Rashmi Sharma contains articles on community participation in different states (Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh), and is the largest compilation of studies on the topic. Behar/Kumar (2002) touch elementary education as part of the 11th schedule, which defines the areas of devolution to PRIs. Sarangapani and Vasavi (2003) provide an evaluation of DPEP in the state of Karnataka. Leclercq (2002) examined the functioning of EGS schools in two districts of Madhya Pradesh in terms of student achievement and teacher motivation, but discusses the role of the VEC and PTAs in the schools under studies only marginally.

[37] This does not preclude that there may be a number of valuable unpublished M.A. and PhD theses in the libraries of local universities, which are difficult to trace and even more difficult to physically get hold of. The research section of the RSK had conducted some 'action research' on the functioning of PTAs in a number of districts, but these only started to flow back to the RSK towards the end of 2007. For references to the working of School Committees in other countries see Khan (2006), Bray (2001), Chapman et.al. (2002), and Georgio (1997).

sets on the functioning of PTAs precluded certain types of research methods, most obviously quantitative approaches based on the analysis of such data sets.

As a consequence, the two options available were the collection of large amounts of primary data in a survey exercise, in order to establish correlations between the indicators as developed in chapter 2 and the functioning of PTAs, or conducting a small number of in-depth case studies, in order to identify (rather than hypothesise and test) factors at work in within the cases and build explanations deriving from these observations.

The former option was inhibited by a number of factors. Firstly, to avoid extremely insecure reflux it would have been necessary to visit every school personally, with according logistic effort. Secondly, the incidence of adult illiteracy precluded the distribution of written questionnaires unless one settled for a sampling bias towards literate parents. Given the policy commitment to the inclusion of socially disadvantaged sections in local level educational governance, among which the proportion of illiterate parents can be reasonably expected to be especially high, such sampling bias would have defeated much of the purpose of this study. Thirdly, conducting oral survey interviews of a number of respondents large enough to draw statistically valid inferences was technically infeasible in a single-researcher setup.

Apart from the technical constraints impeding a quantitative research design, there were substantial arguments for giving preference to in-depth case study.

Looking at the aims and motivations with which individuals enter PTAs as arenas of collective action requires the analysis of the action situation in sufficient depth. This would include the institutional surroundings (on the horizontal as well as on the vertical axes), prevalent norms and values in institutions as well as among individuals, and – last but not least – the very biophysical conditions under which collective action takes place. This can only be achieved by being physically present for a period of time, and by building up a relationship to respondents, which goes beyond a one-time encounter.

Furthermore, given that the aim of the study was to identify both the relevance of certain deductively derived factors for an observed outcome (PTA activity), and, as the case may be, to detect _other_ factors or combinations of factors which influence the outcome, the research process required a just amount of flexibility and adaptability, which seemed to be best secured by a semi-inductive approach to in-depth case study.

Consequently, I decided to select a small number of cases, and within each case a limited number of respondents, by purposive (in contrast to randomised) selection, and conduct guideline interviews based on the indicators that were derived from theory and the relevant literature, as depicted in the previous chapter. This decision entailed the important question of how to select the cases.

As Robert Yin (2003:10f) pointed out, the credibility of case studies often suffers from being measured against the standards of statistical methods in terms of representativeness and generalisability.

He noted that case studies and survey studies (as a classical quantitative method) are very different in nature and require different strategies for choosing the objects of study. Given that quantitative studies usually select cases using some randomisation strategy, which ensures the sample represents the general population fairly adequately, qualitative case studies using a small number of cases need a selection strategy which ensures that on a theoretical level the cases have relevance for the larger population of cases[38].

Cases can be selected with a focus on either the dependent variable (the outcome of interest), or the independent variables (the factors causally related to an observed outcome).

The selection of cases on the dependent variable has been considered a no-go option by many researchers, because:

> "When observations are selected on the basis of a particular value of the dependent variable, nothing whatsoever can be learned about the causes of the dependent variable without taking into account other instances when the dependent variable takes on other values" (King/Keohane/Verba 1994:129).

Two of the most common strategies in the 'Comparative Method' (Lijphard 1971) for case selection in comparative politics, the 'most similar' and the 'most different' approaches, focus exclusively on the independent variables assumed to lead to an observed outcome[39].

A number of researchers are critical towards the ability of the comparative method to draw valid inferences on causalities *within* cases[40]. George and Bennett point to the inability of the method of elimination to grasp the impact of different combinations of variables (some of which might be eliminated beforehand in a 'most similar' or 'most different' cases approach) on an outcome, as well as the possibility that in different settings different causes may lead to a similar outcome, or vice versa (cf. George/Bennett 2004:157f).

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[38] For single case studies the criteria for choice tend to be clear-cut, with single cases usually representing either a critical, extreme/unique, revelatory, or a typical case. The choice of these cases depends on the theory to which it is assumed to be critical, typical etc. (cf. Yin 2003:40f, the same argument is also brought forward in Mahoney 2007[38]).

[39] In the most similar cases approach, independent variables showing the same value characteristics in cases are ruled out as not potentially causal for the observed *different* outcome. In contrast, in the most different cases approach, independent variables with value characteristics that are not present in both cases are ruled out as not potentially causal for the observed *similar* outcome. The aim of both strategies is to strengthen causation, viz. determining which conditions cause a certain outcome (cf. George/Bennett 2005:165).

[40] E.g. Goldthorpe (1997) and Lieberson (1991), cited in Mahoney 2007:135.

Acknowledging that research interest in the social sciences is often induced by observable outcomes, some authors have developed standards that support the explanatory power of cases chosen on the dependent rather than the independent variable.

George and Bennett in this context suggest typological strategies for case selection. They propose to ensure not merely a polar variance in outcomes, but to introduce types within different categories of outcome to avoid oversimplification through blinding out the different ways in which positive and negative outcomes may materialise (ibid:253ff). For instance, PTA inactivity may be a result of lacking member participation, but also of stalemate interest constellations between very active members, which paralyse the body and thus lead to inactivity. Both phenomena, while belonging to the same category of outcome, are arguably subject to very different dynamics.

In a recent publication, John Gerring suggested a 'diverse cases' approach to ensure that the choice of cases in small-N studies achieves a maximum variance along the relevant dimension, whether it is the dependent or the independent variable. The selection needs to represent a variety of values of the respective variable, which can be assumed to represent the whole spectrum of values it takes on in real life (Gerring 2007: 97ff)[41].

The 'typological' and the 'diverse cases' approach both reflect an effort to enable researchers to select on the dependent variable (which often is the dimension of interest to researchers) without falling into the traps of selection bias which is usually associated with it[42].

Irrespective of this question, George and Bennett are generally sceptical towards the utility of comparison *between* cases for drawing conclusions on observations *within* individual cases.

To strengthen the internal validity of causal inferences in an individual case (before comparing it to another case) they recommend applying within-case methods of analysis. The 'tools' they suggest to do so are the 'congruence' method and the 'process-tracing' method. The essential feature of the congruence method is that it starts from a theoretical proposition about the relation of an independent and the dependent variable, and assesses the ability of this proposition in explaining (or predicting) the observed

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[41] Gerring argues that such selection logic is widely applied by social scientists, and its advantage lies in introducing variance in key variables, especially when cases are selected on the dependent variable. The problem is that there has been little methodological defence of this research strategy, and the lack of a recognisable name of this approach has made it difficult for researchers to a) identify it as a proper strategy, and b) explain its logic to the scientific audience (cf. Gerring 2007:101).

[42] Barbara Geddes makes the same point when she says that if cases are selected on the outcome, it is necessary to test hypotheses on cases representing a reasonable range of variation on the outcome (Geddes 2003:96f).

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outcome in a specific case. If the outcome in the case is matching the theoretical prediction, it can be assumed that a causal relationship may exist[43] (cf. ibid.:181).

A number of researchers have referred to such efforts to develop explanations (rather than correlations) as the 'mechanism-based' approach (e.g. Elster, Hedström/Swedberg). The aim of this approach is to open the 'black box' of the processes under which combinations of factors lead to an observable outcome of interest, instead of merely claiming a causal relation between factors and outcomes, as it often happens in statistical regression analysis (cf. Hedström 2005).

Causal mechanisms according to Hedström explain how certain key factors regularly bring about a specific type of outcome (ibid:25). Mechanisms link actors and their actions to aggregate social outcomes, that is they explain social phenomena by explaining the causes and effects of the actions of individual actors. In this sense, the mechanism-based approach is essentially based on key assumtions of rational-choice theory.

The explanatory power of mechanisms is evaluated in terms of their ability to establish *patterns* of causality producing a certain type of outcome across space and time, which are congruent with a set of theoretical assumptions guiding the research questions. The approach, as understood by Hedström, is essentially deductive, but aims to carve out more 'fine-grained' explanations to social phenomena, thereby enriching existing theories.

Process-tracing is aiming at a historical explanation of a causal relationship, namely *how* independent variables have lead to an observed outcome (cf.ibid.:206). According to George and Bennett, process tracing is a suitable method for testing theories under conditions of multiple interaction effects, where it gets increasingly difficult to explain an outcome by only a few independent variables. In fact, process-tracing is described as the instrument of choice for detecting causal mechanisms by some authors (e.g. Checkers 2007).

Mahoney points out that process-tracing has also successfully been used for theory development. The concept of path-dependency for example has emerged from extensive process tracing in case studies (cf. Mahoney 2007:126). This is important, because it points to the usefulness of process-tracing for inductive and hypothesis-generating research.

Gläser and Laudel point out the importance of triangulation[44] of data for the internal validity of within-case analysis. Triangulation can refer to the sources of data as well as

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[43] Robert Yin refers to a similar procedure as 'pattern matching', cf. Yin 2003:116ff).

to the methods applied for generating data, and are viewed as an essential strategy for ensuring the validity of causal inference (cf. Gläser/Laudel 2006:102f).

Choosing a viable approach for case selection living up to the standards of internal validity, reliability and generalisability seems a task to be almost impossible to accomplish in the face of the range of opinions and practice in social science research.

The inherent difficulty when choosing a small number of cases for study, as Gläser and Laudel emphasise, is that choosing a case constitutes a first result of empirical research, rather than a preliminary exercise: To properly define and chose cases it is important to know the field sufficiently well.

How much one can know about the field before physically entering it crucially depends on the definition of the case. When cases are located downward the macro-micro scale (arguably, village schools and their governing networks are located far more towards the micro-end than education ministries at the state or national level), it will be difficult to get hold of any relevant data before physically entering the field.

Given that PTAs at least in the Indian context have not been subject to extensive research as yet, the only viable option for choosing cases appeared to be the selection on the dependent variable while ensuring reasonable variation (approaching what Gerring calls the 'diverse cases' strategy). As Gläser and Laudel have pointed out, the merit of qualitative multiple case studies lies in the option to alter the choice of cases in the course of research (i.e. excluding selected or including new cases) if the insights generated from the first case necessitate adaptation. The choice of further cases then profits from the insights generated from previous cases (c.f. Gläser/Laudel 2006:95).

3.2   Defining the Case

To get a clearer picture of what constitutes the 'case' and what has to be studied in the case to answer the research questions, it seems useful to distinguish between the case as the setting and the units of analysis within the case which need to be examined to answer the research questions (cf. Yin 2003:39ff). This approach can hopefully accommodate the complex social and institutional context in which the units of analysis are assumed to function.

In this study I have chosen to define the school as the case. Within this case, there are four units of analysis. This case construction is visualised below.

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[44] The term triangulation has been introduced in the context of multi-method research, e.g. Denzin (2003). Yin has conceptualised four types of triangulation, namely data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (cf. Yin 2003:98f).

Fig. 4: Conceptualisation of the case and its units of analysis
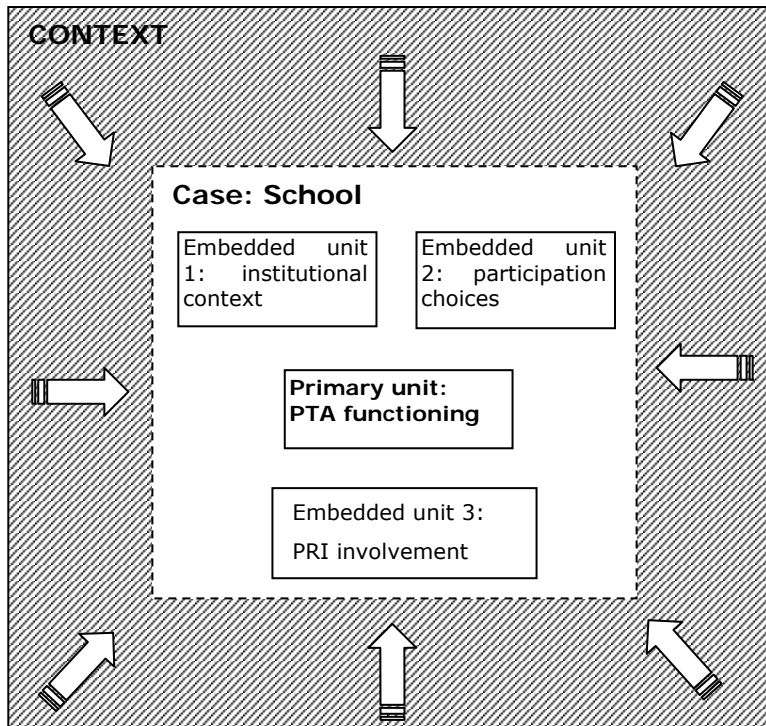
Source: own, based on Yin's case study designs (Yin 2003:40)

The primary unit of analysis is the functioning of PTAs in the schools selected as cases, viz. what PTAs actually do in the schools under study. The main sources of data are interviews with parents, teachers, PRI members, administrators, and the PTA meeting minutes, which record all activities of the PTA throughout the school year.

The remaining three units of analysis represent the factors assumed to influence the outcome of the primary unit of analysis. I refer to these as 'embedded' units.

The *formal* institutional context in which the school and the PTA function constitutes the first embedded unit of analysis. Sources of data are the relevant legislation and government orders, as well as interviews with administrators at different levels.

The second embedded unit is the motivation of parents to participate in the activities of the PTA - or to refrain from doing so. Interviews conducted with parents and teachers constitute the primary source of data for this unit.

The third embedded unit is the involvement of PRIs in school governance and monitoring. The primary source of data again were interviews with panchayat members and teachers. I have chosen to examine schools (rather than states, districts or blocks) as cases to avoid the problem of heterogeneous context conditions such as different legislation,

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administrative structures (in case of states), and factors relating to the motivations and priorities of actors in different government and administrative constituencies.

However, because of the fact that the case design contains embedded units of analysis, rendering independent variables of the central unit of analysis dependent in the embedded units of analysis, possible combinations of factors influencing the observed outcome multiply. This is why I assume within-case explanation to be important for understanding how different factors combine to produce an outcome, and thus analytically every case is treated as a single case, in an effort to trace causal factors for the functioning of the PTA in the particular case.

Only in a second step the value characteristics of detected variables and how they combine in the cases are compared, to trace differences and similarities between the cases. This proceeding will be further elaborated in section 3.5.

3.3   Location of the research site and choice of cases

As indicated above, controlling context conditions effectively also meant a reduction of the population of cases from which to choose.

To begin with, the choice of district was guided by two considerations. The first concerned the potential for generalisability of research results beyond the population of cases. One rather obvious factor potentially impeding generalisability in the Indian context is the composition of the population: informal institutions such as social norms governing interaction within and between different caste and religious groups can be assumed to have an impact on local governance processes.

Thus, the district should have a population structure that represents 'typical' features in terms of the relative proportion of different categories of the population, viz. general castes, OBC communities, and SC and ST population. This excludes all districts where tribal and scheduled caste population is significantly higher than the state and national average[45].

Along the same line of reasoning, I decided to choose a district that is *not* notorious for its social cleavages and violent confrontation between dominant and subordinate caste groups, which applies (to differing extents) to those 12 districts in Bundelkhand region

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[45] The national average of SC/ST population is 16.48% resp. 8.08%, the state average being at 15.4% resp. 20.3%, with 13 districts at the southern borders of the state accounting for the majority of the ST population.

bordering the state of Uttar Pradesh[46]. Both types of districts are depicted in figure 5 below.

Fig. 5 Districts with high ST population/belonging to Bundelkhand region

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■ High ST population
■ Districts belonging to Bundelkhand region
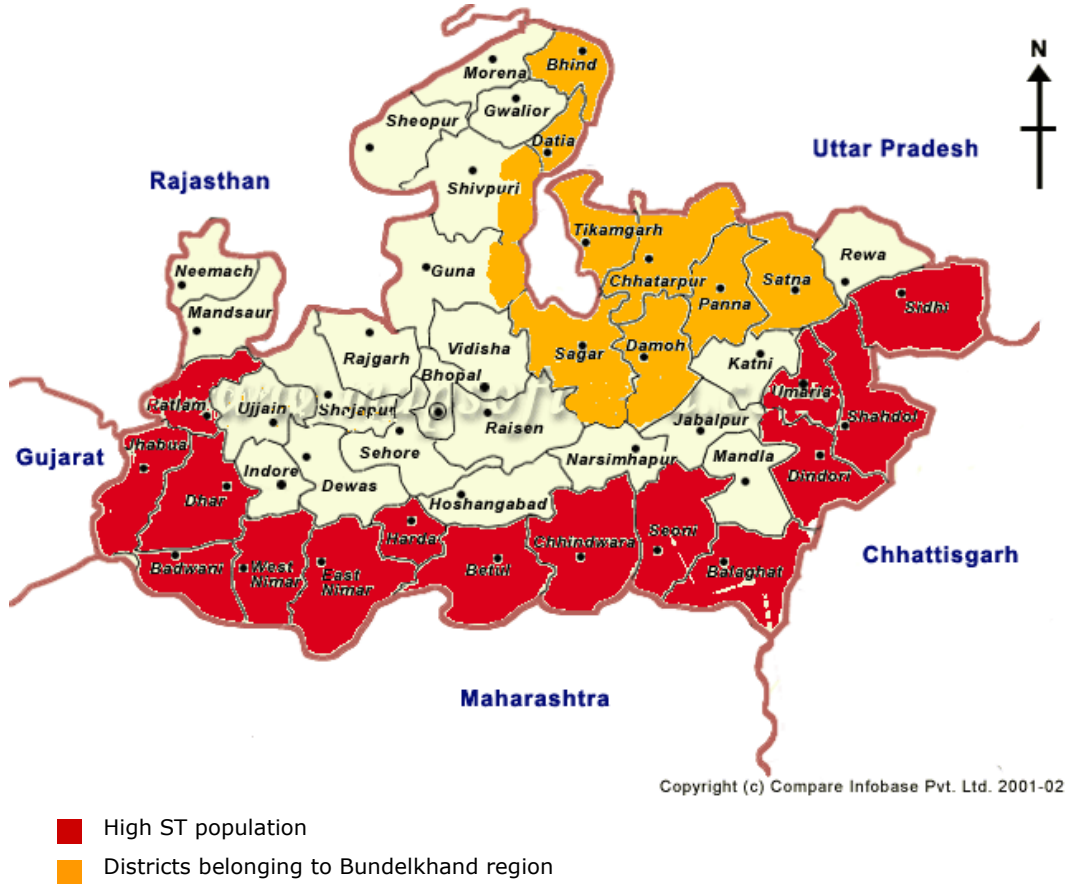
Source: mapsofindia.com, marking added

A second consideration for the choice of the district was the overall functioning of the schools. The most important indicator for school functioning is undoubtedly what students learn in school – all efforts that are being made in national and state education policy should ultimately aim at raising the achievements (not merely enrolment or attendance) of students in government school[47].

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[46] I am thankful to Prof. Krishna Kumar for pointing out to me that studying school functioning in one of the most deprived regions of India does not lend itself for broader generalisations, besides imposing great constraints to research proceedings due to the lack of basic infrastructure such as accessible roads, telephone and internet connections, medical care etc.

[47] Initially I planned to make the literacy rate a criterion for sampling because higher literacy rates point to reasonable access of larger parts of the population to the education system and at least basic levels of school functioning. However literacy rates are not suited to draw conclusions about the *current* functioning of the school system, because a) states like Madhya Pradesh have a legacy of high adult illiteracy that still impacts literacy rates strongly, and b) it often happens that those states with the lowest total literacy rates show the best results in student achievement (cf. ASER 2005, Times of India 06.02.2006, Editorial). In these cases, access and retention rather than school functioning as such seem to be the problem.

Consequently, I decided to select a district with comparatively high student achievement. The simple assumption underlying this strategy was that factors constraining PTA activity in a comparatively functional environment are likely to hold true in dysfunctional environments as well, while those conducive to PTA activity may be found to a lesser extent in dysfunctional environments.

Since student achievement levels are not systematically tested and statistically documented by state or union governments[48], I relied on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), based on a large-scale achievement test conducted in almost all districts of India under the auspices of Pratham Charitable Trust. The Report had attracted much public attention when it was published in January 2006 and was lauded for providing an objective picture of the status of elementary education in India (cf. Banerji/Wadhwa 2006; The Hindu, 06.02.2006).

According to ASER 2005, learning levels regarding reading and comprehension as well as basic numeric skills were quite gloomy in Madhya Pradesh (as well as in many other states where this would be less expected, e.g. Tamil Nadu). The average percentage of class V children who can read short stories and solve division and subtraction was 51.5% and. 37.5% respectively.

Fig.6 Districts with high student achievement according to ASER 2005

Source: mapsofindia.com, marking added

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[48] This observation is not wholly true – NCERT had conducted a national survey on student achievement in 2002, but it had not been published until ASER and its results received so much public attention and debate in 2006.

There were, however, eight upward outliers: Neemuch, Ratlam, Dhar, West Nimar, Dewas, Harda, Sehore, and Shajapur. Dhar, West Nimar and Harda were ruled out because they belong to the tribal belt of MP, which features unique social and economic structures and cleavages between the tribal and the non-tribal population.

This left the districts of Neemuch, Ratlam, Shajapur, Dewas and Sehore for consideration.The final choice among the eligible districts was based mainly on practical reasons that I considered important for the viability of field research. Public infrastructure (accessible roads, telephone and internet connection, medical facilities etc.) were rated best in the districts of Dewas, Shajapur and Sehore, due to their proximity of the major industrial centres of Indore, Bhopal and Ujjain.

The choice of the district was made in consultation with the RSK and the District Project Officers (SSA) of Sehore and Shajapur districts[49]. Both of these leading administrative officers were very cooperative and invited research in their districts.

The choice finally fell on Sehore for largely practical considerations: Due to the proximity to Bhopal, there was opportunity to commute back and forth between the district headquarter and the state capital, which was frequently used to visit the RSK for further consultation.

Furthermore, the presence of two reputed NGOs in the district, Samarthan Centre for Development Support[50] and Pratham Charitable Trust[51], enabled further networking and support, which included finding accommodation, settling all bureaucratic necessities, and, last but not least, touring villages in the block and facilitating discussions with villagers to get a first impression of the field[52].

Having tied down the district, the choice of the individual schools was made in consultation with staff of the Zilla Shiksha Kendra (ZSK) Sehore and the Janpad Shiksha Kendra (JPSK), on the basis of their judgement of PTA activity in the block.

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[49] The DPO of Dewas district could not be consulted, due to his absence from the meeting of District Project Officers in the RSK in February 2006.

[50] Samarthan Centre for Development Support is a network of voluntary organisations promoting participatory government in Madhya Pradesh and primarily working with PRIs at different levels. It has two main centres (apart form the headquarters in Bhopal) in Sehore and Panna districts.

[51] Pratham is a public charitable trust that has emerged out of a handful of activists teaching children in the slums of Mumbai. Their activity in the education sector has spread to 14 states. Pratham offers additional classes to weak children in government primary schools; and is editing institution of the Annual Status of Education Report. Pratham is supported by Unicef and works in close cooperation with the union and state governments. Pratham has a state base office, but otherwise is organised very decentrally, cooperating with activists in all the districts and blocks of Madhya Pradesh.

[52] Five villages were visited this way. In all these villages, there was opportunity to meet teaching staff and get an impression of the number of students, teachers, facilities and equipment. In two of the villages, members of the gram panchayat were available for discussion.

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Conducting research within a small administrative unit had the practical advantage that moderate distance between the locations minimised the time spent on commuting back and forth and increased the time spent in the field. The ability to easily visit two case locations in one day (esp. on those numerous occasions when I failed to accomplish a task that was planned for a given day in one location) was vital for getting things done in an environment not particularly conducive to keeping schedules[53].

There are three administrative units between the district and the individual school. These are the blocks, clusters and *sankuls*. Blocks constitute the lowest level of general administrative and political constituencies, while *sankuls* and clusters are units of educational administration. Clusters are a unit of between 10 and 14 schools located in a radius of 8km around a government middle school that has been designated *jan shiksha kendra* (JSK, formerly Cluster Resource Centre)[54]. The *sankul* is a financial unit comprising three clusters located around a government secondary school that has been designated *sankul kendra*. Principals of government secondary schools are authorised to draw teacher salaries from the bank account of the *sankul* and distribute it to the teachers in cash[55].

Significant variance in the outcome of interest (PTA activity) was detected on the level of the *sankul*. According to ZSK staff, in two clusters belonging to one such *sankul,* schools showed great variance in PTA functioning. At the upper scale, there was a middle school that represented something of a reference case, being perceived one of the best functioning PTAs in the entire district. On the low end, there was another middle school, which was infamous for the dysfunctionality of its PTA.

To ensure confidentiality towards village level respondents and cluster level administrators[56], the clusters in which the schools were located will be referred to as cluster 1 and cluster 2. The schools belonging to the respective clusters will be assigned the same numbers. Cluster 1 is a rural cluster; its JSK is located 12km southwest of the city of Sehore along the Bhopal-Indore highway.

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[53] Appointments, especially with parents and teachers, were generally handled rather casually, and it happened quite often that I came to a village for an interview appointment to find the respondent had left for some other business.

[54] This structure was created under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). It is mainly a unit for providing academic support to teachers and facilitate peer learning and sharing of best practices.

[55] Madhya Pradesh is quite backward in this respect. In other states (e.g. Andhra Pradesh), teacher salaries are transferred directly to the personal bank accounts of teachers.

[56] Jan Shikshaks, teachers and respondents in the villages were assured that neither their names nor the names of their villages/clusters will be published. This was necessary to create an atmosphere of confidentiality so that respondents need not fear any consequences in case authorities at a higher level should demand to be informed about the outcomes of research.

Cluster 2 is partly urban and partly rural, with the JSK located on the fringes of the municipal area of the district headquarter. All schools chosen as cases were located in the rural areas.

The two middle schools representing the top and bottom, respectively, of a continuum of PTA functioning were selected (MS1 in cluster 1 and MS2 in cluster 2) for study.

However, middle schools are rather large and consequentially have a larger teaching staff and parent community. They do not represent the average setting of the typical rural primary school with two or three teachers, comparatively small student numbers, and students who predominantly reside in the village in which the school is located. For this reason, two primary schools were added to the 'sample'. PS1 represents a moderately functional PTA, while PS2 represents a dysfunctional PTA.

In the course of research, EGS1 was included because it belongs to the same panchayat area as PS1, but the level of PTA functioning in the former was substantially lower than in the latter. This was somewhat counter-intuitive, considering that under the EGS scheme schools were opened on community demand, which suggests a wider interest of parents in enhancing educational opportunities.

The discrepancy between PTA activity within one *gram panchayat* area may indicate either that PTA functioning indeed (as pointed out by RSK staff) has been successfully made independent from the functioning and priorities of the panchayat, or on the contrary, that the widely observed phenomenon of panchayat neglect towards smaller villages in the panchayat areas (cf. Behar/Kumar 2002, Kumar 2006, Srivastava 2005) adversely affects the functioning of other participative bodies such as PTAs in these villages. Including EGS 1 as a case followed the logic of case selection to refine or test findings from previous cases, as suggested by Gläser and Laudel.

Fig. 7 Selected cases according to PTA activity

Active PTA   inactive PTA

It should be noted that middle schools have one PTA for the primary and upper primary section each. I have focussed on the PTAs of the primary sections in both middle schools, because they are assigned a wider range of responsibilities, as the midday meal programme and the distribution of incentives to students (free textbooks and uniforms), which are central evaluation criteria for PTA activity, are restricted to the primary

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grades[57]. In addition, it must be noted that in the middle schools under study the separation of PTAs for the two school sections appeared to be formal rather than functional –PTAs in both middle schools usually executed their functions (including the fortnightly meetings in MS2) jointly.

Data collected at village level included student and teacher attendance registers, PTA meeting registers, school account records, and between eight and ten interviews per village with members of different stakeholder groups, viz. parents (both participating and non-participating in the PTA), panchayat members, and teachers.

Data collected at cluster level comprises the compiled data submitted to the block level for the formulation of the Cluster Education Programme for the school year 2006-2007, in which data on village level enrolment, retention, learning achievement, out of school children, school finances, infrastructure etc. is compiled. In addition, the *jan shikshaks* of both clusters were interviewed.

At block and district levels, collected data comprised statistics (vacancies of administrative posts, utilisation of funds received under SSA), recent government orders regarding the proceedings of PTA work, and manuals for the training of PTA members. Interviews were conducted with staff of the *janpad* and *zilla shiksha kendra* (Block and District Project Offices, SSA) and the Block and District Education Officers.

Thus triangulation of sources in this study has been ensured by interviewing respondents from different stakeholder groups, while triangulation of data generation was achieved by a combination of conducting interviews, collecting school-based statistical data and minutes, and observation.

To validate the findings emerging from the field studies, a number of interviews were conducted at the state level in a second brief trip to Bhopal in September 2007. The interview guidelines based upon the results of data analysis and largely served the purpose of determining whether and to what extent the findings from the cases are generalisable for rural government schools in Madhya Pradesh state. These interviews further offered the opportunity to keep up to date with respect to the latest policy developments.

3.4   Choice of respondents and modes of data collection

There were two criteria for the choice of potential respondents belonging to different stakeholder groups:

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[57] It is currently planned to extend the midday meal programme to the upper primary stage, but up to the school year 2007-2008, this has not been implemented.

1. Office/profession (head teachers, administrators, PTA presidents, *sarpanches*, panchayat members)
2. Differentiation: regular/irregular participants (PTA working committee members); weak/well-performing child (parents)

Practically, at school/village level availability and willingness[58] determined who among the persons targeted as eligible persons was actually interviewed:

I introduced differentiation as a criterion for the selection of respondents because the choice of non-elected PTA members as a very large group of potential respondents required a more structured approach. Thus, those parents who engaged with the PTA on a regular basis were chosen by that virtue, provided they were ready to be interviewed. For the vast majority of non-engaging parents I introduced the criterion of child performance in school. For this purpose, I asked teachers to name the parents of three weak and three well performing children in each grade. This narrowed potential respondents to about 30 persons per school. Out of these, two or three parents were interviewed, depending again on their presence in the village[59] and willingness to respond.

Table 6: Respondents in administration and government, by level and function

	Function	No. of respondents	Gender	Institution
Cluster level	Jan Shikshak	2	m	RGSM
Block level	Block Academic Coordinator	1	m	RGSM
	Block Education Officer	1	m	GoMP
District level	District Project Coordinator	1	m	RGSM
	District Gender Coordinator	1	f	RGSM
	District Accountant	1	m	RGSM
	District Education Officer	1	m	GoMP
State level	Principal Secretary, School Education	1	m	GoMP
	Secretary Panchayati Raj	1	m	GoMP
	Head Enrolment & Retention, RSK	1	m	RGSM
	Addl. Mission Director, RGSM	1	m	RGSM
Total		**12**		

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[58] Willingness occasionally proved to be a difficult one, as it is considered very rude to say 'no' into someone's face, much more so when the face belongs to a foreigner. As a result, a number of attempted interviews were basically unusable.

[59] Initially I tried to fix proper dates with villagers to conduct the interviews. I abandoned such efforts in the course of fieldwork after exceeding frustration arising from respondents repeatedly not keeping appointments. I thus resorted to the strategy of going to people's houses straight away, and then conduct interviews with persons available at that time.

Making children's school performance a criterion for the choice of interviewees was based on the shared understanding of teachers and *jan shikshaks* that parents of students who perform well value their children's education higher (which is expressed by the support they extend to their children's learning), and are thus more willing to engage in the PTAs than those who are (allegedly) indifferent. Choosing respondents along this line of argument provided opportunity to look behind this assumption, while also increasing the variance in answering patterns. I thus followed a similar variance-maximising logic as during case selection, in the effort to select respondents who represent the parent population more adequately than only working committee members, or only active or passive parents.

Table 7: Respondents at village/school level by function and gender

Function	No. of respondents		
	Total	Male	Female
PTA president/Vice president	5	3	2
Elected PTA members	9	6	3
Non-elected PTA members	17	8	9
Head teachers	4	4	0
Teachers	5	4	1
Private school teachers	4	4	0
Sarpanches	2	2	0
Panchayat members	8	5	3
Total	**54***	**36**	**18**

*4 respondents are double-listed because they held multiple functions
 (panchayat member and PTA member), so the actual number of respondents at school level was 50

Interviews followed the 'expert interview' approach of Gläser and Laudel (2006). These authors argue that the definition of what an 'expert' is should be extended from the usual association of a functional elite whose members have expert knowledge on a certain subject (e.g. scientists, high level politicians and administrators in different ministries). Since social scientists often are exploring processes in social context to which they themselves do not belong, they need to gain insights from people who live and act in the context of interest. These people, even though they are not experts by function, become experts for the researcher because they can act as sources of information on the processes and social contexts they are part of (ibid.:10). Expert interviews are a method to tap this knowledge. They are an appropriate tool for studies aiming at reconstructing social situations and processes.

The interviewing techniques for expert interviews may vary depending on the aim of the study and the characteristics of the 'expert'. Frequently mentioned techniques in social sciences on an ascending scale of standardisation are 'narrative', 'biographic', 'focussed',

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'problem-centred', 'guideline assisted', 'non-standardised', 'semi-standardised' and 'standardised' interviews (ibid.:38).

Because expert interviews serve the aim of extracting information on social processes in specific contexts, Gläser and Laudel suggest that the guideline interview is a suitable technique. The guideline ensures that information on all aspects considered important for the reconstruction of the process of interest (in our case(s) the functioning of the PTA) is asked of the respondent. At the same time, the course of the interview can be kept more or less natural because it is not important to keep a certain order of questions, and respondents have the opportunity to put forth aspects of interest that have so far not been considered by the researcher (ibid.:41).

An issue of enduring inner conflict was the decision whether to record the interviews. In most of the methodological literature on qualitative research, audio-recording of interviews is mandated because the multiple tasks of asking, listening, understanding and taking notes are a great challenge to any researcher, and inevitably result in a loss or manipulation of information.

On the other hand, it is acknowledged that audio-recording does impact on the interview situation, and may alter respondents' answering behaviour towards socially desirable answers (cf. ibid.:51). Robert Yin regards audio-recording as largely a matter of preference of the researcher. While he acknowledges that no other method can produce as accurate renditions of an interview as audio-records, he considers it perfectly legitimate not to use them when the researcher feels they are a strain on the interview situation (Yin 2003:92).

In a different context, John Hailey has emphasised that the cultural context and local circumstances in much of rural South Asia are more conducive to informal and personalised modes of interaction than to more functional and technical approaches[60].

Most researchers and NGO activists[61] whom I consulted before entering the villages shared this perception. The tenor of all these discussions suggested that the intention to audio-record interviews, if properly done with permission of the respondents, requires a lot more time invested into confidence building in the field, and imposes constant danger of inducing respondents to give answers he or she anticipates the interviewer wants to

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[60] Hailey has studied the modi operandi of successful South Asian NGOs and in this context come to the conclusion that the formalistic and technical methods of participatory decision-making in development projects are regarded with suspicion. Instead, long-standing personal relations to villagers and informal modes of listening and discussing were the key feature of the success of these organisations to build mutual trust and cooperation (Hailey 2001).

[61] Manju Rajoriya (RSK research section), Dr. Aishwarya Mahajan (Action Aid India, Education Section), Ashish Mainkar and Nanda Gole (Pratham), Shafiq Khan (Samarthan)

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hear in fear of saying something 'wrong'. In case of government employees and officials it was pointed out that a recording device might reduce respondents' readiness to leave official rhetoric and reflect more openly on own experiences and opinions.

Indeed ex post I feel that at least in some of the cases (MS2 and PS2) audio-recording would have prevented any meaningful research, because it would have interfered with the anyhow at times challenging process of building mutual trust between me as a researcher and some of the potential respondents, especially teachers.

Teachers and *jan shikshaks* were tangibly concerned about the possibility that their responses could somehow reach senior administrators, even though confidential treatment of the information was assured to every respondent.

In addition, parent and teacher respondents in initial 'warming-up' conversations tended to report that cooperation between parents and teachers in the PTA was smooth and reasonably effective, when on closer inquiry there were tangible disparities and frictions, a tendency which the presence of a recording device is unlikely to reduce[62].

All of these considerations led to the decision to refrain from audio-recording interviews in favour of taking notes, and instead write memory minutes as detailed as possible immediately after the interview[63]. This necessarily means a compromise between reliability and validity of data. This also has some implications for data analysis, which will be discussed below.

All interviews except those at state level were conducted in Hindi language. Speaking the local language proved to be extremely valuable for building rapport and increasing people's readiness to communicate and take part in interviews, and somewhat balanced the rather cautious behaviour of some respondents.

The important aspect was that the ability to directly converse created the perception that not only I as an interviewer came to take information, which may be more or less (probably less) meaningful to individual respondents, but that they also could benefit

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[62] Stelios N. Georgiou has made the same experience while researching on parent involvement in schools in Cyprus, asserting that statements about potential conflict in the cooperation between parents and teachers were preferably made when the tape recorder was turned off (Georgiou 1997:194).

[63] Writing detailed interview minutes based on memory and interview notes, and the process of typing it on the computer later on, had the one great advantage that data could not be simply stored away for later analysis (which is very tempting at the end of an exhausting day). By engaging with the minutes repeatedly, reflections on the interview situation, the appropriateness of interview guidelines, and further questions arising from the data were triggered, and incorporated into the research strategy. This brought the data collection process (unintentionally) close to procedures in grounded theory, where the analysis of already collected data occurs parallel to the proceeding data collection.

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from this relation by getting to know things about a far away country and share friendly relations with a foreigner. Personal relationships were very important for getting information beyond the surface, and much information flew in casual conversations over tea rather than in a scheduled interview situation.

There was no single native speaking person accompanying all interviews, but key informants in the respective villages, who also assisted in contacting (and often enough finding) respondents, accompanied most village level interviews. Key informants were those persons who were either particularly involved in the school, or otherwise engaged in local governance processes.

In two cases, these were PTA presidents (EGS1 and PS1), in two other cases, these were villagers affiliated to Samarthan (MS2 and PS2), and in one case, the *anganwadi* (preschool) worker took over this role (MS1).

3.5   **Data Analysis**

For analysing the data, I have followed Gläser and Laudel's approach to qualitative content analysis, which is based on a method of the same name developed by Phillip Mayring. Content analysis in its origins is a quantitative method based on an evaluation of the frequency of specific information in large amounts of text.

Developing a qualitative approach to content analysis aimed at the analysis of the *meaning* connoted to key terms in a text (rather than their frequency), while retaining the rule- and theory-based procedure that is characteristic for quantitative content analysis (Gläser/Laudel 2006:192).

What characterises all content analysis approaches is the creation of a database that is distinct from the primary source (interview transcripts, newspaper articles, archive records etc.). This is in contrast to most other qualitative approaches to data analysis, which work with the original text throughout the whole process (e.g. narration analysis, objective hermeneutics, free coding in grounded theory, and free interpretation).

Qualitative Content Analysis regards the text which needs to be analysed as 'material containing data' (ibid.:193). Thus, only those parts of the text which contain information relevant to the research questions are viewed as 'data'. These data need to be extracted from the text in a step preceding the analysis.

Extraction is a rule-based process, the determination of rules serves to make explicit and facilitate the verifiability of the inevitably interpretative process of extraction. The rules of extraction of data are based on a core system of categories that reflects the variables and factors derived from theoretical conceptualisation.

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Gläser and Laudel emphasise that since extraction is an act of interpretation, it is a subjective exercise of understanding and evaluation, even if there are explicit rules (ibid.: 195).

Fig. 8: Basic proceeding of qualitative content analysis
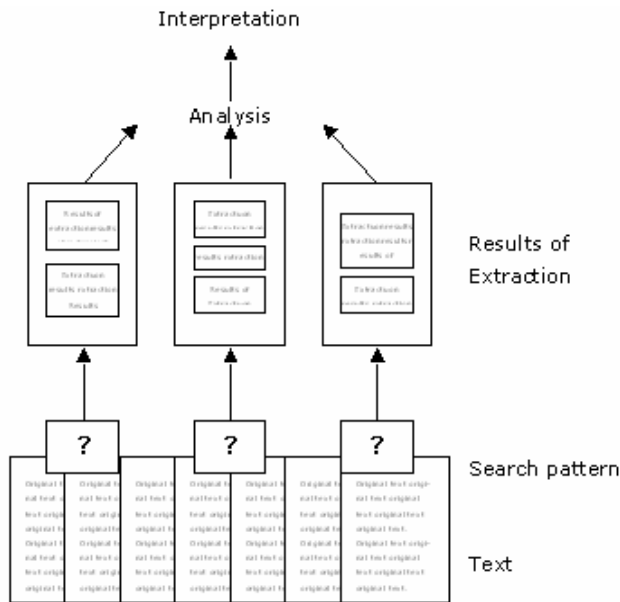
Source: Gläser/Laudel 2006:194

The dilemma one faces when working with minutes written from memory, rather than transcripts, is that the database thus created by the researcher is distinct from the primary text as 'produced' by a respondent. Treating this database in the same way in which one would treat the original text is inappropriate, because it conceals that the information is filtered through the 'lense' of the researcher, with all her implicit and explicit assumptions on the topic of interest. Reconstructing an interview in a protocol, no matter how much effort is put into sticking close to what the respondent has said, is an act of valuation of information: The researcher in the course of the interview decides which information is important and needs to be recorded and which is not.

Therefore, what inevitably happens is a process of 'extraction' as Gläser and Laudel describe it in qualitative content analysis. While it would be wrong to state that this process is entirely intuitive, as the researcher will stick to the interview guidelines in determining what information is relevant, its accuracy is not intersubjectively verifiable (and in fact not revisible for the researcher herself).

While this is a serious methodological constraint, I still strongly hold the opinion that verifiability of data and a hundred percent sound methodological proceeding is of limited value when the *validity* (or in extreme cases the availability) of data is severely affected by the use of a recording device.

The difference between qualitative content analysis and coding (as done in grounded theory) lies in the combination of deduction and induction for generating categories. While the basic matrix of codes is deductively derived from the same theoretical considerations which have guided the development of the research question and the variables and indicators to answer these questions, the *value characteristics* (or properties) of these codes are not deductively determined or scaled, but emerge from the data. In addition, new variables which have not been anticipated by deduction may be included in the system, but without deleting original categories altogether. Keeping the base matrix constant ensures that the relation between the research question and the direction of analysis does not get lost (ibid.: 198)[64].

Fig. 9: Sources of data and code systems
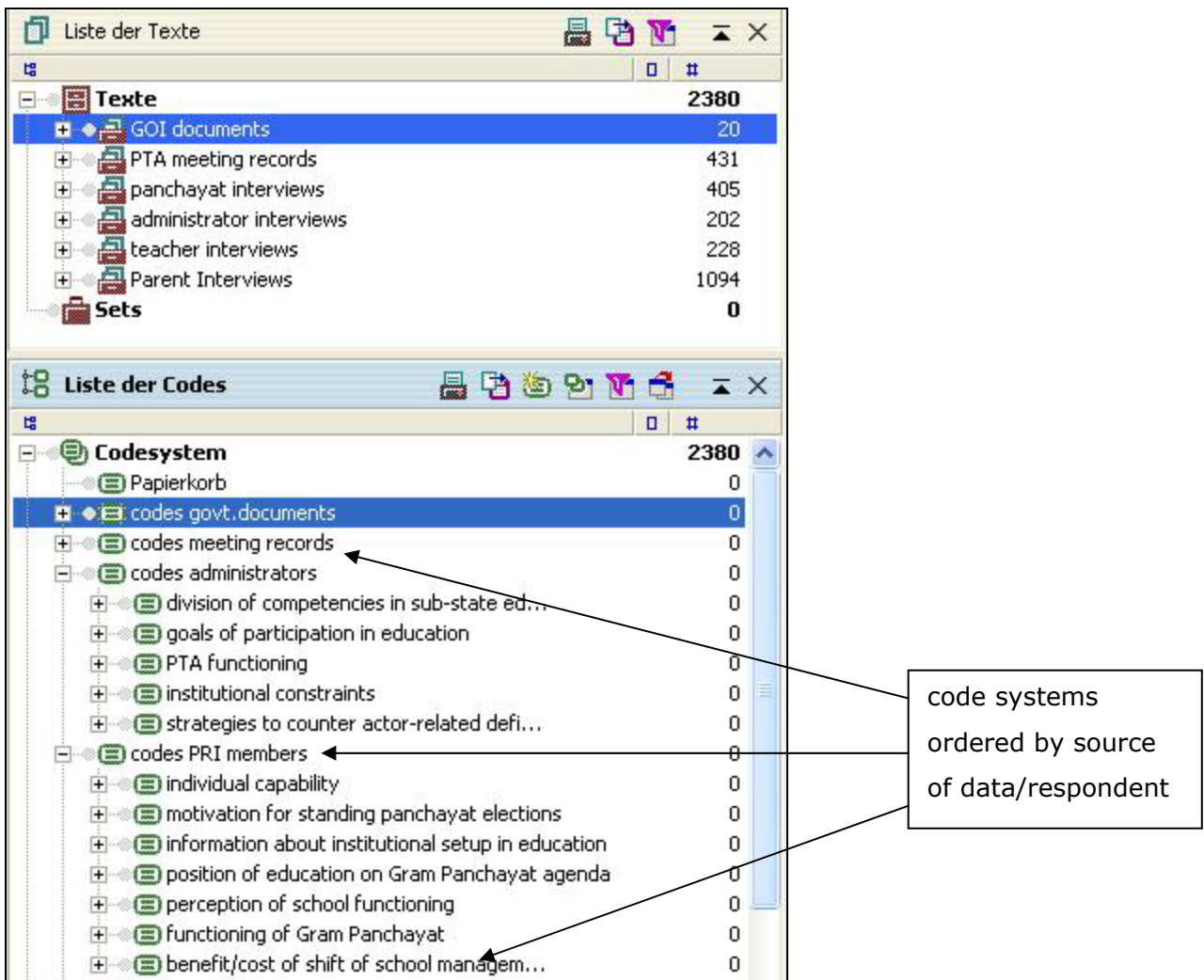
Source: own, generated from MaxQDA

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[64] Robert Yin suggests maintaining a 'case study protocol', in which all changes in the research proceedings (including new sets of variables to be introduced in the collection of data) are recorded, for the same purpose (Yin 2003:78).

Since different interview guidelines were developed for different groups of respondents in accordance with the indicators discussed in the previous chapter (cf. Appendix 3), different code systems emerged during the process of analysis, as illustrated in figure 9 above. The major categories as deductively derived for each group of respondents (e.g. information, motivation, values, in case of parent interviews) were ordered according to the unit of analysis (PTA functioning, participation choices, institutional context, PRI involvement) in the context of which a certain value (or property) was assigned to the category by a respondent.

The matrix thus consists of the units of analysis at the first level, the superior codes assigned to the deductively generated categories, and the subcodes assigned to the value characteristics/properties as emerging inductively from the data.

I have attempted to visualise this in figure 10. Superior codes (green) represent the categories derived from theory. The subcodes (red) represent the value characteristics or properties of these categories as they emerged from the data.

Fig.10: deductive and inductive levels of coding
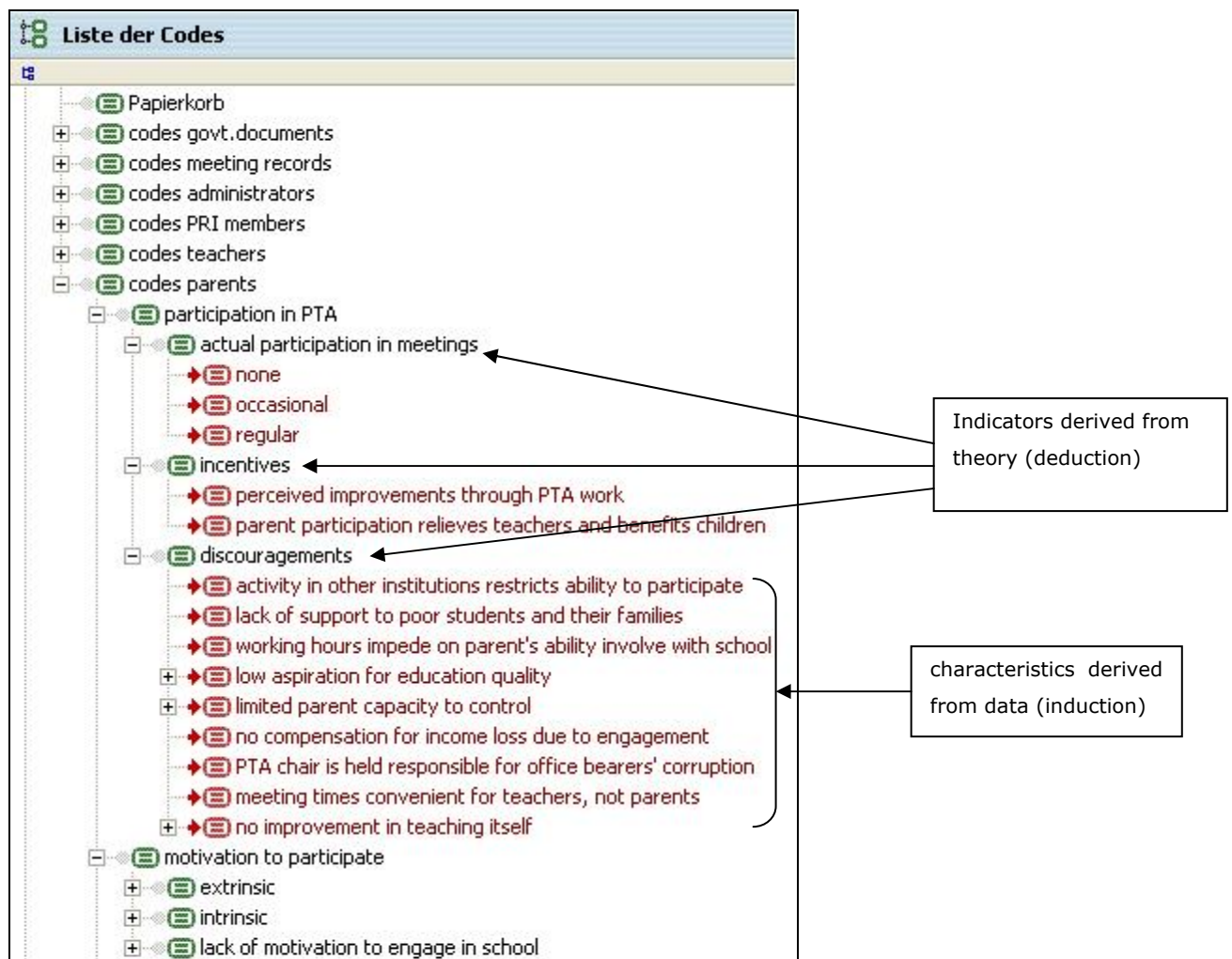
Source: Own, generated from MaxQDA

On the technical side, I have decided to use MaxQDA software for the administration and analysis of the data. All interview protocols, and policy documents (if available as soft copy) were fed into the programme and and coded according to the procedure described above. For inductive categorising, I used the free coding tool in MaxQDA. New codes and subcodes were generated for every statement that did not fit into any of the previously generated codes. The system of categories underwent a continuous process of restructuring, involving the creation of new codes at different levels, shifting subcodes to other superior codes, or merging redundant codes.

Since the visual tools are limited in the basic version of the software, most of the charts and diagrammes in chapters 6 and 7 were created in MS Excel, after exporting data sheets from MaxQDA.

The analysis of the data was guided by the aim to build explainations for the functioning of the local PTA which consider the institutional framework (structure) as well as the actions of individuals (agency), conceptualised as 'rules-in-use' in the theoretical framework.

I have tried to structure the results of within-case analysis according to the effect of the conditions on the primary outcome of interest, namely PTA activity. Gläser and Laudel suggest five types of conditions (ibid.:245):

- Necessary conditions that need to exist for an effect to occur
- Sufficient conditions that cause certain effects in any case, no matter what other conditions prevail in a case
- Supporting conditions that facilitate or reinforce occurrence of a specific effect
- Obstructive conditions that disturb or diminish the occurrence of a specific effect
- Prohibitive conditions that prevent an effect from occurring no matter what other conditions prevail in the case

While such clear-cut distinction of conditions effects on outcomes is intriguing, it seems that neither sufficient nor prohibitive conditions are often found in reality. In fact, none of these types of conditions predetermine an outcome, but combine in largely unpredictable ways, and the existence of certain necessary conditions in different cases does not necessarily lead to similar outcomes.

One difficulty I encountered, for instance, was that the same value of a variable which was, say, supporting in one case was found to be obstructive in another, which was due to the different impacts certain values of independent variables developed in combination with other factors. This points to the problem of (inter)dependence of independent variables.

Of course, all disciplines need to draw different lines of where to stop the inquiry, and tracing independent variables down to the cognitive and bio-physical constitution of individual actors may not deliver much additional insight into the aggregate outcome of interest. On the other hand, too rigid a boundary may lead to missing important pieces of the puzzle. The extreme contingency of PTA functioning on the independent variables influencing the embedded units of analysis is one of the striking features of the case discussions in chapter 6. In fact, the following two chapters, dealing with the policy choices in the context of decentralisation in general, and the education sector in particular, also show that the contingency of institutional performance on individual actors and environments is a problem at all policy levels from the top down to the bottom.

In spite of these constraints, and in an effort to structure findings, I have attempted to extract factors at work across cases – including both anticipated (deductive) and unanticipated (inductive) factors and their combinations (chapter 7), and match them with theoretical propositions (chapter 8).

4

Delegation, Devolution, Deconcentration: Panchayati Raj in Public Services

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4.1 The constitutionalisation of Panchayati Raj and responses of states

4.1.1 Panchayats in the pre-73rd Amendment polity

Decentralisation in India has been intimately connected to traditional modes of local self-government. Panchayats, councils of five village elders vested with the authority to arbitrate disputes in traditional village systems, have a long history in pre-colonial India. Members of these traditional councils were not elected, but represented different sections of the village population (most often along caste lines) by virtue of their credit within the community they represented. As a result of religious discrimination, the village populace belonging to the untouchables were not represented in traditional panchayats. Women were equally excluded from membership in traditional panchayats.

In addition, in many parts of India there were caste-based panchayats, which had the function of determining the rules of conduct (i.e. concerning marriage, treatment of widows, treatment of migrant caste members etc.) within a caste group.

Traditional panchayats were essentially deliberative bodies in which decisions were taken in consent, and usually unquestioningly accepted by the village community (deviance was not seldom draconically sanctioned, for instance with exclusion from the village or caste community).

Under British rule, village-level local government-units were established, first in Bengal and later on all over British India, with the primary aim to collect local taxes and maintain *chaukidars* (local police officers) who would keep the district magistrate informed of the law and order situation in the villages[65]. Even though these councils were partly elected, the electorate was very restricted to local taxpayers, excluding women and the poorer population (cf. Bandyopadhyay et.al. 2003).

Bandyopadhyay et.al. emphasise that elected representatives in these colonial local councils, while technically representing at least part of the citizenry, were the emerging patrons in a consolidating "network of patron-client relationship of which the colonial rulers were the highest patron." (Ibid.)

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[65] Securing an information flow on the potential of social upheaval was vital for the colonisers after the upsurge of 1857 and numerous smaller and decentralised peasant movements.

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It is important to keep this genesis of formal local government in India in mind, because it gives some force to the notion of path-dependency in institutions, given the ample evidence that *panchayati raj* bodies operate to a large extent on patronage bonds tied with members of the state and central parliaments in whose constituency the panchayat falls[66].

The very term *panchayati raj* originated from the political thought of Mohandas K. Gandhi as a central feature of his larger politico-philosophical vision of *gram svaraj* (village self-government). This concept had political, economic, and moral features. *Svaraj* essentially referred to the ability of humans to rule themselves, viz. to exercise constraint on all kinds of human impulses (related for instance to violence and desire) for the sake of not imposing one's own wants and needs on others. Thus, morally speaking, humans should rule themselves so as to not being a hindrance to the development of other humans.

Similarly, the village as a conceived primary socio-political entity should be ruled by elected members of a *gram panchayat,* so as to enable unrestrained and equitable development of all members of that entity. While the village was envisioned by Gandhi to be politically and economically autonomous, he considered it important that villages remained interdependent with other villages or larger entities where such dependence was necessary for peaceful interaction (cf. Kumar 2006:38f). Essentially (and quite contrary to the largely centralised polity established after Independence) power flows upward from the self-governing village communities to the provincial and central levels, following what is nowadays called the principle of subsidiarity.

After independence, a decentralised power structure with panchayats at its centre was firmly rejected by many Congress and left party leaders, and in fact panchayats were not even mentioned in the draft constitution. This triggered off an enraged reaction of many members of the Constituent Assembly (Gandhi among them). Accommodation of the proponents of panchayats as an indigenous form of local self-government was achieved by including a clause in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Art. 40), which assigned the states to organise panchayats at the village level and endow them with the powers to function as units of self-governments, as deemed necessary. Given the non-enforceable character of the Directive Principals, most states have not felt obliged to support the organisation of village panchayats (ibid.:16f).

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[66] According to Bandyopadhyay et.al., failure to make the bureaucracy accountable to the people, thus essentially maintaining its colonial character, led to a situation where an ordinary villager was unable to approach the most proximate local administrator without a patron, who drew his power from members of state and central parliaments and their party, to intervene on this behalf. Rajiv Gandhi termed these intermediaries 'power brokers', and breaking their pervasive influence was on of his driving arguments for the constitutionalisation of panchayats.

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Between the late 1950s and 1992 there have been several more or less half-hearted attempts to do justice to Art. 40 of the Directive Principles. It is worth looking at the closer context of these attempts, as they reveal quite a bit about the way central and state leaders have looked at panchayats.

The first recommendation for the establishment of a three-tier panchayat system throughout the country was articulated by the Balwant Rai Mehta Commission in an evaluation of the ambitious Community Development Programme, which had failed to invoke local participation[67].

Thus basically the recommendations of the Commission had an instrumentalist outlook, as they revolved around the effective implementation of a central government development scheme, and its scope for participation was very narrow and outcome-orientated as a consequence. In fact, the recommended structure of local government clearly reflected the needs of the programme, the implementation of which focused on the newly created administrative unit of the blocks. This artificial administrative entity was conveniently converted into the boundary of the middle tier of rural local government (Bandyopadhyay et.al. 2003:8).

The 'hidden agenda' (ibid.) of legitimising a central government-led development programme somewhat continues to echo in the functioning of PRIs in many Indian states to date. These are often preoccupied with planning and implementation of numerous central and state sponsored development programmes.

As a result of the recommendations of the committee, most of the states passed Panchayat Acts in the late 1950s and early 1960s, after Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh had taken a lead and were lauded by Prime Minister Nehru for this step towards devolving responsibility and authority for development to local levels.

However, as Behar and Kumar point out, since at the time there clearly was no political will to empower local government institutions, the panchayats remained purely legal bodies which were basically managed by the bureaucracy (cf. Behar/Kumar, 2002:10f). In correspondence to their insignificance, no regular elections to panchayats were held

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[67] The Community Development Programme started in 1952 and covered a wide range of development activities from local economy (agriculture, animal husbandry, village industries) to public goods (irrigation, education, women and child welfare). It encouraged activity of village panchayats and cooperatives. However, the programme failed to mobilise sustainable participation among villagers, which was essentially due to the lack of accountability of the local bureaucracy towards villagers on one hand, and the reluctance of state governments to push for the establishment of village panchayats, which would have been able to implement the CDP, on the other (cf. Kumar 2006: 40).

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for almost 30 years, except in Maharashtra and Gujarat (so-called 'first-generation' panchayats) and West Bengal ('second-generation' panchayats)[68].

It is important to note that the second-generation PRIs were created on a very different conception than the first-generation PRIs, shifting from the instrumentalist to the institutional perspective. The Ashok Mehta Committee had recommended broadening the institutional scope of panchayats to enable them to function as fully-fledged local governments, rather than mere development agencies, and it is clear to see why only three states have embarked on such experiments.

Leaders in most states lacked the political will to share power with district and lower levels of government. In fact in the three states which followed the recommendation, political leaders clearly did so on hard political considerations: Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal were governed by non-Congress parties, which under the rule of Indira Gandhi at the centre were in constant threat of being disempowered through the largely arbitrary use of President's Rule, and thus sought to establish a firm power base at local levels. In Karnataka, Devraj Urs, the Congress candidate installed by Indira Gandhi by default, made efforts to build up his own power base in the state and gain independence from the centre, and by that virtue developed a strong agenda for decentralisation and the redistribution of power between dominant and disadvantaged caste groups in the state (cf. Kumar 2006:71ff).

In most other states, where Congress governments were led by weak and submissive followers of Indira Gandhi, the recommendation of the Ashok Mehta Committee went largely unheard. In addition, state bureaucracies, which thus far has been the dominant agency below the state level[69], were reluctant to submit themselves to the control of elected representatives at local levels, and had little reason to push for decentralisation unless forced to do so by state governments.

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[68] Panchayats of the second generation were created in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in 1978 following the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee. However, in Karnataka and Andhra attempts to establish a working panchayat system ended with changes in government at the state level, something that did not happen in West Bengal, where the Left Front government survived for successive election periods.

[69] In his dissenting note to the Report of the Ashok Mehta Committee, its member E.M.S. Namboodiripad wrote "The Constitution itself, according to me, failed to envisage an integrated administration in which, apart from the Centre and the states, there will be elected bodies which will control the permanent services at the district and lower levels. Democracy at the Central and state levels, but bureaucracy at all lower levels – this is the essence of Indian polity as spelt out in the Constitution." (Cited in Kumar 2006: 43, Fn 36). The dominance of the bureaucracy, especially the Collectorate at district level, is a characteristic feature of the sub-state polity in most Indian states, and has remained so despite 15 years of constitutionalised PRIs. The greatest challenge for local bureaucracies currently appears to emanate from a combination of the gradual grounding of system of local governance and the enforcement of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, which empowers individuals as well as LGIs to hold the bureaucracy accountable for what it does.

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It is clear that in the absence of pressure from the electorate, or the bureaucracy, or the centre, panchayats have always been essentially dependent on the will of the party in power in the Legislative Assembly to share power and resources.

Under such circumstance, the establishment of PRIs was an act of generosity that could be withdrawn without any consequences for state governments. While in the post-constitutionalisation era states can be sued for dragging the establishment of functional LGIs, the cases of Bihar and Orissa document that the enforcement of the constitutional mandate is not followed in earnest, especially on part of the central government. The lack of substantial sanctions from above, or political pressure from below, indicate that PRIs have not yet been grounded in the institutional setup of these states to an extent which makes them capacities independent of the state government.

4.1.2 The 1992 Amendments and Responses of the States

When considering the reasons why the central government chose to constitutionalise panchayats in 1992[70], it is important to note that state governments had not merely changed their minds, or were less inclined to view the creation of panchayats as a means of the central government to bypass disagreeable state governments in the distribution of central programmes and deal with district level PRIs directly.

The country faced severe political and economic crisis by the end of the 1980, and the temporal proximity between the onset of economic reform on one hand and the constitutionalisation of panchayats on the other has been argued by some authors to point to the attempt of the national political elite to retain legitimacy in the face of increasing resistance to its economic reform policies (cf. Johnson 2003:32).

Chaudhuri rejects this causal connection, stating that the two policies, while coinciding temporally, had different initial impulses and aims. Economic reforms resulted from an acute balance of payment crisis in 1991, which allowed the central government to push

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[70] To avoid omission, it should be noted that the constitutionalisation of local government institutions (LGIs) was not restricted to the rural areas. The 74th amendment regulates the constitutions of urban bodies, and the relevant state legislation is the 74th Amendment Act of 1995. Since I am concerned with the decentralisation of social services in rural areas, the focus here is on the 73rd amendment and the structure of local government in these areas. It is important to note however that the higher tiers of LGIs, zilla and janpad panchayats, need to deal with both gram panchayat and municipal bodies (nagar panchayats), and the literature indicates that integration of these two different structures is lacking. In fact there appears to be quite a heavy bias in social science research towards rural self-government which is in need to be rectified, and studies on the integration of planning and implementation of development schemes in rural and urban areas appears to be lacking all together. This again reflects the somewhat superficial rural-urban divide in central and state schemes, which rarely look at policy fields in both areas from an integrative perspective.

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reforms that may not have been feasible under less serious conditions[71]. Institutional reform in contrast was incremental and cannot be understood without consideration of the colonial legacy of local government and the attempts to establish sub-state institutions after independence (cf. Chaudhuri 2006:162).

Fig. 11 Three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions as required by 73rd Amendment
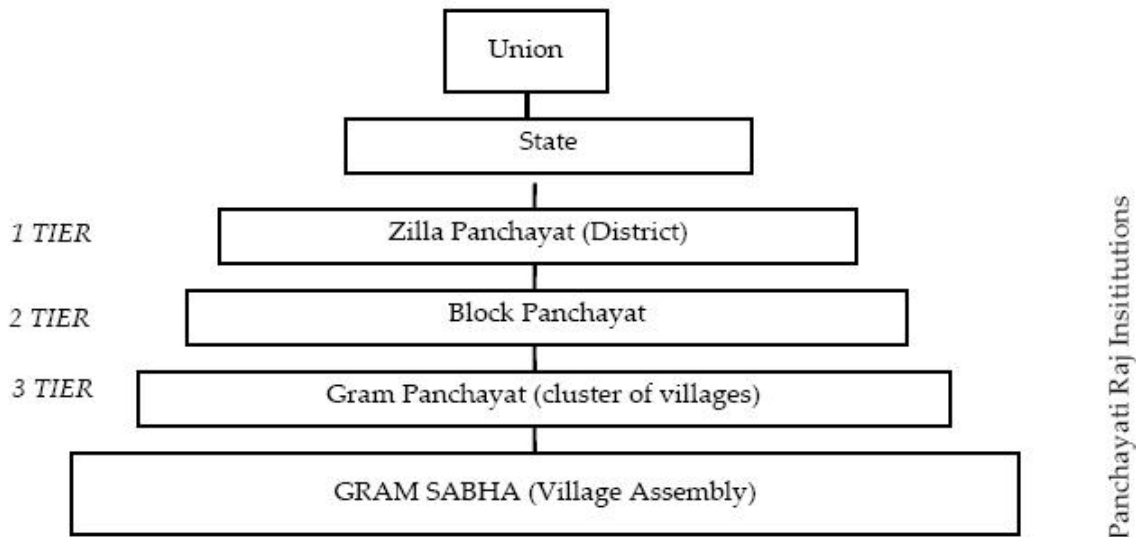
Source: Chaudhuri 2006

Be that as it may, the successful grounding of PRIs in the political and administrative system heavily depended on the dedication of state governments and their mechanisms for dealing with resistance from the bureaucracy and the political establishment. Srivastava emphasises that the functioning of PRIs is contingent on its interaction with the old system of local governance, which was dominated unilaterally by bureaucracy, and whether or not the new 'rules of the game' prove to offer more incentives for compliance than the old ones. Expressed in North's terminology, old formal rules may become new informal rules, and may run counter to the aims of the new formal rules. As long as the latter are not internalised by actors in local governments, the newly created institutions cannot be grounded successfully (cf. Srivastava 2005).

Mathew has pointed out in this context that it is necessary to look beyond the state panchayat acts to understand why PRIs function so differently in different states. He emphasised that the obligation to devolve powers has been imposed on the states alone, without considering a rebalancing of powers between the states and the centre. This has

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[71] In fact, some of the contra-adjustment arguments seem to reflect exactly the argumentative pretext of the government ('we can't help it – it's the IMF) in justifying reforms (see for instance Sadgopal 2004c).

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fostered resistance in the states, and effectively hinders fuller devolution, especially of funds and functionaries, to local levels, because state governments are determined to prevent an erosion of their powers vis-à-vis both the central as well as local levels (Mathew 2004:3).

It is not only state governments' fear of power erosion, however, that has restricted the empowerment of local governments to become truly functional units of self-government. It is partly grounded in the very limited vision of local government as determined in the constitutional amendment itself: it defines the purpose of local government institutions as ensuring economic development and social justice.

As a consequence, certain qualifications that would be usually associated with a government, i.e. legislative and policing powers, are retained at the state level. In addition, the absence of other vital characteristics of governments, such as command over revenue and other resources, and autonomy from intervention in decisions taken in local elected bodies, indicate a reluctance to develop lower level governments into truly independently functioning capacities.

A number of indicators are relevant for this conclusion: a) the number of functions, functionaries and funds transferred to panchayats by way of enactment of state legislation and/or government order[72], b) the Constitution of a District Planning Committee and whether or not it is headed by a state minister or the district panchayat president, c) whether or not *gram panchayat* presidents are elected directly or indirectly, and whether or not MPs and MLAs are ex officio members of panchayats, d) whether or not the state government has the power to intervene with decisions of local bodies and/or to suspend the president of a local body or even dissolve a local body, e) ability of local bodies to raise own revenue, and restriction on the power to sanction expenditures. According to these indicators, Chaudhuri has ranked states in terms of the extent to which state governments have fulfilled the constitutional requirements of devolution to

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[72] The areas in which states are required to devolve functions, funds and functionaries to PRIs are listed in the 11th schedule of the constitution (central, state and concomitant responsibilities are listed in the 7th schedule). It includes core areas related to public goods (maintenance of community assets, drinking water, roads and communications, electricity, poverty alleviation, health and sanitation) agriculture (land improvement and implementation of land reforms, irrigation, water management and watershed development, animal husbandry, fisheries, social and farm forestry, minor forest produce, markets and fairs), industries (small scale industries, khadi and cottage industries), and welfare (rural housing, education (including primary, secondary, technical and vocational and non-formal education), libraries and cultural activities, family welfare, women and child development, social welfare, public distribution system), cf. 11th Schedule of the Constitution of India, available at http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/ELEVENTH-SCHEDULE.pdf.

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PRIs. A summary of his findings including a comparison to other rankings (11th Finance Commission, World Bank) is depicted in the table below.

Table 8: Status of devolution to PRIs in 14 major states

Dimensions of devolution	AP	BI	GU	HA	KA	KE	MP	MA	OR	PU	RA	TN	UP	WB
Political devolution														
Regular elections	0	-1	-1	0	-1	1	0	1	0	-1	1	1	1	1
Women's representation	1	-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-1	1	1	-1	1
Dalit/Adivasi representation	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	1	1	1	-1	1	-1	-1	-1	1
Political autonomy	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
Functional devolution														
Transfer of functions	0	-1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	-1	1	1	0	1
Transfer of functionaries	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	1	1	1	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	1
District Planning Committee	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	0	-1	1	-1	1	1	0	1
Expenditure autonomy	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	1	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	-1	1
Financial devolution														
Transfer of funds	0	-1	0	-1	1	1	1	1	0	-1	-1	-1	1	1
Flow of funds	-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	-1	1	1	0	0
Share of funds	1	-1	1	-1	1	0	0	1	0	-1	1	-1	-1	0
Crude overall index	-4	-10	-3	-6	2	8	5	5	-1	-9	2	0	-2	7
Rank	11	14	10	12	6	1	4	4	8	13	6	7	9	2
Category	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal	Modest	Significant	Modest	Modest	Minimal	Minimal	Modest	Minimal	Minimal	Significant
Index of decentralization 11th Finance Commission	Above average	Below average	Average	Average	Above average	Above average	Above average	Above average	Average	Average	Above average	Above average	Average	Above average
World Bank study	Minimal				Minimal	Significant	Minimal	Modest			Minimal		Minimal	

Source: Chaudhuri 2006 table 5.13

Chaudhuri has come to the conclusion that the majority of state governments (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh) have only minimally fulfilled the requirements of the constitutional amendments, while four (Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan) have progressed modestly in devolution, and only two (Kerala, West Bengal) have progressed significantly[73].

It is worth looking at the factors distinguishing these three groups of states, as well as noting the differences within these groups.

In congruence with the observation that by definition PRIs are planning and implementation rather than genuine decision-making bodies (lack of legislative authority), it is worth noting that in all states members of the National Parliament and/or members of the Legislative Assemblies of the states are ex officio members of the two higher tiers of panchayats, indicating the desire of the state legislature to retain a powerful influence in local bodies. Similarly, governments in all states have the power to intervene with decisions of local bodies and remove the elected president of a local body or dissolve a panchayat altogether. That being similar in all the states, some fundamental differences emerge with respect to other indicators (cf. Chaudhuri 2006 table 5.6).

Among the states categorised under minimal devolution, Bihar, Gujarat and Punjab stand out with virtually no devolution having taken place thus far. In the remaining states in

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[73] It should be noted that Chaudhuri's analysis captures the developments up to 2001, so progress (or regress) in the aftermath of the 2002 state assembly elections is not considered here.

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this group (except Uttar Pradesh) there is a noticeable bias towards the devolution of functions, with hardly any functionaries or funds having been devolved up to 2001.

Within the modest performing category, Karnataka and Maharashtra expose a balance between the number of functions, functionaries and funds devolved to lower levels, while in Madhya Pradesh and more severely in Rajasthan the bias towards functions is comparable to that of the low performing group of states. Further, it is notable that in Madhya Pradesh the District Planning Committee is headed by a state minister rather than the district panchayat president(ibid. table 5.7).

In Kerala and West Bengal, while the number of functions devolved to PRIs by far exceeds the number of functionaries and funds, the District Planning Commissions are headed by district panchayat presidents and, no less important, there are no restrictions on panchayats to sanction expenditures, irrespective of the source onf funding. This is significant, because in other states panchayat discretion with respect to expenditure is uncapped at best for those resources generated by the panchayat (ibid. table 5.8). Given the dismal state of panchayat revenue activity, it is evident that the proportion of funding over which there is unrestricted command is minimal.

In addition, in Kerala 40% of all state funds to PRIs come untied, significantly increasing the proportion of expenditure over which panchayats exercise full discretion, and substantially deviating from the usual pattern of tying grants to specific purposes linked to centrally and state sponsored schemes (ibid.:18).

In fact, Kerala, Haryana and Punjab are the only states with a significant proportion of own revenue (17.7%, 61.1% and 34% respectively of total revenue between 1995-98). In all other states, this proportion remains way below 10%. (ibid. table 5.9)

With respect to revenue dependency on the state, Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra have the highest share of own revenue relative to state revenue, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. But in the former states most of the revenue is generated at the district level, quite in contrast to Kerala, where the larger proportion of revenue is generated at the village level.

With the exception of Kerala and West Bengal, it is evident that most state governments retain control over the use of resources at local levels by way of capping expenditure – often even on panchayats' own resources - and tying the largest proportion of state funds to central and state schemes.

In addition, most state governments give state controlled officers (most notably the district collector) the power to intervene with decisions taken by PRIs, thus essentially placing state government-controlled bureaucrats above elected representatives at lower levels. Numerous case studies indicate that bureaucratic interference penetrates right down to the lowest level, where panchayat secretaries exert control over the flow of

information to *gram panchayat* members and the *gram sabha*[74]. Hence it would be appropriate to state that thus far in most Indian states decentralisation has taken the shape of delegation rather than devolution.

Despite these rather sobering facts, it is beyond doubt that the extension of representative democratic institutions below the state level has generated some tangible and appreciable effects throughout almost all states. The number of population per elected representative has declined from an average of 200000 (state assemblies as lowest level of elected government prior to the panchayat amendments) to an average of 400 (excluding Kerala and West Bengal, where *gram panchayat* constituencies are large, the average ratio would be app. 1:200 at the lowest level, cf. Chaudhuri 2006:170). Clearly, the opportunity of citizens to access elected representatives and hold them accountable has risen simply by virtue of physical proximity.

In addition, the constitutional requirements for representation of women and members of the SC/ST/OBC categories, which have been met in most states[75], have led to a wider involvement of these groups in local decision-making, besides generally broadening the base of representative democracy. Further, the constitutional status of the *gram sabha* (village assembly), in spite of all deficiencies in actual functioning of this body, has added a direct democratic dimension to the polity that has not existed in India before.

This in itself should be seen as a major achievement. While the activity and performance of panchayats varies significantly across states and districts, the widely observable disillusionment with PRIs appears to result from the overly high expectations which were raised towards their ability to promote equitable development and inclusionary decision-making, rather than real and comprehensive failure across local contexts. There is little empirical evidence that the introduction of the three-tier panchayat system has actually worsened exclusion of marginalised sections from decision-making or the delivery of public services[76]. Even though the process of institutional change is slow and often

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[74] cf. Crook/Manor 1998 (Karnataka), Behar 2003 and Behar/Kumar 2002 (Madhya Pradesh), Johnson 2003 (Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), Deshpande/Murthi 2002 (Karnataka), Kumar 2006 (Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh). This issue will be extensively discussed in the case studies.

[75] According to Chaudhuri, Haryana Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have failed to reach proportionate representation of Dalits and Adivasis in district and village panchayats. Punjab has grossly failed female representation at village level (13.2%), and Uttar Pradesh has failed proportionate representation of both female and SC/ST, pointing to the patriarchal conservative social order in rural areas of these states (Chaudhuri 2006 table 3c).

[76] The quality of services is sometimes said to have declined (in contrast to quantity) in the process of decentralisation, however this is more likely to be grounded in certain policy choices (i.e. lowering of

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disrupted by adverse interests, the numerous insulated accounts of successful inclusion of disadvantaged groups' representatives and positive impacts on local development and provision of social services across Indian states indicate that the system does offer some potential for citizens to make their interests heard - especially in conjunction with such important national legislation as the Right to Information (RTI) Bill, which provides a tool for the enforcement of accountability of the lower level bureaucracy and panchayat members towards citizens.

4.1.3 The Role of Panchayats in Public Service Provision

As discussed at some length above, the scope of PRIs' capacity for self-government was somewhat restricted to the core purposes of ensuring economic development and social justice by the constitutional amendment itself. Economic development, especially in rural areas, is linked to issues of public infrastructure, especially roads and transportation, irrigation, and electricity. Social justice is strongly related to access to poverty alleviation measures (food subsidies, housing, employment) and primary health and education facilities. The 11th Schedule of the constitution mandates the involvement of all three tiers of panchayats in provision of the following public goods and services:

a) physical infrastructure
- Maintenance of community assets
- Drinking water and sanitation
- Maintenance of roads, culverts and bridges
- Electricity

b) social services
- Poverty alleviation
- Health
- Rural housing
- Education
- Family welfare, women and child development, and social welfare
- Public distribution system

While on the rhetoric front the delegation of public good provision aims at ensuring needs-based localised planning (efficient targeting of resources) under inclusion of the local communities (participation) and creating accountability for developmental activities (encouraging performance, discouraging malperformance), it is quite clear that local

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professional status and payment of staff) than in the fact that panchayats have some limited scope of say in service provision.

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government bodies in most states are ill equipped to act independently on the service front.

All of these public good related issues are items of state and centrally sponsored government schemes (e.g. the overarching Bharat Nirman Programme, including components of roadworks, water management, sanitation etc., Indira Awas Yojna (rural housing), Midday Meal Scheme, Polio Vaccination Scheme, Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, etc., to name only a few). The coexistence of numerous central, state, and sometimes local government schemes, in combination with the limited ability of panchayats to levy taxes and decide over untied funding, renders obvious why PRIs in most states are so preoccupied with planning and implementation of higher level government schemes[77]. It simultaneously reveals that at the higher echelons of government and bureaucracy the mentality of the developmental state, which knows best what is good for its citizens, and lacks trust in people's capacities to decide for themselves, is still prevalent.

The division of labour between the tiers of local government with respect to planning is similar in all public service sectors. The base level of planning is conducted, usually sector-wise, in the village panchayats. These plans are integrated and presented to the *gram sabha* for approval, and then submitted to the block level panchayats. The latter compile (and ideally integrate, but this seems to happen rather rarely) village plans to submit them to the district panchayats. Here, village and municipal plans are integrated to sector-wise draft district plans. District Planning Committees integrate the sector-wise plans into a comprehensive district plan, which is submitted to the state planning committee. While there are minor deviances from these procedures across states, this appears to the basic structure of planning (cf. PRIA 2007).

It is important to remember that in many states the District Planning Committees are headed by the Minister in Charge of the District (rather than the District Panchayat President), and the Collector or the CEO of the District Panchayat is the member secretary. Even though at least four fifth of all the members must be elected members from the district panchayat, the scattered empirical evidence suggests that the Ministers dominate the planning process (ibid.:16ff).

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[77] The coexistence of schemes at different level raises problems in terms of targeting and equitable distribution: Both central and state governments tend to favour those districts for participation in schemes in which the same party dominates the district panchayat. This may lead to over-allocation in some districts and under-allocation in others. (I am grateful to Vinod Raina for pointing out this problem in the context of the choice of districts for the first phase of DPEP).

A study in 11 districts of 7 states conducted by PRIA in 2006 revealed that in the sample districts of four states DPCs existed only on paper and had not met after the constituent meeting. In those districts where DPC were found functioning, the agenda was clearly dominated by the Minister in Charge, or meetings were convened only with the approval of the District Collector.

Moreover, planning was insufficiently integrating different sectors, as sectoral planning under many central government schemes, (e.g. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) is carried out in the respective implementation agencies (District Programme Offices in case of SSA). Thus, important components of district development planning are completely out of the purview of elected members of the District Planning Committees (cf. ibid.:27).

In Madhya Pradesh, the planning capacity of local bodies is effectively constrained by sector-wise budget ceilings, which are prescribed by the state planning commission. It is not quite clear how these district-wise budget ceilings translate into ceilings for individual village panchayats, viz. whether there is some prescribed formula, or whether local sector-wise demand is being taken into account.

With respect to the provision of basic public services, there is considerable state-wise variation in the distribution of powers and functions between the three tiers of local government. In Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra, the district panchayats are stronger than the lower tiers in terms of devolution of funds and functionaries (cf. Chaudhuri 2006:181). In Kerala, in contrast, the village panchayat enjoys considerable autonomy in planning, budgeting and implementation, making it the primary actor in local service provision.

In Madhya Pradesh, taxation powers are vested predominantly in *gram panchayat*s, while the district and block panchayats have no revenue power and thus depend completely on funds from higher-level governments. In addition, since the funds for state and central programmes are often distributed through parallel programme implementation bodies (e.g. the Rajiv Gandhi Missions), district and block panchayats have extremely limited command even over tied funds (cf. Johnson 2003:54ff).

Johnson has come to the conclusion that the role of district panchayats in the provision of pubic services in Madhya Pradesh, due to the lack of authority over funds and the usurpation of the planning process by the District Planning Committee (which is dominated by MPs/MLAs and the Minister in Charge), is actually quite diminished. This is because the influence of MPs/MLAs/Ministers penetrates right into the process of sanctioning of beneficiary lists for poverty alleviation programmes, which should be essentially decided at the village level (ibid.:42).

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Disillusionment with the functioning of PRIs in recent years has resulted from declining levels of participation at the village level in most states (cf. Narayana 2005, Alsop et.al. 2000; Deshpande/Murthy 2002; Nambiar 2001). Many observers attribute this phenomenon to a widespread sobering concerning expectations of social justice and accountability of *gram panchayat*s vis-à-vis *gram sabhas*, and the tendency to view panchayats as extended institution for the distribution of "state largesse" (Kumar 2004:3, Bandyopadhyay 2003). While it is beyond the scope of this study to dwell on the issue of participation in *gram sabhas* in different states, the efforts to increase participation in *gram sabhas* and strengthen the accountability link between the village electorate and elected panchayat representatives made in Madhya Pradesh derserve some attention.

4.2 Panchayati Raj in Madhya Pradesh: From Sarpanch Raj to Gram Svaraj and back?

4.2.1 The genesis of panchayat legislation in Madhya Pradesh

The genesis of Madhya Pradesh deserves some special attention because it is unique in India, and can explain some of the specifics of political culture and mobilisation that are important for understanding the path decentralisation has taken.

Madhya Pradesh was created in 1956 by merging the areas belonging to the former British Central Provinces and Vindhya Pradesh, which was itself an 'amalgamation' of 38 former princely states (cf. Kumar 2006:77). Madhya Pradesh politically unified five culturally and historically distinct regions: Mahakoshal, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh, Bhopal, and the Hindi-speaking areas of Chhattisgarh and Sironj. While Hindi was the lingua franca in all of these regions, they otherwise had little in common culturally. Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal were dominated by the upper castes (esp. *brahmin* and *bania*, who were fiercely competing for political power and made up for about 20% of the population) and had little tribal population.

In Mahakoshal and Chhattisgarh, in contrast, there was (and still is) substantial tribal (up to 50% in some districts), and significantly fewer upper caste population (around 10%, cf. Purohit 1976, cited in Kumar 2006:78). For its conglomerate composition Madhya Pradesh has been called '*shesh pradesh*' (the left-over state).

The socio-cultural differences between the five major regions, and the fierce competition between them for resource allocation, led to a highly uneven development in the state, as the higher caste elites in Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal ensured partial thriving of 'their' areas within these regions, at the expense of the rest of the state.

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In its early days, Madhya Pradesh has been characterised by the absence of a coherent political community, which found its expression in the extremely low voter turnout of 40.22% during the first assembly election in 1957[78]. In addition, the former provinces united in the state of Madhya Pradesh all had different (and in some regions thoroughly underdeveloped) administrative structures. In the absence of both a functioning bureaucracy and a politically mobilised population, instability plagued the state and required repeated interference from the centre (cf. Kumar 2006:79f).

What is important to note is that the very formation of the state, in contrast to most western and southern states of India, was not driven by the political mobilisation of the non-elites, mostly along the lines of nationalistic and linguistic movements[79], but came into existence because "there was nothing else to do with its constituent parts" (Weiner 1968:16). Political inertia and the lack of mass mobilisation of the non-elite population are features that continue to characterise the political landscape of Madhya Pradesh to date, and it is important to keep this in mind when thinking about decentralising efforts - especially its more normative aim of 'deepening democracy' - and structures of people's participation in governance.

Unlike other backward states, Madhya Pradesh has also not witnessed a strong backward caste movement, as it exists in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Kumar goes so far as to state that Madhya Pradesh, despite of 15 years of decentralisation, continues to be a feudal state in terms of its socio-economic structure (Kumar 2006:105 fn.80). This is the reason why politics in MP have been dominated for a long time by power struggles of the elites in the state capital and regional industrial centres, to the neglect of good governance and the development of the rural areas, where local patrons could do as they please in the absence of control through a functioning system of local government, and a state bureaucracy that was busy dividing resources among itself.

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that panchayats as units of local self-government have not become functional until the constitutional amendments of 1992 made it mandatory for the states to ensure regular elections and endow these bodies

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[78] Interestingly, the ST population had the highest voting participation with 46.55%, as compared to the general castes (39.93%) and scheduled castes (35.83%). Cf. Election Commission of India: Statistical Report on the General Election 1957 to the Legislative Assembly of Madhya Pradesh, available at http://www.eci.gov.in/StatisticalReports/SE_1957/StatRep_MP_1957.pdf

[79] It should be added that there is some logic to this phenomenon, none of the northern Hindi-speaking states mobilised political support on the cultural and linguistic front –Hindi was supposed to become the national language of the country, and the linguistic movements in other states were partly a reaction to the fear of being culturally dominated by the north.

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with some authority (albeit with the states defining the extent and nature of devolution), even though the first Panchayati Raj legislation was passed as early as 1962[80].

Keeping in mind the absence of a broad political mobilisation of the rural non-elite masses, who could have taken advantage of the local governance system for their own political goals, the development of Madhya Pradesh into one of the few states in the country where devolution of powers and functions to PRIs has actually taken place on some scale can only be explained with a surge of dedication of state politicians to empowerment of PRIs.

The shape of *panchayati raj* in the state during the first 15 years was moulded by its chief minister Digvijay Singh, who led the government between 1992 and 2002. It is important to note that the support to substantial devolution of powers to panchayats was limited to a small circle of MLAs, MPs and officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), while the larger majority of the legislative assembly and lower level bureaucracy was quite suspicious of the prospects of sharing power with elected bodies at the local level. The lack of wider support for the empowerment of panchayats (however restrictive) forced its proponents into developing unique mechanisms to bypass resistance to devolution from politicians and bureaucrats.

The Congress government under Chief Minister Digvijay Singh soon after its assumption of office identified three priority areas of development in the state: Education, health, and rural employment. To accentuate the urgency ascribed to the above-mentioned areas, the Rajiv Gandhi Mission was created in 1994 as the nodal agency in the design of government programmes in the three above mentioned priority areas (cf. RGM Report 1994-2002:3). The Mission includes the four branches Shiksha Mission (Education), Watershed Mission, Rural Food Security Mission and Mission on Community Health[81].

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[80] This had occurred in reaction to the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Commission. The 1962 Panchayati Raj act prescribed a three-tier local government system comprising of village, block and district panchayats. While the village and district panchayats were directly elected, the block panchayats consisted of elected members of the village panchayats exclusively. The act did not lay down the areas of competencies for these local government bodies, so the devolution of resources was unregulated and left to the state government.

[81] Tasks formulated for the watershed mission were: Integrate concerns of poverty reduction and environmental regeneration through participatory watershed management, focus action on degraded areas and dry land areas to build environmental security and food security, and improve agricultural production and incomes (cf. http://www.mp.nic.in/rgm/watershed.htm). The food security mission was an experimental initiative to target families in 366 villages threatened by seasonal hunger, by integrating programmes for food security and employment and reviving the communitarian practice of grain banks. Grain Banks were considered an effective mechanism to tackle seasonal hunger. (cf. http://www.mp.nic.in/rgm/foodsecurity.htm). The Community Health Mission was initiated to develop a rights-based framework for basic health services by

The Chief Minister enthusiastically took on the constitutional requirements for the establishment of the panchayat system, and Madhya Pradesh was the first state to enact post-amendment panchayat legislation in 1994.

Srivastava summarises Singh's guiding approach to policy reform and decentralisation as follows:

> „What he [Digvijay Singh] did was to provide the *paradigmatic ideas* that structured the reform agenda. These were, first, to lay out the *guiding approach*: to bring people to the centre of decision making and implementation, trusting in their capabilities, giving them freedom from the bureaucracy (especially the lower bureaucracy), and decentralising power, resources and responsibilities to their hands. Then the people would prove more effective 'problem solvers' than the government – in short, 'people are the solution and not the problem'. Secondly, Singh's ideas laid out the *direction of change*, which heavily emphasised investment in capacity building amongst the masses (education and literacy, health, poverty reduction)." (Srivastava, 2005:6, italics in the original)

The shaping of policies in above mentioned priority areas in accordance with these paradigmatic ideas was achieved by a dedicated and reform-minded set of bureaucrats, handpicked from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), who shaped the policies under the umbrella of the Rajiv Gandhi Missions.

The refuge of the Mission as a space protected from outside intervention enabled them to work undisturbed by vested interests in politics and the bureaucracy. The fact that the Mission operated directly under the purview of the Chief Minister further sealed the Mission Officers off from potential adverse impacts of the usual political and administrative practice. This also made possible long-term policy planning, and more daring and creative policy designs, as accountability for these policies was primarily shouldered by the Chief Minister (cf. ibid.). What this means is that the policies shaped by the Missions and their implementation through PRIs and Mission offices emerged without a broader political consensus, and in fact needed to be protected from the influence of MLAs and bureaucrats.

As James Manor pointed out, no state government has pushed the decentralisation agenda without its own, non-altruistic motivations. According to him, Digvijay Singh sought to secure his power by penetrating the intermediate and local levels of government and society[82]. The creation of strong PRIs on one hand, and of special

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identifying select services and ensuring their universal provision within a defined time-frame, create intersectoral institutional arrangements at village, District and State level for action on health and key determinants of health like safe water supply, sanitation, nutrition and hygiene education, and develop two community health activists in each village to mobilise the community on health-related goals (cf. http://www.mp.nic.in/rgm/health.htm)

[82] Remember that the Congress Party was in opposition at the Centre, and control over districts undermined the possibility that MLAs and MPs of the BJP would be tying up with the central government in the decision over allocation of central schemes to districts.

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administrative institutions as the RGMs on the other, were a welcome means to bypass the perceived ineffectiveness and sometimes hostility of the bureaucracy, and tie panchayat representatives to the Congress party by giving them more powers (Manor, 2003, also Srivastava, 2005:6 and Kumar 2006).

This strategy was an effort to remove central development issues from the existing political and administrative institutions, which were perceived to be burdened with exorbitant transaction costs, and corrupt and inefficient beyond redemption (cf. Srivastava 2005:3). Prompting this kind of institutional change was legitimised by referring to the value of participatory democracy and increased efficiency of social service delivery especially to the poor:

> "The Missions were an effort to unlock the physical and human potential of the state by attending to some selected tasks with a sense of urgency. The Missions therefore crafted a model that worked through participatory structures, which generated collective action as well as altered institutional arrangements within government to generate intersectoral action around identified Mission goals. It was an effort to enlarge the freedoms, opportunities and capabilities of the rural poor of Madhya Pradesh."
> (Rajiv Gandhi Mission, Eight Years Report 1994-2002:3)

The combination of selective devolution to PRIs and shifting policy-making competency to a parallel bureaucracy led to the creation of multiple layers of institutions, which were prone to work against each other as they competed for command over resources and decision-making power.

The old line department structure of bureaucracy, with its extended offices in the district and block headquarters, was left untouched, while the Rajiv Gandhi Missions as well as PRIs were superimposed on this existing structure, as a complete restructuring of local bureaucracy was deemed politically infeasible.

The fact that old institutional structures and their dominant actors (notably Collectors and Chief Executive Officers) were attempted to be given a back seat in planning and implementation raised considerable opposition within bureaucracy, as well as among MLAs, who were usually well connected to their district bureaucracies, and feared loss of influence (cf. Manor 2004, Singh et.al. 2003).

The stiff resistance the Chief Minister faced in empowering panchayats forced him to compromise in the face of running the risk of being denied support in the legislative assembly. This partial surrender has crystallised in concessions to MLAs and bureaucrats as discussed in the context of the District Planning Committees.

Adding different institutional layers has essentially resulted in a rather complicated division of labour (including overlapping and/or unsettled competencies) between the different chains of institutions involved in local governance: administrative (line

department bureaucracy), regulatory (collectorate), technical/professional (Mission offices), and democratic (PRIs).

It should be noted that - except the Shiksha Mission, which is technically led by the Shiksha Kendra[83] and at district level by the district project officers - the regulatory and technical branch in the other missions (watershed management, community health, food security[84]) are basically integrated, as the District Collector heads both of them. The Minister in charge of the district is the ex officio head of the advisory committee. The Collector as mission leader and the advisory committee are superior to the *zilla panchayat* as nodal agency, again reflecting the dominance of state level politicians and bureaucracy in decentralised bodies (cf. organisational structure of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission for Watershed Management, MP, at http://www.watermissionmp.com/content/organisation.html).

The role of PRIs in local governance has been changing significantly during the last seven years. This has not only been a result of numerous amendments to the Panchayat Act, which will be discussed below, but also of changes in the legislation concerning those services and goods panchayats are mandated to be involved in through the 11th schedule. In case of PRI involvement in education, the interplay of panchayat and other legislation and policy decisions has led to a substantial disempowerment of panchayats at all levels.

A characteristic feature of the division of competencies between the different level PRIs in MP is the concentration of regulatory and taxation powers at the lowest level, viz. the *gram panchayat*. This provision carries the former Chief Ministers' handwriting, who was for various reasons committed to the 'power to the people'-approach.

As a consequence, regulatory and taxation powers decline towards the top of the PRI system, with z*illa panchayat*s basically acting as coordinating and supervising agencies, or rather intermediaries to the gram and *janpad panchayat*s (who carry out some genuine development work) and the state government.

Following from the lack of taxation powers, the *zilla panchayat* depends exclusively on funds from the state government, while *janpad* and *gram panchayat*s can generate own funds by means of their (limited) taxation powers. Discretionary spending is possible only within the limits of these self-generated funds, however, as has been mentioned previously, incentives for extensive taxation are low. Especially at the *janpad* level, which

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[83] The Rajya Shiksha Kendra (RSK) is a merger of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), and Department of Public Instruction

[84] Note that only the Shiksha and Watershed Missions operate since 1994, Food Security and Community Health Missions were started in 1998 and 2001 respectively.

is a career step for political newcomers who depend on electoral support, elected panchayat members are little inclined to repel voters by raising taxes.

Table 9: Distribution of Functions, Powers and Tax Imposition between the three tiers of PRIs

Functions	Power	Tax
Village Panchayats		
Sanitation; construction and maintenance of sources of water; construction of roads, buildings, bridges, latrines, wells; lighting of village streets; control over entertainment shows, shops, eateries; maintenance of *Panchayat* property; establishment and management of market and *melas*; prevention of contagious diseases; promotion of youth and property; prevention of contagious diseases; promotion of youth and family welfare, etc.	Providing public health facility, control on erection of building and such building; fining obstruction and encroachment upon public streets or open spaces; to name buildings and streets etc.	Property tax on land or buildings, tax on private latrines; lighting tax; professional tax; market fees; fee on registration of cattle sold in any market under the control of *Gram Panchayat*.
Janpad Panchayat		
Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP); agriculture; social forestry; cottage industries; family planning; sports; rural employment programme; provision for emergency relief in cases of fire, flood, drought, etc.; arrangement in connection with local pilgrimage and festivals; management of public ferries public markets, melas, etc.; any other function with the approval of the State government and the *Zila Panchayat*.		*Janpad Panchayat* can impose tax on theatre and other public entertainment; fees for any licensee or permission granted by the *Janpad Panchayat* and for use and occupation of lands or other properties vested in or maintained by the *Janpad Panchayat*.
Zila Panchayat		
The functions and powers of the *Zila Panchayat* are to: Control, coordinate and guide the *Gram* and *Janpad Panchayat* within the district; coordinate and consolidate the *Janpad Panchayat* plans; coordinate the demands for grants for special purposes received from the *Janpad Panchayats* and forward them to the State government; secure the execution of plans, projects, schemes or other works common to two or more *Janpad Panchayats* of the district; advise the State government on social forestry, family welfare, welfare of the disabled, destitute, women, youth and children; exercise such other powers which the State government entrusts to it.		

Source: Behar/Kumar 2002

It is important to keep in mind that given the very limited role panchayat members play in actual decision-making, the value of being member of one of these institutions does not lie in the execution of power, but the access to what Social Capital Theory calls 'bridging social capital'. *Janpad* and *zilla panchayat* members tie patronage

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bonds to higher level party functionaries and bureaucrats, and through these
channels often try to intervene with decision-making through the back door[85].

The following paragraphs will outline the provisions of *panchayati raj* legislation for the constitution of and devolution of competencies and resources to the three-tier PRIs based on the 1993 Act. Significant changes made in the numerous amendments will be discussed in this context[86].

Since most 'real' powers and functions are vested with the village level institutions, the majority of amendments to the Panchayati Raj Act have addressed the powers and functions of the *gram panchayat* and the *gram sabha*.

For this reason I will only briefly discuss the composition and powers of the two intermediate PRIs, and devote more space to the village level institutions, which have also been of great importance for the functioning of the schools in the case studies.

4.2.2 Structure, powers and functions of the zilla and janpad panchayat

Composition of the body

In contrast to the *gram panchayat*, intermediate panchayats comprise a number of non-elected, ex officio members. In the highest tier, the *zilla panchayat*, these include chairpersons of district cooperatives and development banks; all members of the *lok sabha* representing the district partially or wholly; all members of State Legislative Assembly returned from districts; and members of *rajya sabha* returned from the state whose names appears in the voter list of a *gram panchayat* within the district. The *janpad panchayat*, the second tier of the panchayat system, is constituted at the block level and, besides those members elected from the constituencies, consists of members coopted from the marketing societies or cooperatives, and all members of the State Legislative Assembly representing constituencies of the block[87].

The government divides the constituencies for district- and *janpad panchayats*, and each constituency has a population of not more than 50,000 and 5,000 respectively. The total number of constituencies should not exceed 35/25, and these are single-member constituencies. As a consequence, there are no more than 35 resp. 25 elected members in each *zilla/janpad panchayat*. In the latter, one fifth of all *sarpanches* in the block are

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[85] Srivastava goes as far as speaking of a 'redefinition of incentives' in the institutional system, referring to the observed adjustment of institutional action in PRIs to the goal of paving the way for further reaching political ambitions: "[…] an honest *sarpanch* would remain *sarpanch* all his life." (former MLA, cited in Srivastava 2005:23).

[86] I am basically following the discussion in Behar/Kumar 2002.

[87] The constituencies at different levels are not concentric, so that several MLA constituencies can be part of one block, and one constituency can be part of several blocks.

members of the *janpad panchayat* for one year by rotation (cf. *Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj and Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam*, Chap.III section 22).

Besides the above-mentioned ex-officio and elected members of the body, there are a number of administrative officers posted in each intermediate panchayat. This is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the upper end of the hierarchy, assisted by one Additional Executive Officer[88], one Extension Officer, and three assistant clerks (cf. Singh, 2004:21).

The procedure of election of members from the constituencies of the intermediate panchayats follow the rules prescribed for *gram panchayat*s, which will be described in some detail below.

Sources of revenue

In terms of financial endowments, both *zilla* and *janpad panchayat* depend almost completely on the grants-in-aid from the central and state governments to implement schemes and programmes. According to Mathew (2004) tax revenue of local bodies is less than 5% of the state's total tax revenue (which applies to nine out of twelve major states considered by him), and most of the few tax raising powers are vested with *gram panchayat*s.

While this reflects the functional sphere assigned to the intermediate PRIs (implementation of programmes and schemes devolved by state government departments), it is also noteworthy that the distribution of financial powers between the state and the three levels of panchayats has not been changed at all as compared to the 1981 and 1990 acts (cf. Singh 2004:29).

What this means is that panchayats in Madhya Pradesh have the same ability to raise own resources as they did 25 years ago. The only thing that changed is the allocation of assigned revenues and grants-in-aid. While this clearly is an expression of states' unwillingness to increase resource autonomy of local bodies, Mathew has pointed out that the reluctance of states is to a significant degree caused by the reluctance of the centre to restructure state-central fiscal relations to increase states' financial autonomy. Under such conditions, it is little surprising that states resist any increase in powers to raise tax and non-tax revenues of local bodies to the detriment of their own meagre resource base (cf. Mathew 2004:15).

The *zilla panchayat*s have no taxation powers at all, and little non-tax revenue power, which is limited to raising resources from water tanks (predominantly fishery rental) and raising rent or fees from property. The major source of tax revenue for *janpad panchayat*s is entertainment tax. Non-tax sources of revenue are fees for the use and

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[88] Former Block Development Officers were appointed as Additional Executive Officers after the merging of the Block Development Office with the *janpad panchayat* in 1997 (cf. Singh, 2004:21).

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occupation of land or other property, auction or lease of ferry services, and imposition of fines of defaulters of payment of taxes (cf. Singh 2004:30ff).

All funds and revenue available to *zilla* and *janpad panchayat*s are deposited in the panchayat fund (*panchayat kosh*), of which the Chief Executive Officer acting as the secretary is in charge.

Devolution of functions

As discussed above, the amount of regulatory functions of PRIs declines towards the top, with *janpad panchayat*s entrusted some regulatory power in crises management (natural calamities), public health services, public works, development of cottage industries, women and child welfare, etc. (cf. ibid.:15). In addition, *janpad panchayat*s are required to manage public markets and festivals. With respect to those functions entrusted to it by state departments, the *janpad panchayat*, as the *zilla panchayat*, is required to act as an agent of the state government[89].

Since *zilla panchayats* have not been assigned any obligatory functions in the panchayat act, they carry out all their functions devolved by 23 government departments as agents of the state government, a logic congruence with its dependence on state financing.

In addition to the functions devolved from state departments concerning the implementation of schemes, the *zilla panchayat* controls and supervises the administration of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), and all functions and schemes assigned to DRDA by the State government should be implemented under the supervision of the *zilla panchayats*. While according to Singh (ibid.:20) both bodies were supposed to merge, in the sense that there should be functional assimilation and interchange in the staff, a clear functional division can be observed, somewhat keeping alive the parallel-institution-structure which was supposed to be overcome[90].

However, as the name indicates, DRDAs are concerned with rural development exclusively, reflecting the general lack of coordination between rural and urban planning in general.

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[89] Departments which have devolved planning and monitoring functions, and to a lesser extent implementation, to *zilla* and *janpad panchayats* include the Village Industries Department (dissemination of information on schemes, ZP/JP), Forest Department (non-forest areas, ZP/JP), Health Department (inspection of primary health centres, JP) Department of Women and Child Welfare (supervision of the Intergrated Child Development Programme, JP), Water Resource Department (construction and maintenance of irrigation projects, ZP), Rural Development Department (implementation and supervision of Jawahar Rozgar Scheme, JP/ZP), Social Welfare Department (Security Pension Programme, JP), Animal Husbandry Department, Department of School Education (employment of contract teachers, JP/ZP), cf. Singh 2004:15ff).

[90] DRDAs were incepted as a parallel institution to the District Development Office, which is part of the Collectorate. DRDAs were created to build a professional supervision and monitoring agency for the implementation of central and state anti poverty programmes.

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This lack of coordination was addressed with the inception of district governments in 1998, which transferred state government functions to the constitutionally mandated District Planning Committees and sought integration of rural and urban planning. Under the BJP government, however, many of the competencies devolved to the DPCs were withdrawn because it was argued that these bodies were undemocratic and lacked the legitimacy necessary for being endowed with regulatory functions of a government[91].

It should be noted that even though the establishment of DRDAs is not mandated by the constitution, it is in fact mandatory for all districts where central and/or state anti-poverty programmes are operating. This is important because it indicates that mistrust in PRIs' capability to effectively implement development programmes is not a phenomenon restricted to state governments, but is equally evident at the national level.

Subordinate bodies

Every *zilla and janpad panchayat* forms five standing committees from its members. These are the General Administration Committee, Agriculture Committee, Education Committee, Communication and Works Committee, and the Cooperation and Industries Committee. MLAs and MPs belonging to the block/district are ex-officio members of all standing committees, and except in the General Administration and Education Committees, chairpersons are elected from among the committee members. The General Administration Committee must be presided over by the president of the *janpad/zilla panchayat*, while the Education Committee must be presided over by the vice president of the respective panchayat. The CEO functions as secretary of all standing committees of the panchayat (cf. *Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam*, 1993, section 47).

4.2.3 Structure, powers and functions of the gram panchayat

Composition of panchayat bodies at village level

Village level PRIs basically comprise the *gram panchayat*, the *gram sabha*, and its sub-committees. Each *gram panchayat* consists of between 10 and 20 wards (depending on population size), from which the members of the *gram panchayat*, the *panches*, are elected. The wards thus function as constituencies within the *gram panchayat* area.

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[91] The introduction of district government in MP was fiercely debated among politicians as well as decentralisation and governance experts. Some held the opinion that the devolution of regulatory functions from the state government meant a fuller decentralisation than the mere implementation of development and welfare programmes (cf. Behar 1999), while others argued that scaling up the DPCs to governments further weakened the *zilla* panchayats and extended control of the state government over local politics (Minocha 1999, Manor 2004).

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A *gram panchayat* can consist of one or more villages and settlements. In single-village-panchayats, there is one *gram sabha* or village assembly, of which all registered voters of the village are members. If a panchayat area consists of more than one village, each village can hold its own *gram sabha,* independently of the panchayat centre. Issues concerning the entire panchayat area however can only be deliberated in a joint *gram sabha* (*Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam,* Art. 6 (5)).

Election procedures and reservation

There is an exhaustive body of rules concerning the equitable participation of all sections of village society in all PRIs down to the village level. These regulations have been inspired by the comprehensive reservation regime in the public sector. It is mandatory for PRIs to represent members of the scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) according to their proportion of the population. Where the above-mentioned groups comprise less than 50% of the total population, an additional 25% reservation for the other backward classes (OBC) category comes in. In addition, it is mandatory that a third of all members in the PR bodies be women (this also holds for the SC/ST/OBC representatives, of whom again one third have to be women).

The positions of *sarpanch* and *upsarpanch* (but significantly not that of the secretary!) are also subject to reservation rules. A percentage of *sarpanch* seats corresponding to the proportion in the population in the block are reserved for SC/ST/OBC candidates. The reservation rotates in the block, so that every community with at least one family of the reserved categories will have a reserved *sarpanch* seat occasionally. If the *sarpanch* is elected from an unreserved category, the *upsarpanch* has to belong to one of the reserved categories. Equally, if the *sarpanch* is a male, the *upsarpanch* has to be female. Out of all *sarpanch*es within a block, one third have to be female. To ensure this, a special reservation for female seats (both general caste, SC,ST or OBC) exists[92].

However, in combination with the traditional caste/class-based reservation regime, it is easy to anticipate the problems this can create in even finding a suitable candidate for the office of the *sarpanch* and *upsarpanch*. The rotation of reserved seats leads to the absurd situation of having to elect an SC *sarpanch* in a village where there actually is no SC population[93]. Where a seat is reserved for a female SC, ST or OBC *sarpanch*, it can be

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[92] By introducing a 33% quota for women in PRIs, the Government of India has promoted women in public offices in ways that eclipses all efforts to the cause made in most western countries. On the other hand, the resistance against the introduction of such quota in state and union parliaments speaks of the limits of the political will to women's empowerment.

[93] For instance, if one of the smaller villages or hamlets adjoined to the main village has a single SC or ST family, the *sarpanch* seat will be included in the rotating reserved seats in the block, but the *sarpanch* will not be representing any substantial part of the village population, which is an inherently difficult situation for a potentially inexperienced member of a disadvantaged group in a village.

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difficult to find a suitable (in terms of capacities) and willing candidate. It is not uncommon that applicants for the post of the *sarpanch* actually reside in a neighboring panchayat area, but due to the lack of competing candidates stand elections for another panchayat.

A common feature in reserved constituencies appears to be the election of proxy *sarpanch*es[94], as documented among others by Leclercq (2002) and Srivastava (2005)).

Apart from the elected members, every panchayat can post two staff, a secretary and a recovery clerk, as well as one unskilled employee for all kinds of services (cf. Singh, 2004:24).

Posts of panchayat secretaries are tendered block-wide, and the *gram panchayat* chooses from among the received applications. Usually preference is given to locals or candidates residing in reasonable proximity to the location of the panchayat office.

It is important to consider that the post of panchayat secretary is not subject to reservation, and as a result panchayat secretaries most usually belong to the forward castes even in villages where there is no forward caste population. Given that panchayat secretaries have command over all information pertaining to the *gram panchayat*, their position is very powerful, especially in settings where a majority of elected members are first-time incumbents and are handicapped by low educational and socio-economic status. The resulting dominance of non-elected secretaries over decision-making in *gram panchayat*s will be illustrated in the case discussions (MS2 and PS2).

Sources of revenue

As already discussed, the *gram panchayat* as the lowest tier of local government is the only body that has been assigned mentionable tax raising powers. Taxes to be collected by the *gram panchayat* include property tax, water rate, lighting rate, drainage tax and building rent (cf. Singh 2004:34). Non-tax revenue include fees on fairs, markets and festivals, fishery rental, bus/cart stand fees, ferry services, fines and penalties, animal registration fees, and interest.

While *gram panchayat*s also avail of land revenue and taxes on mines and minerals, profession, local cess and surcharge on commercial tax, these sources of revenue are collected by the state government and reallocated to the *gram panchayat*s according to their tax bases. Singh has pointed out that this approach to allocation (which is also applied in the reallocation of revenue from the central to state governments) leaves the financially stronger panchayats with larger funds, while the financially weaker panchayats, viz. those with a higher relative need for state government funding, get less.

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[94] These may be the wives of ex-*sarpanch*es or other influential people where there is a female reserved seat, or an SC/ST *sarpanch* operating in the interests of his employer on whom he depends (cf. Srivastava, 2005:10)

Furthermore, release of assigned revenues is frequently delayed, and less than the legitimate share (ibid.:69f).

The most important source of panchayat revenue, however, are grants-in-aid from the state and central governments to enable panchayats to carry out the functions devolved to them. Grants-in-aid can be of two types: conditional and unconditional. Conditional grants are earmarked for a specific purpose and cannot be rededicated by the local body. Unconditional (or general purpose) grants are usually utilised to meet establishment and administrative costs, as well as honorarium and allowances (which makes them less unconditional than the name would suggest – untied funds are the only means of which panchayats avail to pay staff and meet material costs). The majority of conditional funds come in the form of block grants for the execution of public works programmes. Since the amount of these funds depends on the number of projects proposed by a *gram panchayat*, there is heavy competition for resources among panchayats, and political interference with allocation is reported to be frequent (ibid.:86f). Singh points out that block grants are calculated per capita and lack elasticity, because they are not adjusted to changing price levels or revenue receipt of states.

Grants-in-aid constitute roughly 35% of all panchayat revenue in Madhya Pradesh. An even larger proportion of funding comes from allocations made under centrally sponsored schemes, roughly 60% according to Singh (ibid.: 37).

Given that own tax and non-tax revenue plus assigned tax-revenue make up for merely 5% of total panchayat funds, it is obvious that *gram panchayat*s' motivation to increase their own tax base is low – the political costs of enforcing compliance are huge relative to the proportion of additional income this can generate in relation to total income. Nonetheless, even small sums over which panchayats have full discretion can make a tangible difference at the village level, for instance if an additional part time teacher can be employed in the local school, or an *anganwadi* can be opened with panchayat resources[95].

Functions devolved to the gram panchayat and gram sabha

In 2001, the Panchayat Act was amended to establish *gram svaraj* by means of transferring all decision-making powers and the establishment of subcommittees for planning and implementation from the elected body to the village assembly, viz. from the

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[95] During a tour to a number of villages in Nizamabad district of Andhra Pradesh in 2007, I came across a village where the school infrastructure was heavily upgraded, including the employment of a substitute teacher, with panchayat resources, which were raised by levying a cess on all BPL cards issued in the village. While these resources were generated by the poorer populace, this has also disproportionately benefited children of poor families, who formed the majority of the government school's student body.

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gram panchayat to the *gram sabha*. The *gram panchayat* was basically converged into an implementation and grievance redress agency, having no discretionary powers, but being fully accountable to the village electorate. This step had been the result of a widely perceived domination of *gram panchayat*s by their elected president and lacking accountability towards the wider village community[96].

Since the introduction of *gram svaraj*, the *gram sabha* has become the centre stage of activities at the village level. Most of the functions earlier assigned to the *gram panchayat* have been vested in the *gram sabha*. In practice, however, this does not mean that the members of the *gram sabha* themselves manage all the tasks assigned to the body. Rather, the *gram sabha* delegates the execution of these tasks to its elected standing and ad-hoc subcommittees, or to the elected members of the *gram panchayat*. The important point here is that, at least in theory, there is a strong accountability link between villagers and there elected representatives, because legally the *gram sabha* is the superior body, and its decisions are binding on the *gram panchayat*. Whether or not this power is well used by villagers is a very different question.

The major functions assigned to the *gram sabha* are following:
- Approve all annual plans designed by the *gram panchayat* and lay down principles for the identification of government schemes and their priority for village development
- Consider the annual budget of the *gram panchayat*, make recommendation on its use, and ascertain and ascertain and certify the proper utilisation of these funds
- Identify and select beneficiaries of poverty alleviation and other government programmes, and ensure the proper utilisation and disbursement of funds and assets to the beneficiaries
- Mobilise people for community welfare programmes and ensure people's participation in the implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution of benefits of development schemes in the village
- Manage natural resources including land, water, forests within the area of the village
- Sanitation, conservancy and prevention and abatement of nuisance;
- Construction, repair and maintenance of public wells, pods and tanks and supply of water for domestic use
- Construction and maintenance of village roads, culverts, bridges, bunds and other works and building of public utility
- Regulation of and control over entertainment shows, shops, eating houses and vendors of drinks, sweet meats, fruits, milk and of other similar articles
- regulating the construction of houses, latrines, urinals, drains and water closets

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[96] The then-Chief Minister of MP, Digvijay Singh, is frequently cited with the statement that he did not intend to replace *collector raj* with *sarpanch raj* (cf. Kumar 2004:11).

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● Management of public land and management, extension and development of village site

● Maintenance of records of births, deaths and marriages

● Rendering assistance in the census operation and in the surveys conducted by the State Government or Central Government, in prevention of contagious disease, in inoculation and vaccination and enforcement of other preventive measures for safety of human being and cattle, and to the disabled and destitute

(Source: *Madhya Pradesh Gram panchayat Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam* 1993 (as amended up to Act No. 20, 2005), Chapter II Section 7).

Given that the *gram panchayat* acts as executive agency of the *gram sabha,* its range of functions broadly corresponds to that of the *gram sabha* (except the selection of beneficiaries and the approval of plans, the annual budget and all monitoring functions).

Standing committees of the gram panchayat/gram sabha

The 1993 Act laid down that each *gram panchayat* can have standing sub-committees not exeeding three in number. These usually were one general administration committee, one construction and development committee, and one committee for education, health and social welfare, in accordance with the areas in which devolution had to take place according to the 11th schedule of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution (cf. Singh, 2000: and 150f).

Some of these committees gained special importance through the implementation of certain government policies, such as the Education Guarantee Scheme. The recruitment, employment and payment of the teachers for schools opened under the scheme were to be conducted by the *gram panchayat*, more precisely by the Village Education Committee (*gram shiksha samiti*). Generally, however, Mission Programmes ran somewhat parallel to the PRIs, in that they sought to involve stakeholder groups rather than local government institutions. Thus under the Watershed Mission, water committees were set up, under the EGS parent-teacher-associations (PTAs) and school management committees (SMCs) were created, and in the Food-Security-Mission self-help-groups were organised in the villages selected for the programme. Only in the Community Health Mission there are no stakeholder groups at the local level, but it, too, functions through state and district health societies, which coordinate resources and activities (cf. http://www.mp.nic.in/rgm/health.htm). The stakeholder groups under the supervision of the RGM for quite some time constituted a parallel structure to the *gram panchayat* committees operative in the respective field. This led to much confusion among members as to which committee they belonged to, and generally raised doubt about the need of an ever-increasing number of sub-committees, stakeholder committees or user committees (cf. Behar 2003).

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The *Gram Svaraj* Amendment[97], intending to strengthen accountability towards the local electorate by placing more authority in the *gram sabha*, shifted the establishment and supervision of sub-committees from the *gram panchayat* to the *gram sabha*.

In order to fulfil the new amplitude of assignments, the *gram sabha* was required to set up eight standing committees[98] and as many ad-hoc committees as it deemed necessary to complete the tasks delegated to it from higher levels of government. But the problems that bereft the *gram sabha* from the beginning, namely the lack of participation resulting in the frequent failure of the quorum, persisted, and for a majority of villages it proved difficult if not impossible to fill all the positions in the eight plus committees and get enough members to participate in the meetings (cf. Manor 2003). The usual practice was to nominate members of these committees on paper, but only to hold a meeting when it was required by a government order or some other external agency (i.e. NGOs)[99].

The newly elected, BJP-led state government in 2004 has responded to this problem by reducing the mandatory standing committees from eight to two, namely the construction committee (*nirman samiti*) and the development committee (*vikas samiti*). What this has meant for the participation of panchayats in school management through the village education committee will be discussed in more detail in a short while. In addition, the prescripton for monthly meetings has been retracted in 2004, along with the reduction of standing committees, for the very same reason: lack of participation. By reducing the number of mandatory *gram sabha* meetings to four per year, de facto much of the day to day business and decision-making competencies have been delegated back to the *gram panchayat*, which oversees all government programmes, although the selection of beneficiaries is still assigned to the *gram sabha*.

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[97] I am referring to the *Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam* as updated by the Institute of Social Sciences. The staff of the Local Government section update all available state Panchayati Raj legislation and annotate all changes in the original act, in what year, and through which act. The Madhya Pradesh act was kindly forwarded to me by Mr. Rajan Kuttappan.

[98] *gram vikas samiti* (Village Development Committee), *sarvajanik sampada samiti* (Common Resources Committee), *krishi samiti* (Agriculture Committee), *swasthya samiti* (Health Committee), *gram raksha samiti* (Village Protection Committee), avasamrachana samiti (Infrastructure Committee), *shiksha samiti* (Education Committee), *samajik nyay samiti* (Social Justice Committee) (cf. Behar/Kumar 2002:65)

[99] This was put forward by staff members of Samarthan Centre for Development.

While *gram sabhas* had induced quite some enthusiasm in the initial phase after the enactment of state panchayat legislation, participation appears to have sunk significantly from 1997 onwards[100].

My own research suggests that participation in *gram sabhas* varies significantly between the main and minor villages of a panchayat area. Minor villages did not hold separate *gram sabhas* (either because villagers were not aware of the option to do so, or because the *sarpanch* was unwilling to convene the meeting), and except the elected panchayat members from the minor villages, only few villagers found it worth travelling to the main village to attend. Having to leave the village at night time was a particular constraint on female participation. In addition, it appeared to be still common that women sit separately behind the men, restricting their ability to follow the debate and raise own concerns.

However, it was not the lack of participation that was troublesome in the villages under study, but the delays in convening *gram sabha* meetings in two of the three panchayat areas due to the apprehension of *sarpanch*es and secretaries that an audit of accounts would create serious conflict in the village.

While the euphoria associated with the 2001 *Gram Svaraj* Amendment has largely faded and given space to a more sober perspective on village level governance, and especially on the prospects of wider people's participation in direct democratic bodies, it would be misleading to call it a failure entirely. Some of the shortcomings associated with *gram svaraj* can clearly be spotted at the legislative level – the establishment of eight standing committees could have been anticipated to be beyond the scope of villagers who in their vast majority struggle with subsistence, and cannot be expected to engage in local self-government on a near full-time basis. This is especially true of the socio-economically disadvantaged sections of village populations, who are mandated to be represented on sub-committees in accordance with their proportion of the population in the village.

On the positive side, it seems that the accountability link to *gram sabhas* has been strengthened significantly under the *gram svaraj* provisions. Social audit and annual audit of accounts as instruments of control over *gram panchayat* activities have become well entrenched mechanisms in many districts of Madhya Pradesh, not least because of the sustained capacity-building and support extended by NGOs/CSOs in the field of local governance.

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[100] Two studies by Samarthan in different districts of the state suggest that participation declined by almost 30% between 1996 and 2000, cf. Behar/Kumar 2002:37. Data collected by Narayana in Morena district is somewhat inconclusive, as roughly 47% of survey participants asserted to have attended a *gram sabha* meeting during the past 5 years, while only about 20% stated to have attended the last *gram sabha* meeting (Narayana 2005 table A.7)

The major flaw in the *gram svaraj* provisions appears to be that too much of planning and implementation works have been assigned to the *gram sabha*, to the neglect of strengthening villagers' position in terms of the effective exercise of monitoring functions and installing grievance redress mechanisms. This mandate easier processes for appeal to higher levels, calling of special *gram sabha* meetings, etc. Enabling members of the *gram sabha* to directly submit proposals to the concerned agency would make it significantly easier for villagers to act on perceived deviances of *gram panchayat*s and demand accountability.

Fig. 12: Structure of local government according to Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam
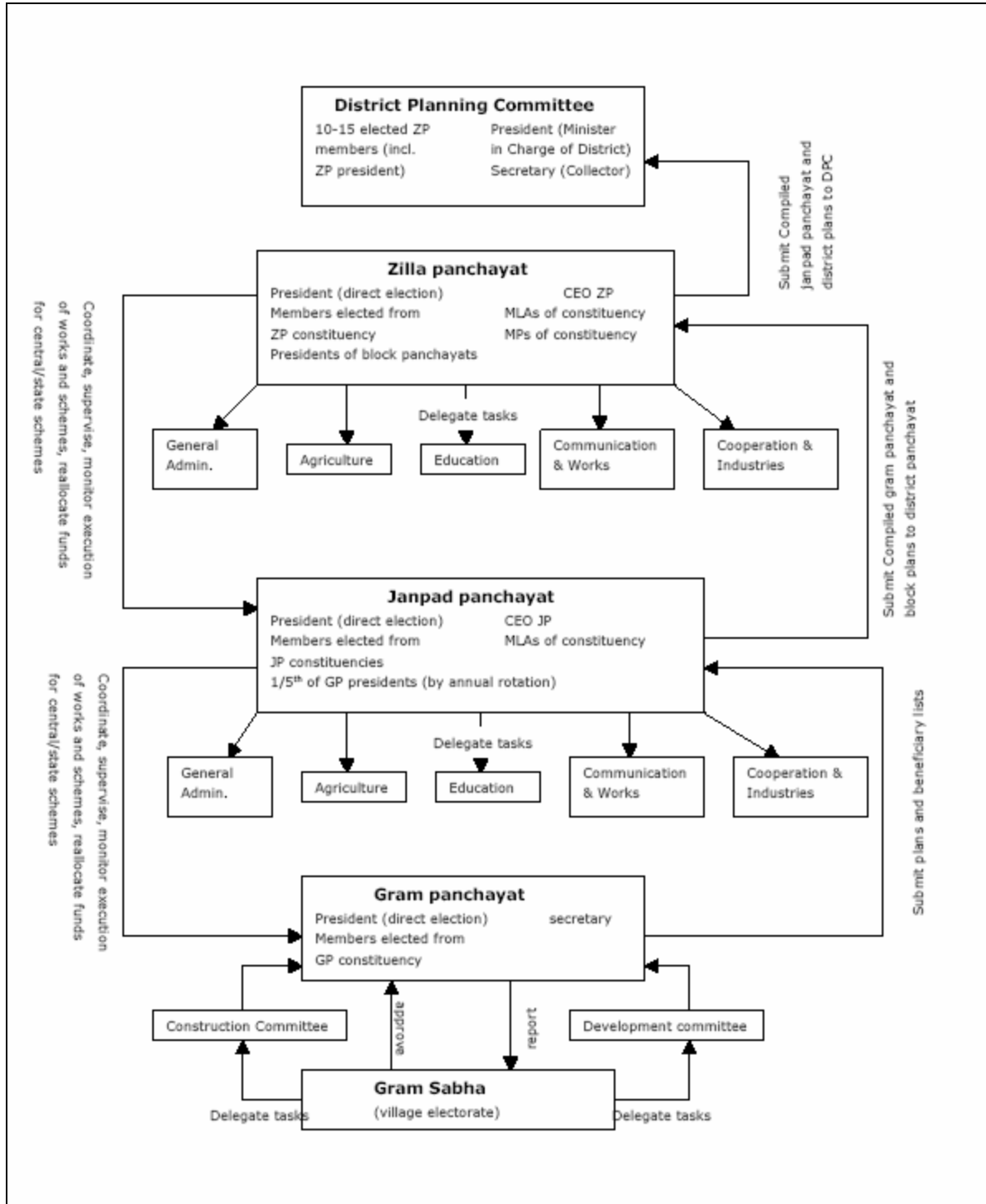
Source: Own

Policy meets Polity: Panchayati Raj and Elementary Education in Madhya Pradesh

5.1 The District Primary Education Programme: Introducing public management to education in India

As indicated above, changes in panchayat legislation have tended to affect the structure of local educational management significantly, and have often entailed changes in subordinate legislation (government orders) in education. To fully understand the path decentralised management of education in Madhya Pradesh has taken since the inception of *panchayati raj* in 1993, I would like to give a brief account of educational management under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), the two largest and most momentous interventions in the education sector in Madhya Pradesh during the last 15 years.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Government of India started to accept external funding in primary education in the form of loans. Induced by the balance of payment crisis India faced in 1990, which brought the country on the verge of illiquidity, India turned to an adjustment country almost overnight.

As an indispensable condition for loans from the IMF and the World Bank, the entire social service sector was decentralised. The stabilisation and structural adjustment policies that accompanied loans from the World Bank and the IMF, like in many other countries under similar circumstances, inflicted serious cuts in budgetary resources of all sectors, including education, and primary education in particular (cf. Tilak 2002).

Following the aid commitments made in the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien in 1990, international donor organisations were compelled to show their commitment to basic education. As a consequence, a social safety net programme, a compensatory programme that aims at reducing the impact of structural adjustment policies, was launched with loans from the World Bank/IMF to protect vulnerable but important sectors like primary education from adverse impacts of the economic reform policies (cf. Tilak 2008:39).

One of the proclaimed medicines to cure the ineffectiveness of social services in general, and education in particular, was decentralised planning and monitoring. Some read this

as a genuine effort to enhance community participation, whereas critics saw the target of decentralisation in local resource mobilisation primarily, with the aim to reduce the state's economic burden of financing social services, an argument entirely unfounded at least for the education sector, as we will see below.

The District Primary Education Programme, which was launched in 42 districts across seven states in 1994, turned into the largest externally funded and centrally steered government intervention in education ever in the country. The difference between DPEP and the aid programmes operational in India before 1990 was that education policy, instead of being conceptualised by the government itself (which then sought to raise money from foreign donors), became a post-facto-policy, designed to accommodate funds that were being made available before (cf. Sarangapani/Vasavi, 2003:1).

The proportion of external funding to education is surprisingly little, considering the liabilities that resulted from accepting loans. Tilak has pointed out that in absolute terms, aid has increased significantly during the 1990s (from 5% of central government plan expenditure in 1993 to about 25% in 2002), but its amount relative to the combined expenditure (plan and non-plan[101]) of state and union governments is insignificant (about 1.6% at its peak) to an extent that raises doubt about the necessity of foreign aid to elementary education in India (Tilak 2004:4720).

Fig. 13: Proportion of external funding in central government plan expenditure on education
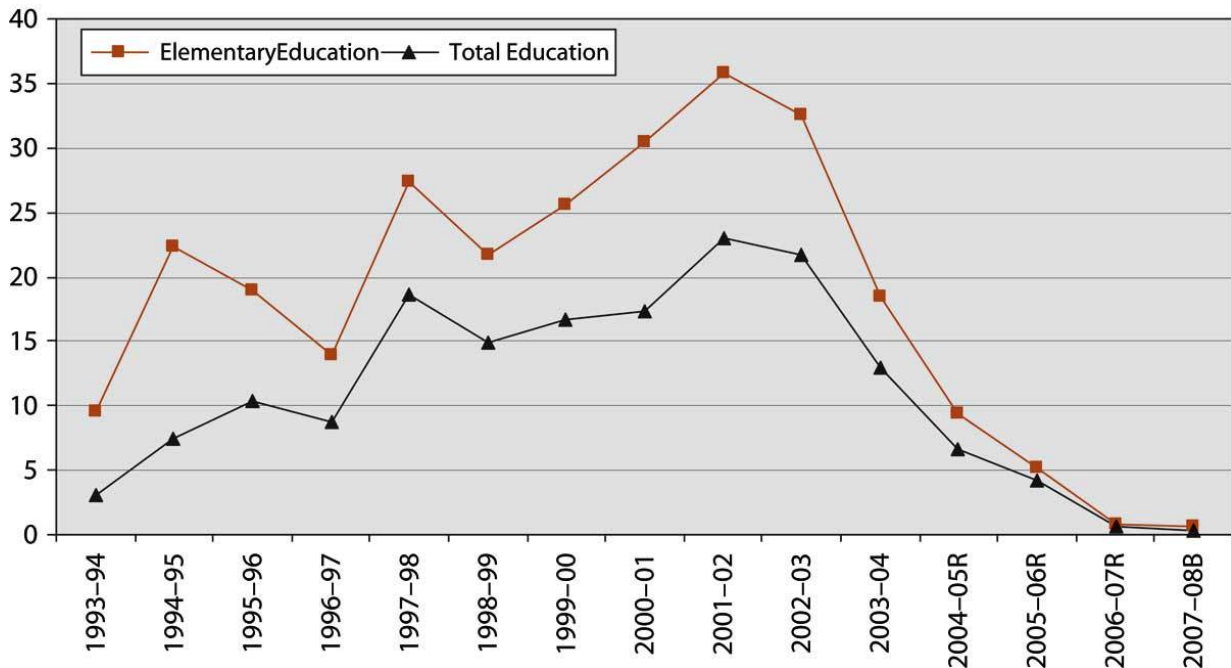
Source: Tilak 2008

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[101] Plan expenditure refers to the development expenditure on new schemes and programmes, while non-plan expenditure refers to the maintenance expenditure for existing programmes and schemes.

In quite some disproportion to the actual scope of external aid to education, the inception of DPEP has been criticised for its contribution to creating a 'dependency mindset', viz. the perception that India cannot universalise elementary education without relying on external aid (cf. Tilak 2004 and 2008; Sarangapani/Vasavi 2003).

The DPEP was something like a revolution to educational policy in India. It sought to devolve educational planning and monitoring from the state to the district level; to facilitate micro planning and respond to local needs; promote community involvement for resource mobilisation; increase the enrolment of girls and children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes; enhance teacher capacities by in-service-training and development of teaching-learning material; and, last but not least, to set up a data base for evaluation (Education Management and Information System, EMIS, cf. Sarangapani/Vasavi 2003:1.).

These measures matched the usual policy conditions in education that were attached to aid packages in other countries, too. While decentralisation of educational planning and implementation were straightforward and immediately tangible in the school education sector, conditions frequently included policy reforms in other sectors, in sub-sectors of education (e.g. higher education), and macro-level fiscal reforms of the type India has been going through for the last 15 years. These include liberalisation of the economy and budget restructuring/reduction of budget deficit (Tilak 2008:42).

The patterns of decentralised management in the social sector reflected the development of the 'New Public Management' in western countries, most importantly the UK and the US. It included the separation of operative (delivery) from strategic (policy-making) units of service provision.

While the traditional branches of governance in the service sector, line departments and bureaucracy, functioned as strategic units, where most of the decision-making as well as sanctioning powers were retained, operation was 'outsourced' to different agents, at different levels.

At the intermediate level, operative tasks were delegated to PRIs and the lower level offices of the state implementation agencies. At the delivery level, 'operating entities' included government schools, alternative schools, schools run by religious institutions (madrasas and Sarasvati Shishu Mandirs), schools run by NGOs, and, last but not least, private schools. In fact the relaxations of restrictions on the operation of private schools is a vital part of the strategy to enlarge the access base, and without taking notice of the encouragement of private sector activity in elementary education, the public management nature of education reforms can be easily overlooked.

The buzzword in educational governance in India from the early 1990s onward was school-based management (SBM), the dominant application of new public management in the school education sector. SBM operates on the idea that schools are independent organisations which need to be given autonomy in developing a mission, planning to achieve this mission, and generating resources from as many sources as possible.

Leithwood and Menzies (1998) distinguish different forms of SBM, which pertain to the dominant control agency: administrative control SBM, professional control SBM, and community control SBM.

School management as envisioned in Madhya Pradesh exposes some features of community control SBM (in the sense that parents form the larger part of school councils), while there is virtually no element of professional control SBM (teachers as dominant decision-making agents) and little evidence of administrative SBM (principals acting as dominant decision-makers), as the vast majority of government primary and middle schools do not have a proper principal position.

According to Leithwood and Menzies, there is little empirical evidence suggesting that forms of SBM have any positive impact on student achievement. Some studies suggest that professional control SBM has the strongest prospects of positively affecting student outcome, as teachers are the central agents and enjoy autonomy in creating conducive teaching-learning environments.

Administrative control management was found to have moderately positive impacts on effective management of resources (without much evidence of positive effects on student outcome), and community control SBM was found to be *potentially* best suitable to increase accountability of schools towards parents and the larger community.

However, empirical studies reviewed by Leithwood and Menzies pointed to numerous distortions and problems in realising successful SBM, which were largely similar across the three types, suggesting that SBM is as likely to affect school effectiveness negatively as positively.

Cheng (1996) has contrasted the basic characteristics of school-based management with what he calls 'external control management', the traditional hierarchical mode of educational governance through line departments.

In contrast to the traditional modes of centralised educational governance, the roles ascribed to different actors in the education system in SBM reflected the partnership and multiple-actor approach so typical for the concept of governance. Not only did new actors (or stakeholders) enter the scene (parents and the 'community'), the role of the traditional actors (administrators, teachers) was significantly redefined.

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This became particularly obvious with respect to the previously entirely excluded stakeholder group of parents, who now were viewed as receivers of quality services, partners for positive participation and cooperation, and supporters in schools. The governance structures established under DPEP clearly reflect some of the prerogatives of SBM as summarised table 4 below.

Table 10: School-based management and external control management

Characteristics of internal functioning	school-based management	external control management
1 school mission	° mission shared, developed and willingly actualised by members ° emphasises participation in developing educationa ideal ° strong and unique organisational culture	° mission unclear, given by outside, no development needed; members may not accept and commit to ° emphasises keeping and implementing external mission ° weak and vage organisational culture
2 nature of activities	° school-based activities: managing and educating according to characteristics and needs of the school	° non school-based activities: content and style of education and management determined by the external authority
3 management strategies a) concept of school organisation b) style of decision-making c) use of power	° school is a place students, teachers, and administrators live and develop decentralisation, participation of teachers, parents and students ° mainly expert and reference power	° school is a tool, teacher is an employee, kept when needed, out when not needed ° centralisation, administrators make decisions ° mainly legitimate, reward and coercive power
4 use of resources	° autonomy: self-budgeting according to school needs ° in time to solve problems ° tends to broaden resource base	° tightly restricted by the centre ° according to external rules ° apply and wait for permission ° tends to avoid troublesome procedures for more resources
5 differences in roles a) role of school b) role of central authority c) role of administrator d) role of teacher e) role of parent	° active-developing style: exploit all possible resources for development of the school, teachers, and students; problem-solving ° supporter and advisor ° goal developer and leader ° manpower starter and coordinator ° resources developer ° partner, decision-maker, developer and implementor ° receiver of quality service ° partner: positive participation and cooperation ° school supporter	° passive-receptive style: implement centralised mission, administration procedure-based, avoid making mistakes ° supervisor and controller ° watcher of strategic goals ° personnell supervisor ° employee, follower, oder-receiver, implementor ° receiver of quantity service ° outsider: not eligible for participation and cooperation

Source: adapted from Cheng 1996

In line with the concept of corporate governance, educational management was envisioned to include different kinds of institutions with clearly delineated areas of competencies. These included the more traditional structures of line departments and sub-state bureaucracy as well as local government institutions (LGIs) and stakeholder

groups at the individual school level. Given that centralised state bureaucracies were perceived as inadequately fit to improve teaching quality and efficiency in individual schools, it was necessary to establish a professional institution which would be able to reach down to the ground level.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission was set up for this purpose.

The management structures created under DPEP, namely the cluster, block and district level Resource Centres, functioned under the oversight of the state and district offices of the implementation society (Shiksha Mission). At the lower levels, Block Resource Centres (BRCs) were responsible for overseeing 8-10 Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). The latter again were responsible for the academic support and monitoring of a manageable number of 10-20 schools within a radius of 8 km. Thus, the resource centres became the most important agencies for school inspection (cf. Lecerlcq 2002:9).

Fig. 14 Organisational structure of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission
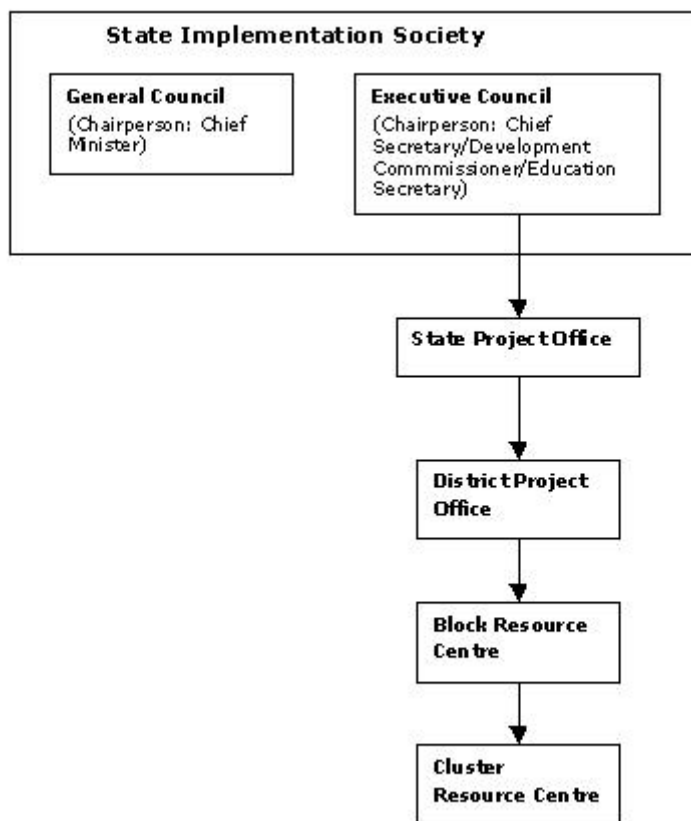
Source: Own

Besides the creation of a leading strategic unit, the inclusion of LGIs in educational management was an essential part of corporate educational governance, especially for extending the resource base of schools (cf. Govinda 2003).

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Starting at a time when most states had passed or were in the process of passing *panchayati raj* legislation in accordance with the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution, DPEP is profoundly interlinked with the process of decentralisation of the sub-state polity in India.

Because involvement of local elected bodies in the administration of DPEP schools belonged to the policy conditions of the programme, it was mandatory for panchayats at all three levels to establish standing education committees. These were involved in the implementation of supplementary schemes (which were often managed by other departments than the education department, e.g. the Midday Meal Scheme) and the distribution of allocations for student benefits under DPEP (free uniforms and textbooks for girls and SC/ST students). Teacher recruitment was another field where panchayats played a role, as they acted as employers for certain categories of teachers.

What panchayats at all levels were explicitly excluded from was any say in pedagogic matters. Even at the district level, the focus of educational planning under DPEP and afterwards, panchayats were not involved in any decisions concerning curriculum, syllabus, use of textbooks, teacher training, etc., which were taken in a centralised manner at the state level. This is important, because it means that all decentralised planning in education can happen only within the boundaries of the standards set at the state and central levels.

Apart from the panchayat education committees, there were two school-level bodies to enhance more direct participation of those villagers who had children in DPEP schools. These were the school management committee (SMC) and the Parent-Teacher or Mother-Teacher-Associations (PTA/MTA). These two stakeholder committees operated independently of the panchayat education committee, even though multiple memberships for instance of the head teacher and panchayat members ensured some convergence between these bodies. It is important to note that there was a rather clear-cut division of labour between different bodies at the local level. PTAs/MTAs were mainly concerned with educational matters such as monitoring student attendance and achievement. More importantly, they were also expected to control teachers' presence in the classroom and teaching activity, viz. exercise 'policing' functions, while on the other hand allowing teachers to gather parental support in running the school (not exclusively, but predominantly for the purpose of additional resource mobilisation, cf. Leclercq 2002:9).

The division of labour between SMCs and VECs is less clear, in fact, it appears that some schools established both committees while others did not[102].

The type of decentralisation achieved under DPEP is essentially administrative in nature. As in most other policy areas, PRIs were delegated planning, management, implementation and monitoring functions, but there is little scope for decision-making.

Teacher employment can serve as an example here. *Zilla* and *janpad panchayat*s are endowed with the power to employ teachers of certain categories (*shiksha karmi* II and III, contract teachers), but they are not in a position to decide over the *creation* of teaching positions. All teaching positions are sanctioned by the education department, based on the plans received from the districts and blocks. Thus, panchayats are enabled to decide whom they would employ, but not how many teachers should be employed, and in which schools they should be posted.

It is noteworthy that in Madhya Pradesh, every new government scheme in education has entailed the creation of its own category of teachers, something that has not been the norm in other states. While some of these teacher recruitment schemes operated in several states (e.g. the Shiksha Karmi Scheme), the government of Madhya Pradesh promoted its strategy of replacing the traditional civil servant recruitment procedure in education with a decentralised, contractual mode of employment. This was done partly to avoid the creation of liabilities resulting from fluctuating teacher demand (government teachers employed on tenure cannot be disposed when not needed), but more significantly to avoid some of the principal-agent problems with which all social service sectors were and continue to be inflicted: Absenteeism, lack of accountability towards the public, and limited options for effective sanctioning resulting from restrictive labour legislation and strong unions[103].

Thus teachers recruited under DPEP were employed as *shiksha karmi*, while teachers recruited under EGS were employed as *guruji*. All these different types of teachers were required to have different qualification levels, received widely differing salaries, and

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[102] In Betul and Raisen districts for instance, according to Leclercq DPEP schools had only VECs and PTAs, while SMCs were established in EGS schools exclusively. In most policy documents, however, there is reference to both VECs and SMCs. A logic explanation is that where a VEC is responsible for more than one government school, individual schools would establish an SMC to take care of the day-to-day management, while the VEC would be distributing funds and resources to the schools under its jurisdiction and coordinate planning and joint activities. In villages with only a single government school, the VEC would be responsible for its management, and the establishment of an SMC would be unnecessary.

[103] cf. Leclercq 2002, Raina 2003, both authors argue that enabling change in teacher recruitment policy was at the heart of the decentralisation effort in education in Madhya Pradesh. The same strategy can be observed in primary healthcare, where doctors and nurses are now being employed at district and block level on contracts.

were employed by different agencies[104]. Since 2002, however, all teachers employed in government-operated schools are recruited as contract teachers in an effort to homogenise qualification and remuneration levels, as well as recruitment and transfer procedures.

While the DPEP has been widely lauded to be the most successful large-scale intervention in primary education, field studies in different states suggest that a number of its targets have not been achieved. These include both genuinely academic (improvement of classroom interaction, use of innovative TLM) and management-related issues (lack of local participation in planning processes, misallocation of resources, defective planning). Reasons identified in a number of studies and evaluations in different states were lack of critical evaluation, unreliability of data collected through EMIS, a high degree of formalisation of the micro-planning process, which resulted in the reluctance to recognise specific local needs[105], and lack of sustainability concerning new methods of classroom interaction[106]. Even though thousands of primary and middle schools were opened under DPEP between 1994 and 1998 in Madhya Pradesh, access to elementary education remained a problem in small and interior rural villages throughout the state, especially in the tribal belt. A large state level survey campaign, the *lok sampark abhiyan*, conducted in 1996 as a joint venture of the DPEP and the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), revealed that a stunning 32.2% rural habitations had no primary school within the distance of one km (cf.), and that 24.4% of boys and 35.2 % of girls in school age were either not enrolled at all, or not currently attending school (cf. Sharma/Gopalakrishnan 2001, Ramachandran 2004:1). This finding has lead to the development of the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), the second major intervention in elementary education in the state during the last decade.

5.2 Education Guarantee Scheme: Experiments in demand-based, localised provision of Primary Education

The Shiksha Mission's strategy to solve the access problem in elementary education was to offer a demand-based programme for creating community owned schools in villages

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[104] *Shiksha karmi* as well as contract teachers for primary and upper primary level are employed by the *janpad panchayat*, for secondary and higher level they are employed by the *zilla panchayat* (however both are paid by the Dept. of Education). *Guruji* are employed by the *gram panchayat*, but paid from funds received from the Shiksha Mission

[105] Mosse speaks of the bureaucratisation of participative processes in donor-driven projects (cf. Mosse 2001).

[106] Cf. Aggarwal (1998) for the DPEP-I states of Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, and Sarangapani and Vasavi (2003) for Karnataka.

without a primary school within a radius of 1 km within 90 days after the demand has been passed to the district government by a village panchayat. This scheme was called the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS). It was accompanied by the *padhna badhna* programme, which targeted adult illiterates in villages.

The *padhna badhna* programme was meant to sustain demand of parents for primary schooling for their children and was launched in 1999, at a time when more than 26.000 EGS schools had been created in rural areas (cf. Ramachandran 2004:1).

By 2003, the number of EGS schools rose to 30.000, but afterwards (following the state government's proud declaration that it has achieved universal access to primary education) new opening of EGS schools seized, and the state government began thinking about how to integrate these schools into the formal education system.

What was unique to EGS was that the programme was financed through state resources, without reliance on central government or external resources.

This had a positive and a negative aspect. The positive aspect was that the programme was independent of central funds and foreign aid, and thus sustainable in the long run. It reflected the commitment of the state government to make genuine own efforts in extending the access base of government provided primary education.

The negative aspect was that resource commitment was extremely limited, leading to the necessity to rely on locally mobilised resources. Due to the lack of the latter, use of inferior material for construction of buildings was widespread, and teacher salaries were curbed to an extent that brought teaching in EGS schools closer to a voluntary service than a paid job.

EGS operated on two assumptions. Firstly, enabling people in a locality to demand a school from the government would include a process of mobilisation for education, which was crucial for the goal of involving the community and creating 'ownership'[107].

Secondly, the use of local resources (including the teacher) would induce people's interest in the effective use of these resources.

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[107] This attempt to make service provision demand-based has been lauded by many observers (e.g. Ramachandran 2004, Vyasulu 2000, Clarke 2003, Kulkarni 2003). However, some of the more heavily field research-based comments on EGS emphasise that demands for EGS schools were mostly induced by members of higher level institutions such as *janpad panchayats* or Cluster Resource Centres, who pointed out the possibility of opening a school to *sarpanch*es, who then mobilised support from villagers (cf. Leclercq 2002, Srivastava 2005). For the sake of fairness we must recognise that many panchayat members, let alone villagers, may not have known about the EGS and consequently could not be expected to demand a school unless adverted to the option by someone from outside. Still the observation that demand was induced from above, rather than raised from below, casts some doubt on the assumption that the process of demanding a school automatically leads to mobilisation for education among people.

The latter had the convenient side effect of relieving the state of part of its financial burden for the extension of access to government provided education. As a consequence, the community was required to provide the space and contribute to the construction of a school building, as well as recruit a preferably local person educated up to at least 10th standard, who would be willing to teach in the school for a small honorarium (a fraction of what a government teacher and even a *shiksha karmi* earned)[108].

The fact that the poorest citizens were required to materially contribute to their children's access to education, while the state bore the entire costs of establishing schools in larger villages and urban areas which potentially catered to better off citizens, has been widely perceived as an 'anomaly' (Govinda 2003:216). The Madhya Pradesh government was accused of creating a parallel, low-profile education stream for the poor and disadvantaged, thus cementing the unequal access to quality elementary education for different sections of society (cf. Kumar et.al. 2002; Sadgopal 2003, 2004d, and Tilak 1999).

While the material contribution of the community to the establishment of a school, which should be provided by the government free of cost according to the Right to Education Bill, was problematic from the point of view of justice, it is widely acknowledged that LGIs and parents did experience greater ownership of EGS schools (c.f. a.o. Ramachandran 2004).

This was essentially because all resources for EGS schools were administered by the Village Education Committee (VEC) of the *gram panchayat* and the SMC, with little interference of the education department or the Shiksha Mission in the initial years. Teachers could be fired from schools on the spot if the panchayat thought this appropriate[109]. It was first and foremost this direct control over teachers, which was appreciated by parents as an effective instrument to demand accountability from teachers (cf. ibid., Vyasulu 2000). However, similar to the experience with the *shiksha karmi* scheme in its initial years, before the shift of appointment power from *gram panchayat*s to *janpad* and *zilla panchayat*s, the choice of a candidate for teaching in an EGS school was often fiercely contested within *gram panchayat*s, leading to delays in appointment to the detriment of progress in the school (cf. Sharma 1999).

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[108] The initial salary of *guruji* was a meagre 500Rs per month. This has been gradually scaled up to 1000Rs and recently to 1500 Rs per month, in the process of upgrading EGS schools to regular primary schools (cf. Leclercq 2002:7).

[109] Srivastava pointed out in this context that the layoff of a guruji depended more on his or her relations to village notables and panchayat members than on actual teaching performance. However, aspiration for a permanent and better-paid teaching job appears to have largely prevented EGS teachers from major deviances even if they could have afforded them in terms of protection from sanction (cf. Srivastava 2005:24f, Leclercq 2002:68).

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Besides the question of justice, para-teacher employment under DPEP and EGS had some important implications for the composition of the teacher corps and the standard of teacher qualification in Madhya Pradesh.

As has been mentioned before, the qualification requirements for teachers were lowered in the process of the decentralisation of teacher recruitment. While previously a primary teacher needed at least higher secondary education and some pre-service training (usually a college teacher education course), under DPEP the entry level was lowered to secondary education (10th grade), and pre-service training was largely replaced by in-service-training.

In addition, teacher training in Madhya Pradesh was also decentralised and transferred from the teacher education colleges in the state's capital and industrial centres to the District Institutes of Educational Training (DIETs)[110]. Since the academic qualification of much of DIET personnel is questionable, to say the least, the standard of teacher education has been observed to be on the decline throughout the last 15 years (cf. Kumar et.al. 2001, Sharma 1999, Balagopalan 2004).

Adding to this, the requirement of at least secondary level education for *guruji* had to be relaxed because of two competing requirements under EGS: That *guruji* be local (viz. if possible reside in the same village), and that employing women as *guruji* be encouraged. Since in many EGS schools positions remained vacant because there was no candidate fulfilling the entry criteria, frequently persons with merely upper primary level (8th standard) education were employed as *guruji*. These persons, while often highly motivated, simply lacked the most basic qualifications for teaching children anything beyond letters and numbers[111].

While empirical evidence suggests that students in EGS schools showed similar or slightly better learning achievement than their counterparts in regular government primary (whether DPEP or non-DPEP) schools (cf. Leclercq 2002:48ff; Srivastava 2005:15), a fact which confirmed the government in its strategy to extend para-teacher recruitment, Srivastava points out that the main motivation of para-teachers to outperform their government employed colleagues - despite of their lower salaries - was the hope that their positions would be made permanent, and they would eventually transfer into the regular teacher cadre (Srivastava 2005:24).

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[110] While this move was argued to establish teacher training in rural areas, where colleges did not exist, it was basically a strategy to establish a cost-effective formal qualification for teachers in rural areas. I am grateful to Vinod Raina for pointing this out to me.

[111] Frightening recounts of EGS teacher trainings were given by the District Education Officer in Sehore. These will be reproduced in the cross-case discussion.

This motivation is likely to cease once teachers realise that they will not be able to secure the same employment conditions as their civil servant counterparts. The dynamics alternative employment schemes have developed thus far tend promote a convergence of employment modes through intensive unionising of alternative teachers. In the case of the *shiksha karmi* scheme, this has lead to significant increases in salary (2700 Rs per month for a primary teacher) and tenure. Especially the latter has effectively undermined the purpose of introducing contract based employment modi.

By the year 2002, when the Government of India launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Madhya Pradesh had a fragmented teacher corps consisting of government and panchayat employees with three different salary levels. It had a range of primary schools (Department of Education, DPEP, EGS and AS) with different structures of management at the primary level, while at the upper primary level all schools were either Department of Education or DPEP schools. Children from EGS and AS schools needed to be integrated in order to proceed to the next higher level.

One of the central purposes of the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam (People's Education Act) of 2002 was to integrate different types of government run schools into a single management scheme, regularise the distribution of competencies, and mainstream the modes of community participation in schools.

In line with this, it was decided to upgrade all EGS schools to regular primary government schools, a decision which was mandated by the adoption of the Right to Education Bill, which made access to quality government provided education a fundamental constitutional (though non-justiciable) right.

The effort to integrate non-formal schools into the formal system in Madhya Pradesh was well in line with the central government's strategy to integrate all parallel schemes in education, and supplementary policies such as the Midday Meal Scheme, into a single planning and management structure under the 'umbrella scheme' of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)[112].

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[112] SSA embraces a number of central schemes and schemes run by different state government departments. Central schemes of the Department of School Education (MHRD) include: Alternative and Innovative Education Scheme (AIS), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), National Programme for the Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGL, gender component of SSA), Operation Blackboard (OBB), Mahila Samakhya, Lok Jumbish, National Programme of Nutritional Support to Elementary Education (Midday Meal Scheme), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). It should be noted that some of the central scheme components are coordinated by the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development and the Department Women and Child Development at state level. In Madhya Pradesh, this concerns the Midday Meal Programme, the Early Childhood Care and Education, and the Integrated Child Development Scheme.

The implementation structure of DPEP, which was well established in all major states in India, was kept intact, and the State Implementation Societies created under DPEP are now responsible for the implementation of all schemes continuing under SSA. Thus, the modes of 'community involvement' were pre-determined by the governance structures of the DPEP.

5.3 Provisions for 'community participation' under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

According to the Government of India, the goals of SSA are to a) ensure eight years of compulsory education to all children of 6-14 years of age until 2010 b) focus education policy on elementary education of 'satisfactory quality' and 'education for life'; c) bridge all gender and social gaps in access an retention in elementary education until 2010, d) allow states to formulate context specific guidelines for implementation, d) encourage districts to reflect local specifics in their planning, and e) promote local need based planning[113].

Promoting the involvement of local elected representatives as well as the village community at large was perceived a viable strategy to ensure local need-based planning, which is at the core of the programme. Consequently, the notion of 'community ownership' takes a central place in the rhetoric of SSA policy:

> "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an effort to universalise elementary education by community-ownership of the school system. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. The SSA programme is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children, through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode."(GOI, MHRD, Dept. of School Education&Literacy: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. A Programme for Universal Elementary Education)

While the term is defined nowhere in the policy document, community involvement is referred to mostly in the context of local planning and monitoring of schools.
The policy framework suggests to establish core planning teams at the habitation level which should consist of selected VEC members, selected community leaders, NGO representatives, head teachers, selected teachers and some selected parents, ensuring participation of women as well as persons from the deprived section of village communities. Setting up such a core planning team means converging different bodies (panchayat VEC, PTAs, SMCs) for the purpose of planning that are otherwise endowed with specific delimited functions. In terms of monitoring, the policy paper remains rather

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[113] cf. GOI, Dept. of Education: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. A Programme for Universal Elementary Education. Framework of Implementation, available at www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/ssa/ssa_1.htm. The following discussion of provisions for community participation relates to these documents on the web.

vague, prescribing the exposure of all school related data to be scrutinised by 'the public'. There are no concrete directives with respect to monitoring competencies of different bodies such as VECs, PTAs, and SMCs.

The section on management and implementation makes little mention of the 'community' and its role, and dwells rather extensively on the national and state levels. Interestingly, while there is mention of the integration of NGOs into the process of programme implementation at district and sub-district levels (mostly in the context of local capacity building), there is no mention of the role PRIs are envisioned to play.

The 'community' figures more prominently in the section on the improvement of school facilities and civil works. Here, it is important to note that contracting out civil works is discouraged, and all school-related civil works need to be carried through VECs/PTAs/SMCs involving some (undefined) community contribution. In addition, any investment in school infrastructure requires the self-obligation of the community to maintain the new structures.

It seems that the notion of 'ownership' in SSA is essentially linked to physical structures – the contribution of the 'community' to civil works is depicted as *the* indispensable precondition for the generation of ownership. This restricted perception may explain why there is so little mention of 'control', which is another vital aspect of ownership (if I pay for something I also want to control what happens with or in it).

Given that one of the goals of SSA as formulated in the basic framework is to "allow states to formulate context-specific guidelines for implementation", it is not surprising that there are few specifications in terms of the actual division of competencies in planning, implementation and monitoring between institutions associated with the 'community', viz. PRIs, school based bodies, and NGOs.

In Madhya Pradesh, as discussed at some length above, the *gram svaraj* amendment of 2001 gave the *gram sabha* a leading role in educational governance at the local level, while intermediate panchayats were endowed with selected powers for teacher recruitment, re-allocation of funds, and a general right to oversight and inspection. Their main domain, however, is planning and coordination.

According to a government order issued by the Ministry of School Education in January 2001[114], the *gram sabha* was declared responsible for the following school-related tasks:

a) Facilitating management of all schools in the village
- Repair, cleaning and maintenance of the school building

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[114] Government of Madhya Pradesh, School Education Department, order no. 1-44-46/2000/20-2, issued on 25th January 2001.

- Purchase of furniture and mats etc. for sitting
- Employment of non-teaching school staff
- Playground facilities
- Environment protection and planting trees
- Drinking water and toilet facilities

b) Management of educational activities
- Establishment of the school education committee
- Conducting of school activities
- Ensuring the timely presence of teachers and students
- Ensuring regular teaching in school
- Carrying out all activities related to school development
- Inspection of the implementation and progress of all programmes of the central and state government
- Enhancing different activities in school
- Appropriate use of government and non-government funds
- Run the 'chatra sankhya vriddhi programme' and make progress in it
- Spreading universalisation of education to every individual
- Provision and distribution of free textbooks
- Distribution of student allowance
- Provision of a village library
- Controlling the works of the school staff as governing authority
- Mobilisation of resources for the school

The *gram panchayat,* on the other hand, was assigned only coordinative and limited allocative functions, namely the coordination of educational activities of all schools and institutions in the *gram panchayat* area, and the allocation of resources for the coordination of educational activities in accordance with the guidelines for *gram panchayats* issued by the Rajya Shiksha Kendra.

The evolution of *panchayati raj* legislation in Madhya Pradesh by means of amending the original act has been discussed earlier, but it may be recalled here that the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Sanshodhan) Adhiniyam, 2001, required eight standing committees to be constituted by the *gram sabha*. This provision was changed, partly as a response to the above mentioned confusion with Mission or NGO created committees, partly because of the persistent lack of participation in the sub-committees[115], in the

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[115] According to a member of the Research Section of the Rajya Shiksha Kendra in Bhopal the number of mandatory standing committees to the *gram sabha* was drastically reduced because there were not enough

amendment of 2004, which mandated the mandatory set-up two sub-committees to the *gram sabha*, the Village Development and Village Construction Committees. While this does not prevent *gram sabhas* from setting up other so-called ad-hoc committees, e.g. a water or education committee, this is usually done in a task-bound manner, viz. if a government order requires the set-up of a committee to carry out or monitor a specific task.

Thus, the Mission continues running its programmes through stakeholder and user groups, while concurrent panchayat committees have been abolished. This move has been criticised as weakening panchayats by means of bypassing them in planning, implementation and resource management (cf. Behar 2003).

By abolishing mandatory village education committees and simultaneously transferring all former committee functions to the Parent-Teacher-Associations (PTAs), the village panchayats have been left with a marginal role in educational management and planning. However, and this is important, as a democratic-representative body, the *gram panchayat* is endowed with the responsibility to forward complaints against school teachers to the block and district education committees an administration (BEO/DEO) for sanctioning, and thus are a link in the chain of enforcement vis-à-vis teachers. Similarly, the *gram panchayat* is responsible for issuing fines against parents who have offended against children's right to education by allowing or encouraging student absenteeism[116].

The current governance structure in school education in Madhya Pradesh is composed of five branches: the administrative (Dept. of Education) and the regulatory (Collectorate) branch, both traditional structures of centralised educational governance, the financial (represented by project coordinators) and the academic (represented by academic coordinators) branch introduced under DPEP, and the democratic branch embodied in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

While the traditional structures (education department and collectorate) reach down to the block level, the newly added structures (project offices and panchayat committees)

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active villagers to actually fill the committees, let alone attend meetings. This led either to accumulation of offices among the few active persons, and joint meetings of sub-committees, or to complete dysfunctionality of sub-committees.

[116] It should be noted that it is the *gram sabha* in which the decision to initiate showcase against such parents. The process is quite elaborate, requiring the issuing of a notice to parents in which they may comment on the appropriateness of the complaint. The chairman of the *gram sabha* (viz. the *sarpanch*) is to consider the reply and in case of violation of issues a note to the parent to appear before the *gram sabha*. The latter can, after hearing the accused parent, issue a fine of no more than 10Rs. for indifference to a child's attendance in school, and up to 1000 Rs for actively withholding the child from attendance, with a majority of two thirds of all present members. In case the convict is reluctant to pay the fine, a revenue recovery certificate must be sent to the District Collectorate for recovery.

reach down right to the individual school. Before 1994, schools were inspected rather erratically by education office or development office staff, and were otherwise left on their own. The installation of cluster level (*jan shiksha kendra*, JSK) and village level institutions (VECs) brought schools under much closer purview of agencies authorised to directive action.

The division of competencies between the different branches of educational governance at district and block level is somewhat muddled, especially between the two traditional branches. Block and District Education Officers are the superiors of teachers employed by the state government on tenure, and of *shiksha karmi*s. As such, they authorise the disbursement of salaries, issue orders of transfer and initiate penal action.

The collector, however, is responsible for all government employed staff, and thus also exercises authority over government teachers. For this reason, the collector must approve of all employment related issues. Being superior to the DEO in the administrative hierarchy, the collector also has veto power in terms of penal action against teachers, at least teachers employed as tenured government servants.

Fig.15 Structure of educational governance in Madhya Pradesh
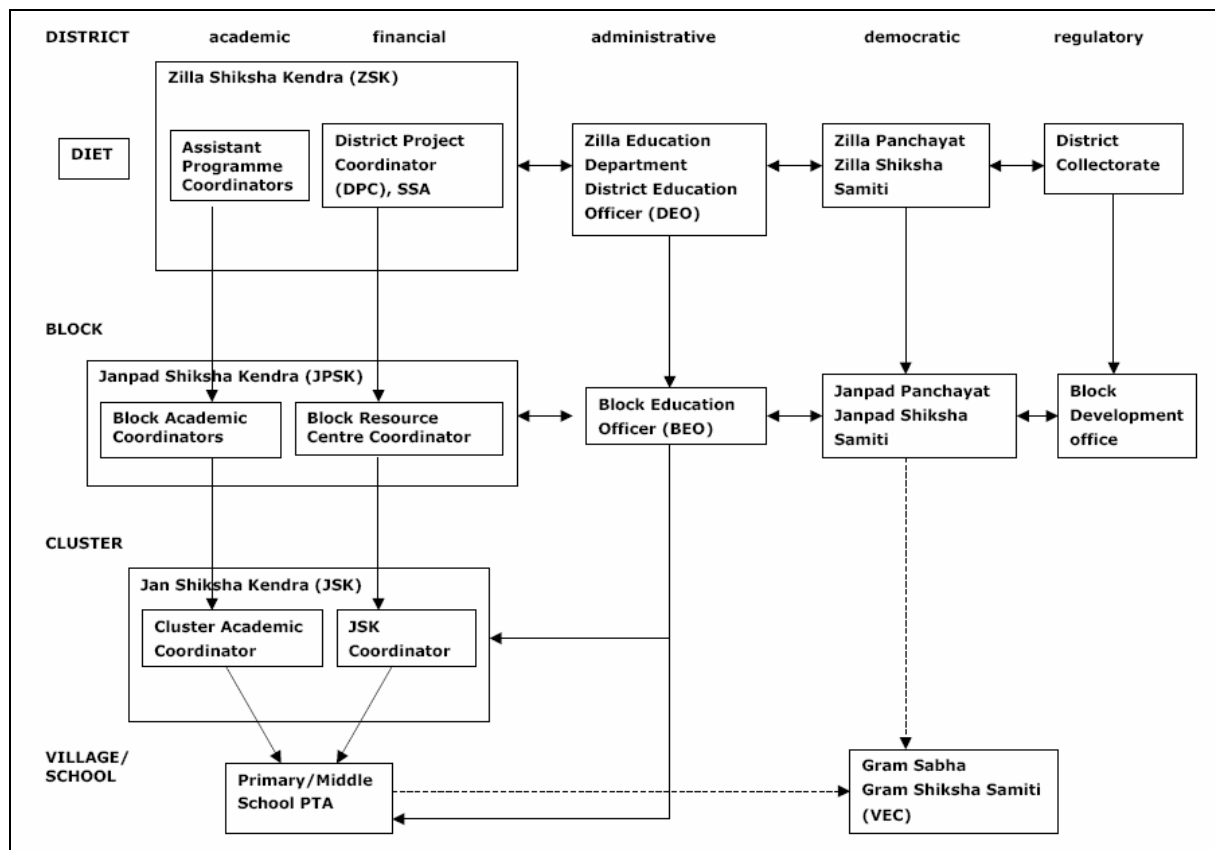
Source: Own

The division of labour between the more recently established branches is quite clear and without significant overlap, except the issue of inspection. Any of the five agencies involved in educational governance at each level has the right to inspect schools, and while all of them do so, there appears to be little coordination between them in terms of ensuring that schools in the block/district are inspected in roughly similar frequency.

The Project Offices (*shiksha kendras*) are staffed with professionals with managerial background (coordinators), who take care of the financial and infrastructure issues, as well as educational backgrounds (usually experienced middle or secondary school teachers), who serve as academic coordinators and are responsible for the professional support of teachers. The academic coordinators also monitor planning and student outcome, compile the relevant data, and report to higher levels.

Having provided an overview over the key institutions involved in educational governance at sub-state levels, we can now turn to the intricacies of local school governance as envisioned in the core legislative framework, the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam (People's Education Act) 2002 and its subordinate rules, the Jan Shiksha Niyam of 2003.

5.4 The rules of the game: Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam (People's Education Act) and participative governance

The Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam and its subordinate rules, subsumed under the Jan Shiksha Niyam (2003) merge the requirements of the state panchayat act and the provisions of SSA policy. They define the role of the different 'branches' of educational governance in Madhya Pradesh as illustrated in figure 5. It should be noted that both legislations delineate the devolution of functions and powers of the democratic (PRI) and the academic/financial (Shiksha Mission) branches, but make no mention of the role the administrative (education department) and regulatory (collectorate) branches play in educational governance.

While this is to some extent logic, because functions and powers have been devolved from the latter to the former, it is almost impossible to get an idea of the extent of involvement of line department offices (District and Block Education Offices) and the Collectorate from any official document.

In line with what has been said about the role of intermediate panchayats in service provision more generally, the JSA/JSN ascribe only few functions to PRIs at block and district levels. Not only does this hint the imbalance in the devolution of functions and powers both vertically, between different levels of PRIs (the *gram panchayat*/sabha being

vested with most powers and functions), but also horizontally, between the different branches of educational governance. In correspondence to the lack of involvement of PRIs at block and district levels, here powers and functions are centred on the administrative and regulatory branches.

I will now turn to the rather intricate ascription of powers and functions at the individual school and village level, which has been of greatest importance for the case studies[117].

A feature which sets local educational governance in Madhya Pradesh apart from the guidelines of SSAm as well as proceedings in other states (e.g. Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan,) is the exposed role of the Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA). While PTAs were incepted as consultative bodies parallel to the VECs and SMCs under DPEP, involving mostly in educational matters and resource mobilisation, they have by the beginning of 2006 advanced to the major school managing body.

The factual abolition of VECs as panchayat sub-committees has led to a situation where there was no established standing panchayat committee concerned exclusively with the management of local schools. While legally the powers vested in the VEC subrogated to the *gram sabha* and *gram panchayat* respectively, these general purpose bodies, due the magnitude of other responsibilities and priorities, are unfit to deal with the day-to-day business of schools.

As a result, the PTAs as the only school-based body - remember that SMCs existed only in EGS schools, or in DPEP schools located in a village along with other formal government schools - were endowed with the necessary powers to ensure the day-to-day management, while PRIs retained largely coordinative, supervisory and supportive functions.

The discussion of composition, structures and functions of PTAs follows the provisions made in the JSN, sections 8 and 9.

Composition

Members of the PTA can be categorised as non-elected, elected, and ex-officio members. Non-elected members are all parents and guardians who have a child enrolled in the school (membership in PTAs being non-exclusive). Elected members comprise PTA presidents and vice-presidents and 10 working committee members[118], who are elected for one academic year by the entire body of parents.

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[117] A comprehensive overview over the distribution of functions and powers is provided in appendix 5.

[118] Note that working committees have a prescribed strength of members, which is insensitive to the size of the school and the total number of parents on the PTA.

Table 11: Categories of PTA members

Non-elected	Elected	Ex-officio
All parents/guardians of children enrolled in the school	President Vice-president	Head teacher
All teachers employed in the school	10 working committee members	Delegated primary section teacher (in primary section PTAs of middle schools)

Source: Own

The only ex officio member of the PTA is its secretary. In primary schools, the head teacher is ex officio secretary to the PTA; in middle schools, where there is one PTAs for the primary and upper primary section each, the head teacher is secretary to the upper primary section PTA, and one senior primary teacher is delegated by the head teacher as the secretary of the primary section PTA.

Election of Committees

The election procedure of presidents and working committee members has been borrowed from the rules governing the election of PRIs. The rules of reservation in the working committee are the same as for *gram panchayat*s: 33% of all members must be female, and SC/ST population must be represented according to its proportion of the local population. In addition, one of the chairpersons must be from the SC/ST category and/or female (cf. JSN 2003 sec.8).

Working committee members and presidents are elected for one academic session within the first month of the school year.

The election of the working committee takes place in the first PTA meeting of an academic year and has to be announced to parents of enrolled children by way of displaying the meeting agenda at the panchayat office and the school notice board at least three days before the meeting is scheduled.

The quorum for the constituent meeting of the PTA is one third of all members. Teachers have no voting right in the election of the presidents and working committee members. It should be noted that the JSN makes no provision for the establishment of PTA subcommittees. Nevertheless, PTAs by means of government order are directed to establish purchase and inspection committees, and PTAs in all cases under study have indeed done so.

Meeting procedures

The operation of the PTA is supposed to be facilitated by holding regular meetings, in which all members are invited to participate. These meetings are general-purpose meetings, they facilitate the exchange of information, collective decision-making, rendering account for school activities and expenses, and whatever ad hoc task the

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school faces (government orders, upcoming examinations, necessity of resource mobilisation etc.).

It is important to note that elected members of the working committee are not delegated any decision-making power. The quorum of PTA meetings was fixed at one third of the entire parent body. While this rule may have been introduced to avoid partisan decision-making of the head teacher and a small number of parents, it seems that the failure of the quorum has also somewhat been anticipated by the crafters of the JSN.

The inability to take legitimate decision because of failure of the quorum, similar to what we know from regulations guiding the meetings of *gram sabha*[119], can be circumvented by postponing the meeting for half an hour, after which it can be conducted without being bound to the quorum (JSN section 8 (15)), practically rendering the quorum a non-starter. In fact, after the postponement of a meeting for half an hour, decisions can be taken by two or three persons, given that there is no minimum presence of members required for taking legitimate decisions in a PTA.

Decisions in PTA meetings can be taken by simple majority of present members. In case of the equality of votes, the vote of the PTA president is final. Meetings shall be presided over by the PTA president.

Functions and powers

While the JSA/JSN make no specifications linking positions to powers and functions in the PTA, the existence of a working committee indicates that a specific division of labour is intended. There are four distinct functions of PTAs mentioned in the JSN: planning, implementation/execution, decision-making, and monitoring.

Planning is envisioned to be a joint activity of all members, with the PTA secretary/head teacher and president taking the leading role. In villages where there is more than one school, planning is a joint exercise of PTA secretaries and presidents of all schools. While the *gram sabha* has no explicit role in the process of planning, it needs to approve the plans submitted by the planning group of the PTA(s).

Implementation/execution functions are vested in the elected members of the working committee. They are expected to carry out whatever decision has been taken in the general PTA meetings, which are scheduled at least once a month, or any task delegated to it by means of government order.

Execution tasks are most frequently related to school maintenance and construction, the distribution of student benefits (uniforms, textbooks, and since January 2006 the

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[119] Section 6 (2) of the original act allowed the postponement of *gram sabha* meetings for one or more days, in case of which no quorum was required (cf. Behar/Kumar 2002:42). This provision was abolished by an amendment to the Act in 2005 (Sec. 2 of Act No. 20, 2005).

distribution of the midday meal), and mobilisation of local resources for activities sanctioned by the PTA. The PTA is free to delegate any of these executive functions to other agencies, for instance the *gram panchayat*. Such delegation frequently happens in civil works.

Decision-making is confined to the general PTA assembly, including the non-elected members. It should be noted that there are only very few items for decision-making listed in the JSN. These are decisions about the provision of school uniforms, and decisions regarding the continuation of *guruji* in EGS schools[120]. There is also scope for decision-making over employment of non-teaching staff (since the transfer of the midday meal to PTAs the employment of a school cook has gained importance) and appointment of a preschool teacher in those schools that have an ECCE section. The PTA also approves or rejects the annual activity calendar of the school, which is prepared jointly by the head teacher and PTA president.

Monitoring functions are confined to two core areas, the audit of school accounts and student progress. The latter is envisioned to be a continuous process of parent-led evaluation of student progress by reviewing the monthly progress report cards, as well as the quarterly, biannual and annual examinations. The general assembly may recommend remedial measures to improve student achievement based on this monitoring process.

While the right to monitor school accounts and access all other information regarding the school does amount to some monitoring powers of PTA members, actual control and sanctioning power is vested in the *gram sabha*.

The *gram sabha* as democratically legitimised body has the right to monitor PTA activities and overall school performance. It can also enforce sanction in case of the violation of legal norms, such as the right to education (imposition fines on parents who constrain their children's regular attendance at school), and direct the concerned authorities to take action against deviant teachers. Other than this, *gram panchayat* and *gram sabha* are called upon to support PTAs in their efforts "in improving the quality of learning level of all the children" (JSN section 10 (a)). The ascription of functions to PRIs is as comprehensive as it is vague, the appears to be comprehensive support and interaction without interference in the decision-making process, which is vested in the PTA.

Whether and to what extent the rules in operation at the school level comply with the formal rules established by the complex legal framework of the Panchayat Act, the Jan

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[120] Free uniforms are provided only to SC/ST and girl students. PTAs can decide to provide uniforms to all students (if the necessary resources are generated), and they can choose the design, fabric etc. of school uniforms. With respect to the continuation of teachers, it should be noted that PTAs of non-EGS schools can also decide over the extension of contracts of untrained substitute teachers employed by the *gram panchayat* to fill temporary vacancies due to prolonged appointment procedures.

Shiksha Adhiniyam and Niyam, and SSA policy, will be elaborated in some depth in the case studies in the following chapter.

Figure 6 visualises the division of labour between different local level institutions and lists core functions and powers.

Fig. 16 Division of labour in local educational governance according to the *Jan Shiksha Niyam*
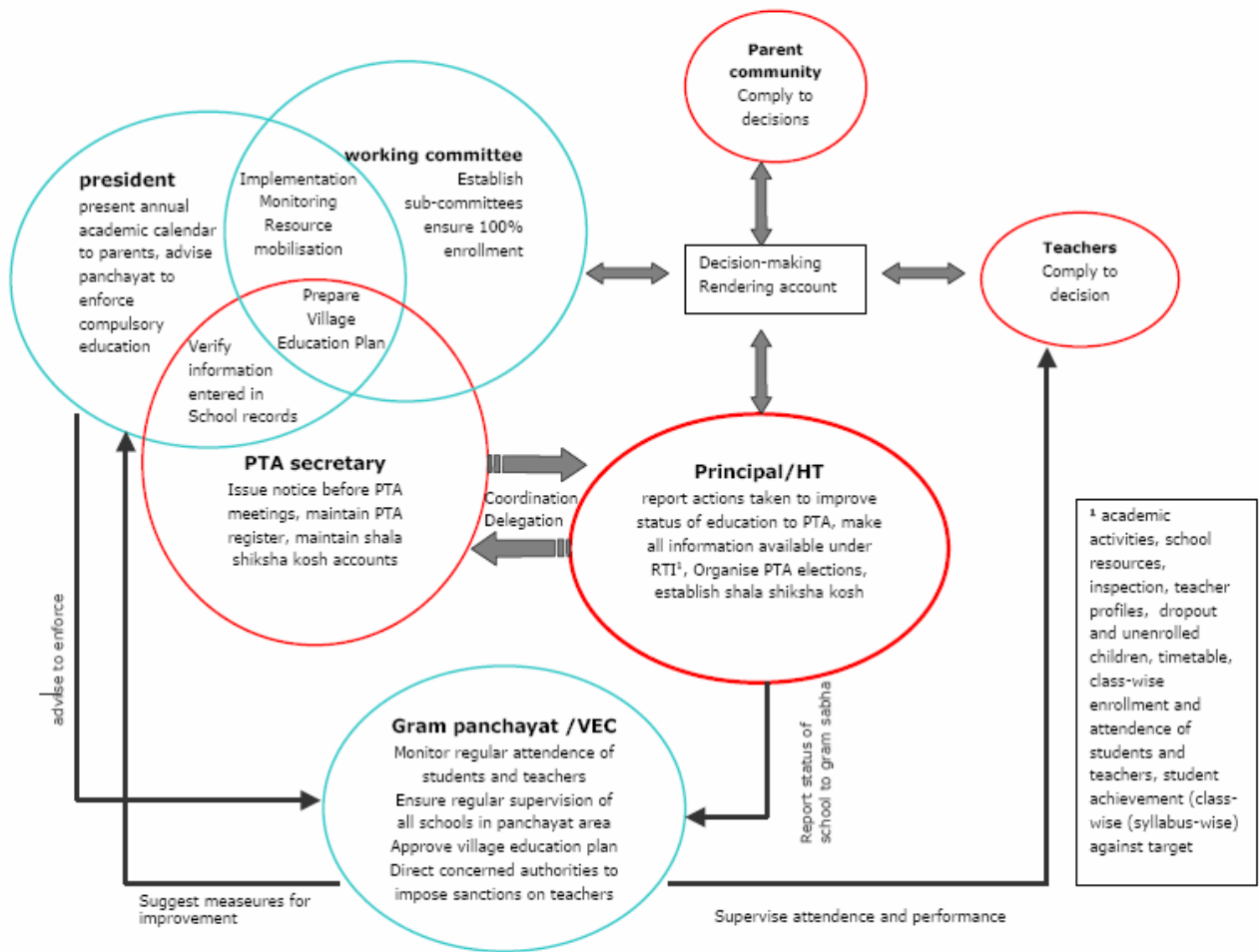
Source: Own, based on *Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam* 2003

6

Case Study Evidence: Parent Participation and Panchayat Activity in five Government Schools in Sehore Block

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6.1 Socio-economic profile of Sehore District[121]

Geography

Sehore district is located 39 km in the southwest of the state capital of Bhopal along the Bhopal-Indore highway. It is devided into the five blocks of Sehore, Ichhawar, Ashta, Budhni and Nasrullahganj.

Fig. 17 Map of Sehore District

The district covers an area of 6.578 km² and is bordered in the north by the Parvati river and in the south by the Narmada river. Numerous smaller arms of these two large rivers flow through the district and play an important role for agricultural irrigation. Roughly

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[121] If not indicated otherwise, data presented in this subchapter is drawn from the official district government website available at http://sehore.nic.in/Sehore-Statistics.htm#Bk3.

25% of the area is covered by forests, most of which are located in Ichhawar and Budhni blocks. 57% of land is under cultivation, 14% is uncultivated land, the rest comprises of wasteland and cultivable fallow land.

Population

Sehore district is predominantly rural, with 81% of its population being spread over 1011 villages. The remaining 18% live in seven towns.

Sehore is the most populous block due to its physical size and the location of the district headquarter. The latter also affects the rural-urban population ratio, with the urban population accounting for 26.18% of the total population in the block.

Table 12: Block-wise rural/urban population

	Rural Population		Urban Population	
Block	Total	%	Total	%
Ashta	252285	84.08	47778	15.92
Budhni	100770	81.03	23603	18.97
Ichhawar	119396	90.39	12688	9.61
Nasrullagani	149384	88.65	17240	10.35
Sehore	262510	73.82	93115	26.18
Total	**884345**	**83.59**	**194424**	**16.21**

Source: Census 2001

The total population is roughly 1.9 Million, among which on average 10.8% belong to the scheduled tribes (ST) and 20.5% belong to the scheduled castes (SC). Even though the district has a moderate tribal population as compared to the districts along the southern border of the state, Budhni, Ichhawar and Nasrullahganj block have substantial tribal population of between 14 and 21%.

The majority of the remaining 68.8% of the population belong to the OBC (other backward classes) category, which includes large sections of the Muslim communities. Since most sources for official statistics (census, NSS and NFHS) do not discriminate between OBC and general castes, proportions can only be estimated. Caste-wise school enrolment figures[122], however, suggest that approximately 50% of the population in the district belong to the OBCs, and about 18% belong to the general castes. 37.7% of the population in the district live below the poverty line[123].

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[122] From: District Project Office Sehore, Annual Report 2004-05

[123] It should be noted that the national poverty line is fixed at 30 Rs per person per day, which is lower than the international poverty line of 1 $ (app. 40 Rs) per person per day. On the basis of the latter the poverty rate in the district would rise above 40%.

About 10% of the population are Muslim, 85% Hindu, and 5% belong to smaller religious groups, most notably Jains and Christians (cf. Census of India, Basic Data Sheet District Sehore).

Decadal population growth at 27.99% is slightly higher than the state average (24.3%), Madhya Pradesh being number three of the high population growth states, and well above the all India average (21.54%).

Literacy

Literacy rates in Sehore district are slightly below the state average, notably because female literacy is abysmally low (22.6% in 1991 in rural Malwa region[124], to which Sehore district belongs). Adult illiteracy continues to strongly affect statistics, even though literacy rates among the younger age groups have improved dramatically during the last 15 years.

As a result, according to 2001 census data a large gender gap of 30.19%in literacy pertsists.

Table 13: Literacy rates (7 years and above) for Sehore district, 1991 and 2001

District	Literacy Rate					
	1991			2001		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Sehore	40,43	56,9	21,99	63,83	78,14	47,95
Madhya Pradesh	**44,67**	**58,54**	**29,35**	**64,11**	**76,8**	**50,28**

Source: Census 2001

There also is a notable rural-urban gap of 25.17 % in female literacy in the district. This intra-gender gap is highest in Sehore block, at an astonishing 32.54%. At the same time, the gender gap in urban areas is lowest in the block at 15.18%. In terms of rural literacy, Sehore block ranks second lowest after Ichhawar block.

Table 14: Literacy Rates by residence and gender – District and Block

		Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sehore		63,83	78,14	47,95	60,58	76,25	43,22	77,80	86,25	68,39
	Sehore	64,37	78,59	48,62	58,38	75,27	39,60	80,10	87,32	72,14
	Ashta	62,88	78,95	45,27	60,61	77,99	41,58	74,47	83,87	64,16
	Ichhawar	55,83	72,43	37,54	54,25	71,41	35,33	69,96	81,59	57,25
	Nasrullan	65,87	77,96	52,44	64,43	76,81	50,73	77,54	87,12	66,54
	Budni	70,06	81,02	57,52	67,78	79,20	54,76	79,53	88,41	69,10

Source: Census 2001

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[124] cf. Government of Madhya Pradesh, Dept. of Health and Family Welfare: Madhya Pradesh Population Policy, 2000:3. The table includes disaggregate data for different regions, with Malwa region having the lowest female literacy rate in the state in the 15-34 age group.

It should be noted that the census literacy rate includes the population age 7 and above. Considering that the age group of 10-18 years makes up for 18.7% of the total population in the district[125], and that literacy in this age group is significantly higher, it is not unreasonable to assume that female *adult* literacy is still below 40% in the district, and probably below 30% in rural areas.

This also is a telling indicator of the neglect of adult literacy programmes and structured efforts to sustain especially female adult literacy through continuous learning programmes, which has done its share to keep female adult illiteracy high. As the above table indicates, female literacy is especially low in Sehore and Ichhawar blocks[126].

Health Care Facilities

District wise indicators such as maternal and infant mortality are not available, but there is no reason to assume that conditions should be much better in Sehore district than in the rest of the state. Average maternal and infant mortality rates are high at 379 per 100000/76 per 1000 live births (as compared to the all India averages of 301/68)[127].

Sehore district is quite average for the state in terms of access to government provided health care facilities. There are two medical hospitals, six community health centres, 16 public health centres and 150 sub-centres spread over the district. In addition to this, alternative medical treatment is widely available, as can be seen in the high number of ayurvedic and other alternative hospitals (16), which by far exceed the number of 'modern' medical hospitals. All of these have a total capacity of 410 beds for inpatient treatment. This means that each sub-centre serves an average of 6.74% villages, and 2632 heads come on one hospital bed[128]. The government of Madhya Pradesh has tried to tackle the severe under-provision of state-provided health services, which is typical for rural Madhya Pradesh, with a strategy similar to the EGS in education: Instead of providing fully fledged health centres with qualified personnel, individuals from the villages are trained as birth attendants and village health workers (*jan swasthya rakshak,* cf. Government of Madhya Pradesh 2003b).

Water and Sanitation

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[125] Computed from census 2001 population data available at http://www.censusindiamaps.net/.

[126] It has been pointed out to me in a conversation over tea by a member of the *zilla panchayat* that female adult illiteracy is so exceptionally high in the district because male family members do not have much interest in educated wives, mothers and sisters. According to him, educated women are clearly perceived as more independent and self-conscious, and thus more troublesome and less easy to control.

[127] cf. GOI, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare: Madhya Pradesh Profile, available at
http://mohfw.nic.in/NRHM/State%20Files/mp.htm#sp

[128] cf. ibid.

Madhya Pradesh is partly drought prone, as most Indian states under continental climate. According to the Water Resource Department, ground water is over-exploited or critical in 12 out of 45 districts, and semi-critical in another 12, including Sehore district[129].

Provision of safe drinking water in the state has been ensured mainly through the installation of handpumps and bore wells tapping ground water. According to the district government, every village in Sehore district avails of at least one handpump. However, the safety of ground water is not systematically controlled. Given high levels of agricultural production in the area, contamination of ground water with pesticides or fertilizers is not at all unlikely; fluoride contamination has already been detected (cf. Walters 2000:17, WaterAid 2006:1). In addition, with sinking ground water levels during summer, many handpumps fall dry, so there may actually not be sufficient access to clean drinking water within villages occasionally. According to the Public Health Engineering Department, as many as 10% of all handpumps in Sehore district went dry in the summer of 2007 because of sinking ground water levels.

The state of sanitation and drainage is dreadful, not only in many villages visited in Sehore block, but also in the district headquarters. Large areas in the city do not have any underground canalisation, which causes severe health hazard during heavy rainfall, when open sewage canals are flooded. This is the major reason why malaria is endemic in the district, which has the highest infection rates in the state.

The central and state government operate a number of schemes for improving the status of sanitation. The largest initiative is the national Total Sanitation Campaign, which was launched in 1999. 62% of this Scheme is financed by the central government, 22% by state governments, and the remaining 16% by local governments.

Local Economy

The economy of the district is dominated by agriculture. Sehore district is one of the largest wheat and soybean growing areas in central India. Other agricultural produce include sugarcane, lentils and pulses.

30.6% of the district's net sown area is irrigated, the corresponding 63.3% are rain fed. 57.2% of the working population are engaged in agriculture, 36.4% of which are agricultural labourers. This is significantly above the state average of 28.7%[130]. 31.7% of the total labour force in the district are categorised as marginal workers, pointing to substantial rural underemployment. Since the percentage of families sustaining on small landholding is high, underemployment is most acute between the major harvesting

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[129] Cf. http://www.mp.gov.in/wrd/HIS/GW/PROB_BLK.HTML.The data available from the Water Resources Department is excessively old (1998) and serves only as an orientation. For Sehore block, responses from villagers support that sinking ground water levels are a serious and widespread problem.

[130] cf. Census 2001, data available at http://www.censusindiamaps.net/page/India_WhizMap/IndiaMap.htm

seasons. Industrial development is weak in the district, so seasonal unemployment cannot be compensated locally, leading to substantial migration among landless and marginal landholding families.

More than half of the marginal workers are women, which is usually attributed to their twin responsibilities of family work and income generation. It is, however, also a result of social preference: In families owning small plots of land, it is usually the women who take care of this land, while the male family members supplement income through wage labour[131].

In terms of industrial development, most districts of the state are categorised as backward by the government. Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior districts figure as fully industrially developed. Among the backward districts, Ratlam, Katni, Satna, Ujjain and Devas are considered to be on the rise, followed by Hoshangabad and Sehore (cf. GoMP, Administrative Report of Dept of Commerce, Industry & Employment 2006-07:19)

Roads and Electricity

Being located in the centre of India, Madhya Pradesh profits from a large number of national highways running through the state. State highways and district roads connecting the district headquarters are usually asphalted, but some are in very bad condition. Dirt roads and paths connecting villages make up the majority of roads. In Sehore block, villages located off the district roads and highways are accessible either by motorbike or jeep, because the shape of the roads is too bad for a regular car. This makes travel and transport a time-consuming task verging on impossibility after heavy rainfall.

Even though there are 16 power stations located in Madhya Pradesh with capacities ranging between 20 and 2150 MW, power supply is a major problem in the state. In fact, power and roads have been the topics on which the former chief minister Digvijay Singh and the Congress Party have lost elections in 2003[132]. There are 1072 villages in the district, 99.7% of which are electrified according to district government data. However, not all households in the villages are electrified, and, more importantly, power supply is erratic, with frequent power cuts of up to several hours even in the district headquarter. In the villages, power supply is often restricted to a few hours a day.

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[131] cf. Interview PTA President EGS1, 29th March 2006.

[132] cf. Manor 2004. It is interesting to note that the Congress Party seems to have learnt immediately from Singh's glorious defeat: Sonia Gandhi has fought and won the general national elections 2004 on exactly the issues of basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity and rural employment, in contrast to the BJP, which has focused on economic growth and foreign policy.

Local government

Besides the *zilla panchayat*, there are five *janpad panchayats*, 499 *gram panchayats* and five *nagar panchayats* (municipal bodies).

Sehore z*illa panchayat* consists of 17 elected and 11 ex-officio members, the latter including the chief minister and the minister in charge of the district as members of the national parliament, the members of the state legislative assembly from the constituencies falling wholly or partly in the district, and the presidents of the five *janpad panchayats*.

The last panchayat elections in January 2005 were not contested along party lines, which means that it was not allowed for candidates to expose party symbols and logos during the elections. Still, most candidates were affiliated to a political party, and at district and block levels, party leaders did campaign for their local candidates.

At district level, panchayat elections brought about an odd result: The majority of all seats went to candidates from the congress party, while most of the president and vice president seats were won by candidates affiliated to the BJP (cf. Sasaki 2005; The Hindu 24.02.2005[133]).

This situation is also reflected in the *zilla panchayat* of Sehore - it is dominated by elected members of the Congress Party, but the panchayat president is a BJP member, who won the election on a reserved (ST) ticket.

It is quite notable that both panchayat president and vice president at district level are female, the vice president belonging to the scheduled castes. Both have a reputation of being politically weak, and to be influenced by other more powerful (male) party representatives. The lack of leadership impacts negatively on the functioning of the *zilla panchayat*[134].

Sehore *janpad panchayat* consists of 25 elected members (including panchayat president and vice president) and 30 ex-officio members; of the latter two are MLAs from the constituency and 28 are *sarpanches* from villages within the block. Membership of *sarpanches* in the *janpad panchayat* is based on rotation, one fifth of all *sarpanches* in the block are member of the *janpad panchayat* for one year.

This is important because it means that the composition of the *janpad panchayat* changes constantly, with half of all members being subjected to annual rotation.

Politics in Sehore district are virulent due to the proximity of the district to the state capital, and the resulting interference from state level politicians. A telling indicator is the frequency of transfers among collectors: Between 2003 (when the BJP government came into power at the state level) and April 2006, the district has seen four collectors. As

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[133] Available at www.theHindu.com/2005/02/24/stories/2005022406250500.htm.

[134] This perception has been expressed by the DPC and BEO independently of each other during informal conversations.

head of the district administration, the position of the collector is the most powerful at district level, and ambitious collectors are frequently perceived as a threat to state level politicians and administrators[135].

6.2 Status of education in Sehore district

6.1.2 Enrolment and Infrastructure

Enrolment

With respect to enrolment targets as determined by SSA (total enrolment in the 6-14 age group by 2003), total enrolment is being approached at primary level, but is still quite elusive at higher levels.

A mid-term monitoring report suggests that the gross enrolment rate was 99.5% in the district in 2006 (cf. TISS 2006:31). At upper primary level, gross enrolment was reported slightly lower at 99.1%. Unfortunately, this evaluation report neither features net enrolment data, nor does it discriminate between boys' and girls' enrolment rates.

The district report card draws a rosier picture of the state of enrolment in grade 1-5, claiming 129% gross enrolment and 100% net enrolment at primary level for the academic year 2005-2006.

The high excess in gross enrolment is due to the fact that there is large-scale over- and underage enrolment, so this is not per se unrealistic. In programme components such as NPEGL, gross enrolment is targeted at 130%, because it is estimated that the overage target population among girls is large.

In contrast, the same report card states a gross enrolment ratio of 71.2% at upper primary level. Taking into account the low transition rates, which will be discussed below, this seems a more realistic number than the 99.1% claimed in the TISS report. Net enrolment is reported to be as low as 54.2%, again pointing to large numbers of overage students at this level.

Unfortunately, district-wise data for girls' enrolment was unavailable, but considering parents' reluctance to send daughters to schools outside the village of residence[136], it

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[135] I am grateful to Sangeeta Geoffrey, head of a special school for handicapped children in the city of Sehore, for pointing this out to me.

[136] Social control over female family members is still highly valued. During the period between puberty and marriage, parents are very concerned about their daughters moving in public without the company of male family members. Considering that most girls enter puberty sometime between 12 and 15 years of age, and this matches the time span of upper primary education, it can be assumed that social concerns impact schooling decisions seriously, and indeed this concern has been expressed by many (especially male) parent respondents.

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may be assumed that a large proportion of the 29.8% students who drop out after primary school are girls.

In terms of caste-wise enrolment, data has not yet been available for the school year of 2005-06. Data from the previous year, however, seem to indicate that the enrolment gap between SC/ST children and other parts of the population has been narrowed, as their proportion in enrolment (government and private recognised schools) broadly reflect their proportion of the population, as depicted in the table below.

Table 15: Enrolment primary stage (std. I-V) by caste/gender in Sehore district 2004-2005

Blocks	SC			ST			OBC			GEN		
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
Ashta	34.5	34.3	34.4	3.6	3.8	3.7	42.1	42.1	42.1	19.7	19.8	19.7
Budhni	17.4	16.3	16.9	19.9	21.2	20.6	44.7	45.2	45	17.9	17.4	17.7
Ichhawar	21.3	22.3	21.8	22.5	21.5	22	46.7	46.4	46.6	9.4	9.8	9.6
Nasrullaganj	16.7	16.3	16.5	32.2	32.0	32.1	42.6	43.0	42.8	8.5	8.6	8.6
Sehore	20.9	20.0	20.5	3.8	3.7	3.75	63.5	63.0	63.3	12.6	13.3	13.0
distric mean	23.6	23.4	23.5	12.4	12.2	12.3	49.8	49.8	49.8	14.3	14.5	14.4

Source: Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Zilla Sehore, Annual Report 2004-2005

At upper primary level, in contrast, the proportion of SC/ST children declines by 2-3%, while it rises accordingly for OBC and general caste children. This indicates that the number of children *not* transferring to upper primary level was still higher among children from scheduled castes, and, even more so, children from scheduled tribes in that year.

While access and enrolment are almost universal in Sehore district at the primary level, universalisation of enrolment in upper primary education still is at distance.

Table 16: Enrolment upper primary stage (std. VI-VIII) by caste/gender in Sehore district 2004-2005

Blocks	SC			ST			OBC			GEN		
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
Ashta	34	29.9	32	2.9	2.3	2.6	41.9	44.4	43.2	21.2	23.1	22.2
Budhni	15.7	17.1	16.4	16.8	13.7	15.3	45.9	48.1	47.0	21.6	21.0	21.3
Ichhawar	21.7	22.0	21.9	15.0	13.9	14.5	53.0	52.4	52.7	10.3	11.6	11.0
Nasrullaganj	17.8	18.3	18.1	23.2	20.3	21.8	48.9	49.4	49.2	10.2	12.0	11.1
Sehore	18.5	18.2	18.4	3.1	3.2	3.15	64.9	62.2	63.6	13.4	16.3	14.9
district mean	23	21.9	22.5	9.1	7.8	8.5	52.0	52.6	52.2	15.9	17.8	16.8

Source: Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Zilla Sehore, Annual Report 2004-2005

This is to some extent caused by the provisions of SSA themselves, as the universalisation of elementary education would require upgrading all primary schools to middle schools, if student intake is really meant to be the same in grade six as in grade one. Given the 1km-radius-approach that has been realised by means of EGS, it is

impossible (because highly uneconomical) to upgrade schools that already have classes with less than 10 children in each grade.

Creating larger middle schools within a radius of 3 km, as prescribed in SSA, needs to be flanked by measures to ensure that children will not be kept back for social concerns, which affects especially girls.

Infrastructure Requirements as per SSA Norms

In terms of educational infrastructure, provisions of SSA (government primary school within a radius of 1km, provided there are >40 children, and government middle school within a radius of 3km of each habitation) have been met in Sehore district since the academic year 2004-05 (cf. RGSM Sehore, Annual Report 2004-05:10). Because the government is closing down primary schools when student numbers decline below 40 (e.g. because of high private enrolment, or demographic fluctuation in a village) this provision may be violated in isolated cases, but overall it can be assumed that access was ensured in 2005-06 and 2006-07.

With progressive upgrading of EGS schools, the provision of government inputs has been homogenised across the government primary education sector. In addition to the minimum standard of two classrooms and two teachers per primary school, there are several base line quality standards that should be aimed at for each school: a student-teacher-ratio not exeeding 40:1, 1m² of space per student, availability of drinking water and toilets, a library and a playground (these are also parameter on which private schools get government recognition).

Some of these targets are still remote in both primary and middle schools. According to the district report card (2005-06), 20.9% of government primary and EGS schools in Sehore district are single teacher schools, 25.5% of all government schools (including secondary and higher secondary) have a student-classroom-ratio above 60:1 (in rooms that are hardly ever larger than 20m²), and an average of 2% of schools have no building at all. If we add to this additional quality standards, like the availability of drinking water and toilet facilities, a substantial number (if not the majority) of schools in the district do not yet meet the infrastructure requirements as per SSA norms.

Interestingly, the number of schools failing certain quality requirements seems to increase rather than decrease, because the drive to total enrolment in the villages is not matched by appropriate additional infrastructure, especially classrooms and teachers. Construction activities and teacher appointment can take up to several years. Thus the average student-teacher-ratio increases[137], and so does the number of students per

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[137] Average student-teacher-ratios are not overly expressive because they do not indicate class-wise ratios, but school-wise averages, and because they are based on enrolment/employment rather than attendance. Still they indicate that there is a relative decline in the provision of teachers.

classroom and the number of structures requiring major or minor repair, as can be seen below.

Table 17: selected SSA performance indicators Sehore district

performance indicators*	04-05			05-06		
	Prim	Prim-Up Prim	Prim-HighSec	Prim	Prim-Up Prim	Prim-HighSec
% single classroom schools	12.5	3.5	3.9	15.1	7.1	5.7
% single teacher schools	17.1	0.6	2.6	20.9	1.9	0.9
% schools with common toilet	42.2	72.0	80.5	45.7	72.2	83.0
% schools with girls's toilet	29.6	56.9	76.6	29.1	51.5	65.5
% schools with drinking water facilities	68.1	84.2	93.5	74.3	89.1	97.2
% schools with female teachers	54.8	64.0	77.9	52.4	62.9	87.4
student teacher ratio (STR)	33	26	28	38	30	27
% schools with PTR>100	1.5	0.6	1.3	3.1	2.2	1.9
student-classroom-ratio (SCR)	47	48	53	49	51	44
% schools with SCR>60	20.6	23.5	24.7	22.5	24.7	28.3
% of classrooms in good condition	76.5	880.9	79.3	60.7	57.2	54.5
% of classrooms requiring minor repair	19.4	16.0	18.4	36.0	38.8	41.9
% of classrooms requiring major repair	4.1	3.0	2.3	3.3	4.0	3.7

*data of upper primary and upper primary+secondary schools excluded, as these account for only 1.2% of all recognised schools

Source: District Elementary Education Report Cards 2004-05 and 2005-06

This trend is not unique to Sehore district, but can be observed for the state as a whole (even though some districts do perform significantly better).

A general problem seems to be the practice of fund release from the state to the district, and patterns of spending activities: Only 30% of the annual approved budget for SSA were released to the district by the end of August 2006, and of this, only 73% funds have been spent, making a total of 22% of the approved budget (cf. TISS 2006:33). Consequently, schools do not receive the funds on time, and frequently are unable to fulfil government orders regarding infrastructure within prescribed time limits.

Private schools

The proportion of private schools is substantial in Sehore district. According to the district report card of 2006, excluding primary schools (grades 1-5), where 97.5% of all children are enrolled in government schools, 37.35% of all other school types are private schools, and they account for 23% of total enrolment in the district as captured by government statistics.

Table 18: Proportion of private schools in Sehore district

Key data: Elementary Education						
School category	Total schools*		Rural schools*		Total enrolment*	
	Govt.	Private	Govt.	Private	Govt.	Private
Primary only	1,023	32	983	28	99,374	2,515
Primary with upper primary	343	280	309	218	69,913	40,493
Primary with upper primary & sec/higher sec.	52	54	48	30	13,650	11,422
Upper primary only	6	1	5	1	943	302
Upper primary with sec./higher secondary	9	6	6	4	1,669	780
No response in school category	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: District Elementary Education Report Card: 2005-06

It should be kept in mind that these numbers do not include private unrecognised schools, which are mushrooming in rural areas in a number of states including Madhya Pradesh, but are not included in the EMIS data collection system (similar to the non-capture of private health care facilities in government statistics). As Geeta Gandhi Kingdon points out, this leads to gross official under-estimation of the extent of private primary enrolment in rural areas (cf. Kingdon 2007:20). In spite of not figuring anywhere in the estimation of the share private schools take in total enrolment, enrollment in unrecognised private schools figures in the estimation of input demand into the public system.

According to ASER 2006, 22.6% of all children *at primary level* in rural Sehore district are enrolled in private schools. At upper primary and secondary stages, the relative strength of private enrolment increases significantly, because most private schools cater to all levels from primary to secondary (to ensure sufficient enrolment), and government secondary schools are close to unavailable in outside the district and block headquarters.

In urban areas private enrolment is much higher than in rural areas, which is obvious from the sheer number of private and convent schools in the district and block headquarters[138]. In the urban and semi-urban clusters of Sehore city, private schools by far outnumber government schools, so it can reasonably be assumed that enrolment in private schools exceeds enrolment in government schools.

Even though the Government of Madhya Pradesh does make efforts to extend its teaching-learning materials to private schools (especially madrassas), there is no monitoring of the physical status of these schools, the syllabus, and learning levels.

6.2.2 Internal efficiency and education outcome

Retention, Completion and Transition

With respect to universal retention and completion at primary level until 2007 and at elementary level until 2010, as part of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), the district still has a long way to go. According to the district report card 2005-06, the retention rate at primary level was 84.6%, indicating that a mean percentage of 15.6% of all children in a grade 1 cohort did not reach grade 5 within the prescribed period of time.

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[138] Unfortunately, Pratham has not published the results from the surveys conducted in urban areas. According to a former employee of Pratham Madhya Pradesh, this is due to the fact that the data revealed downward trends in student achievement and a lack of positive impact of its remedial teaching programme.

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The average drop-out rate at primary level was comparatively low at 5.9%, which is below the state average of 7.3% (State Elementary Education Report Card: 2005-06). The average repetition rate has been slightly higher than the state average (16.2%) at 17.7%.

Both repetition and dropout rates reached a peak in grade 5, as a result of the combination of low learning levels and centralised board examinations. Correspondingly, promotion rates dropped to 56.6%. As a consequence, completion and transition rates are of great concern. As per definition, these estimate the rate of completion/transition in year x from the reference point of the student cohort enrolled in first grade in year x-4. They reflect the internal efficiency of the system and must not be confused with the annual rate of completion and transition in a given 5th grade student population, because the latter include repeaters and students who have enrolled in in higher grades.

Assuming that the promotion rate in grade 5 is identical with the completion rate, a completion rate of 56.6% means that 43.4% of students enrolled in grade 1 in the year 2002 did not pass the grade 5 board examinations in 2006. This includes students who took the examination but did not pass, students who reached grade 5 but did not participate in board examinations, repeaters and dropouts.

Unfortunately, dropout and promotion rates have not been estimated in the district report card of 2005-06 and 2004-05 for grade 6-8. The available alternative source, the RGSM report for 2004-05, estimates the completion rate for upper primary level at an extremely low 32% of the 11-14 age population.

This indicates that within the elementary education system, almost two thirds of all students in the district did not reach grade 8 in the prescribed time period of eight years, almost half of them repeating or dropping out already within the primary cycle. Thus, internal efficiency and outcome predictability of the system are very low. Factors leading to this internal inefficiency will be discussed in context of findings from the field research.

Out of those students who actually took grade 5 board examinations in 2005 and 2006, 85.54% and 83.3% respectively are reported to have passed (the gender gap being minimal). For grade 8 board examination the pass rate was substantially lower at 70.12% resp 69.3% (cf. DRC 2004-05/2005-06).

Pass rates, however, must not be equated with learning achievement, because cheating is reported to be common in board examinations[139], and teachers have little incentive to prevent it.

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[139] According to Kingdon (2007:15), in the state of Uttar Pradesh pass rates in board examinations fell dramatically from 57% to 14.7% after the introduction of police presence to prevent mass cheating in examinations in the year 1994. Little surprisingly, this experiment was terminated immediately after its impacts became visible. No such experiment has been made in Madhya Pradesh as yet, but one may wonder how the 24.2% class 6-8 children who cannot read a class 2 level story in government schools in Madhya Pradesh, as

Learning achievement

There is a scarcity of structured and regular testing of student achievement in all of India, and Madhya Pradesh is no exception to this. The only fairly recent study apart from the ASER reports is an achievement survey carried out by NCERT in 2002. As discussed in chapter 3, student performance was used as an indicator for the choice of the district for research, and Sehore district has fared quite well in this respect compared to other districts in the state, being in the top five group for both reading and arithmetics.

A note of caution is in place nonetheless. Sehore district, and Sehore block even more so, has a large number of private recognised schools in rural areas (20.7% as compared to 12% on average in the state). Considering that, according to ASER 2005, private school students outperformed government students by 25% in reading and 20% in arithmetic skills throughout the state, the good performance of the district may partly be due to the high number of private school students (representing 22.6% of students tested at primary level!).

It also should be considered that the learning levels tested by the ASER team were not appropriate to the respective grades. A high proportion of children being able to read a grade 2 text in grade 5 does not say much about the ability of children to master the syllabus of grade 5. The high repetition and dropout rates at this stage (22.8% resp. 20.6%) indicate that almost half of the students finishing grade five have not acquired the necessary learning levels to go on to the next grade, and in this respect Sehore district is very close to the state average.

What makes the assessment of student achievement even more difficult is the system of grading. Students are not only graded by performance, but also by attendance, the composite grade being calculated from attendance and performance grades divided by two. Thus, students whose achievement is well in spite of lower attendance levels will get a lower overall achievement grade, while students whose achievement is weak will get a higher grade if their attendance records are straight.

Furthermore, grading levels are somewhat pecurliar: Achievement levels above 60% feature as an A, and subsequent grades require accordingly lower achievement. This means that in grade 5 board examinations, students who have managed less than half of the tested content will still pass with a B grade (45-59%). This also sheds an entirely different light at the impressive pass rates of 83.8% at elementary level, as presented in the district report cards.

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detected in ASER 2005, have made it into upper primary schools without cheating in board examinations. Indian students may not achieve high cognitive learning levels through school education, but they certainly acquire amazing skills of survival in the system.

Teacher Qualification

As discussed in the previous chapter, teacher employment status and qualification have diversified in the state due to the implementation of DPEP and EGS.

A central feature of DPEP was the substitution of pre-service training (usually in the form of a college course in education) with in-service training to bypass the shortage of qualified teachers while extending access to government schooling.

In addition, ex ante educational requirements were lowered form completed higher secondary to secondary (male applicants) and upper primary level education (female applicants) during the implementation of EGS[140].

As per 2002, the percentage of EGS schools was 33.2% of all government schools, which was significantly lower than the state average of 47.1% (cf. GoMP HDR 2002:39). Sehore district has not been affected by EGS as much as other districts, because its tribal population (at which EGS was primarily targeted) is comparatively small, and because it has been part of DPEP from the first phase onwards, during which a large number of primary schools were opened. Consequently, the larger proportion of para-teachers (35.5% of all government teachers in the district) consists of *shiksha karmis* rather than *guruji*.

Since the bulk of schools under EGS have been opened between 1998 and 2002, and the state has been following a policy of upgrading EGS schools to regular government schools, the proportion of EGS schools has shrunk dramatically.

Nevertheless a majority of teachers appointed during the last 15 years have been appointed either under DPEP or under EGS, implying that a third of all government teachers in the district have received no (EGS) or negligibly few (DPEP) pre-service training.

As per 2006, the proportion of para-teachers (*shiksha karmi* and *guruji*) has been reported at 35.5%. The number of teachers with pre-service training may be expected to rise due to the new recruitment policy for contract teachers; however, the number of new teaching positions can be expected to rise only gradually, as teachers employed by the government on tenure retire and are replaced by contract teachers.

Those teachers in the system who have started as para-teachers can be expected to remain in the system for the next decades.

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[140] In a conversation on 21.09.2007, the Additional Mission Director Elementary Education has pointed out to me that during the main recruitment drive under EGS he has attended induction teacher trainings where selected candidates were unable to even recite the Hindi alphabet. Apparently appointment practice favoured local residence over qualification, screwing down educational requirements according to the availability of candidates. As a result, large numbers of severely underqualified teachers have been appointed, with grave consequences for the quality of education in government schools.

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A problem for the evaluation of the effects of large scale employment of para-teachers on children's learning achievement is the absence of systematic reliable student achievement tests, both before para-teacher schemes were started, and afterwards.

Leclercq in his study on EGS in Betul and Dewas districts, where large numbers of EGS schools were opened, concluded that children's learning levels were not below and in some cases above the learning levels of children in primary schools run by the Department of Education.

Nonetheless, teacher respondents and administrators held the view that educational achievement has severely declined in Madhya Pradesh since the inception of para-teacher schemes under DPEP and EGS. They attribute this decline primarily to the gradual erosion of teacher training[141].

In this context, it is necessary to look at two factors, namely qualification and motivation. Statistics indicate that in most states where para-teacher schemes have been run on a massive scale, a majority of these teachers have higher educational merit than regular government teachers (cf. Pandey 2006:14f).

Nevertheless, research on para-teachers across Indian states has revealed that in the absence of appropriate training in teaching methods and curriculum transaction, classroom practice of para-teachers was extremely dull and inefficient (cf. Pandey/Raj Rani 2003).

This points to the necessity of pre-service training in pedagogy and teaching methods. Providing in-service training to large numbers of untrained teachers bears the risk that teachers who have already developed a teaching routine without any pedagogical support will be unwilling or unable to let go of this routine even after they have completed their D.Ed. or B.Ed. The reluctance of teachers to use TLM and adopt so-called 'child-centred pedagogy' may be rooted here.

Having outlined the status of government provided elementary education in the district, we can now turn to the more specific conditions under which individual schools function, the outcome they produce, and the role parents and the community play through participation in PTAs and involvement of the *gram panchayat* in school management and supervision.

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[141] This view was brought forward by the head teacher of PS2 and the DEO of Sehore district. Rajagopalam (2004) has pointed out that in Tamil Nadu, the quality of education has been affected adversely by the growth of private so-called matriculation schools, which were supported by the state government, while at the same time teaching positions in government schools were kept vacant for years (in: Frontline (16), Jul. 31 - Aug. 13, 2004). The phenomenon of declining student achievement levels coinciding with the expansion of elementary education in India may well be a result of two mutually reinforcing trends: students from disadvantaged sections depend more on the pedagogic capacities of teachers for their learning achievement than children from more educated and affluent social backgrounds, and at the same time, those latter children now systematically select into the private education system (cf. Kingdon 2007:23).

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6.3 Case Study Evidence: PTA Functioning, Participation Choices and Panchayat Involvement in Five Government Schools

6.3.1 Case 1: The Government Middle School of Cluster 1 (MS1)

The government middle school in cluster 1 was the school with the most active PTAs in the entire block according to the judgement of SSA District Project Office staff.

Both primary and upper primary section PTAs stood out by high levels of participation among elected as well as non-elected members, and a comparatively wide scope of activity, including genuine pedagogical issues.

A functional division of labour between the *gram panchayat* and the PTAs contributed to the latter's ability to focus its activities on the core responsibility of increasing student attendance and achievement. With rules-in-use coming quite close to the rules-in-form as prescribed in the relevant legislation, MS1 constitutes a good reference case for cross-case comparison.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that in spite of high activity of the PTAs, student outcome indicators were less favourable than in some of the schools with less active PTAs, pointing to certain limits to improvement of outcome indicators through parent and community participation, grounded in the lack of focus on learning achievement in the institutional framework.

6.3.1.1   *Village population, settlement structure and basic amenities*

MS1 is located in a village about 12 km southwest of the district headquarters, along the Bhopal-Indore highway.

The village has a comparatively large population of 2232 persons, living in 270 households[142].

It has a heterogeneous population of more than 10 different caste groups. About one third of the population belongs to the *khati* caste (OBC category), which is one of the strongest caste groups in the district (numerically as well as socially – Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan is a prominent example).

Muslims constitute roughly 20% of the total population. Most Muslim families belong to the OBC category, some families (i.e. s*heikhs*) are categorised general castes/classes.

There are three large scheduled caste groups (*sapera, balai* and *chamar*), which constitute another 20% of the population.

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[142] Data from *jan shiksha register*. Census data has recorded 2029 persons in 2002. Population growth is considerable at 3.3% p.a.

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The remaining households belong to different SC and OBC as well as general caste communities.

Heterogeneity within the population in terms of caste and class affiliation is mirrored in the heterogeneity of economic status of households, about 40% of which are registered as below-poverty-line (BPL). In terms of landholding patterns, few families own more than 20 acres of land, while most families own smaller plots. Landless households mostly belong to the scheduled castes. Employment opportunities in the village are restricted to agricultural labour and occasional public works by the *gram panchayat*.

The village is devided into three major habitations, broadly representing caste composition: The *basti* (settlement) behind the school premises is inhabited by one of several SC communities (*sapera*). Traditionally earning their living as migrating alm beggars, they constitute the poorest section of the village population. Due to frequent migration, the children from this *basti* belong to the most irregular and difficult to retain students in the local government middle school.

At the other end towards the west, there is another quite large SC *basti* with a population belonging to different castes (mostly *chamar* and *balai*). Next to it is the Muslim *basti* with a small mosque in its centre.

The majority of *khati* families settle in different 'colonies' along the main road, in the centre of the village, between the SC *basti* behind the school and the Muslim *basti* (see map). The wealthier households are located around the *panchayat* building and the temple.

About one km towards the southeast, there is another small settlement which is part of the panchayat area. It is also inhabited by families belonging to the scheduled castes (*balai*). According to the *jan shiksha kendra* (JSK) education plan for 2006-07, 33 children from this settlement did not attend school, which was mainly attributed to the distance of their homes to the government middle school.

The settlement structures are typical for larger villages in Madhya Pradesh: The wealthier sections of the community are located at the centre, the poor and minority communities on the outer edges of the village.

The village is endowed with a comparatively well developed public infrastructure. All roads connecting the different *bastis* are paved.

There is a public health sub-centre next to the government middle school, and an STD facility, an *anganwadi* (day-care centre), and a number of shops are located along the main road, among them a PDS shop[143], a dairy shop, and a small grocery market.

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[143] Public Distribution System shops where subsidised foods, and fuel are sold to holders of below-poverty-line (BPL) ration cards.

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Fig. 18: Village of MS1
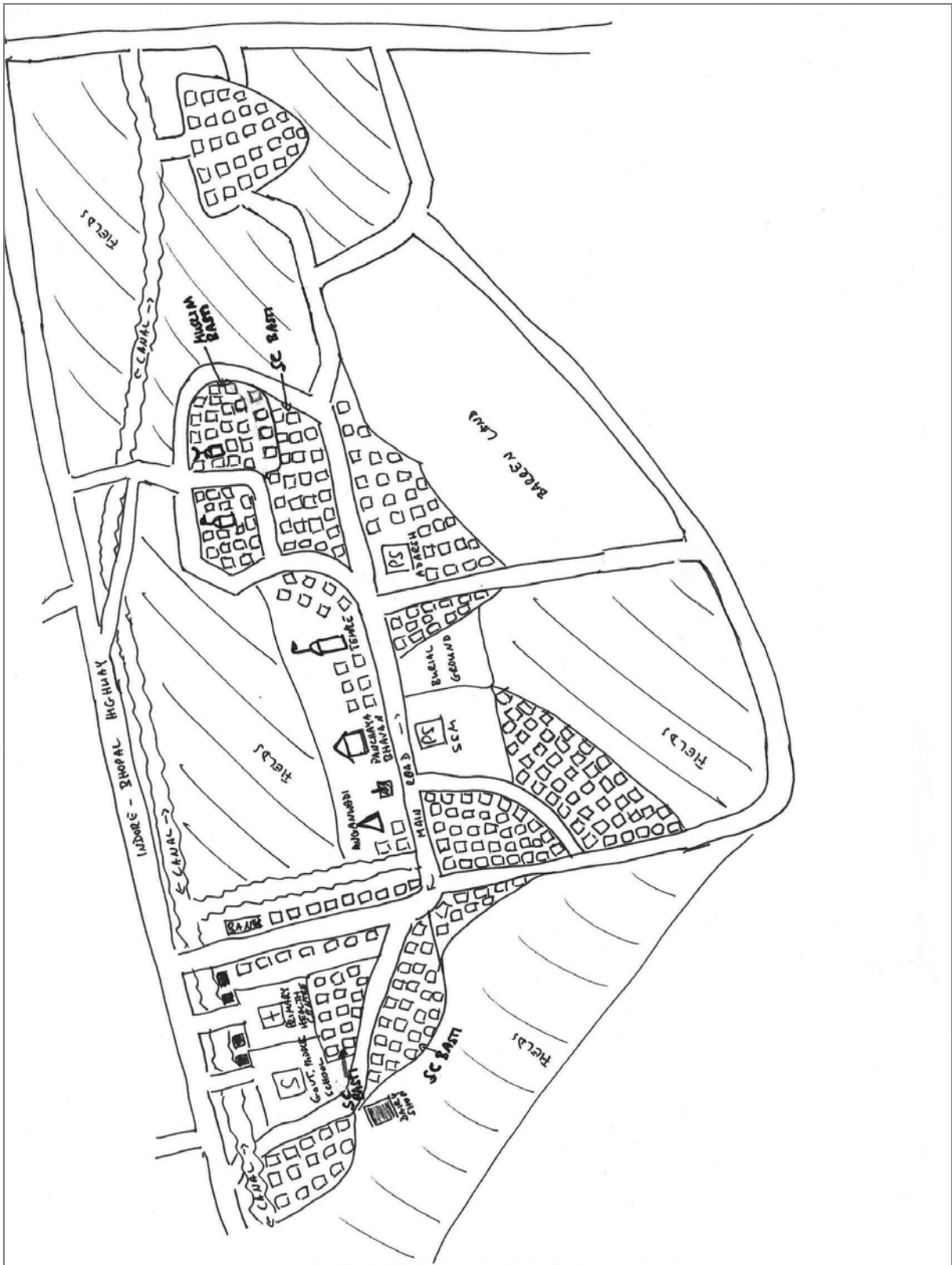
Source: Map available at the *jan shiksha kendra*

There is also a smith manufacturing all kinds of metal goods (esp. boxes), a carpenter, and a tailor, so a range of amenities is available in the village. In the neighbouring village on the other side of the highway, there is a branch of Punjab National Bank, a post office, and an office of the Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board. These facilities are also easily available. As far as water supply is concerned, there is a borewell in the centre of the village between the *anganwadi* and the *panchayat* office, but according to villagers it falls dry in summer because of default construction, which regularly leads to water shortages in the village in summer. Each *basti* as well as the school and the *anganwadi* are equipped with a handpump.

A number of the wealthier households have private toilets, but especially in the poorer *bastis* it is common to use surrounding uncultivated fields as open latrine. There is a canal that serves as open drainage.

There are two private recognised middle schools located in the village. The Saraswati Shishu Mandir (SSM), which is partly funded by the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS)[144], opened in 1996. The private secondary school was started in 2000 by an unemployed local resident.

Both private schools had a combined enrolment of around 260 students, of whom around two thirds were enrolled in the SSM school.

Fees are moderate in both private schools at 40 Rs per month in the primary grades and 75-80 Rs per month in the upper primary grades.

There was a notable division of labour between the two private schools: The SSM school catered predominantly to lower caste students, including ST children from outside the village, while the other private school was almost exclusively populated by children from the dominant *khati* (OBC) caste. According to its manager, this choice was clearly based on status considerations, as the government school was much better equipped than the private school, and enjoyed a good reputation in terms of teaching quality [145].

What is characteristic for both of these schools is a comparatively low female enrolment. This reflects common investment priorities in rural families on one hand, which are biased towards boys, and the availability of incentives for girls' enrolment in government schools under NPEGEL, which are not available in private schools, on the other.

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[144] Cadre organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Saraswati Shishu Mandirs operate all over India. According to the head teacher of the school, the RSS provides resources for renting a building and paying teachers for the first year of operation of the school, after this the schools have to cover costs and salary from student fees.

[145] Interviews were conducted on 2nd April 2006 in the schools.

The presence of two private middle schools in the village has tangible consequences for enrolment in the government school, which is heavily biased towards students from the poorer village populace, and especially girls.

6.3.1.2   *Indicators of school functioning*[146]

Enrolment and students' socio-economic background

393 students were enrolled in the school in the academic year 2005-06. The primary section was numerically larger than the upper primary section, with 217 as compared to 176 students. There was a sharp contrast in girls' enrolment between both sections: In grade 1-5, girls constituted 65-70% of the student body. In grade 6-8 the relationship was inverse: here boys constituted roughly 65% of the student body.

High girls' enrolment at primary level clearly reflects the efforts towards this end under the Model Cluster School Programme. However, given that 52% of the 5-11 aged children in the village are boys, and there are no out of school children, they again point to the male bias observable in private schooling at primary level.

The smaller proportion of girls in the upper primary section is caused by different factors. To start with, the gender gap in the child population of the age group 11-14 in the village is higher (10%) than in the 5-11 age group (2%). Further, overage enrolment is more common among girls than among boys, so a considerable proportion of girl students in the 11-14 age group are still in the primary grades, contributing to the higher proportion of girls at this stage.

This has its own implications for student attendance and classroom practise. With the age span in single grades being as large as three years, especially in the first two grades, teachers are confronted with the challenge of catering to children with differing levels of cognitive and motor skill development. In addition, teachers have pointed out that over-age children often feel displaced among the smaller children, a factor impacting negatively on their attendance and achievement[147].

Further, many parents are reluctant to send their daughters to schools outside their village of residence, especially when they enter puberty. This negatively affects girls'

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[146] All data presented here refer to the school year 2005-06, unless indicated otherwise.

[147] This was brought forward by a female teacher in a casual conversation on April 2nd, 2006. The Government of India has responded to the demotivation of students due to the lack of coeval peers by introducing bridge courses which are supposed to enable thus far non-enrolled or dropped out children to reach a learning level which enables them to join their age-appropriate classes.

proportion in middle schools, as these draw a considerable part of the student population from the surrounding villages.

The student population is mixed in terms of socio-economic background. As depicted in the table below, SC enrolment exceeds the number of resident children from these caste groups. This is a result of SC enrolment of students from the surrounding villages at the upper primary stage.

Notably, among the children belonging to the OBC category, a little more than half are enrolled in one of the two private schools. These are predominantly children from _khati_ caste, whereas enrolment of Muslim students (the second strongest OBC group in the village) is higher in the government school[148].

Table 19: Enrolment by caste, MS1

	SC			ST			OBC			GEN			all
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	**castes**
village	40	37	77	-	-	-	274	240	514	32	20	52	643
govt. school	50	48	98	-	-	-	111	152	263	19	13	32	393
SSM priv.	21	28	49	13	19	32	22	28	50	-	-	-	131
A. priv.	2	-	2	-	-	-	94	39	133	1	-	1	136
non-enrolled	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
out-of-school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: _Jan Shiksha Register_ 2005-2006, form 3, school report cards 2006

More than half of all children from general castes are enrolled in the government school. Enrolment registers suggest that many of these children belong to Muslim families[149], however the number of children from Hindu general caste families increases at the upper primary stage. The principal of the government middle school also pointed out that a number of children from higher castes were enrolled in private English-medium schools in the district headquarters.

Teacher qualification and attendance

Out of the ten teachers employed in the school, all but two were assistant teachers, viz. employed under the conditions prevalent until 1998 as tenured government servants.

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[148] This information was provided by the principal (25th April 2006). School statistics do not discriminate different castes/communities within the four categories (SC, ST, OBC, general), so it was necessary to rely on statements of teachers and villagers.

[149] In rural India, Muslims and Christians tend to replicate the Hindu caste system in the sense that communities of different socio-economic status retain a tradition of endogenous marriage and rules of conduct similar to those of Hindu caste communities. Thus, wealthier Muslim communities are listed as 'general castes', while more deprived ones are listed as OBCs.

As per requirements of the Model Cluster School Programme, there was gender parity in the staff, with three out of the five female teachers teaching primary grades. Two of them were employed as *shiksha karmi* for primary level, but their qualification was similar to that of assistant teachers.

Teacher attendance compared rather favourably to the other schools under study, with an average absence of 16 days in the first nine months of the school year 2005-06.

According to the teacher attendance register, the average number of days devoted to non-teaching activities was 22 days per teacher. Increasing non-teaching work load was no less an issue of complaint among teachers in MS1 than in any other government school I have visited, however, non-teaching duties were not associated with a lack of time to teach the curriculum by respondents from the teaching staff in MS1.

School-related non-teaching tasks (such as record keeping, correction of examination papers, conducting PTA meetings etc.) usually took place after school hours, or in teachers' free periods, and due to the size of the school, the absence of one or two teachers on other duties could be compensated without significant negative effects on teaching activity.

The mean student-teacher-ratio (STR) was 39:1, and thus within the norms of SSA, but given the exemption of the principal from most teaching duties (except Sanskrit in grade 8), the 'net' STR was to 43:1 in the primary section and 34:1 in the upper primary section. While the prevalence of single-grade teaching was perceived as generally conducive to the teaching-learning process by teachers, its positive effects were narrowed by extreme grade-wise variation in enrolment, with student-teacher-ratios occasionally exeeding 1:70[150].

Student attendance and achievement

Quite in contrast to the efforts to develop school infrastructure, control teacher absence and improve classroom practice, student attendance and achievement were low. In fact, among all the schools in the cluster, MS1, in spite of being Model Cluster School and housing the JSK on its campus, had the highest number of irregular children in the cluster (*Jan Shiksha Kendra ki Shiksha Yojna* 2006-07:29). This is related to the fact that two of the three largest caste/religious communities in the village, whose children constitute the larger proportion of students, are educationally backward, and there are large numbers of migrant labourers[151]. As already mentioned, enrolment in private

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[150] The student attendance and achievement register 2005-06 records 73 children enrolled in 1st and 62 in 3rd grade. Parallel classes per grade level are not common in rural Indian schools.

[151] The role of student background for better educational outcome in private schools across the country is disputable; many authors have pointed out that private schools outperform government schools even when

schools had a strong impact on the student composition in the government middle school. Average attendance levels were sobering, especially in the first two grades, as table 20 below illustrates.

At primary level, 24% of all enrolled children attended less than 40% of all school days, with absence declining in the higher grades.

It is noteworthy that the first two grades showed the greatest discrepancy between enrolment and attendance. The actual student-teacher-ratios on any given day hardly exceeded 1:40[152].

Table 20: Average attendance at primary level, MS1

	average attendance primary grades							average attendance upper primary grades*				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	all		6th	7th	8th	all	total
class strength	58	44	50	33	33	218	100%	77	43	55	175	393
below 40%	24	17	9	2	1	53	24.32%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
40 - 60%	17	11	12	7	2	49	22.48%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
60 - 70%	10	9	12	9	8	48	22.01%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
70 - 80%	4	4	9	9	10	36	16.51%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
above 80%	3	3	8	6	12	32	14.68%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
av. attendance rate	40.1	44.8	60.2	66.1	76.3		57.5	74.0	83.7	90.9	82.9	70.2

*data incomplete

Source: Student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

This runs counter to the common assumption that irregularity and drop-out rates rise with age, as children are required to participate more in income generation or household work. Rather, it indicates that children and parents from households of low educational status, especially when children are so-called 'first-generation-learners', need to be socialised into the process of schooling. This was confirmed by the _jan shikshak_:

> "Parents who have never been to school cannot understand why it is important to attend each and every day, because the manual work they are used to do does not require keeping pace with progress." (Interview _jan shikshak_ 1, JSK 25th March 2006)

In the primary grades of MS1, C and D attendance grades were almost exclusively distributed among students from migrating SC and Muslim OBC families, who belong to the educationally backward sections of the population. From third grade onwards, more students, especially from the scheduled castes, were found to have A and B attendance.

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student background is controlled for (e.g. Murlidharan/Kremer 2006). Kingdon points out that there may be a 'private school effect' (more able and motivated students systematically selecting into private schools) and has found in her study on Uttar Pradesh that controlling this sort of sample selectivity bias significantly reduces the gap between government and private schools with respect to literacy skills, while numeracy skills remained consistently higher among private school students (cf. Kingdon 2007:23).

[152] Data generated from the student attendance and achievement register Year 2005-06.

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Teachers traced different causes for irregularity of students from different caste and religious backgrounds. Among SC children, migration was considered the most important factor for irregular attendance, which also explains why attendance is lower in lower grades: Parents are unwilling to leave younger children in the village for several months. Among Muslim children, whose parents rarely migrate for labour[153], social attitudes were assumed to account for parents' reluctance to ensure their children's, and especially their daughters', attendance at school[154].

Teachers tended to emphasise students' family background as decisive factor for low student attendance. This reflects the general assumption of policy makers that it is the so-called 'pull-out' factors, viz. causes external to the school, which drive irregular student attendance. It fails to explain, however, why students do not attend classes even when they are obviously *not* actively kept back by household members. The neglect of 'push-out' factors in the analysis of student absenteeism makes it difficult to grasp what exactly it is that keeps students in or out of school when they are more or less free to decide[155].

There was agreement between teachers across cases and administrators at higher levels that learning achievement depends crucially on parents' willingness and ability to ensure a minimally conducive learning environment at home, e.g. making children do their homework and equipping them with the necessary utensils (notebooks, pencils) to do so, ensuring that pages of textbooks and notebooks are not torn by younger siblings (or used to pack lunch by parents). Adverse home environments can obviously not easily be compensated by the school, in spite of being endowed with above-standard material resources and a motivated teaching staff.

While the nexus between educational achievement and socio-economic status hardly comes as a surprise[156], it points to the deficiency of equating access to functional schools

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[153] This is related to landownership. Most Muslim families in the village own small plots of land which they cultivate. Among these families, it is common that some of the male family members go for wage labour, while the others (especially the women) cultivate the land owned by the family (PTA president, 24th March 2006).

[154] Principal MS1, 24th March 2006. The jan shikshak and most of the teachers shared this view (*jan shikshak* 1, 25th March 2006).

[155] One explanation school research offers in terms of student push-out is the gap between the requirements of school environment and home environment. The greater this gap is, the more adaption skills are required of the student. This process of adaption precedes the actual process of learning in school, and students failing to adapt to the requirements of the school environment (starting from being clean and well dressed to being able to sit still and concentrate for a given period of time) are in danger of being pushed out of the school irrespective of their actual capacity to learn. As it is, in large standardised school systems over the world, student achievement reflects the ability of a child to adapt to the system at least as much as his or her ability to learn.

[156] The insight that educational input had almost no direct impact on student learning achievement deeply shocked educational researchers and professionals in the US and Europe in the 1960, when the famous study of

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with sufficient learning achievement, and assuming this will enhance social opportunity, as long as broader social issues are not addressed.

The *jan shikshak* pointed out in this context that it is difficult to change habits and behaviour of parents (especially mothers) who themselves have not gone through the process of schooling, and that parents' willingness to assume responsibility for their children's school career and to engage with the school more actively may not materialise until the current generation of students become parents (Interview *jan shikshak*, 25th April 2006).

6.3.1.3   The impact of professional leadership on school development

In spite of the fact that student outcomes in MS1 were all but magnificient, respondents, including administrators at block and district levels, made surprisingly positive judgements about school functioning. Parent satisfaction was found to be very high, although parents' actual status of information about classroom proceedings was as low as in the other schools under study.

School functioning benefited from the combination of institutional and leadership-related factors which enabled the realisation of some important aspects in SBM:

1. A 'vision' for school development (professional leadership)
2. Close cooperation with the *gram panchayat* (local support networks)
3. Status of Model Cluster School and Cluster Resource Centre

Professional leadership in MS1 materialised in a straightforward perspective for school development, based on an analysis of the major obstacles to raising attendance and achievement levels of students enrolled in the school, and the effort to develop site-specific solutions. Working towards these goals presupposes reasonably high professional expectations towards the staff, and teachers' performance and working routines were under comparatively close scrutiny and supervision of the principal, who in contrast to other schools primarily perceived himself a school-based administrator rather than a head teacher.

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James Coleman (1966) on the impact of school input factors on learning achievement revealed that input accounted for a mere 10% of the observed difference, while the correlation with the socio-economic background of students accounted for 90% of the observed difference. Later research on the effects of parent involvement on student achievement (government programmes for the increase of parent involvement had been developed in response to the disappointment with input effects) qualified the flat correlation of achievement with socio-economic status, tracing the major proportion of difference in achievement to parenting practices, which happen to prevail in certain socio-economic strata (cf. Chrispeels 1996:300f).

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Conditions for realising such professional ambitions were favourable in MS1 in terms of school infrastructure and personnel. Serving as *jan shiksha kendra* (JSK), school infrastructure had been upgraded several times. The school was endowed with a large campus and meeting hall, which served both purposes internal to the school and the JSK (e.g. trainings conducted by the JSK) and purposes which benefit the wider village community (e.g. holding *gram sabha* meetings or village functions). There were eight classrooms (all electrified) and two verandas, a computer lab, which was used to conduct computer classes for middle school students of the whole cluster as part of the Headstart programme[157], and a library room.

More importantly, the principal of the school was by designation the JSK coordinator, and as such in a way his own direct superior. This can be assumed to increase the space for manoeuvre, since the JSK is the primary monitoring institution for schools in a cluster.

The school was designated Model Cluster School under the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)[158] in the academic year 2004-05, following the submission of an action plan to upgrade facilities and increase girls' enrolment to the district authorities.

According to the principal, the process of scaling up the school to meet the norms of a Model Cluster School involved massive team efforts from the old as well as the newly recruited teachers and the *jan shikshak* to mobilise villagers towards enrolling all children, especially girls. To realise this enrolment drive, continuous support of the *gram panchayat* had been necessary. In fact, in the course of the process, three 'education awareness campaigns' had been conducted in the village in a joint effort by the school staff and panchayat members. The latter had sought support of a local NGO for planning and conducting the campaign. What emerged in this process was a network of local and external organisations cooperating on the issue of educational governance in the village. Knitting such local support networks is one of the major goals of SBM.

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[157] Headstart is a programme for the extension of computer-enabled education in rural areas. It was started in 2000 as a pilot project and has been extended to cover 3361 JSKs up to 2007. While the state government lauds itself for the innovative technology-based self- and peer-learning processes the programme enables, critics have pointed out that the immense input commitment made under Headstart would have better been used for the benefit of remote and under-equipped government primary schools, rather than the already privileged JSK schools (cf. Sadgopal 2004d).

[158] Under NPEGEL, one school in each cluster is designated a Model Cluster School (either by application, or through selection by the RSK on suggestion of the ZSK). These schools are required to develop a plan for ensuring 100% enrolment and retention of girls in their respective catchment areas (cf. GOI, MHRD, Dept. of School Education (no date): Guideline for Implementation of the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGL) as a Component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), available at www.ssa.gov.in/girls-education/npegel/npegl.pdf.

Community mobilisation around enrolment had the side effect of taking the school centre stage in public deliberation. This was conducive to teachers' ability to motivate parents to participate in the PTA, which had been given legal status and clearly defined responsibilities only a year before, when the Jan Shiksha Niyam became effective. This specifically affected the primary section PTA, which gained strength in membership through the leap in enrolment from 2004 onwards.

While total enrolment of girls in the village was achieved in the academic year 2005-06, student attendance, achievement, and transition to the upper primary section remained low. To effectively combat student irregularity, especially the adverse effects of labour migration on student attendance, the principal, supported by panchayat and PTA members, applied for upgrading to a secondary boarding school. Boarding facilities are a strong incentive for poor migrating parents to leave their children in school, since they are provided food and accommodation free of cost. Regular attendance of migrant children was expected to significantly reduce repetition rates and thus improve overall school outcomes.

Another motivation to go for upgrading was the enhancement of girl's higher education, restricted as it is in rural areas due to the social constraints girls face in commuting to the cities, where government secondary schools are usually located, without the company of a male family member. Rural secondary schools are rare and as such prestigious institutions. They attract large numbers of students from the surrounding villages, which enhances the local economy and generates employment opportunity.

The plan to upgrade the school was unconventional because it went beyond the exhaustion of options usually available to middle schools for stabilising enrolment and retention and maximising resource allocation. The logic the principal followed was that if the means available to a middle school are not sufficient (precisely, middle schools are not equipped with boarding facilities by the Department of Education), the school needs to develop other strategies to obtain the necessary means (being upgraded to secondary school).

In addition to the establishment of an institutional network for local educational governance, teachers perceived themselves as a professional community with common goals. Several teachers emphasised that they felt encouraged by the principal in adjusting day-to-day operations according to the perceived necessities of managing classes and non-teaching tasks[159].

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[159] To illustrate, the primary section teaching staff decided to deviate from the established division of labour between teachers at primary level to reduce the impact of the growing amount of non-teaching duties on teaching activity. Typically, at primary level each teacher is assigned to teach all subjects in a specific grade.

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To sum up, professional and community leadership in MS1 were conducive to a) the establishment of a professional community of teachers who determined shared goals of school development under the leadership of the principal and *jan shikshak*, and b) the emergence of a network of different organisations (local government, school-based, NGO) which enabled a matching of common goals and mutually supportive practises (such as regular participation of panchayat members in school meetings and regular reporting of the principal on the status of the school in *gram sabha* meetings).

6.3.1.4 Parent-Teacher-Association: Composition, parent participation, and scope of activities

Composition of working committee, frequency of meetings and parent participation

The PTA of the primary section had a total of 338 parent members (including both mothers and fathers of enrolled children). Election of the working committee had been conducted in the first meeting of the academic year 2005-06. The PTA working committee had 10 members other than the president and vice president, as prescribed in the JSN (section 8(21)).

Parent participation in PTA meetings was comparatively stable among elected as well as non-elected members. Even though the great majority of the latter (80%) participated less than three times during the school year, the absolute number of participants was high compared to other schools in the cluster with comparable student numbers[160].

In spite of this, the 1/3-quorum was failed in the election meeting. This was common in larger schools with a numerically strong parent community, where meeting the quorum requires the mobilisation of more than 100 parents. The principal took a rather casual view on quorum requirements, pointing out that the quorum first and foremost serves the purpose to ensure that the positions of president and vice president are not delegated to parents by teachers unilaterally, especially in smaller schools.

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Absence of a teacher in this setup means that one grade has to be taught simultaneously with another grade by one of the colleagues. To avoid regular multi-grade teaching, it was decided to introduce subject- rather than grade-wise teaching, replicating the standard in upper primary sections. As a result, all teachers taught their respective subjects in all classes at primary level, so that the absence of one teacher did not lead to distortion of classes for the entire day in a particular grade. I owe this information to a casual conversation with one of the primary section female teachers, while waiting for the *jan shikshak* for an interview appointment on 25.03.2006. The same teacher emphasised that she felt encouraged as a professional by the principal and *jan shikshak*, that there were goals in her work in which she had a say as a team member, and that the atmosphere was supportive and motivating.

[160] *Jan shikshak*, 25.03.2006.

Among the working committee members, only three out of twelve attended meetings sporadically or not at all, while nine members attended regularly. Female representation exceeded the prescribed one-third-quota: five mothers were elected into the working committee, thus constituting almost half of all elected members. Notably, participation among the female working committee members was more stable than among male members: only one of the three irregular participants was female.

The aggregate educational status of the working committee was comparatively high: All members but one were literate. Unfortunately, the exact educational status is recorded only for president and vice president, but according to the principal most working committee members passed 5th but dropped out before passing 8th grade[161].

Table 21: Working Committee members by caste, gender and educational status,MS1

PTA working committee 05-06	gender	caste/ community	educational status	No. of attended meetings
president	m	muslim (OBC)	7th	12
vice president	f	SC	5th	8
member	m	muslim (OBC)	literate	3
member	m	muslim (OBC)	literate	10
member	m	muslim (OBC)	literate	7
member	m	muslim (OBC)	literate	3
member	m	SC	10th	8
member	m	OBC	literate	9
member	f	SC	literate	12
member	f	SC	illiterate	0
member	f	muslim (OBC)	literate	10
member	f	OBC	literate	10

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

Owing to the student composition, membership in the working committee was heavily biased towards parents belonging to SC and Muslim sections[162]. Among the non-elected members, mothers' participation was negligible at 10% according to meeting records.

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[161] The signatures in the meeting register suggest that some of the members are not functionally literate, as their signatures were orthographically wrong and quite shaky. In the statistics, parents who have not completed the primary cycle, but show some minimal skills (like signing their names), are recorded literate. This, however, offers little indication towards *functional* literacy and the ability to compute and store information. The DEO of Sehore district pointed out that in rural areas, parents often lose functional literacy even after having passed the primary cycle, in the absence of its utilisation in daily life. Thus the number of working committee members recorded as literate should be treated with caution.

[162] The working committee of the middle section, in contrast, was dominated by members of the k*hati* caste, equally reflecting the higher number of students from this caste group in the upper primary section of the school.

Participation of non-elected members varied between 9 and 25, with an upward outlier on the occasion of Independence Day. Both Independence Day (5. August) and Republic Day (26. January) are celebrated in large functions in most government schools. Usually, the uniforms and textbooks for girls and SC students are distributed on the occasion of Independence Day, which has contributed to larger parent participation (a phenomenon that was also observable in the other schools on the same occasion).

There were 10 fathers among the non-elected members who participated in more than half of all meetings throughout the school year. This makes a stable participant group of 21 parents. It is notable that all non-elected regular participants belonged to the *khati* and general castes, and half of them were elected members of the upper primary section PTA.

Fig. 19 Participation in PTA meetings among different groups of members, MS1
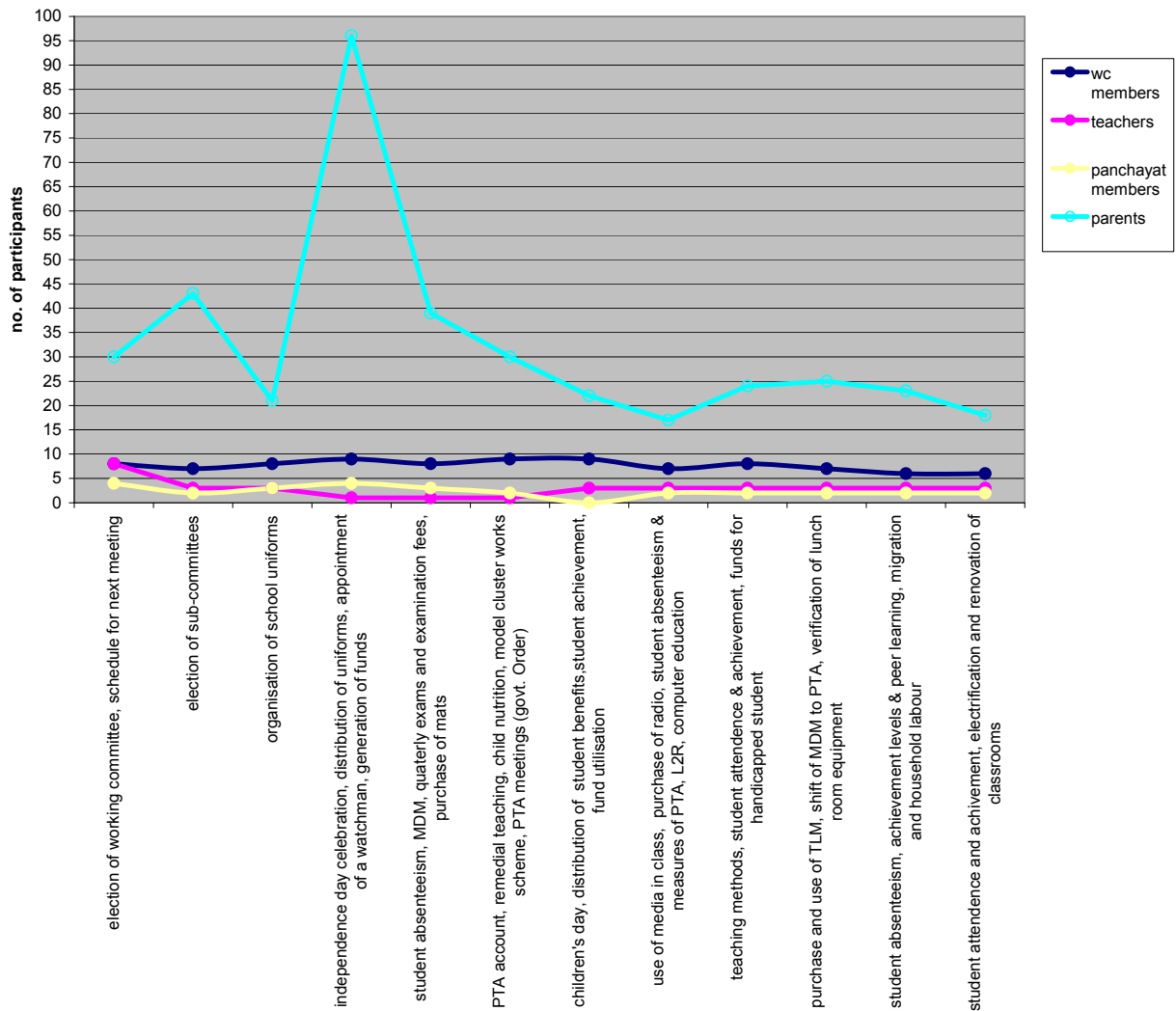
Source: PTA meeting minutes

Interlinkage between the *gram panchayat* and the PTA was considerable: Three of the regular participants were elected members of the *gram panchayat* and/or its village

development committee. Furthermore, the *sarpanch* participated in two thirds of all meetings, and the panchayat secretary attended occasionally.

Meetings were conducted and recorded regularly throughout the year. However, the frequency of meetings as prescribed by the government (first and third Friday of each month) was not strictly adhered to, but adjusted according to need[163].

The statements of principal and teachers about the scope of parental participation were congruent with what has been recorded in the meeting register, which is particularly noteworthy because of the significant discrepancies in this context in the other schools under study.

Record-keeping routines play an important role here. According to the PTA president, the agenda of the meetings are written into the register beforehand. Anything additionally discussed is recorded below the agenda. This procedure enabled the PTA secretary to collect signatures below the minutes immediately after the meetings, so it can be assumed that signatures of parents reflect parent participation in that particular meeting. The principal, the PTA secretary, and the PTA president jointly prepared the agenda before the meetings. According to the PTA president, the principal took the lead in agenda setting, but asked the president and secretary of the PTAs (primary and upper primary section) for comments and suggestions. The leading role of the principal was reinforced through prolonged illness of the PTA secretary of the primary section (which led to the decision to exempt him from this office in January 2006, however without any indication of replacement).

Parents' motivation to participate: perceptions of respondents

a) Teachers' perceptions of parent motivation

The principal of MS1 had a straightforward perception of the determinants of parents' willingness to involve in the PTA. According to his reasoning, two factors are decisive for parents' willingness to participate in the PTA:

The amount of interest parents take in their children's education, which was perceived to depend on their own educational status, and their inclination to accept responsibility for their children's school career.

As a consequence, he pointed out that for a PTA to be moderately functional,

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[163] According to the principal, the government tends to over-regulate proceedings in order to ensure that at least one meeting a month takes place. The common practice in MS1 is to hold a mandatory meeting once a month and schedule additional meetings according to necessity (Interview 25th March 2006).

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> "PTA working committee members *must* be educated and feel responsible not only for their own kids' education, but also for the education of their neighbours' kids." (Group Discussion, 24th March 2006)

The inference that parents' interest in school education depends directly on their own educational status was based on the observation that individual participation levels rise with parents' educational status. The principal and the *jan shikshak* consistently argued that the combination of low educational and socio-economic status enhance the domination of benefit-seeking behaviour of parents vis-à-vis the school.

Parents exposing this kind of behaviour participate only when material benefits such as uniforms and textbooks are being distributed. This was attributed to a passive, receiving mentality grounded in the attitude that education is a responsibility of the state, in which parents have no role to play[164].

Quite in line with this reasoning, it was frequently stated by other teachers, too, that many parents simply do not value education, or that they are outrightly ignorant.

The following impacts of parents' own educational status on participation were asserted:

- Educated parents show more interest in the school and their children's learning because they value education higher than uneducated parents
- Educated parents can draw on a pool of personal experience with the school as an institution, they are less insecure in dealing with teachers
- Educated parents feel better able to judge school processes and support their children's learning

As pointed out before, the composition of the PTA working committee suggests that teachers made efforts to balance between the inclusion of traditionally excluded parts of the population (SC and Muslim) and ensuring high aggregate educational status to enhance PTA functioning.

This reflected in their mobilisation efforts, which were focussed on ensuring a functional working committee, but otherwise followed the common strategy of inducing parents of children with low attendance and achievement levels to attend particular PTA meetings to make them explain themselves and to appeal to their conscience.

b) Perceptions of parent respondents

Parent respondents included one working committee member (apart from the PTA president) and three non-elected members from the SC, Muslim, and OBC communities.

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[164] It should be noted that this indeed is what many generations of parents were told by teachers, who have traditionally been hostile to parent involvement (particularly parent control), not only in India.

Table 22: Details of Respondents, MS1

Respondent	membership status	gender	caste/ community	edu. status	adult literates in house-hold**	no. of household members	estimated income per month*
PTA president	elected	m	muslim (OBC)	7th	3	15	3000 Rs
wc member	elected	m	SC	10th	2	10	1200 Rs
member 1	non-elected	m	lohar (OBC)	5th	3	14	1500 Rs
member 2	non-elected	m	SC	illiterate	0	5	1000 Rs
member 3	non-elected	f	muslim (OBC)	illiterate	4	20	3000 Rs
sarpanch	no member	m	khati	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
panchayat secre	no member	m	general	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

*average monthly household income as estimated by respondents
** no female adult literates in either household
Source: Interviews

The children of three respondents (PTA president,wc member, member 1) showed regular attendance and high achievement levels, while the children of the other two respondents (members 2 and 3) were irregular and low achieving students.Parent responses indicate that the dedication of the working committee profited from the good reputation of the principal and teaching staff in terms of transparency and teaching priority, and the focus on ensuring attendance and achievement especially of the most vulnerable children in the village, namely those of migrant SC families.

The PTA president[165] pointed out that he felt the principal and *jan shikshak* were genuinely concerned with opening doors out of the inherited poverty and vulnerability of these children, rather than with their mere nominal participation in school. Even though this concern has not yet changed patterns of behaviour among migrant parents, it has increased support for the government school by the socially progressive parts of the village community.

The importance of a high level of satisfaction with school functioning for parents' willingness to engage in the PTA was also confirmed by the working committee respondent[166], an educated (secondary level) member of one of the SC communities.

In terms of motivation to participate in the PTA, he stated that he volunteered for the candidacy after the former PTA president and the PTA secretary had asked his wife if she would consider being a candidate for the position of the vice-president[167].

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[165] Interview conducted on 24th March 2006 in the school premises.

[166] Interview conducted on April 4th at the respondent's home. It should be noted that actually I planned to conduct the interview with the wife of the respondent, who at the time was PTA vice president. The presence of her husband(also working committee member) effectively resulted in him responding to my questions and her sitting beside and confirming whatever he said. Unfortunately, she was reluctant to agree to an individual interview at a later point of time.

[167] According to the principal, the number of literate mothers among SC students is very limited, so the PTA approaches eligible candidates to convince them to be elected in the constituent meetings of the PTA. The gender coordinator of the ZSK has pointed out that constellations where husband and wife are on the same committee always bear a strong element of social control (conversation at ZSK, 25.02.2006).

Even though the impetus to get involved in the PTA had been external, the respondent emphasised that both he and his wife were willing to engage without much convincing on part of teachers or other persons. This respondent also expressed some pride in the good reputation of the school, its status as a Model Cluster School, and the fact that 'official people' from the _zilla panchayat_ visited because of the successful work towards girls' education and parent involvement.

He further asserted that hope for increased employment opportunities for his children was the main motivation to invest in their education, even though he did not express any clear expectations towards educational attainment other than "getting a secure job" (_naukari_). The importance ascribed to school education also surfaced in forms of parental support, including control over attendance in school, supplying the necessary stationery[168], and attention to examination results.

Remarks of the PTA president somewhat qualified the impression that even very poor working committee members were highly motivated to engage for school improvement. He stated that while generally he perceived parents in the village to be more open to participate in the school than elsewhere, many working committee members attended meetings only when personally and repeatedly called to do so by the president, principal, or a teacher.

Given that keeping up elected members' commitment required substantial effort on part of the principal, _jan shikshak_ and PTA secretary already, it is not surprising that they followed a very selective strategy for involving _non_-elected parents in activities of the PTA. Here, the focus was on parents of particularly weak and irregular children. Considering high absenteeism levels among students, these parents alone constitute close to half of the parent community in MS1.

That this approach is of limited success when parents reject the idea that they should be responsible for their children's attendance in school was tangible in the responses of members 2 and 3, who experienced both forms of mobilisation, but either did not retain the information (member 3), or, in spite of retaining it, rejected participation in PTA meetings (just as any other thinkable form of parent participation in school, member 2). Member 2 was head of an illiterate household from an SC community, and father of two notoriously irregular boys in 2nd and 4th grade. His comparatively high level of information about the school resulted from immediate residential neighbourhood to a working committee member belonging to the same caste community, who according to

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[168] Spending on slates, pencils, notebooks etc. was estimated at 130 Rs per child per year - in a household with 5 children this adds up to a substantial investment.

consistent statements of both regularly approached him because of his children's absenteeism.

Given that he knew about the PTA, its monthly meetings, and that parents are invited to participate, non-participation in his case was clearly a deliberate choice. He stated that due to the family's dependence on wage labour, neither he nor his wife have the time to attend meetings. Both parents left home early in the morning in search of wage labour within and outside the village, and usually did not return before evening.

This means that the three children (the youngest being four years of age) stayed unattended the whole day, resulting in inevitably low levels of active parenting, the older children being effectively responsible for raising the younger ones, with all its implications for their attendance in school.

The ineffectiveness of occasional admonition for truancy led the father to assume that his children simply "do not have the brains to study"[169]. As a consequence, he showed no ambitions for upward mobility of his children, rather he fatalistically predicted that his sons will be wage labourers like himself.

This mixture of resignation and helplessness also reflected in the attitude that if the government was so keen on getting all children in school, and posted paid employees to implement this, they should also responsible for ensuring it happens[170].

Member 3 brought forward a similar opinion. She clearly rejected the idea that poor families should be held responsible for their children's attendance in school, let alone participate in its management, given their daily struggle with subsistence.

It was particularly interesting to note that this respondent was apparently clueless about the existence of the PTA and the conduction of meetings, even though she stated that she had been summoned to "some meeting in school" once or twice to explain the recurrent absence of her children. This means she was actually exposed to the PTA, but had obviously not retained the information. This related to the low priority school education had in her daily routine, underlined by her response when asked if she would consider to attend PTA meetings in the future:

> "We are a poor family. We are concerned with filling our stomachs, not with going to meetings in school." (MS1 member3, 4th April 2006)

Issues of immediate concern to the family were all related to daily subsistence: The lack of drinking water due to falling levels of ground water, the lack of entitlement to BPL

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[169] Given the bias against low caste children, which has prevailed among many government school teachers until very recently, it is not unlikely that he has internalised this argument during his own childhood, a case Myron Weiner has made some 25 years ago (cf. Weiner 1990:60).

[170] "It's their job - that's what they get paid for" (Interview Parent 3, April 4th 2006).

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ration cards[171], and the inability to keep back money until the end of the month to pay the electricity bill. As a consequence, school attendance of children was of little concern, in fact, at the time of the interview five girls of school-going age were engaged in drying cow dung along with the adult women in the courtyard of the joint family's house.

Even though this respondent rejected the idea of involving in school and clearly subordinated her children's attendance in class to immediate needs of the household, she did assert the desire to have all her children educated up to 8th grade, with the important qualification that under the given economic constraints this will not materialise for all her children. In this sense, the lack of information about the school in general and the PTA in particular, and lacking concern for student attendance reflect a priority statement, but should not be mistaken as a fundamental negation the of value of education.

Further, the fact that many parents perceived finishing the upper primary cycle to be a desirable educational goal for their children points to the establishment of universal elementary education as a norm of what is socially desirable. Importantly, however, there was no notion of compulsion whatsoever among parents with regard to children's attendance in school. This indicates the lack of enforcement of compulsory education vis-à-vis parents, and the inability of the *gram panchayat* to fulfil its enforcing functions in this respect.

While mobilisation of parents who reject involvement in school is difficult even if substantial effort is made to personally contact them, the inappropriate modes of information transmission between the school and parents who did *not* belong to the primary target groups (SC/ST families and families of irregular students) actually impeded participation of parents potentially interested in PTA activities.

All parents get notified by the school a couple of days in advance of monthly (or fortnightly) meetings through a slip of paper containing date, place and time of the meeting, which is distributed to the students to forward it to their parents. This method appears to be inappropriate for several reasons: Firstly, giving a piece of paper to relatively small children and expecting it to reach parents on time, if at all, is prone to considerable risk.

Secondly, this piece of paper will be of limited use to illiterate parents. With female adult illiteracy being high, and some probability that children will forward the paper to their mothers, there is yet another hurdle to be taken before the information reaches someone who can make something out of it. In addition, it cannot be assumed that children in primary grades will be able to read the slip of paper to their parents (these are usually hand-written by the teachers).

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[171] She particularly complained about the inappropriate indicators for entitlement, which exclude families who own land (no matter how small the plot), or a TV.

The respondent from the _lohar_ caste[172] illustrates this problem. As father to three children enrolled in the primary section, all of whom attend regularly and have A and B level achievement (the child in 3rd grade has been rated best student in the class by teachers) he has neither been ordered to school by teachers to discuss irregular attendance or lack of performance of his children, nor has he been the target of intervention from working committee members, who contact only the parents of irregular children. As a result, the respondent did not know that a PTA existed in the school, and claimed he had never been invited to a meeting.

Given that there were no problems requiring parental action, communication between teachers and parents was not sought on part of the school.

As a consequence, parents' attention was focused on children's ability to pass the end of year examination (by ensuring that they devote some time to self-study and homework each day). The respondent neither knew how many teachers teach in the school, nor who teaches what subject to his children, even though three of them were enrolled at primary level.

Importantly, the respondent did expose willingness to participate in PTA meetings in the future, provided he will be informed where and when they take place. Thus in this case, lack of participation was actually induced by ineffective transmission of information from the school towards a parent, effectively hindering participation of someone potentially willing to engage.

The respondent, belonging to a minority caste in the village, interpreted the lack of information about the PTA in the context of a perceived wider lack of social connectedness of minority groups, which impedes a casual exchange of information with neighbours. Under such circumstance, being member of the PTA working committee may become additionally attractive as a means to connect to fellow villagers and accumulate some social capital in the village. Given that there were several very small caste groups in the village (most of them artisan or crafting castes such as _sonar_, _lohar_ etc.), this respondent may not have been the only potentially engaging parent foregone by selective mobilisation strategy and ineffective transmission of information to the larger parent community.

c) Conclusions

Summarising what has been discussed above, five factors appear to bear influence on parents' willingness to participate in PTA meetings in MS1:

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[172] MS1 member1, interview conducted at respondent's home on April 4th 2006.

- satisfaction with school functioning/children's learning achievement (as indicated by examination results)
- Relative value of school education (esp. for upward mobility)
- Opportunity costs of participation (interference with income generating activities)
- Mobilisation efforts of teachers
- Modes of transmission of information from the school to parents

While information, value and opportunity cost (depending on both value and socio-economic status) have been anticipated to be important factors in the framework of analysis, the importance of mobilisation, especially in a context of contingent and often ad hoc choices between different and competing activities, has been underestimated.

It seems to be characteristic (not only in MS1) that parents, even when they are basically willing to engage in the PTA, need to be personally (and continuously) motivated by teachers or other PTA members to do so. Thus, teachers' attitude towards parent participation, their efforts towards continuous mobilisation, and their mobilsation strategies bear direct influence on the functioning of the PTA.

In MS1, there was some indication that a substantial number of parents fall through the cracks of the mobilisation pattern, particularly those whose children do reasonably well at school and do not belong to one of the 'target' communities in the village. Given that the level of information about the PTA depends on the initiative of teachers to transmit this information, parents who have neither attended the constituent meeting of the PTA at some point of time, nor have other sources of information (i.e. being member of the *gram panchayat*), may end up being unaware of the existence of the PTA.

It should be noted at this point that most parents did have some tacit knowledge about the existence of a body of parents and teachers who are jointly involved in managing the school (viz. the PTA working committee). What they were unaware of was that membership in this body was non-exclusive, and that meetings took place regularly and were open for them to participate.

The relative value parents ascribe to education seems to be decisive for both the retention and use of information once it has been obtained, and the resulting participation choices.

Similar to members 2 and 3, particularly illiterate respondents across cases rejected responsibility for children's attendance and achievement in school, and sometimes perceived it as outrightly absurd that they should be involved in running a school.

Given that most participatory projects in service provision are explicitly created to involve the poor and marginalised, who are assumed to benefit most from the service on

offer, it should be taken seriously that exactly these people tend to perceive participatory requirements as an impertinence rather than a welcome opportunity to increase one's own influence on the quality of service provision.

This is all the more so when participation interferes with income generation, and does not result in immediate tangible benefit. Participation in educational governance is particularly problematic because of the uncertain and remote benefits from education. In view of the substantial responsibilities and resulting necessity of presence in school, especially for PTA presidents and working committee members, it should be acknowledged that participatory governance increases the opportunity costs of education for those parents who bear this responsibility.

Table 23: Determinants of parent participation, MS1

Variables and Indicators	Characteristics of Respondents		
	regular participants in PTA regular/achieving child	irregular participants in PTA	
		irregular/weak child	regular/achieving child
mobilisation by teachers targeted & sustained efforts towards mobilisation by caste/community affiliation, educational status	target' groups for mobilisation: muslim (OBC)/Chamar (SC); high educational status	target groups for PTA members' intervention (student irregularity)	no 'target' for mobilisation: regular children, OBC community
level of information about PTA educational background importance ascribed to school-related issues	high levels of information; education beyond primary level; interest in children's learning achievements	no information about PTA; no formal education; low capacity to handle information	no information about PTA; primary level education; moderate capacity to handle information
perception of school functioning level of information perceived importance	high level of satisfaction with functioning of school, specifically teacher performance	no information about school functioning; no interest in student achievement	low level of concrete knowledge about school functioning, but high level of satisfaction with student performance
perceived value of school education aspiration for upward mobility; own educational status	moderate optimism about educated children's employment prospects	low value of school education relative to ensuring subsistence	no explicit expectation of upward mobility, value of education for access to information
interference with income generation level of income working hours	flexible (landowning)/irregular (landless agricultural labour in village) working hours, low levels of income (1200-2000 Rs p.m.)	flexible (landowning) working hours/day-long absence from home (landless agricultural labour outside village); low levels of income	flexible (self-employed); low level of income depending on season

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<u>*Scope of PTA activity: Perceptions of main responsibilities among parents and teachers*</u>

PTA meeting records, which were comparatively well maintained and up to date, indicate a variety of issues which were discussed, decided and accomplished by the PTA[173].

The focus of discussions as captured in the minutes was on increasing student attendance, the provision of incentives to increase attendance of particular groups of students, and raising student achievement. Extra-curricular activities, which are important for 'bonding' with the village community, also received considerable attention. Matters related to the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and the use of funds were regularly discussed, but did not dominate the agenda.

Table 24: Issues discussed, decided, and achieved according to meeting minutes, MS1

Type of issue	discussions by issue	noted decisions	noted accomplish-ments
generation of additional resources	5	3	1
utilisation of funds	10	4	0
construction and maintenance	5	2	2
midday meal	4	2	2
distribution of student incentives	7	7	7
increasing student attendence	9	7	1
improving learning achievement	8	4	4
use of TLM	6	4	1
functions/inaugurations	7	7	7
establishment of sub-committees	5	5	5
miscellaneous	3	2	0

Source: PTA meeting minutes

There were some indications that PTA involvement in MS1 shares features of 'community controlled' and 'professional' school-based-management (SBM) as characterised by Leithwood and Menzies (1998, chapter 5:105).

Firstly, there was significantly more discussion on the use of funds, as more funds were generated from the village community over which the PTA was able to command. This means that there was an active pursuit of broadening the resource base of the school. It is important to note that the generation of extra resources did not primarily focus on extracting fees from parents (e.g. examination fees), but included such strategies as the selling of waste materials (old examination papers) and targeted and purpose-bound generation of funds for the enhancement of educational opportunity for specific groups of students (e.g. handicapped children).

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[173] As PTA records resemble minutes of results rather than minutes of proceedings, the course of discussions and lines of consent and dissent between different members cannot be reconstructed. Meeting minutes are merely an indication of the ranking of priorities within the PTA.

Secondly, there was more extra-curricular activity in the school, including the organisation of festivities (children's day), performance competitions, and distribution of prizes for outstanding student achievement (not only in examinations, but also in performance or arts).

Thirdly, there was substantially more decision-making with respect to classroom processes and raising achievement levels of students in which parents were involved than in the other schools under study, (even though these discussions according to the PTA president were dominated by the principal, because most parents were ill-equipped to judge pedagogic measures).

As indicated in table 27, there was a steep decline in the amount of information about the core responsibilities of the PTA between elected and non-elected respondents, while the responses from the principal, teachers, and elected parents were astonishingly congruent, as compared to the sometimes grave dissonances in other schools under study.

Table 25: Perceived central tasks of PTA according to respondents from different stakeholder groups, MS1

	principal	teachers	working committee members	parents
planning	—	—	—	—
implementation	° ensure 100% enrollment and retention => sensitise parents of irregular children and exert pressure ° assist in provision and distribution of incentives: midday meal, uniforms, textbooks (relief from non-teaching duties)	° ensure 100% enrollment and retention => sensitise parents of irregular children and exert pressure ° assist in provision and distribution of incentives: midday meal, uniforms, textbooks (relief from non-teaching duties)	° ensure 100% enrollment and retention => sensitise parents of irregular children and exert pressure ° provision of student incentives: midday meal, uniforms, textbooks	° assist in 'running the school'
decision-making	—	—	—	—
monitoring	°efficient use and quality of resources °check student and teacher attendence ° review student achievement	° check student and teacher attendence	° check student and teacher attendence ° review student achievement	

Source: Interviews

It is notable that in spite of substantial decision-making in PTA meetings, all respondents referred to implementation as the most important function of the PTA.

What made the implementation character so dominant was the routine of issuing orders for every time-bound task on part of the RSK. While these may have been intended to ensure that PTAs actually fulfil the core tasks assigned to them by the JSA/JSN, in effect,

they left no perceptible scope for the PTA to prioritise, as it was constantly told when to decide about what and how to implement it. This 'department paternalism' is likely to contribute to the notion that decision-making is not central to the PTA.

As a consequence, the perception of the roles of different actors (teachers, parents, principals), especially among non-elected parents, still very much reflected those prevalent in control-based school management (see table 12 on page 106).

There was wide consensus among parent respondents that the PTA is meant to assist teachers in the task of running the school in accordance with the requirements of government policy. Thus not only parents, but teachers as well, were mainly perceived as implementors of the current government education policy. This is rather contrary to the conception the of roles school-based management ascribes to teachers and principals, who are viewed as professionals in autonomous institutions, endowed with considerable decision-making scope with respect to resource utilisation, priority-setting, and day-to-day operation routines. Departmental domineering of PTA proceedings obviously has not escaped parents, and significantly shaped the perception of what PTAs can and should do.

Fig. 20: Individual respondents' perceptions of PTA rights and responsibilities, MS1
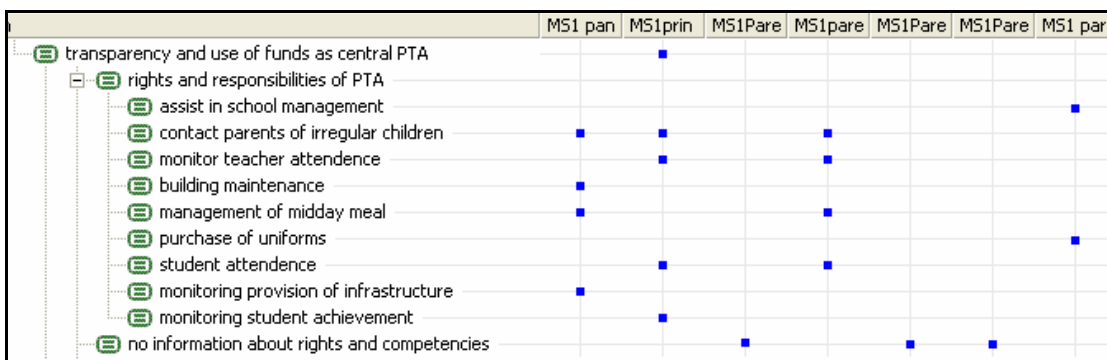
Source: Interviews, generated from MaxQDA

This is important in so far as the notion of empowerment, which is so prevalent in policy rhetorics in the context of the decentralisation of education, appears to be completely absent on the ground, even under favourable conditions.

It is difficult to tell whether this is a result of bureaucratic resistance to handing over control, the persistence of procedural habits, or mistrust in the capacity of PTAs to live up to their tasks on part of educational planners in the state project office. Muddled as reality usually is, it is likely to be a combination of all three.

With respect to monitoring functions, there was agreement across different categories of respondents that PTA members should be involved in controlling the use and quality of resources. This pertains to the use of funds from the *shala shiksha kosh* and the

materials purchased from SSA funds, mainly those necessary for construction, the midday meal, and student uniforms. Monitoring of student achievement by means of reviewing examination results was mentioned by the principal and elected parents, but not by teachers and non-elected parents. This may be due to the fact that usually the PTA secretary and a few elected members form a group which is responsible for reviewing examination results, so there is only a limited number of PTA members involved in the process.

Similarly, planning was an activity carried out by a separate planning group, including the *jan shikshak*, the secretaries and PTA presidents of both primary and upper primary section PTAs, the *anganwadi* worker, the principals of both private schools, and some current and former panchayat members. Given that the primary unit of planning is the village or habitation, rather than the school, joint planning in a large village with different education providers was a necessity, but also detached planning as a core responsibility from the majority of PTA members, and teachers.

While improvement of student performance through specific classroom practices was recorded as a matter of discussion in meeting minutes in MS1, the principal pointed out that such discussions, too, are usually initiated by the receipt of an order to improve classroom practice and pay special attention to weak students by some suggested means from the Department of Education. He asserted that pedagogical and didactical issues are clearly beyond parents.

Division of labour between different categories of members of the PTA

The division of labour between different categories of members within the PTA, as well as between the PTA and the *gram panchayat,* came quite close to the prescriptions of the JSN. Thus the 'rules-in-use' did not differ significantly from the 'rules-in-form'.

The principal took the central role in the definition of the scope of activities to be carried out by the PTA. Even though in MS1, agenda setting for PTA meetings was univocally stated to be a joint exercise, in which PTA secretaries, PTA presidents, and also the *jan shikshak* participated, the principal (in his function as secretary of the upper primary section PTA) and the *jan shikshak* clearly took the lead in this exercise according to the PTA president.

Formally, the most important and powerful post with respect to decision-making is the PTA president, who holds the final vote in case of any stalemate in decision-making within the body, and represents the PTA vis-à-vis other institutions (i.e. the *gram panchayat*). While the JSN ascribes agenda-setting to the PTA presidents as heads of the working committees, de facto in all five schools under study this role was taken by PTA

secretaries (a phenomenon again reminiscent of the proceedings frequently described in *gram panchayats,* where the secretaries often hold the reigns over funds, accounts, and agendas, especially if the *sarpanch* is inexperienced in public administration).

As PTA presidents were elected for one academic year, and were allowed for re-election only once, it is unlikely that they would be able to develop a level of competence allowing them to operate at eye level with the PTA secretary. This comparative disadvantage was reinforced by the absence of an institutionalised body of PTA presidents at cluster and block levels, which severely restricted PTA presidents' opportunity to exchange information and obtain support independent of the teaching staff.

According to a working committee respondent, most members (including himself) had a rather passive conception of their tasks and responsibilities, which was restricted to regular participation in meetings and execution of whatever tasks are delegated to individual or groups of members. Working committee respondents accepted contacting the parents of absent children in their respective neighbourhoods and convincing them to send their children to school as their share in the division of labour within the PTA, while other tasks such as monitoring teacher attendance, accounts, and resource utilisation were, if at all, activities ascribed to the PTA president.

Most time-bound tasks such as construction and the distribution of incentives to students were managed by sub-committees elected from among the parent members for the purpose at stake. Two such committees were established in the academic year 2005-06 in MS1, namely the uniform purchase and inspection committees. The purchase committee consisted entirely of elected working committee members, including the president, while the inspection committee consisted of three elected and three non-elected members. This appears to be the norm, as it reflects the composition of sub-committees in the other cases.

Including non-elected members in inspection committees is meant to increase accountability and transparency within the PTA, as a safeguard against irregularities and self-enrichment on part of elected members. This again reflects the logic of committee formation in *gram panchayats*, where committees are formed from among members of the *gram sabha,* with *sarpanch* and *upsarpanch* as ex-officio heads of the committees.

Involving mothers in inspection committees according to the Gender Coordinator of the ZSK is a strategy for 'bonding' on issues that they will feel competent to judge (i.e. the quality of cloth or food).

With respect to the exclusive delegation of monitoring and exercise of control to the president/vice president, the principal and *jan shikshak* brought forward the view that, given the low administrative skills of working committee members, involving only the

PTA president in supervision and monitoring of records (viz. approving by signature) is a matter of practicability[174], rather than deliberate exclusion of other members.

Fig 21: Division of functions in school governance, MS1
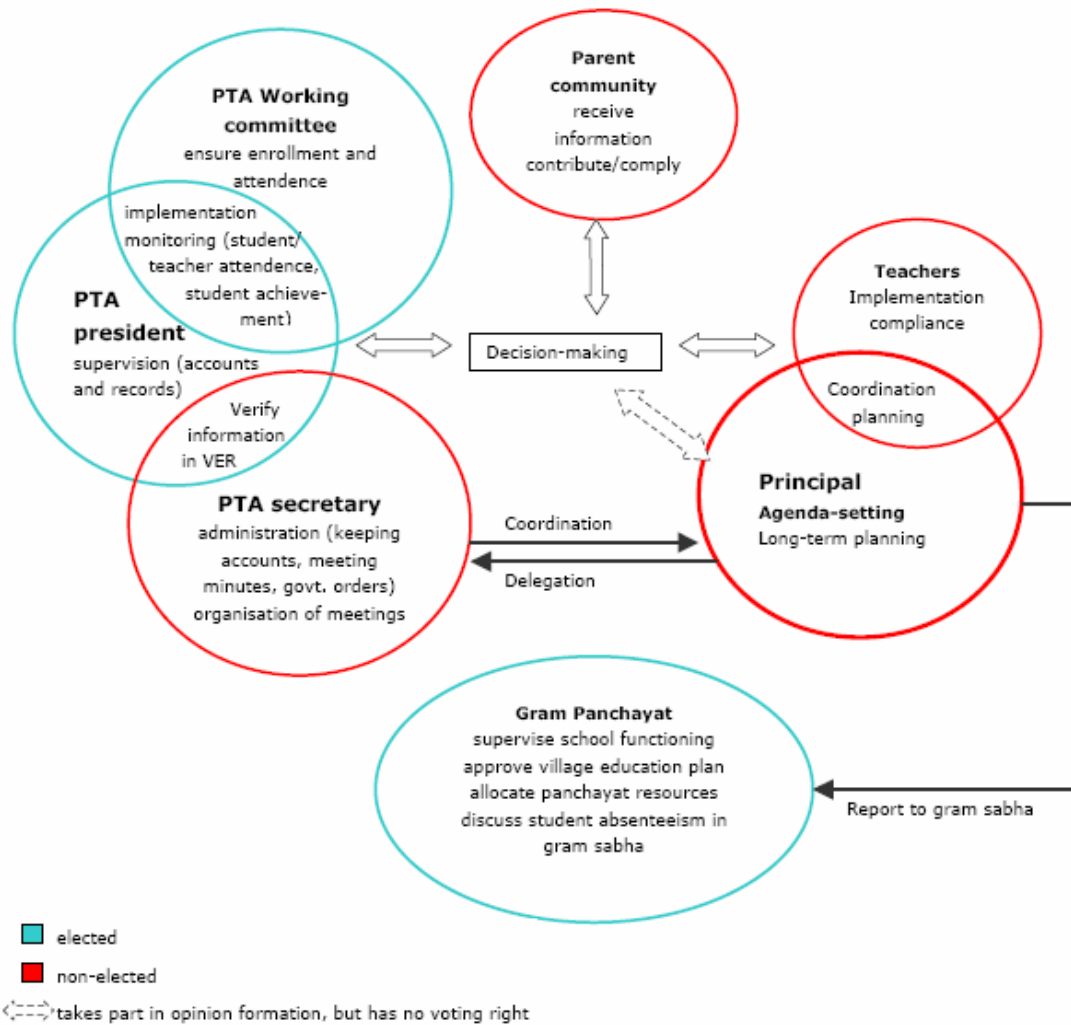
Source: Own

It is important that some of the conditions under which government schools in rural areas operate, especially low educational and socio-economic status of parents, are not conducive to an institutional setup in which parents are to be the primary instance of control over teachers and resources. Turning such a system of parent control moderately

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[174] According to the principal, most parents are not overly interested in the use of resources unless there are obvious and tangible irregularities. This results in the burden of continuous (monthly) review of accounts and records resting on the shoulders of the PTA president. Furthermore, in view of the usually restricted skills of parents in terms of the maintenance of records, accounts etc., training several parents with potentially different levels of skills was perceived inefficient, given that they often involved for only a year.

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functional involves a large-scale training and skill development initiative, which thus far has not materialised[175].

6.3.1.5   The role of panchayat involvement

Panchayat involvement in schools, viz. the extent to which panchayats use their monitoring and inspection powers, support school infrastructure by providing panchayat funds for public infrastructure, and the role they play in enforcement of compulsory education (sanctioning parents of irregular children) and teacher performance, is vital to the functioning of the school and the ability of PTAs to effectively carry out the tasks assigned to them.

Panchayat involvement has been observed to take place at an exceptionally high level in MS1, in all three areas mentioned above.

This appeared to be related to some features of panchayat functioning which have developed over time, and which have positively affected cooperation with the school:

- Emphasis on social development for successive legislative periods
- Heterogeneity in the population and proportional representation in the panchayat
- Leadership and formation of a joint 'vision' for school development

The social-development agenda

School development in MS1 is inseparably connected to the activity of the *gram panchayat* and its village development agenda. The link between the government school and the local government institution according to the panchayat secretary had been established long before the current principal was transferred to the school in 2002.

Since the panchayat elections in 1993, campaigning of candidates for the *sarpanch* seat (which had been unreserved for the first elections, reserved for a female OBC candidate in the second elections, and again unreserved in the third round of elections) revolved around the issue of village development, most notably access to health care and education facilities.

At the time, neither of the two private schools had existed in the village, and the government school had been a primary school (it was upgraded to a middle school under DPEP in 1996, when it became cluster resource centre), so access to educational facilities was restricted to the primary level.

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[175] Significant change in the composition of working committee members and the amount of training they are to receive has been introduced by amending the JSN in August 2006. These will be discussed chapter 7.

With the support of a group of villagers from the higher strata of village society in terms of socio-economic status (including the *patwari*, *thekedar*, local party activists, a retired teacher, and more recently the *anganwadi* worker), the panchayat had managed to achieve a number of development projects in public infrastructure and services, such as the opening of a public health sub-centre, the upgrading of the primary school to a middle school and the establishment of a Cluster Resource Centre on its campus, the opening of a pre-school day care centre (*anganwadi*), construction of a number of public buildings, like the *panchayat* building and a temple, and a sewage and irrigation system. Because during the second round of elections the *sarpanch* seat was reserved for a female OBC candidate, the *sarpanch* was unable to run for a second term as head of the *gram panchayat*. However, a continuation of his village politics was secured when his wife, who stood elections on the reserved seat, became *sarpanch*[176].

Panchayat functioning: cooperation in a heterogeneous setting
The composition of the population, specifically the fact that no community is numerically and socially dominating all others, appeared to be conducive to cooperative and deliberative culture in the *gram panchayat*, which was enhanced by several factors[177]:

- All major sections of the village population are represented with roughly equal strength in the panchayat
- All *panches* (including the 7 female *panches*) are literate, most of them are educated beyond the primary cycle
- The panchayat is supported by influential villagers (such as former *sarpanches* and teachers) who are committed to development issues

Since panchayat members are elected ward-wise, and wards largely are socially homogenous, members of all major social groups (*khati*, Muslim, and SC) are represented in the panchayat (the current *sarpanch* belongs to *khati* caste).
Broadly equal representation in the *gram panchayat* and a fairly even distribution of capabilities (esp. educational status) among electd members are important preconditions to equitable decision-making processes. Besides, competition among different sections of the village community is a strong factor for improving performance: Since no candidate can win a majority merely because of his or her affiliation to a caste or religious group, he or she needs to cater to the interests of the other major groups in order to be

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[176] The secretary did not tire to point out that the newly elected female *sarpanch* was independent in her agenda setting and handling the office entrusted to her.

[177] This view was shared by the panchayat secretary (interview conducted on 24th April 2006 in the panchayat office).

successful. Thus mobilisation in the village is centred on issues rather than group affiliation of candidates[178].

What seemed to be particularly important in this case was the relatively high degree of civil society mobilisation. There were several women's micro-finance cooperatives and youth groups, the latter having a mainly charitable agenda[179].

Both the *sarpanch* and secretary claimed to place great emphasis on transparency and accessibility of panchayat members to villagers. For this purpose, fixed consultation hours have been established: the *sarpanch* and secretary are available to villagers once a week for three hours to address issues of grievances, benefits from government programmes, etc.[180].

According to the panchayat secretary and several other respondents, panchayat meetings were scheduled each month, *gram sabha* meetings once in three months, as required by *panchayati raj* legislation. Special meetings were scheduled on different occasions, notably for social audit, which takes place at least once a year. *Gram panchayat* and *gram sabha* meetings were announced outside the panchayat office, *gram sabha* meetings were additionally announced by the traditional procedure of walking from door to door beating drums and announcing date, time and place of the meetings (*munnadi*).

Important decisions such as selection of beneficiaries of government programmes are posted outside the office. In addition, panchayat meeting minutes are available to the public during office hours.

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[178] Some studies on local governments' performance suggest that competition between diverse interest groups positively impacts local governance. Faguet (2005) for example in his analysis of the quality of local government in two municipalities of Bolivia, which diverged extremely in terms of government outcome, found that in open and competitive settings the quality of local government increases, because competition of diverse ideas and policy propositions to mobilise a heterogeneous electorate is required for electoral success. As a consequence, the needs of different groups are better reflected than in a non-competitive setting dominated by a single interest group.

[179] These groups had been established in the course of a mobilisation campaign of a local NGO (Samarthan) which is active all *gram panchayat* constituencies in which the schools under study are located. However , these interventions were particularly successful in this village, while leading to significant frictions in other villages, which again points to the importance a competitive political setting and a balance of power between different sections of the populace.

[180] This procedure has been introduced in many panchayats represented in the '*janpad sarpanch samiti*' (Block *Sarpanch* Committee, a voluntary association of *sarpanches* who share information and mutual support on issues of local government, facilitated by Samarthan), as a result of joint decision-making on how to effectively implement the 'Right to information' (RTI) Act at village level. According to the *sarpanch* of a larger panchayat bordering Ashta block, the RTI was a major challenge to many panchayats, as they now can be prosecuted for holding back information. Many *sarpanches* thus felt compelled to improve panchayat-community relations by being better accessible to villagers, in order to avoid tension on the occasion of social audit (conversation during a monthly meeting of the *janpad sarpanch samiti*, 23rd February 2006).

One important feature of the *gram panchayat* according to both secretary and *sarpanch* was the fact that *panches* were elected according to their perceived capability, rather than caste, religious or party affiliation. This was argued to enhance community mobilisation around issues of common (rather than particular) interest.

According to the panchayat secretary,

> "That the panchayat has invested in education and health has brought a good reputation and esteem to the panchayat and to the village as a whole. All villagers profit from improved infrastructure and a good atmosphere in the village. I think no future *sarpanch* can afford to ignore these issues, they have become a fixed part of the agenda."(Interview 24th April 2006)

The secretary pointed out, however, that the number of people who are genuinely active for development issues is small.

The larger number of people was stated to participate only when they expect direct, tangible material benefits[181]. Most of these have a low educational status (illiterate or dropped out in primary grades), which makes it more difficult to explain to them the benefits derived from cleanliness, healthcare and education, especially when this involves personal investment or a change of habits.

Another notable feature was the networking activity of the *sarpanch*. He was member of the *janpad sarpanch samiti,* which not only strengthens the lobbying capacities of *gram panchayats* vis-à-vis higher levels of local government, but also allows the use of resources and expertise of the NGO facilitating the meetings of the *samiti*. The *sarpanch* had made use of this to organise several awareness campaigns on education and health issues (total enrolment and education awareness campaigns, toilet construction campaign, child vaccination campaign).

In addition, by virtue of rotation the *sarpanch* was member of the Block Education Committee of the *janpad panchayat* for the year 2006, a body which is particularly appropriate for communicating own successes in the field of elementary education to the next higher level of local government.

Joint 'vision' for school development

Cooperation between the school and the panchayat had developed under the DPEP scheme, when village education registers were prepared and door-to-door surveys conducted jointly by teachers, volunteers from the village, and panchayat members.

However, with the opening of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir private school, a significant number of parents, especially from the *khati* population, enrolled their children in the private school, and pressure for improvement of the government school tangibly decreased.

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[181] Similar observations were made by Srivastava in different parts of the state (Srivastava 2005:18).

The national launch of SSA in 2002, followed by the ratification of the JSA and JSN, in combination with a complete change of leading personnel at local level (principal appointed in 2002, _jan shikshak_ in 2003, _sarpanch_ elected in the same year) seems to have brought new dynamics into the process of school development.

The designation as Model Cluster School required further upgrading of infrastructure and facilitated access to additional resources from both the Department of Education and the Department of Women and Child Welfare. Handling additional government resources is always a strong incentive for panchayats to get active (in fact, in many cases it is the only occasion on which panchayats get active in education)[182].

Construction and renovation activities generate employment opportunities in the village, and the _gram panchayat_ as contractor has significant power to distribute contracts on its own conditions. This is all the more true for the plan to upgrade the school to a secondary boarding school, which involves a massive flow of resources and the creation of long-term employment beyond construction (boarding facilities are equipped with extra cooks, cleaning personnel, security staff, and nursing staff for the children living in the school hostel).

In addition, housing the only government secondary school between the district headquarter and the block headquarter of neighbouring Icchawar block would considerably raise the profile of the village, of the panchayat and especially the _sarpanch_, and is invaluable in terms of reputation and esteem of the incumbent, and consequently for his political ambitions.

In spite of these rather self-serving incentives, there seems to be a genuine interest in furthering school development and education outcomes. A good indicator for the efforts of the panchayat to contribute to school functioning and students' learning achievement was the ongoing discussion between principal and _sarpanch_ about possibilities to enforce student attendance by making it precondition for access to benefit from government programmes. This indicates the willingness of the panchayat to actually enforce compulsory education in the village, against the almost certain opposition of many villagers.

In conclusion, links between the panchayat and the school were institutionalised exceptionally well, and formed the kind of governing network between the school and the community and its representatives which is considered so vital for the functioning of SBM. Further, the convergence school development with professional and political ambitions of the two important leading figures, the principal and the _sarpanch_, are driving factors behind the supportive role the panchayat played in MS1.

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[182] Cf. Leclercq 2002:85f, Govinda 2003:216, Behar/Kumar 2002:40, Srivastava 2005:15ff

6.3.1.6 Conclusions

The PTA of MS1 has been found to function exceptionally well on a number of parameters.

Firstly, parents participated on significantly higher levels than in other schools under study, in fact according to administrators at block and district level parental participation in MS1 was higher than in most schools in the entire block.

However, it was not the overall level of parent participation that accounted for the comparatively wide scope of activities of the PTA, but the regular participation of and clear division of labour between members of the PTA working committee. Compliance to the rules and procedures as prescribed in the JSA/JSN ensured that the 'rules-in-use' did not deviate significantly from the 'rules-in-form'. In this sense, MS1 provides some insights into the limits of school-based management and community/parent participation, especially in terms of the inclusion of deprived sections of the population and raising student achievement.

Secondly, the priority area of involvement of most elected members (apart from the PTA president and vice-president) was the establishment of regular interaction with parents of irregular children, while most administrative tasks were handled by the PTA president and vice-president exclusively, and infrastructure related issues were delegated to the hands of the *gram panchayat*.

Thirdly, the fact that PTA members belonged to different religious and caste groups was instrumental not only because of election requirements, but because each working committee member was delegated the responsibility to work towards student attendance in his/her respective neighbourhood. While there was still a long way to go towards total attendance, working committee members had a specific area for which they alone were responsible and could be held accountable for by the PTA secretary and president. In other words, the PTA working committee had a focussed agenda which was known to all members, and which assigned equally important roles to all of them.

Fourthly, parental resistance to elected membership in the PTA appeared to be less than what has been observed in other schools under study, and this was primarily caused by parents' feeling that it was appropriate to support teachers and a principal with the performance of whom they were highly satisfied.

In fact, the joint efforts of the *gram panchayat* and the principal/PTAs as joint school level management bodies to take school development beyond the standards set by SSA in MS1 reflected the emergence of the 'community ownership' so frequently cited in policy papers.

However, 'community ownership' did not extend to all parents of children enrolled in the school – on the contrary, many (especially poor and illiterate) parents were found to be

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as remote from the school as in any other village. Simultaneously 'ownership' was not restricted by being immediate stakeholder - especially at the upper end of the socio-economic ladder the school had many supporters who considered a well-functioning government school a matter of pride, quite irrespective of whether or not they had their own children enrolled in the school[183].

Equally important was, fifthly, the realisation among panchayat members that school development offered ample opportunity to gain for the village as a whole: The upgrading to a secondary boarding school meant an increase in local employment opportunities (construction labour, watchmen, cleaning and kitchen personnel) and increased the inflow of students from outside the village who were potential additional customers to the small food and *chay* stalls and shops in the village.

Last but not least the reputation gained from the school was instrumental for those in power in local government in advancing their own political ambitions[184].

It was evident in MS1 that parent participation worked *not* primarily because parents had embraced and initiated the activation of PTAs, but because of its instrumentality of a progressive agenda for inclusive education, in which all students irrespective of their social and economic background can be taken to high learning achievement levels, for the professional/political ambitions of leading actors (principal, *sarpanch*).

While parents have played only a minor part in this, it was definitely their children who profited most. Nevertheless, irrespective of the impressive successes in MS1, the case clearly documents that change in parental behaviour is incremental and slow (as indicated by the still very high absence rates and low student achievement), and achieving regular attendance and high student learning levels among children from particularly disadvantageous home backgrounds requires perseverance, not least in the dealings with their parents.

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[183] The children of the *sarpanch* for instance were enrolled in on of the private schools in the village, which did obviously not detract from the importance ascribed to the functioning of the government school.

[184] The school made it into India's high circulation magazine 'India Today' in 2007. The principal in an interview put his ambitions as follows: "By the time we're through ours will be a model to emulate:" (India Today, October 9th 2007).

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Fig. 22 Types of conditions by effect on PTA activity, MS1
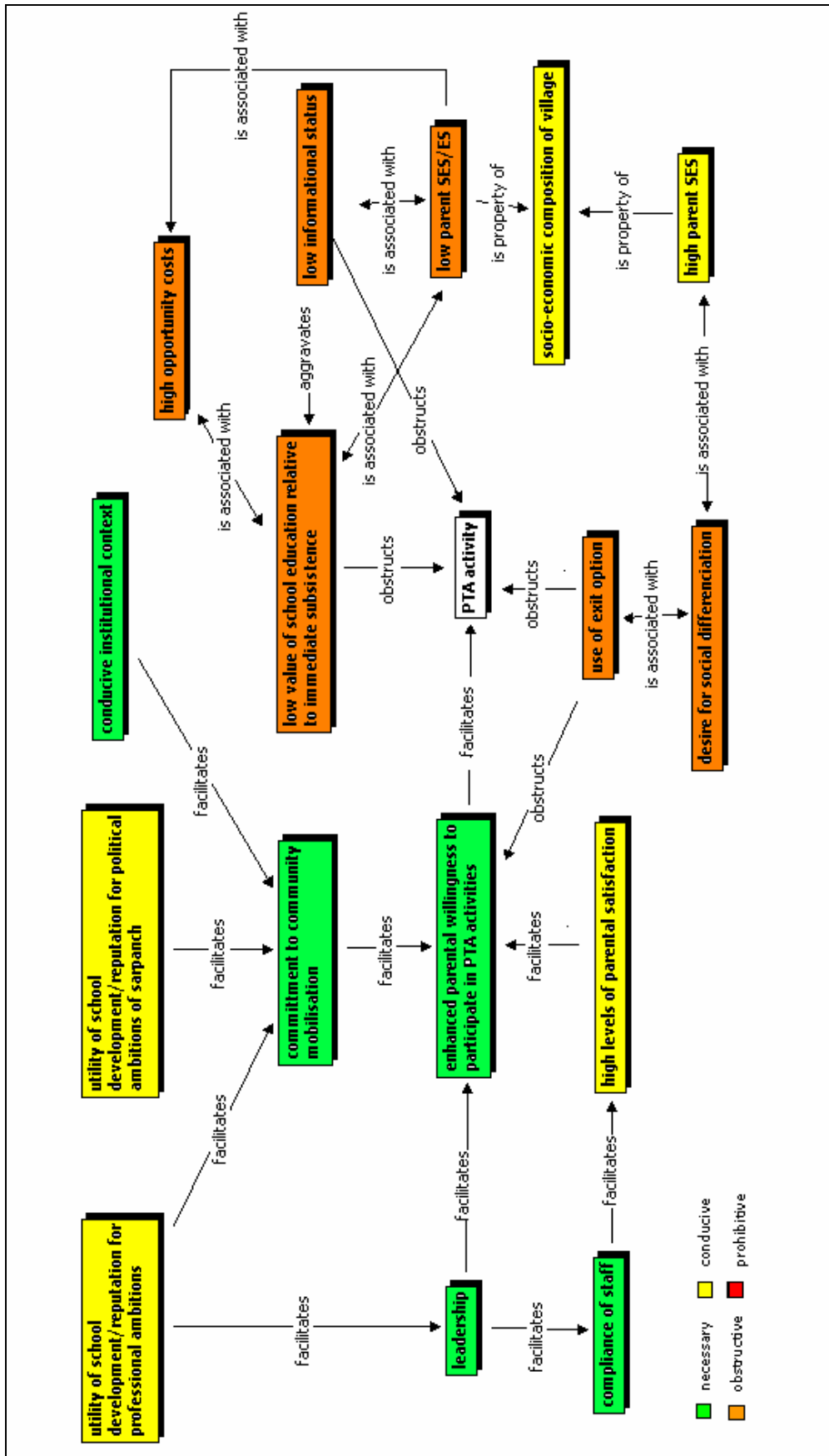
Source. Own

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6.3.2 Case 2: The government primary school in Cluster 1 (PS1)

The government primary school in cluster 1 represented a rather typical educational setting in rural Madhya Pradesh. It was a small primary school staffed with two teachers, one of them employed as assistant teacher by the Department of Education, the other employed under the Shiksha Karmi Scheme.

The PTA was rated comparatively active by ZSK staff as well as the *jan shikshak* of cluster 1.

Nonetheless, the scope of parent participation in PS1 was restricted by incongruent perceptions regarding the goals of parent involvement through PTAs between teachers and parents, especially those who were educated and/or socially active. As a result, parents were discouraged from participation in PTAs because it did not enable them to make an impact on what they perceived to be a desirable outcome of parent participation, namely student learning achievement.

This was connected to the perceived inability of parents to hold teachers directly accountable for what their children learn in school, and to the lack of interest of panchayat members in making children's educational attainment a point on the agenda of the *gram panchayat*.

6.3.2.1 *Village Population, settlement structure and basic amenities*

PS1 is situated in a small interior village about 5km northwest from the JSK. It is accessible from the Bhopal-Indore highway by a mud road.At the time of research, it had a population of 617[185] persons living in 94 households.

The vast majority of the population belongs to the *khati* and *sutar*[186] castes (OBC, major landowning castes in Sehore district).

Four families belong to *nai*[187] caste (also OBC). About 18% of the population are from SC communities, the majority being members of the *balai*[188] caste. A minority of three households belong to the *chamars*[189].

The SC households are located at the northern end of the village.

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[185] As recorded in the *jan shiksha* register 2005-06. According to the census 2002, there were 562 persons living in the village. Since the *jan shiksha* registers are updated annually, I assume the numbers reflect the current state of affairs. Population growth is comparable to MS1 at a little less than 3.29% p.a.

[186] Cultivators and agricultural labourers.

[187] Traditional barber community.

[188] Traditional artisan community producing tools and furniture from woods.

[189] Traditional leather processing community.

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While the population is heterogeneous in terms of caste composition, the dominance of the landowning castes (*khati* and *sutar*), constituting more than 70% of the population, is tangible in the village, especially in the context of local government.

Gram panchayat areas had been restructured because of the growing population in the area before panchayat elections in November 2004. As a result, the village became *gram panchayat* centre of a constituency comprising two more villages (in one of which EGS1 was located, which was previously adjoined to a different constituency). The sarpanch seat in the first panchayat elections was won by a member of one of the *zamindar* families belonging to the *khati* caste.

Due to landownership patterns, the number of households below the poverty line (BPL) is low at 15[190]. Landless families all belong to the scheduled castes (whereas not all SC families are landless). However, BPL status is no adequate indicator for the actual levels of poverty, because even small-scale landownership precludes entitlement to BPL status. About one third of the landowning families in the village own less than five acres and need to generate additional income through agricultural labour, because the margins produced by cultivating their own land does not match subsistence needs. It has been observed that income levels as stated by respondents from non-SC families with small landholdings were sometimes lower than income levels of landless SC families, who additionally profit from access to subsidised foods through the public distribution system (PDS).

Considering that about half of the population owns either no or small plots of land, the actual extent of income poverty observable in the village is much higher than the number of BPL-listed families would suggest.

Employment opportunity is restricted to agricultural labour on the fields of landowning families, some of them residing in the village, others residing in neighbouring villages. According to a panchayat member, there are around 10 families (*khati* and *sutar*) who own land exeeding 10 acres, and four families are large-scale landowners (traditional *zamindar* families). These families represent the upper socio-economic echelon, and their houses are easily discernible in the village by virtue of being *pucca* (concrete) two-story houses. These are located to the left side of the main lane passing the panchayat building[191]. Here the roads are cemented, while houses towards the periphery are connected by stone-and-mud roads.

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[190] Information provided by the *sarpanch*. Notably, in the Samarthan database, 6 BPL households are recorded. A project assistant mentioned that the number given by the *sarpanch* probably refers to the whole panchayat area.

[191] According to a panchayat member, the building consists of an office room and a meeting room. I have not seen the building open once while I have visited the village.

There is a small shop selling items from *beedis* (rolled tobacco leaves) to stationary at the southern entrance of the village, and a dairy shop at the northwestern end (see map). A public landline telephone is available here, and the shop also serves as post office and information booth, as information on *gram sabha* and PTA meetings is posted here.

Figure 23: Village of PS1
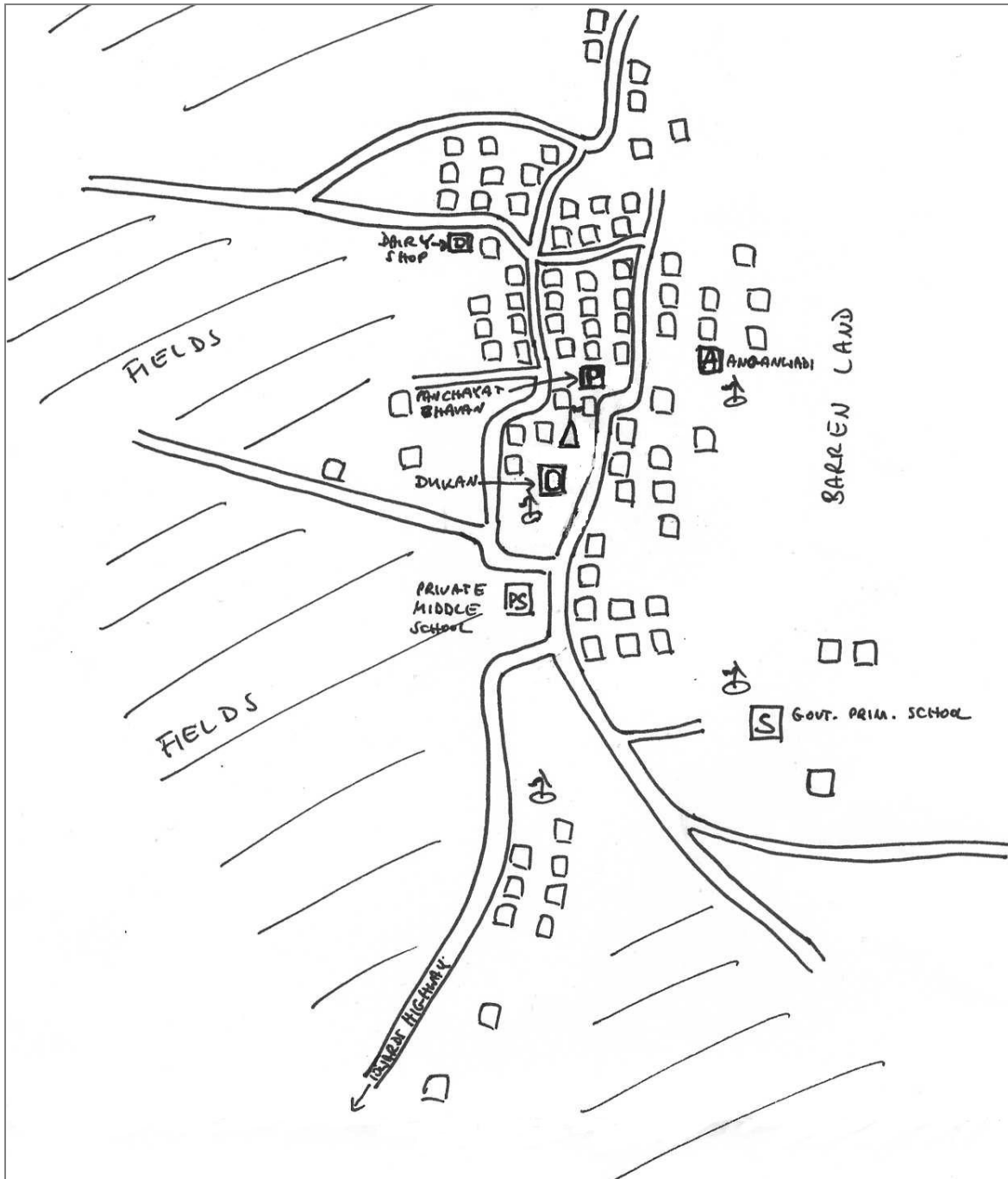
Source: own (aided by head teacher)

There is no sanitation system in the village, the wealthier households have installed private toilets, but the majority of people use the fields as open latrine. There is no canal or drainage system. Five handpumps are available, one of them located on the government school grounds. However, two handpumps (including the one on the school grounds) are dysfunctional due to falling groundwater levels.

The closest public health care facility is the public health sub-centre neighbouring MS1, however there is a private practicing ayurvedic doctor in a neighbouring village.

The closest government middle school is located 4 km south in a village close to the Bhopal-Indore highway[192].

The government primary school in the village had been opened in 1962 under the Department of Education. It operated as a single teacher school until the launch of DPEP in Sehore district, when a large number of single teacher primary schools were allocated a second teacher employed under the s*hiksha karmi* programme.

An *anganwadi* is operating in an old (and extremely, dark, shabby, and unfriendly) storehouse close to the school. The village is completely electrified, but the government school and the *anganwadi* have not yet been connected.

There is a private secondary school in the village, offering primary up to secondary level education. The school was established in 2002 and operated with four teachers. There were 51 children enrolled across grade 1-8. The school had been planned and equipped as a secondary school, and the rented building has 10 classrooms. Fees ranged from 45 Rs per month at primary level to 85Rs at upper primary level.

Due to low enrolment, the student-teacher-ratio (STR) was low at 1:17, one of the comparable advantages to the government primary school. Particularly notable was the gender parity in enrolment in this private school, with 26 boys and 25 girls enrolled in 2005-06. However, not a single child from the SC communities was enrolled there.

6.3.2.2 *Indicators of school functioning in the government primary school*[193]

Enrolment and students' socio-economic background

The child population age 3-14 was 177 as recorded in the village education register 2005, of which 156 children were of school-going age (5-14).

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[192] This is, strictly speaking, a violation of SSA norms, as a government middle school must be available within three km.

[193] All data presented here refer to the school year 2005-06 unless indicated otherwise

Four children (OBC) were recorded as non-enrolled children; one girl from an SC family was recorded out of school. The observable gap between the total number of 5-14 population and children enrolled in the village or out of school resulted from enrolment in schools outside the village. According to the head teacher, these children had completed primary school in the village and were enrolled in the nearest government middle school[194].

The caste-wise composition in the government primary school broadly reflected the composition of the population, with a slight bias towards students from the SC communities, who constituted one third of the student population. This was due to enrolment in private school, which exclusively catered to students from *khati* and *sutar* families. The number of enrolled boys was slightly higher (39) than the number of girls (37).

Table 26: Child population and enrolment by caste and gender, PS1

	SC			ST			OBC			GEN			all
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	castes
village	25	18	43	-	-	-	55	58	113	-	-	-	156
govt. school	15	11	27	-	-	-	26	24	48	-	-	-	76
priv. school	-	-	-	-	-	-	26	25	51	-	-	-	51
non-enrolled	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	-	-	-	4
out-of-school	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

Sources: jan shiksha register, school report cards, student attendance and achievement register, all for 2005-06

A notable feature was the gender composition within grades. In the first two grades girls outnumbered boys, while in fourth and fifth grade the relation was inverse.

Table 27: Enrolment by grade/gender, PS1

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
girls	10	16	3	3	5
boys	7	5	7	10	10

Source: student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

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[194] With respect to enrolment numbers, the head teacher pointed to an interesting fact: "The state government releases annual enrolment targets for each village which are based on calculations from census data. These target numbers are often higher than the actual number of school-aged children. To fulfil these targets, children who are younger than 5 years are enrolled in first grade. These children have not yet reached a degree of self-reliance that enables them to participate in school." (Interview head teacher, 17th April 2006) Administrators have stated that enrolment targets are relative (100% enrolment) rather than absolute, but have pointed out that absolute numbers are provided based on calculations from the latest census altered by the average population growth rates. These are supposed to serve as an orientation – rather than a target - for teachers concerning the number of school-age children in a village while preparing the *jan shiksha* register and *jan shiksha yojna*. However, it appears that teachers do feel under pressure to enrol as many children as the calculation suggests, rather than pointing out to their superior level of administration that the actual number of children of 1st grade age is lower than anticipated.

The high proportion of girls in 1st and 2nd grades according to the head teacher reflected efforts made to enrol all children in school, which resulted in higher numbers of girls being enrolled in first grade two years back, including some overage girls[195].

Students were from all socio-economic strata. Children of the *zamindar* families were enrolled along with children from landless SC families.

This is remarkable in so far as it points to a peculiar division of labour between the government and the private school. Parent respondents pointed out that initially all children are enrolled in the government primary school by their parents. Only when parents feel their children do not perform well or even fail an end-of-year examination, those who can afford it shift them to the private school (often without notifying teachers, who record the children as absent throughout the entire school year).

Thus enrolment in private school does not merely reflect socio-economic status hierarchy in the village, but also parental dissatisfaction, which induces parents to exit out of the government system.

Notably, some of these parents belonged to the poor sections of the village population, with a monthly income of less than 1500 Rs. Thus, in terms of economic status, student population in both the government and the private school in the village mixed, whereas caste-wise, there was a strong segregation, with no SC child enrolled in the private school[196].

Teacher qualification and attendance

The current head teacher had been appointed to the school in 1994 as an assistant teacher. He holds a diploma of education (D.Ed.), which he acquired from an educational college as pre-service training. The *shiksha karmi* was appointed as second teacher under DPEP in 1996.

The fact that there has been no teacher fluctuation for the last ten years was clearly related to teacher residence: The head teacher resided in a neighbouring village where his family owned land; the *shiksha karmi* resided on the fringes of the locality. Like many

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[195] This coincides with the beginning of mobilisation in the cluster by the *jan shikshak*, who had been appointed in 2003-04. According to him, a rise in girls' enrolment can be observed in many schools in the cluster at that period of time as a result of parent mobilisation and enrolment campaigns (Interview April 24th 2006).

[196] The head teacher of the school (himself belonging to the scheduled castes) pointed out that caste even in villages no longer determines the economic status of families. There are landowning SC families who are much wealthier than some of the OBC families. Yet, some practises of segregation are still common, such as excluding SC families from using the same handpump or well. Enrolment in private school appears to reflect this practice. The head teacher interpreted this as an effort to keep up social superiority even though (or because) differences in economic and educational status blur.

teachers recruited under alternative employment schemes, he was a local unemployed Bachelor of Commerce who shifted to the teaching profession in search of employment opportunity.

Multi-grade teaching was the norm, as in all government primary schools with average enrolment per grade below 40. According to the teachers, the *shiksha karmi* taught the first two grades together, while the head teacher taught grade 3-5 jointly.

This required the development of multi-level teaching techniques for different skill levels while teaching the subject-wise syllabus. Notably, multi-grade teaching was not perceived as a problem per se by the teachers (probably because they have never done anything else throughout their professional life), what they complained about was the lack of continuous student attendance in combination with an ever-increasing load of non-teaching duties.

Non-teaching duties have severe impact on school functioning in schools with few teachers posted. However,it would be misleading to assume that it is primarily the head teacher who is confronted with non-teaching duties. In PS1, while the head teacher did perform more non-teaching tasks in the form of participating in meetings and so-called 'other duties', the *shiksha karmi* was frequently absent for D.Ed.-Training[197]. As a consequence, the actual number of days of absence was almost equal for head teacher and *shiksha karmi* (37 and 33 respectively).

Table 28: Teacher attendance September 05-April 06, PS1

status	training	medical leave	casual leave	meetings JSK/ sankul	other duties	strike	total days of absence	total no.of school days	% of total school days
head teacher	3	8	13	10	3	1	38	169	22.5
shiskha karmi	13	0	9	6	1	4	33	169	19.5

Source: Teacher Attendance Register 2005-06

According to the teacher attendance register, on 42% of all school days, only one teacher was present in school, while the other attended meetings, trainings, performed other duties, or was on medical leave. This means that on a considerable proportion of teaching days one teacher taught all five grades simultaneously.

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[197] It is required for all teachers not holding a degree in Education (irrespective of their employment status) to attend in-service training for a Diploma in Education. These trainings are run by the Dept. of Public Instruction through the DIETS. They are not supported by external institutions such as educational colleges or universities (which is why the quality of the training has often been complained about by teachers). Given that according to the former DEO of Sehore district, the DIET serves as a catch basin for the most demotivated and non-performing teachers (whom the Department can only get rid of by posting them in positions where they supposedly do the least harm), the quality of in-service courses is sub-standard.

Multi-grade teaching is frequently discussed as a problem in terms of the quality of education in the literature on the expansion of basic education in India (cf. Leclercq 2002, Govinda/Josephine 2004, Bajpay/Goyal 2004, Ramachandran 2005).

Empirical studies in western contexts have shown that learning in multi-grade as well as multi-age groups of students can yield better results than in the standard monograde learning groups[198], so it is not appropriate to dismiss it as a sub-standard method of teaching right away.

There are, however, just as many external risks to the success of multi-grade teaching as to other teaching methods, and these threaten to undermine the potential of cross-age and cross-grade learning. The most problematic factors here are the design of curricula and syllabi, which are based on monograde teaching norms, and, as a consequence, the neglect of multigrade classroom situations in teacher training and development of teaching-learning materials.

Student attendance and achievement[199]

Student attendance comparatively high in PS1, with an average attendance of 78%[200]. The number of students attending less than 50% of school days was low in absolute terms (4) - 76% of all students attended more than 70% of all school days.

Even though attendance rates in PS1 compared favourably with most of the other schools under study[201], it should be noted that by Indian standards less than 25% absence still

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[198] Different studies of learning achievement in western countries have found that students in multigrade schools performed equal to students in monograde schools, and outperformed the latter on non-cognitive skills. However, the key to success of multi-grade and multi-age teaching appears to lie in teachers' commitment and their adequate support in terms of training and teaching materials (cf. Little 2001 for an overview over international research on multigrade teaching).

[199] Statements about student achievement are difficult to make, as achievement had not been recorded in the student attendance and achievement register. Teachers usually transfer student achievement (read: examination results) into the student attendance and achievement register at the end of the school year, after the final examinations are over. As interviews were conducted in March and April, when examinations were still going on, records had not yet been completed in most schools (except MS1). In addition, new registers were introduced ex post for the school year, and teachers, in an effort to avoid unnecessary paper work, waited for the arrival of the new register books to fill in student achievement. As a consequence, statements about student achievement levels are based on information provided by respondents and the evaluation of student achievement in the school report cards and the cluster _jan shiksha yojna_ report.

[200] The low average in the 3rd grade was due to irregular attendance of two students and weak class strength (10 children). Excluding the two irregular students, the attendance rate rises to 78.3%.

[201] Considering that by indicators of school functioning Sehore district is one of the forward districts in Madhya Pradesh, it is somewhat surprising that attendance rates observed at school level (even when comparatively high) were lower than the official net attendance according to large scale survey data (NFHS, DHS), which

makes a very good attendance grade (A). In international school research, more than 20% absence throughout a school year is labelled 'manifest' (rather than 'occasional') absence. If this definition is applied here, more than 40% of all students would qualify as manifest absentees, while more than 85% would be labelled occasional absentees[202].

Table 29: Average student attendance by grade, PS1

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	all grades
No. of students	17	21	10	13	15	76
below 40%	1	1	1	0	1	4
50- 60%	3	0	1	1	0	5
60-70%	4	2	2	0	1	9
70-80%	3	3	1	4	2	13
above 80%	6	15	5	8	11	45
av. attendance rate	71.1	81.0	69.0	84.2	85.0	78.0

Source: Student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

The head teacher brought forward the notion that student attendance and achievement were negatively affected by two factors[203]:

1. Parents are oblivious of their role and responsibilities in their children's education, which has negative effects on both children's attendance and learning achievement
2. Non-teaching burden is ever increasing, with rising demands on evaluation and monitoring

The head teacher pointed to the problems manifest absenteeism among a large proportion of students creates for the process of teaching:

> "Children come irregularly, because parents are too occupied with their work to see if their children go to school regularly […]. There are hardly ever two successive days on which class composition is the same. So teachers just go on teaching whomever comes. It is impossible to keep up continuous teaching because attendance in the classes is not stable." (Head teacher, 12th April 2006)

Irregular attendance becomes particularly problematic in multigrade settings. These require careful organisation of students around particular subjects, or in learning groups according to ability levels. When student composition varies from day to day, the teacher must be skilled in adjusting student grouping accordingly, and in keeping an overview over different students' learning levels. In the absence of such skills (or the motivation to

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figure above 80% in Madhya Pradesh. If net attendance were indeed this high, one may wonder why the state government is reasoning about calculating the student-teacher ratio on the basis of average student attendance on days of inspection, rather than enrolment. The DEO of Sehore district repeatedly brought forward that according to his experience in several districts of the state, actual attendance in schools is no more than 60% of students enrolled on average at primary level.

[202] Absence rates of between 5-20% are labelled occasional absenteeism (cf. Ricking 2003:73).

[203] Interview conducted in the school premises on 12th April 2006.

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engage in them), teaching activity may stagnate because the same content has to be taught over and over again to students who have missed previous classes, potentially leading to underchallenge and boredom among regular students.

Obviously, teachers in PS1, in desperation about the situation, have chosen the other option, namely going on with classes *as if* student attendance was regular. In addition, it appears that the necessity of dividing students into groups for self-study and peer learning tempted teachers to abandon active teaching altogether in favour of merely supervising the largely self-directed learning activities of students[204].

On top of this professionally challenging (and potentially frustrating) environment, as teacher attendance records have shown, throughout the school year more than 40% of teaching activity in the school was handled by a single teacher. This may not be so much of a problem as long as absence rates of students remain high. Still an average attendance of 78% of children means that one teacher taught 59 to 60 children of different grade- and age-levels simultaneously. To do so effectively, as has been emphasised above, the teacher needs sound skills in multi-level tasking and appropriate materials for different activities such as peer-tutoring and self-study, so that children can profit from joint learning.

More importantly, if attendance increases – which is be one of the goals of SSA - a single teacher in PS1 would be left with up to 80 children of all grades and ages on a significant proportion of teaching days, teaching a syllabus which is not at all appropriately structured for such a setting[205].

This leads to the peculiar situation that for a small school to remain moderately functional, it appears *necessary* that student attendance remains low, to avoid an aggravation of difficulties inherent to the multigrade setting by exceedingly high student-teacher ratios.

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[204] This observation reminds of the warning Angela W. Little has expressed in her review of international research on multigrade teaching and learning settings, namely that self- and peer study may not be mistaken by teachers as a substitute to their own activity in leading different learner groups (cf. Little 2004:16).

[205] Numerous studies on the effects of class size on student learning achievement have pointed to the insignificance of this factor on learning outcomes (cf. among many others Hanushek 1998, Wößmann/West 2006). These studies, however, somewhat obfuscate in what settings class size indeed has been found to make an impact, namely at early age (preschool grades), and when students live in unsupportive home environments. Both factors are important in rural primary schools in India. It should also be noted that most comparative studies operated on regular class sizes of maximum 30 students. What we are talking about in India is STRs of 70:1 and above, and the effect of class sizes this large are clearly not captured by the comparative literature. In addition, there is no comparative study on the effects of class size in multi-age and multigrade settings, so it is difficult to draw inferences about the impact of class size under the conditions prevalent in India and other developing countries.

With respect to parents' role in ensuring children's regular attendance, the head teacher brought forward the same line of reasoning as his colleague in MS1: Besides the fact that most parents of irregular children were preoccupied with subsistence, many of them lacked the experience of processes of continuous education, and thus were unaware of the necessity of regular attendance for learning progress. In fact, many parents' own school experience fostered the perception that it is normal to miss significant proportions of school days.

While this logic is plausible and surely to some extent responsible for the problem at stake, irregular attendance highlights an issue that was seldom brought up by teachers: Considering the fact that primary schools are very proximate to children's homes, especially in smaller villages, and parental indifference is no obstacle to attendance as long as students are not actively held back, school obviously does not offer enough incentives to make children want to attend by themselves, instead of staying home alone while their parents go out to work. If classes were as enjoyable and child friendly, and the midday meal was as good and saturating as SSA reports suggest, one may wonder why children do not prefer going to school over staying home alone, at least as long as they are not obliged to graze the cattle or take care of younger siblings.

With the exception of MS1, which offered a more interesting and diversified environment to its students, the dullness of school premises, the non-accessibility of toys, books or other materials for play and activity, and possibly the bland, text-book based teaching style prevalent in most schools under study push students out of the school, unless some external force (parents) makes them stay in.

Understanding these push-out factors properly involves the distinction of different types of absenteeism, most notably forms of truancy which are usually related to push-out factors, and forms of school refusal or withdrawal, which are usually related to pull-out factors (i.e. parental withholding for involvement in labour or other tasks). Unless a proper practise of documentation of student absence and its causes is introduced, it will be difficult to get a realistic picture on this issue.

Parent perspectives on the issue of student learning achievement add another dimension to the problem, namely their perceived inability to demand accountability of teachers for their children's performance in school. It should be noted that in PS1 as elsewhere parent respondents (especially female and illiterate ones) exposed very low levels of information on actual school functioning beyond the presence of a teacher and some students in school. These parents tended to *assume* that teacher were teaching and children were learning 'well'[206]. While this does indicate some progress, as regular opening of schools

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[206] In the absence of obvious malfunctioning, as indicated by irregular opening hours, irregular teacher attendance, observable lack of teaching activity, or discontinuation of the midday meal, parents across cases

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and attendance of teachers were indeed the most tangible outcome of education policy since the launch of the DPEP, it points to parents' inability to judge the quality of classroom processes.

Among the four village respondents who actually did have a perception of the functioning of the school beyond the presence of at least one teacher and some students[207], the general feeling appeared to be that teachers do a decent job in teaching. However, they perceived the positive impact of 'good' teaching to be neutralised by the amount of non-teaching duties teachers face, and the subsequent reduction of 'time on task'. Interestingly, parents appeared to overestimate the amount of non-school-related workload from departments other than the Department of Education. Parents repeatedly stated that teachers have to conduct all kinds of surveys, especially for the Health Department and the Department of Backward Classes/SC and ST Welfare (BPL survey). Teacher attendance records, however, did not support this perception at all, as 90% of all teacher absences in PS1 were caused by participation in meetings or trainings, and casual or medical leave. This dissonance appears to reflect teachers' strategies in countering parental demands of accountability for student achievement.

The perception of parents that it was basically a flaw in the system that kept teachers from teaching had a strong impact on parents' motivation to engage in the PTA of PS1, as will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3.2.3 *Parent-Teacher-Association: Composition, parent participation, and scope of activities*

Composition of working committee, frequency of meetings and parent participation

The PTA of PS1 had a total of 96 parent members in the academic year 2005-06. Election of the PTA president, vice president, and working committee members had been conducted in the first meeting of the school year on July 14th 2005.

Apart from the president and vice-president, 10 parents were elected into the working committee, among them three women. In terms of educational status, 9 out of the 12

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expressed satisfaction with school functioning. MS2 and to a lesser extend PS2 illustrate the amount of deviant teacher behaviour necessary for parents to perceive that the school is indeed not functioning well. Chapman et.al. (2002) in their study on local schools in Ghana found a similar tendency among parents and other community members to assume their schools offered high quality education in the absence of any easily discernable deficiencies.

[207] These were the PTA president, wc member 2, the subcommittee member, and member 1.

elected members were recorded to be literate. One of these, however, actually stated that his was a zero-adult-literate household. Signatures in the PTA register suggest that at least two more respondents who are classified literate are not accustomed to writing, including the PTA vice-president[208].

Table 30: Working Committee members by caste, gender and educational status, PS1

PTA Karyakarini 05-06	gender	caste/ community	educational status	No. of attended meetings
president	m	OBC (Khati)	10th	8
vice president	f	SC (Balai)	literate*	4
member	m	OBC (Khati)	literate	1
member	m	OBC (Sutar)	10th	5
member	m	OBC (Khati)	illiterate	6
member	m	OBC (Khati)	literate*	1
member	m	OBC (Khati)	literate*	5
member	m	OBC (Sutar)	literate	8
member	m	OBC (Sutar)	literate	7
member	f	SC (Balai)	illiterate	3
member	f	OBC (Nai)	literate	4
member	f	SC (Balai)	illiterate	0

 * not functionally literate

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

Participation levels among working committee members were mixed according to the meeting minutes. There were six members (including the president) who attended more than half of all PTA meeting. While participation among working committee members was significantly less stable than in MS1, there appeared to be a number of non-elected members who attended meetings regularly.

According to the meeting minutes, on average 20 parents were present in PTA meetings, confirming the levels of participation as mentioned by the head teacher. The number of non-elected participants ranged between 10 and 14.

The core participant group consisted of 10 members (including the head teacher as PTA secretary), which is only half of the core participant groups' strength in MS1 in absolute terms, but considerable relative to the small number of students enrolled in the school.

Interlinkage with the panchayat was observable, with the *sarpanch* participating in roughly every other meeting, and the *upsarpanch* (vice president of *gram panchayat*) having attended seven out of ten recorded meetings. In addition, one of the working committee members was also panchayat member.

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[208] As mentioned before, very basic skills such as signing one's name are enough to be recorded literate in school statistics. Teachers have every incentive to do so, as they are expected to ensure as high a number of literate parents in the working committee as possible.

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Fig. 24: Participation in PTA meetings among different groups of members, PS1
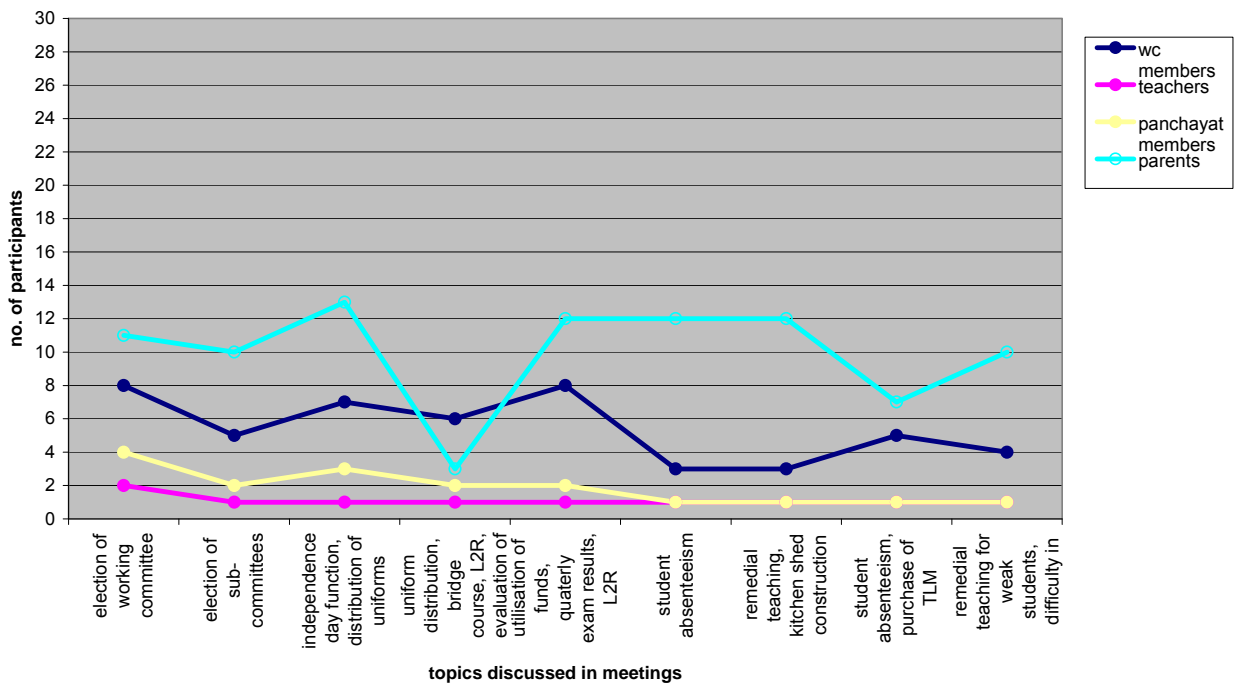
Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

Female participation, in contrast, was particularly erratic in PS1. Among the non-elected parent members, not a single mother participated even once in a meeting. Within the working committee, none of the female members signed the register to confirm their election – indeed they may have not even been present - their husbands, however, did sign. Female membership in the PTA working committee, in stark contrast to MS1, appeared to be a mere formality to be observed during elections.

Husbands of female elected members participated more regularly in meetings than their wives, if their signature under meeting minutes is anything to go by. Most notably, the the vice-president's husband was the most regular participant among all members (elected and non-elected), confirming the impression that his wife was serving as proxy to fulfil the reservation requirements. The same applied to another female working committee member, whose husband also belonged to the regular non-elected participants.

The PTA vice-president confirmed that her husband was the driving force behind her candidacy for the PTA. She stated that her husband attended meetings regularly, while she herself only participated in meetings when the absence of the PTA president formally required her presence[209].

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[209] PTA vice president, 11th April 2006; interview conducted in the respondent's home.

Female activity in public bodies appeared to be lower on the whole in the panchayat constituency of PS1 than in other panchayats under study. A panchayat member confirmed that female *panches* hardly ever attended panchayat meetings.

The head teacher attributed low female involvement in public issues to the high levels of female illiteracy and a resulting lack of self-confidence. But he also somewhat vaguely acknowledged that social values play a role, stating that husbands generally do not like to see their wives exposed to the public[210].

Even though numerically parental participation in the PTA was quite presentable, the head teacher pointed out that due to the irregular participation of both elected and non-elected members it was difficult to delegate responsibilities to a larger number of parents and keep track of their activities. As a consequence, for tasks requiring continuous involvement, such as verifying accounts for the monthly reports to the JSK, he relied only on those few members who attended more reliably.

> "It is difficult to delegate responsibility to individual members, because there are different parents in every meeting. The only more or less regular participants are the teachers, the president, and the vice-president." (Interview head teacher, 17th April 2006)

He emphasised, however, that parents were not generally aversive towards contributions, as labour and other donations were provided to the school by parents when the necessity arose. Rather, it seemed to be the expectation of continuous engagement that parents were discouraged by. The PTA president made it clear that the high frequency of meetings was a major cause of irregular participation, because it required parents to interrupt their work, which according to him no one was ready to do more than once a month.

PTA meetings took place twice a month as prescribed by government order, except in September and October 2005, when only one meeting per month was recorded. According to the head teacher, this was a concession to the soybean harvesting season, when farmers are under pressure to yield the crops, as this is the peak time of income generation. Parent attendance in meetings was stated to tangibly decline during harvesting season.

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[210] A member of the *zilla panchayat* pointed out that among value-conservative rural families, especially of the higher socio-economic echelon, male control over female appearance and scope of activities in public is fiercely defended, and female illiteracy is an effective tool for constraining women's independence and self-confidence. He emphasised that illiterate women are found even in families where the husband holds a doctoral degree and has all means enhance his wife's educational status. The main reason for high female adult illiteracy in the district was the reluctance of male family heads to encourage their wives, sisters and mothers to acquire literacy (informal conversation with an elected *zilla panchayat* representative of the BJP in the office of the DPC (ZSK) on April 20th 2006).

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Interestingly, the number of signatures under the meeting minutes does not support this claim. Much points to the practice of preparing meeting minutes ex post and collect signatures quite irrespective of actual attendance. The absence of any minutes from January to April is another such indication[211].

While PTA records in MS1 appeared to give a comparatively reliable account of participation and issues in the monthly meetings, data from the other schools under study need to be handled with caution, as they exposed considerable contradiction to the statements of respondents, especially with respect to the level of participation among both elected and non-elected members.

Evidence from other cases (specifically PS2) suggests that the number of signatures underneath the minutes is often inflated by ex-post collection of signatures. The required quorum of one third of all members of the PTA for holding a meeting creates pressure on teachers to increase participation, even though the provision that meetings can be conducted without quorum after postponement of half an hour makes the initial provision a non-starter. Yet it appears that teachers felt compelled to collect as many signatures as they can to lend legitimacy to the decisions taken in PTA meetings.

The DEO pointed out that during his inspection rounds he encountered schools where teachers had recorded meeting minutes, had the PTA president sign, and wrote down number 1-20 for collecting parent signatures later on (and most probably irrespective of actual participation).

Parents' motivation to participate: perceptions of respondents

   a) Teachers' perceptions of parent motivation

Teachers in PS1 generally were not very optimistic that parental motivation to participate in the PTA actually exists. This pessimism was grounded in the experience that no parent ever came forward to be elected into the working committee, let alone as president or vice-president. Rather, teachers had to invest more or less effort to convince parents to get elected. This was confirmed by working committee respondents.

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[211] In PS1, according to the head teacher, parents signed on the lower half of the page before the minutes have been written after the meetings. Obviously, collecting signatures of parents was a procedure to suggest parent participation, rather than to have participants verify the content of the minutes. Such practice was justified with parents' reluctance to come back to the school just to sign the register after the PTA secretary has written the minutes.

The head teacher expressed frustration with parental passivity, which he deemed responsible for the perceived complete dependence of the functioning of the PTA on the pains taken by the PTA secretary (viz. head teacher) to activate parents. To illustrate, he pointed out that in case of absence of the PTA secretary, meetings should be organised by the PTA president, which thus far had never happened in PS1. The lack of capacity (or willingness) to act independently was perceived to be the greatest constraint to the functioning of the PTA. While school effectiveness research in the international context confirms that extensive and continuous mobilisation efforts on part of head teachers and administrators are necessary to make community-controlled SBM functional (cf. Leithwood/Menzies 1998), many teachers appear to have internalised the expectations raised in policy papers that parents should be "coming forward" to participate, and the absence of voluntary parental engagement can lead to considerable frustration.

In teachers' subjective theories about the causes of parental inactivity and reluctance to participate in PTA activities, an assumed general indifference of parents towards their children's achievement in school figured prominently. The head teacher complained that as long as children passed the end-of-year examinations, parents did not bother to establish relations with the school. Parental indifference towards their children's attendance and performance in school was, in analogy to the explanation offered by the principal of MS1 and the *jan shikshak*, perceived to be mainly a result of parents' own low educational status, inevitably leading to a lack of understanding of the necessity of continuous presence of children in class.

However, teachers also pointed out that there was an observable difference between the amount of attention parents paid to children studying in private, schools and children studying in government schools. According to the head teacher, when parents have several children, some of whom study in the private school, a great deal of attention is given to the latter, while at the same time attention to the performance of the children in government school approaches zero. This was ascribed to an alleged parental perception that a school that is free of charge cannot be worth much, and that any effort invested in it amounts to a waste of time.

While this was actually confirmed by parent respondents, the reasons behind this parental attitude are somewhat more sophisticated, because they are intimately related to the problem of outcome accountability in government schools, as will be discussed below.

Adding to the alleged parental indifference towards children's learning in government school, there were several factors which were perceived by teachers to be additionally impeding on parents' readiness to participate in the PTA. These, basically resembling

what teachers in MS1 brought forward, included the prevalence of subsistence-level agriculture and labour migration, low SES and educational status of parents, and perceived high opportunity costs of participation resulting from the unregulated working activities, which are characteristic for small-scale landowning cultivator households.

In this context, the head teacher expressed discontent with the strict regulation of meeting procedures by the RSK. He stated that PTAs should be given the flexibility to conduct meetings when it is suitable to members, rather than making them follow a rigid schedule, which discourages parental participation and ignores the actual need for discussion and action:

> "Attending meetings twice a month is too much for parents. If they have interrupted their work once to attend, they will not do it for a second time within a single month. That's why different people sit in every meeting." (Interview head teacher, 17th April 2006)

Under such conditions, it was argued, the need to have parents participate in school governance increases workload on teachers, impacting negatively on student achievement, because teachers spend less time in the classroom. This again was noted by parents and encouraged them to shift their children to the private school.

The coincidence of increased requirements for parental participation and its observed adverse effect on the time devoted to teaching appeared to have shaped a negative perception of the merits of parent participation among both parents and teachers.

b) Perceptions of parent respondents

Parental responses where significantly more differentiated with regard to motives of parent participation than teachers'.

Parent respondents included the PTA president and vice president, three elected and two non-elected members. Among the non-elected members, the child of member 1 was recorded as an irregular and weak student, while both children of member 2 were stated to be regular and well achieving students. Attendance and achievement of the children of working committee member 1 was also high, while the children of working committee member 2 belonged to the weakest students in their respective grade levels.

Respondents' socio-economic backgrounds, as indicated by estimated income per month, showed great variance in PS1. Similar to MS1, income closely corresponded to landownership (rather than educational status), indicating the lack of adequate earning opportunities for educated villagers within their localities[212].

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[212] A project assistant of Samarthan pointed out that educated villagers who own small patches of land are particularly bad off because their mobility is restricted. With land being perceived as a security for subsistence, only few villagers take the step to abandon their land in search of employment in urban areas. As a

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Table 31: Respondent details, PS1

Respondent	membership status	gender	caste/ community	edu. status	adult literates in household	no. of household members	estimated income per month*
PTA president	elected	m	khati	10th	1	6	1000 Rs
PTA vice president	elected	f	balai (SC)	5th	2	7	1500 Rs
wc member 2	elected	m	khati	illiterate	0	6	800 Rs
wc member 3 / panch	elected	m	khati	10th	1	4	1200 Rs
sub-comm. member	elected	m	khati	10th	5**	13	10000 Rs
member 1	non-elected	m	khati	10th	3	9	15000 Rs
member 2	non-elected	f	balai (SC)	5th	2	8	1200 Rs
sarpanch	no member	m	khati	10th	5	23	n.s.

*average monthly household income as estimated by respondents

Source: Interviews

Generally, the level of information about the PTA exposed by respondents declined proportionately to their educational status. This however did not necessarily lead to higher participation levels among educated parents - a number of the more educated parents had a very distinct perception about limits of parent participation which discouraged them from actively engaging in the PTA.

Constraint of information about the existence and purpose of the PTA may have been a relevant preventing factor to less educated parents. But it did not appear to be decisive in the sense that respondents stated they would have participated had they known about the PTA. In addition, conditions for an effective dissemination of information were rather favourable because the number of parents was moderate, and the *shiksha karmi* as resident of the village had ample opportunity to personally remind parents of upcoming meetings.

However, this informal channel appeared to be underutilized, as the practice of information dissemination was rather formal via individual announcement (letter to parents) and public announcement (notice at the *chaukidar's* shop). This was related to the fixed division of labour between the two teachers, the PTA being the domain of the head teacher (who did not reside in the village), with little involvement of the *shiksha karmi,* who was exclusively confined to teaching.

While in MS1 it was observed that working committee members were participating more regularly than non-elected members, and exposed higher levels of information about the PTA, this did not apply to respondents in PS1.

In fact, some of the elected members exposed extremely low levels of information about the PTA, in general, and the working committee, in particular. The vice-president for

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consequence, educated villagers with small landholdings often earn just as little as their illiterate neighbours with similar landholding sizes.

instance was able to recount by name only the president and two other working committee members, and her perception of the responsibilities of the PTA was rather vague and restricted to select implementation tasks:

> "The PTA takes care of the purchase of school uniforms and the midday meal. […] It should watch the construction of new classrooms and repair things when they brake." (PTA vice president, 11th April 2006)

One of the working committee members was actually unaware that he was an elected member; in fact he stated he had never heard of the PTA and did not know anything about its responsibilities. This, however, does not mean he had never attended a PTA meeting – it appeared that its institutionalised nature had simply escaped him. Informational constraint regarding the school and his own children's performance found its most telling expression in the fact that he obviously did not know which grade his children studied in. This reflected not only potentially ineffective modes of communication between parents and teachers, but also a priority statement that was not in favour of school education:

> "How would I know what's going on in school? I leave early in the morning and when I come back the school is closed." (Interview wcmember2, 11th April 2004)

Quite similar to the argumentation of member2 in MS1, this respondent basically deemed teachers responsible for keeping the children in school, especially when they know that both parents are on the fields during the day and cannot control whether or not the children attend.

On inquiry about the sense of making someone elected member of the PTA who is struggling to meet the daily needs of the family, and could hardly be expected to devote much time and thought to the PTA, especially under the capability constraints typical for illiterate parents, the head teacher explained that PTA secretaries had been briefed by government order to also involve parents of weak and notoriously absent children, so as to raise their awareness and activate them as multipliers among the poorer families.
In the cases under study, efforts to involve illiterate and low-income parents have impressively failed, and one of the features of (relative) success of the PTAs in MS1 appears to be the fact that the principal has refrained from involving illiterate parents in the working committee.

Respondents with low educational status exposed few concrete expectations towards the benefit of school education to their children and the family other than 'they should learn something', and the diffuse hope that one of the sons may get some kind of *naukari* (permanent employment). In fact wc member 2 appeared to be completely unconcerned with potential merits of education, since he perceived its utility for his children's future as very limited – he expected his son to cultivate the two acres of family land, and his

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daughter to be married. Thus, even small scale land ownership may restrict the desire for upward social mobility, as most parents are reluctant to give up their land in search of decent employment elsewhere.

This is supported by the fact that the PTA vice president, member of one of the few landless households in the village, exposed a more tangible notion of potential returns of education, stating that her husband's job as *chaukidar* (local guard) in the village had depended on his educational status (passed 10th), and was a much more secure source of income than agricultural labour on the fields of local landowners.

Among the more educated parents, there appeared to be a consensus that their children's educational status should not remain below their fathers' (and this notably applied to girls and boys alike). All of these parents revealed some supportive parenting practices such as encouraging their children to study at home, supervising homework, and acquiring feedback on children's performance in school from teachers.

The sub-committee member brought forward the view that education is particularly useful for cultivator families, because it enables the use of more advanced technology to increase crop rates, and thus generate more income for the family. This view was exceptionable, because most parents expressed the desire that educated youths obtain employment outside agriculture, an attitude that is highly problematic considering the restrictions of the non-agricultural labour market in rural areas. This respondent has been the only one (across all five cases) who established the utility of education for agricultural activity.

Nevertheless, high value ascribed to education and a decent knowledge about the PTA and its roles and responsibilities did not *automatically* lead to increased readiness to assume responsibility in the PTA among the more educated respondents. Rather, it still primarily depended on teachers' persuasive skills. This was grounded in high uncertainty among parents about the cost-benefit relation of regular participation in the PTA, which depends on the balance of perceived opportunity costs of participation, and expected gain from participation with respect to the outcome most highly valued by parents, namely students' learning achievement.

The PTA president emphasised that he did not become president out of choice, but because he was urged by the head teacher and other parents present in the constituent meeting. He argued that the lack of compensation of income foregone due to time spent in school was a major discouragement to parent participation:

> "I didn't become president on my own wish. The head teacher has asked me to be president, and the other parents in the meeting also urged me to do it, so I gave in to the pressure. No one wants to do the job of the president or working committee members. We cannot work during the time spent for the

school, and no one gives us any compensation for the income lost. There should be compensation at least for the president." (Interview PS1 PTA president, 18th April 2006)

Further, two respondents brought forward the concern that while the PTA did positively influence the utilisation of resources and provision of student benefits, it was unable to do anything to increase the time teachers spend teaching in the classroom, which was perceived to be the most important factor determining student learning achievement.

Since the latter was the major concern to these parents, they did not consider participation in the PTA worthwhile.

The PTA president implicitly made this point as well, stating that the positive impact of PTA activities was restricted to matters of input management. Improvement of student achievement, however, in his opinion would be most effectively realised by posting additional staff - preferably a clerk who would be able to relieve the two teachers from doing paper work.

The concern for the lack of amount of time teachers spend teaching has motivated one respondent (member 1) to shift his daughter from the government to the private school.

> "Teaching is better in private school, even though teachers in government schools are better trained and have more teaching experience. But they have to do so much work which is given to them from different government departments that that they just don't have the time to teach the whole curriculum to all children, especially the weaker ones." (Interview member 1, conducted 13th April 2006 in the *anganwadi* premises)

When asked if he has tried to address this issue through the PTA, the respondent stated that the PTA cannot do anything to reduce non-teaching work assignments delegated by government departments. Since the lack of teachers' time-on-task was perceived to be the major constraining factor to children's learning, student achievement was an issue parents felt they cannot hold teachers accountable for[213]. The respondent underscored the lack of accountability of government teachers towards parents by arguing that parents generally feel that they cannot demand accountability from government teachers, because the latter receive their salary through the Department of Education, quite irrespective of their teaching performance. He emphasised that the accountability link between private school teachers and parents is immediate, because teachers' salaries are paid by fees discharged by parents. He argued that it was this immediate link that made parents in private schools more offensive in scrutinising teacher performance and confronting teachers with lacking student achievement.

> "[...] in private schools, people feel they can ask for performance by the teachers and put pressure on them if their children do not learn well, whereas they do not perceive to have a stake in government schools, because they do not have to contribute materially." (PS1 member 1, 13th April 2006)

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[213] A similar view was brought forward by a working committee member (*panch*/wc member3).

In fact, he correctly pointed out that a private school that produces high failure rates in examinations would have to close in no time, while government schools produce large-scale failures with impunity.

It appears quite obvious that teachers reinforced the notion that it is non-teaching duties that constrain classroom transaction, because it relieved them of being answerable to parents. In an effort to minimise increasing workload, teachers appeared to be tempted to make trade-offs on the edge from which they face least pressure and resistance, which happens to be parents and children. Thus, classes were neglected to be able to complete non-teaching tasks on time[214].

Blaming 'the system' (readily accepted by most parents, including the more critical ones) appeared to be a universal strategy for teachers to divert attention from what they actually do in the classroom when they are undisturbed by other duties.

Parents appeared to accept the logic of upward accountability of teachers towards the Department of Education (one of the relicts of external control management), and drew the conclusion that teachers cannot help being distracted from teaching because the system imposes these distractions. Thus the only option left to parents who were not satisfied with their children's learning achievement was perceived to be opting out of the system, viz. putting their child into the private school, if family resources allowed it.

It is significant that parents tended to send their children to private school if they have not managed to perform well in government school. Private schools in rural areas cannot be considered institutions for the educational cream layers[215]. Especially private schools raising moderate fees rather appear to serve as a catch basin for those students who have failed in the government system. The comparatively large proportion of time devoted to teaching the syllabus, necessitated by the obligation of private schools to fulfil the contracts they have entered with parents, requires special care for the weaker students which is not available in most government schools.

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[214] This has been observed in the context of the introduction of new student attendance and achievement registers, which had to be filled out ex post for the current school year and submitted to the RSK after the final examinations were over. To deliver on time without endlessly extending working hours, the head teacher was busy for entire school days copying the monthly attendance sheets from one register into the other, while the *shiksha karmi* had to teach 5 grades simultaneously. Given that the majority of all government schools are two-teacher-schools, it is nothing short of departmental irresponsibility to distract 50% of the teaching staff from preparing students for the end-of-year examination.

[215] These, as was pointed out by the *jan shikshak*, would be studying in private English-medium secondary boarding schools in the city of Sehore.

It is not that teachers in PS1 were completely insensitive to the problem of the quality of classroom transaction and the lack of attention to weaker students. The head teacher did point out that the lack of time to teach the children were regularly discussed in the monthly head teachers' meetings held at the JSK. In this context he stated that generally the *jan shikshak* and JSK coordinator are supportive of teachers and appreciate their difficulties in running the school and teaching under multigrade conditions. However he complained that little hands-on support is offered to teachers as to how to actually tackle these problems in the day-to-day operation of the school[216].

Parents' perception that accountability is enforcable by virtue of salary transfer exclusively was quite common among teachers as well. Especially those teachers employed by the Department of Education perceived accountability as predominantly directed upwards to their administrative superiors. Teachers tended to bring forward the view that they teach within the boundaries set by the RSK by way of issuing government orders and prescribing targets. This means that accomplishing the timely use of resources, activating parental participation, reaching enrolment and retention targets, and compilation and transmission of data, rather than teaching, are tasks considered to be of superior importance, at least as long as no binding student achievement targets are set for individual teachers in individual schools.

The Block Academic Coordinator pointed out that the lower level administration usually does not ask if a government order makes sense, they perceive themselves as mere executors of orders from above. In the context of the lack of control over teachers' success or failure in terms of student learning achievement he stated:

> "We are government employees and as such are accountable to the government. If the government *tells us* to evaluate how many students a teacher has enabled to pass at what achievement level, then we will do it." (Interview BAC, 17th April 2006).

This can have particularly grave impact in small schools like PS1, where the head teachers' preoccupation with administrative tasks led to factual single-teacher classroom situations on a considerable proportion of school days.

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[216] Obviously, the option of voicing dissent with the limitations of the system, by organising *hartal (*demonstration*)*, *dharna* (sit-in) or other forms of public protest, is not considered on part of teachers, which is notable in view of the vocal protests teachers and their unions are willing and able to organise when salary-related issues are at stake. A representative of one of the two large teacher unions in Madhya Pradesh stated that teacher unions get active on salary issues exclusively. The usual way to cope with miserable working conditions is to demand more salary as compensation, rather than to demand improvement in working conditions (informal conversation at the RSK, where we were both coincidentally waiting for the Additional Mission Director Elementary Education), 17th September 2007.

The coincidence of increasing community participation in schools and the tightening of state control over the education system by introducing school-level documentation and data collection appears to have led to the perception among parents in PS1 that with progressing provisions for community involvement teachers spend less and less time in class, leading to a decrease in the amount of teaching and attention children get at school.

One of the working committee members (wc member 3/_panch_) added another dimension to the discouragement of parents to actively engage in the PTA.

He perceived the PTA to be 'toothless' because most parents allegedly were afraid of conflict with teachers, which is why PTA members did not demand control over the utilisation of funds or the attendance of teachers[217].

According to him, the PTA president and vice-president were passive and signed everything the head teacher asked him to sign without any scrutiny. He himself had quit attending PTA meetings because he felt that no one was interested in actually monitoring the use of resources and teachers' performance in the classroom.

The lack of appropriate training for PTA members added to the lack of effective monitoring through the PTA. According to the PTA president, he and the head teacher had been the only ones who attended the training in the JSK. The lack of participation in training may be indicative for the amount of interest elected members took in effectively carrying out their responsibilities, but certainly also reflects the inappropriateness of the training itself. Participants in trainings across cases asserted that these lasted for a couple of hours (even though they are announced as one-day trainings) and consisted of a lecture of JSK staff on the provisions of the JSA/JSN, with little practical exercise on how to keep an account, make sense of government orders, or develop a strategy to mobilise parental participation.

   c) Conclusions

Confirming what has been observed in MS1, parental participation was to a large extent shaped by the mobilisation strategies of teachers. The latter focussed their efforts on convincing parents of higher educational and socio-economic status of carrying out some of the vital and controllable functions (input management and distribution of benefits) while nominally adhering to reservation requirements, but without making any effort to actually induce participation among members elected under reservation rules.

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[217] This notion is supported by the fact that the PTA president had not signed the teacher attendance register 2005-2006, suggesting that monthly monitoring has not taken place.

Especially mothers appeared to be out of the purview of teachers, which is to some extent caused social barriers to approaching mothers in the absence of a female teacher in school. In this respect, cooperation with the *anganwadi* worker was definitely in need of development (the *anganwadi* worker, however, resided in another village some 6km away and thus had less opportunity to informal interaction than the *shiksha karmi*).

Given the small size of the school and teacher residence in/close to the village, the opportunity for informal interaction with parents on behalf of mobilising support for PTA activities and conveying the importance of parent participation appeared to be suboptimally used by teachers. It appears that mobilisation efforts were restricted to the establishment of the PTA, and were not woven into a larger strategy of building community support for school education.

As a consequence, parents' willingness to accept elected membership appeared to be significantly lower than in MS1. Teachers and parents consistently stated that it was 'pressure' exerted by teachers and other parents present in the meeting that finally made them accept a position in the PTA. This was especially true for the PTA president and vice president.

It is important to note that some of the encouraging and discouraging factors to parent participation as brought forward by respondents significantly differed from responses of PTA members in MS1. While with respect to respondents of low educational and/or socio-economic status, reasons brought forward for non-participation (informational constraint, low value ascribed to school education, and opportunity costs incurred by participation) were similar, responses of elected members of higher educational status significantly differed.

This was the result of a concise perception of the limited impact of participation on the outcome most valued by such parents in PS1, namely student achievement.

As a result, among the limited number of parent respondents, the perceived value of school education for children appeared to be inversely related to the willingness to participate in the PTA. While in MS1, parents who valued school education for their children highly also were found to be more willing to engage in the PTA, in PS1, respondents who valued education highly (particularly wc member 3, member 1, and the sub-committee member) were not willing to regularly engage in the PTA precisely because they perceived that the PTA cannot make a positive impact on the amount of time teachers spend teaching their children.

It should be noted that within the limited scope of activities PTA members performed in PS1, parents responded moderately positive towards the usefulness of parental involvement in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and the distribution of benefits to students. Furthermore, satisfaction with the quality of teaching activity (when it took place) was basically high. Nonetheless, teachers were perceived to not spend

enough time teaching because of the non-teaching requirements externally imposed on them actually discouraged these parents from participation in the PTA.

Teachers appeared to reinforce the perception that student learning outcome was largely determined by factors outside the classroom, given its utility for preventing parents to question their teaching practise and interfering into their 'professional autonomy'.

The incongruence between the desired outcome of parent participation in school (increasing student learning achievement) and its perceived effectiveness on this outcome appears to have been the major constraint to parental motivation of those respondents who otherwise exposed reasonable levels of information on the requirements of participation, and ascribed high importance to the education of their children.

Table 32: Determinants of Parent Participation in PS1

Variables and Indicators	Characteristics of Respondents			
	regular participants in PTA (regular/achieving child)	irregular participants in PTA — irregular/weak children	irregular participants in PTA — regular/achieving children	regular/achieving children
mobilisation by teachers selective mobilisation by educational status & capabilities as perceived by teachers	focus on perceived capability: high educational status, male	inclusion of target group (irregular/weak children)	target for teacher mobilisation due to high educational status	no target for mobilisation (low educational status, female)
level of information about PTA educational status, ability to handle information, importance ascribed to school-related issues	decent levels of information; education beyond primary level; interest in children's learning achievements	no information about PTA, no formal education, low capacity to handle information	decent level of information about PTA, high educational attainment, interest in children's learning achievement and supportive parenting	no information about PTA; low educational attainment; moderate capacity to handle information
opportunity costs amount and security of income, working hours	high educational status but low level of income	low level of income, long, unregulated working hours in agricultural labour (small patch of land+wage labour)	high income level, flexible working hours => low perceived opportunity costs	low levels of income => opportunity costs perceived to be high
valued outcome of parental activity ability to judge children's learning progress, perceived value of school education	effective input utilisation, student learning achievement	none (low value of school education relative to ensuring subsistence, low aspiration for upward mobility, negative perception of own children's cognitive capacities)	ensuring student achievement by increasing teachers' 'time on task'	none (no perceived motive to get involved in school as long as children pass examinations)
perceived effective-ness of PTA activities for valued outcome information about rights and duties of PTA, accountabilisation of teachers	satisfaction with effectiveness of PTA for resource utilisation, relative satisfaction with teacher performance (high learning achievement of own children)	ineffective	inability of PTA to affect student achievement because of system constraints => teachers cannot be held accountable for student learning achievement	ineffective

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Scope of PTA activity: Perceptions of main responsibilities among parents and teachers

It is notable that according to the meeting minutes, there seems to be quite a bias towards student achievement as the single largest cluster of issues[218]. This appears to contradict the notion that teachers were unwilling to make student achievement a topic. A closer look, however, reveals that student achievement was a topic either in the context of government orders (announcement of quarterly examinations, remedial classes for weak students held by external providers[219]), or in an effort to appeal to parents to support children's studies at home.

Table 33: Matters discussed, decided, and achieved according to PTA meeting minutes, PS1

Type of issue	discussions by issue	noted decisions	noted accomplish-ments
use of funds	3	1	0
building maintenance	2	1	1
distribution of benefits	4	4	4
student attendence	4	0	0
student learning achievement	11	5	2
functions	3	3	3
establishment of sub-committees	2	2	2

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-2006

Further, the vast majority of issues that were noted as accomplished (rather than merely matters of discussion) either related to the distribution of student benefits and the creation of sub-committees for the purpose, or the organisation of functions in the school.

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[218] Note that statements about the scope of activities of the PTA are subject to the limited reliability of information contained in PTA meeting minutes, resulting from the dubious practise of record keeping mentioned earlier.

[219] The provision of extra-classes was based on the L2R (learning to read) programme developed by Pratham NGO and supported by UNICEF. Since the government of Madhya Pradesh actively seeks cooperation with the private sector and civil society organisations for expanding access and increasing quality of government provided education, the implementation of L2R in all districts of the state was a decision taken right at the top, which was transmitted downwards via government order.

Thus while this initiative actually aimed at improving student learning, it was not the initiative of the PTA which had lead to its realisation, but the mere implementation of just another government order.

It is quite telling that 'remedial measures' for weak students are outsourced to external agents. This can be assumed to contribute to the cementation of the impression that the government system is incapable of improving the quality of education with its own professional resources.

Parent responses towards the core responsibilities largely reflect this implementation bias (if they reflected any information on this issue at all).

While the amount of information parents exposed on the rights and responsibilities by and large reflected their educational status, it was noteworthy that in PS1, in contrast to what has been observed in MS1, the perceived scope of functions depended neither on membership in the working committee, nor on regular participation in PTA meetings. There were working committee members who had no or little clue what the PTA was all about (vice-president, wc member1), and there were other parents who were neither working committee members nor regular participants, but exposed quite concise conceptions about what the PTA does and what it *should* do from their point of view (member1, subcommittee member).

It was noticeable that those who deliberately chose not to participate had the broadest conceptions of the responsibilities and functions of the PTA, especially with respect to monitoring. It was further noteworthy that teachers, who by virtue of knowledge of the regulatory framework could be expected to expose the broadest view on the scope of PTA activities, actually had a very restrictive perception, which was confined to select input management tasks.

Fig. 25 Individual respondents' perceptions about responsibilities of the PTA, PS1
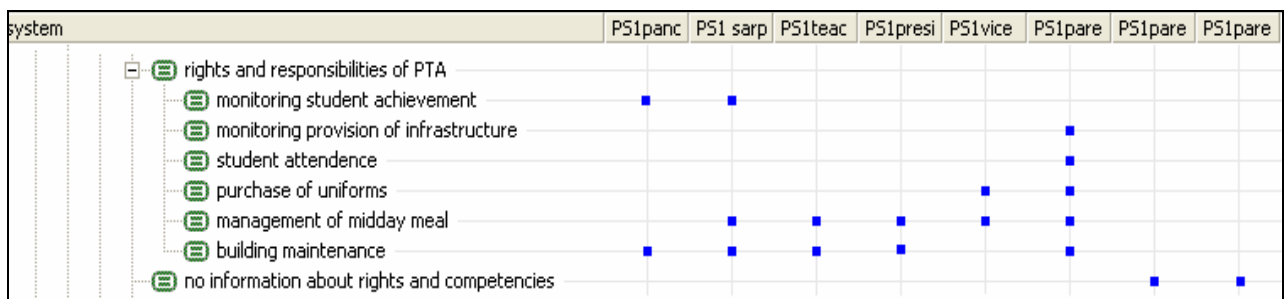
Generated from MaxQDA code system; source: Interviews

Division of labour between different categories of members of the PTA

Similar to what has been observed in MS1, planning and decision-making were completely out of the realm of perceived functions of the PTA. Planning and agenda-setting were activities carried out by the head teacher exclusively – not because he was reluctant to involve PTA members, as he repeatedly emphasised, but because the latter took no interest in involving in it. The PTA president confirmed this when he stated that the head teacher was the one who sets up the agenda for PTA meetings, but *in principle*

working committee members were welcome to make suggestions and bring forward issues of concern. In practise, this appeared to rarely happen.

While parents' factual absence in planning and agenda setting was of little concern to respondents, monitoring appeared to be a more sensitive issue.

A number of respondents expressed concern about the apparent lack of control over funds and accounts. The PTA president stated that he 'checked' the records of the _shala shiksha kosh_ and the school bank account at the end of the financial year. This indicates that there was no control over spending and use of funds throughout the entire year. As a consequence, PTA working committee members could not effectively participate in decisions about the utilisation of funds, as they depended on the bits of information extended to them by the head teacher.

Monitoring is one of the core functions of the PTA according to the respective legislation, but it is also the function requiring the most elaborate skills and largest investment of time on part of parents. In addition, it has the biggest potential for conflict with teachers. Parents were inclined to avoid such conflict, in fear that it will negatively influence teachers' treatment of their children (this was pointed out by _panch_/wc member 3).

It is also telling that those respondents who did point out monitoring functions as central to the PTA (_sarpanch_ and _panch_/wc member 3, sub-committee member), deliberately decided not to engage because they perceived the PTA was unable to effectively monitor.

The selectivity of tasks performed by the PTA in PS1 indicates that the rules-in-use differed significantly from the rules prescribed in the regulatory framework of the JSA/JSN. Particularly, the responsibilities of working committee members other than the PTA president appeared to be ill defined.

Whereas in MS1 working committee members had a clear mandate to exert influence on parents of irregular children by virtue of contacting them personally at their homes, there was no such particular ascription to working committee members observable in PS1. It is not clear whether the lack of regular participation among working committee members is a cause or an effect of this lack of functional ascription.

Fig. 26: Division of functions in school governance, PS1
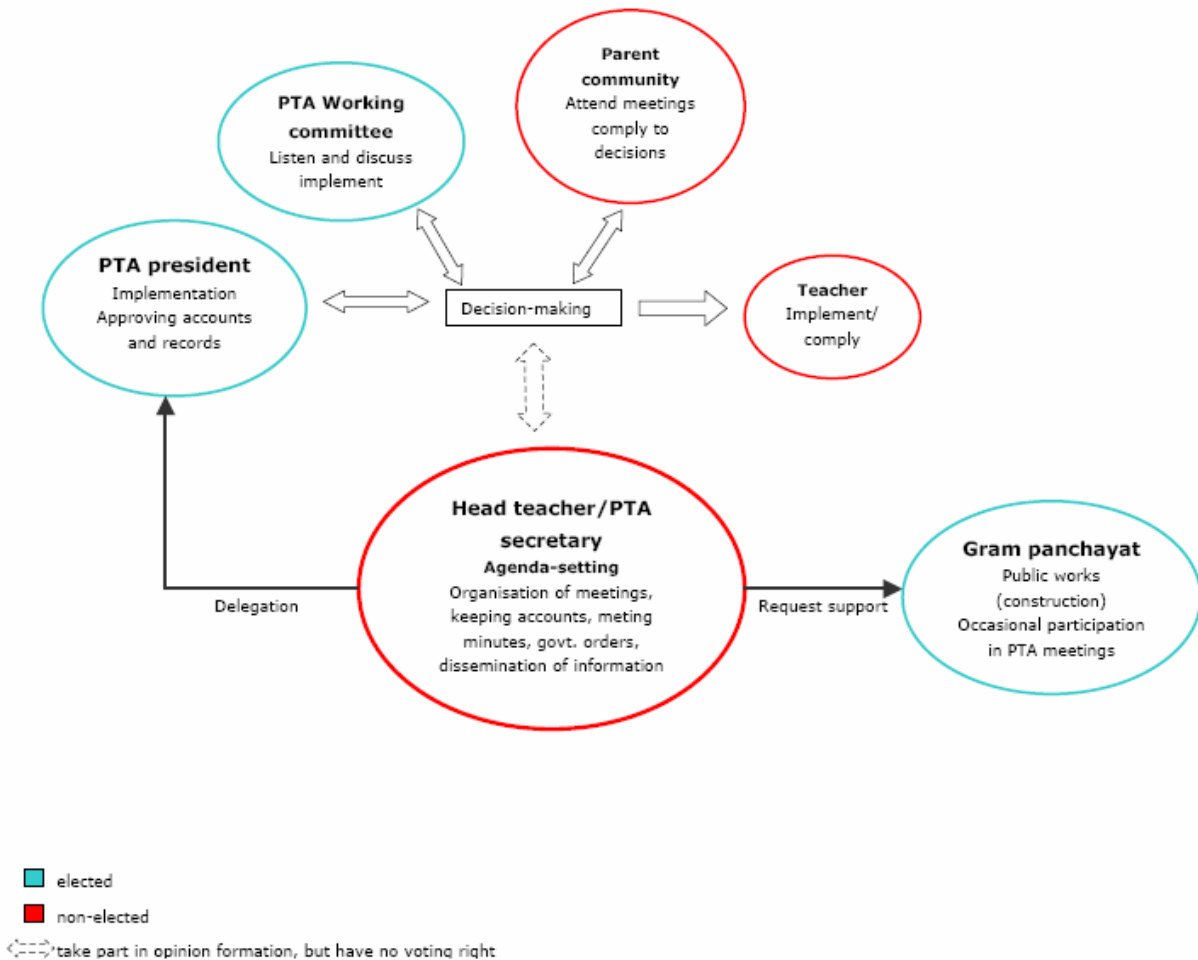
Source: Own

6.3.2.4   Effects of lacking panchayat support

The previous case discussion has shown that panchayat support had played a vital role for school development in MS1, and positively affected parental participation in activities of the PTA. In PS1, panchayat involvement in the school was minimal, restricted basically to support in construction, as the overseeing of public works is one of the *gram panchayats*' most important duties. Low levels of panchayat involvement in school development in PS1 appeared to be related to a number of factors:

- The focus of activity on fund utilisation
- The lack of established link between school and panchayat due to panchayat restructuring
- Patronage and partisan interests in the *gram panchayat*
- Panchayat focus on input-related activities

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Focus of activity on fund utilisation

According to a panchayat respondent (*panch*/wc member 3), infrastructure in the village was ill-developed as most funds for public construction were utilised in the former main village before the restructuring of the *gram panchayat*. Thus the focus of panchayat activity was on the creation of public infrastructure, especially roads, sanitation and drinking water, in the new panchayat centre. The provision of these basic amenities was the most important yardstick of villagers for judging *gram panchayat* achievements.

The overall level of activity of the *gram panchayat* was very low even with respect to public infrastructure: The only achievements the *sarpanch* accounted for was the paving of part of the main road, and the provision of an additional handpump.

Apart from this, the selection of BPL households was a contested issue during the previous year (as in most other panchayats under study), and further widow's pension had been provided to a number of women in the main village.

Since responsibility for the midday meal had been transferred from the panchayat to the PTAs in January 2006, panchayat involvement in school had declined, and village panchayats received no more funds from state departments earmarked specifically for the local government school.

The withdrawal of control over resources has, according to the BEO[220], in many cases led to a withdrawal of panchayat interest in government schools, which was somewhat intended by the state government, given the widely reported misallocation of funds for school schemes by *gram panchayats*[221]. While in villages where the panchayat had been involved actively in promoting school development and educational awareness, the withdrawal of funds may not have impacted the interlinkage of panchayats and school negatively (MS1 is an example), it appears that in many other settings the withdrawal of funds has led to a diversion of panchayats' attention away from the schools.

The lack of established link between school and panchayat

As a result of the recent restructuring of the panchayat area, the degree of institutionalisation of cooperation between school and panchayat was low.

It is interesting to note in this context that the *sarpanch* had been president of the PTA in the previous academic session, a fact that might be expected to have inclined him towards more active support for the school.

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[220] Interview conducted on 2nd April 2006 at the Block Education Office

[221] cf. Leclercq 2002 for some illustrative examples from Betul and Raisen districts.

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The relationship between the school and the *gram panchayat* in PS1 can be described as benevolent ignorance – there was no particular friction between the two, the former was simply not on the agenda of the latter.

A panchayat respondent stated that educational issues have not ever been raised in a *gram panchayat* meeting. This was confirmed by the *sarpanch,* who asserted that while the construction of the school building had been an issue on the panchayat agenda, matters such as enrolment, attendance and achievement of students in the government school were no matter of discussion, as these were perceived to be the domain of the PTA.

A common explanation for the lack of interest of panchayats in education outcome concerns the possibility that panchayat members' children may not be enrolled in the government school[222]. This explanation does not hold for PS1 - the children of the *sarpanch* had been studying in the government school until they outgrew the primary cycle, and the children of three out of the other six panchayat members from the village (including the *upsarpanch*) also studied in the government rather than the private school. However, the fact that achievement among the students of higher SES families was less affected by the quality of classes and amount of instructional time, given families' ability to compensate for shortcomings, than achievement among low SES students, may have contributed to disinterest in monitoring student attendance and achievement.

Patronage and partisan interests in the *gram panchayat*

Panchayat functioning was perceived to be deficient on several fronts by most respondents: Allocation of resources, the amount of public infrastructure provided, and the use of information on government programmes and beneficiary selection processes as source of patronage.

It appeared that in the first year after election, construction of the school building (which was financed by SSA funds) and paving of the main north-south lane were the only public works that were carried out. The latter task was left unfinished as the panchayat ran out of funds and had to wait for new public works allocation. While a panchayat respondent from one of the minor villages confirmed that the funds provided to the panchayat from the state government were insufficient to achieve a tangible improvement in public infrastructure, he also alleged that a number of panchayat members in alliance with the *sarpanch* distributed the available resources disproportionately to their own benefit. In this context he pointed to the domination of decisions on spending and allocation

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[222] This was brought forward by the *jan shikshak* of cluster 1, the DEO, and several respondents in the RSK.

priorities by *panches* from the main village, and complained about the intransparency of processes and the obstruction of inquiries of other elected representatives[223].

A panchayat respondent from the main village confirmed that the *gram panchayat* was dominated by the *panches* from the main village belonging to *khati* caste, and the panchayat secretary.

Caste-wise composition of the *gram panchayat* was mixed, which was largely due to the fact that the three villages in the constituency had different population majorities. While the main village consisted of *khati*, *sutar*, and SC (mainly *balai*) families, in the two minor villages the majority of the population belonged to the *mewaras*, and a smaller number of families belonged to the scheduled castes. In addition, in the larger of the two adjoined villages there were a number of wealthier households from *rai* caste (general caste category). While the latter were not represented in the *gram panchayat* via elected members, the panchayat secretary belonged to this caste group[224].

In the villages under study, there appeared to be strong loyalty ties between *sarpanches* and secretaries. Even though the secretary is not an elected member and is not entitled to vote, villagers' responses indicated that due to his authority over records and finances he is more powerful than most elected members. Given that more often than not panchayat secretaries have higher socio-economic and educational status than *sarpanches*, differing degrees of dominance of the former over the latter have been observed[225].

In the case of PS1, panchayat respondents indicated that the *panches* from the minor villages were unable to effectively pursue the interests of their villages in the *gram panchayat* due to their low socio-economic and educational status.

One respondent pointed out that participation of panchayat members from outside the main village was rather unstable, which adversely impacted their capacity to claim their stake in decision-making. In addition, ties between the two adjoined villages (e.g.

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[223] EGS1 *panch*, 29th March 2006

[224] This position appears to be disproportionately often filled by a member of the general castes, even though these form a minority in most villages in Madhya Pradesh. This reflects the higher caste capture of the administrative system. In the villages under study, all panchayat secretaries belonged to the general castes. Panchayat secretaries are government officers who get appointed to the *gram panchayat*. In MS1 and PS1 the panchayat secretaries were residents of the *gram panchayat* constituency, this however is not necessarily the case, as tenders for these positions are issued block-wise. To ensure accessibility of the secretary however, provided appropriate qualification, panchayat members are requested to give preference to candidates residing in or close to the *gram panchayat.*

[225] The dominant role of non-elected members of PRIs is well documented in the literature (cf. Behar/Kumar (2002) for Madhya Pradesh, Kumar (2006) for West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. Kumar (2006:115) has pointed out that up to 90% of all panchayat presidents in the state were elected without prior exposure to public offices, a tendency that is bound to increase the dependence of *sarpanches* on the advice of panchayat secretaries.

extended families) were minimal, so there was little informal contact between them, further impeding the ability to form cross-village coalitions in the *gram panchayat*.

Responses about the announcement of *gram panchayat* and *gram sabha* meetings were contradictive. Respondents from the main village (*sarpanch*, *panch*/wc member 3) univocally stated that *gram panchayat* meetings where announced to all elected members personally (by taking the agenda to their houses and have them sign and make additional suggestions), and also accessible to the public by way of posting a written announcement at the panchayat building and the *chaukidar's* shop.

Gram sabha meetings were also announced by posting outside the *panchayat building*, and in addition there was a *munnadi* announcement on the day of the meeting.

This was contradicted by a *panch* from a minor village (panchayat member EGS1), who stated that neither *gram panchayat* nor *gram sabha* meetings were announced properly outside the main village.

A common complaint among many respondents from the main village was that the *sarpanch* used information and benefits from government programmes selectively for patronage purposes. One respondent (wc member 2) complained that the *sarpanch* distributed benefits from government programmes among people who are close to him, while many of the poor remained excluded.

A panchayat respondent summarised the situation as follows:

> "The *sarpanch* and secretary are the ones who get all information and government orders, but do not share the information with other *panches*, let alone villagers. Information on government programmes is not given to those at whom these programmes are targeted. This results in the poorest being unable to benefit, while the *sarpanch* and secretary distribute benefits according to their choice." (wc member 3/panch, 14th April 2006)

Similar discontent was expressed with the utilisation of funds, which was stated to be intransparent even to panchayat members. A social audit before the *gram sabha* for the past financial year was overdue, but it appeared the *sarpanch* and some of the panchayat members were dragging it.

Irregular *gram sabha* meetings and ineffective monitoring of *gram panchayat* activities due to panchayat avoidance manoeuvres are well documented in the literature on local government in India (i.e. Crook/Manor 1998, Alsop 2000, Behar/Kumar 2002, Johnson 2003, Srivastava 2005), and such efforts to twist out of accountability towards the village community were observable in other villages under study, too.

Above cited panchayat respondent strongly emphasised that the abuse of power by elected representatives was encouraged by the inertia of the wider village population, who refrain from confronting elected members for fear of creating conflict by demanding transparency and accountability. According to his reasoning, corruption in and

malfunctioning of public institutions were sustained by villagers' fear of creating tensions and thus disturbing 'social harmony' in the village.

The generally rather low levels of political mobilisation in rural Madhya Pradesh (in contrast to states such as Maharashtra, West Bengal, and others), surfaces in the lack of institutionalised *gram sabha* meetings, especially in smaller villages of a panchayat constituency.

Research on the local government system in Madhya Pradesh has confirmed that accountability towards the village community in the *gram sabha* is the weakest spot in the local government system (cf. Singh et.al. 2003, Srivastava 2005, Behar/Kumar 2002, Kumar 2006). Especially *sarpanches* fear conflict in the village over resource allocation, and thus are not enthusiastic about conducting *gram sabhas* meetings. The fact that the gram panchayat was quite self-absorbed in a latent accountability conflict added to the neglect of monitoring responsibilities vis-á-vis the school, restricting involvement to the bare necessities (such as construction). Given that education was neither an issue on the agenda of the *gram panchayat* nor in *gram sabha* meetings, there was no forum in the village where parents could have been mobilised towards the issue of education and supported in effectively monitoring school functioning.

6.3.2.5 Conclusions

In PS1 rules-in-use in the PTA differed considerably from the rules prescribed in the regulatory framework. This was partly grounded in the difficulty to mobilise parent participation, especially for the binding commitments expected of elected members, and partly in the inappropriate institutional setup, particularly the triple function of the head teacher as administrator, PTA secretary, and teacher with full teaching load.

Responses of PTA members were particularly revealing with respect to factors encouraging and discouraging parent participation in PTAs.

Firstly, it became clear that there was incongruence between preferred outcomes of parent involvement, particularly among parents of higher educational and socio-economic status, and the perceived possibility of achieving these through participation in the PTA. The outcome most valued by parents – their children's learning achievement – was perceived to be constrained by the requirements the system imposed on teachers – non-teaching duties. These were perceived to be out of the purview of both parents and teachers, which severely reduced motivation to engage in the PTA of those parents who might otherwise have been capable members due to their comparatively high educational status and the value they ascribed to their children's education.

Teachers on the other hand were frustrated with the lack of interest parents took in managerial issues, resulting in their increasing involvement in tasks which earlier were

outside their scope of responsibilities, because input management was carried out (however deficiently) by *gram panchayats*. While the teacher attendance register did not support the notion that non-teaching duties were the most recurrent reason for teachers' absence, teachers constantly restated the argument, given its utility for undermining any attempt of parents to hold teachers accountable for individual students' learning achievement.

Secondly, the scope of responsibilities of the PTA as perceived by parents, and the activities actually carried out, largely depended on teachers' preferences for parent involvement. The fact that some non-elected parent respondents had a decisively broader view than teachers and elected members of what the goals of PTA involvement should be indicates that teachers may be inclined to mobilise those parents for participation in the PTA from whom they expect less critical scrutiny.

The implementation bias in the perception of core responsibilities of the PTA on part of teachers and (as a consequence) many parents effectively resulted in the negligence of such central tasks as controlling teacher attendance, observing classroom processes and teachers' behaviour towards children, and ensuring children's attendance in school by nurturing contact between PTA members and parents of irregular and weak students.

Thirdly, panchayat support as a precondition to the establishment of a local school governance network was lacking, as the gram panchayat was preoccupied with internal quarrels over public resources. In combination with the lacking activity of the PTA in mobilising parents of weak students, the cleavage in parental behaviour with respect to ensuring student attendance and supportive home environments, between parents of high and parents of low educational/socio-economic status persisted.

Fourthly, full teaching load of head teachers in smaller schools aggravated the multigrade-multi-age teaching situation, imposing considerable strain on teachers, shortage of time to teach the syllabus, and a resulting neglect of the needs of weak students, especially (but not only) those who did not receive support from home. The inevitability of this situation – because PTAs cannot influence the amount of staff available in their school, unless an additional teacher is employed and paid by resources generated from the village community, or PTA members get together in large numbers to pressurise the government - was a major discouragement to parental participation in PS1.

Last but not least, the availability of the private school option within the locality left economically better off parents with the frequently used option to leave the government school and enrol children in the private school, thus systematically depriving the government schools of potentially active PTA members who have a strong stake in what their children learn in school.

Fig. 27 Types of conditions by effect for PTA activity, PS1
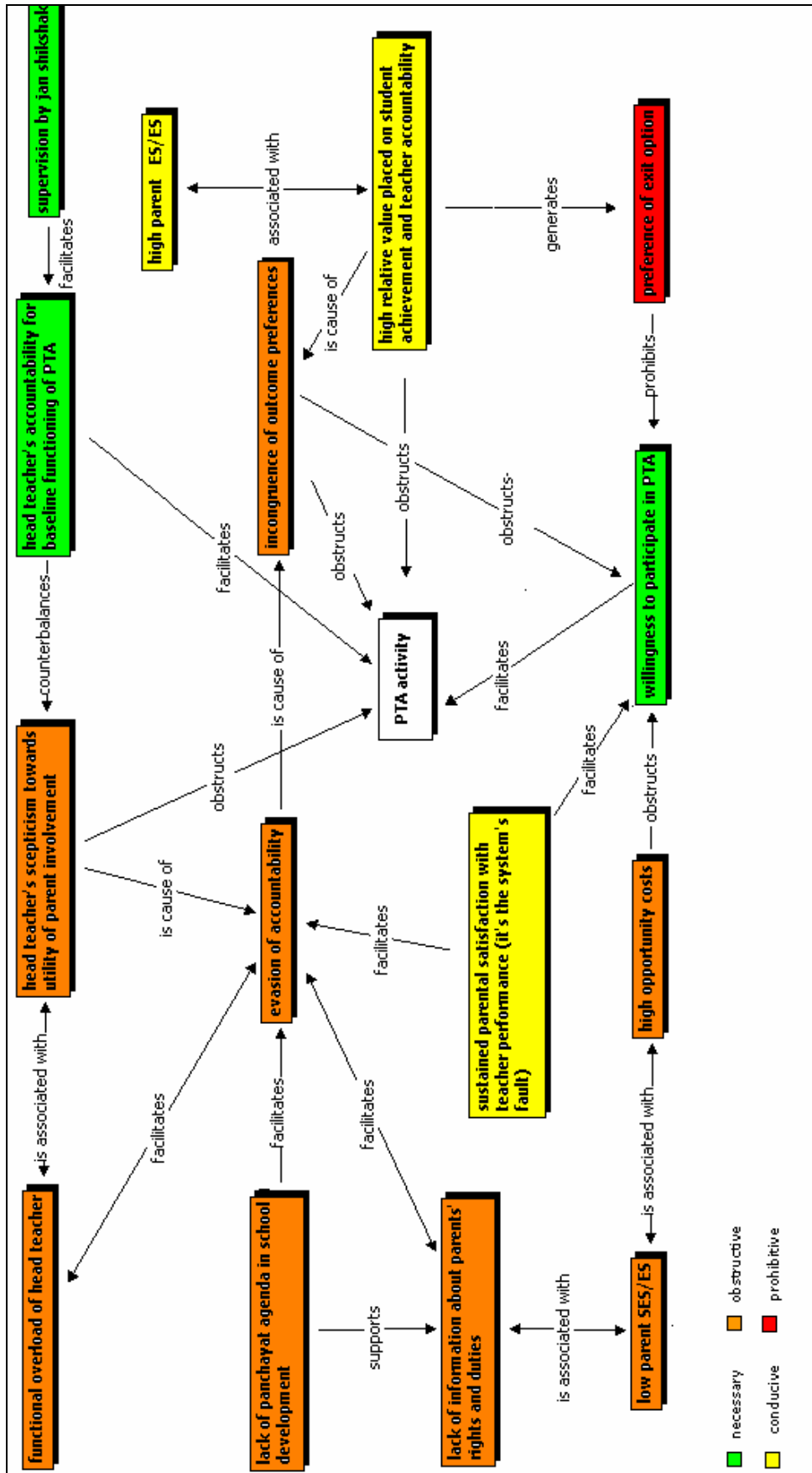
Source: Own

6.3.3 Case 3: The Education Guarantee School in Cluster 1 (EGS1)

The Education Guarantee School was the school with the most inactive PTA in cluster 1 according to the judgement of the *jan shikshak*. It constituted an extreme downward outlier in a cluster that was otherwise considered quite progressive in the promotion of parent participation in PTAs.

This judgement was based on two features, namely the lack of parent participation in PTA meetings, and the inability of the PTA to carry out one of its core responsibilities in the provision of student incentives, the organisation of the midday meal. The inability of the PTA to manage the midday meal was illustrative of the problem of perceived high opportunity costs for engagement in school, inappropriate remuneration of non-teaching staff, lacking support of the panchayat and higher level administration, and, last but not least, parents' obviously lacking awareness about the fact that their children get less than they are entitled to. Interestingly, the school performed remarkably well on other indicators, most notably student attendance and achievement, and internal efficiency. It will be argued here that the case of EGS 1 illustrates how PTAs in settings dominated by low socio-economic and educational status of families depend on outside support to carry out their responsibilities effectively, further that student attendance and achievement – the latter, as already argued in the context of PS1, being the most valued outcomes of schooling for parents - depend on many things, but clearly not primarily on PTA activity.

6.3.3.1 *Village Population, settlement structure and basic amenities*

EGS1 is located in a tiny village consisting of 28 households. The total population was 181 in the year 2006, with an elementary school-age population (5-14 years) of 44 children.

The village is accessible via a mud path from the Bhopal-Indore highway; its distance to the JSK is approximately 4 km.

Out of the 28 households, 24 belong to the *mewara*[226] community; the remaining four belong to the scheduled castes (*balai*).

Variance in income was low, as all families in the village owned small patches of land. The four *balai* households held land of between 1 and 3 acres. Among the *mewara*

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[226] The *mewaras* originate from the Mewar Region of Rajasthan. They can be found in almost any part of India, but their presence outside Rajasthan in strongest in the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Many of the women still speak Rajasthani dialects, which constituted a challenge to me as a Hindi-speaking interviewer. For this reason, all interviews were accompanied by the PTA president, who helped transmitting questions in and responses from the local dialect into Hindi when I felt I did not properly understand a respondent or vice versa.

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families, landholding was within the margins of between 2 and 8 acres. There were two large joint family households owning more than 30 acres of land, these also owned cattle and produced dairy products, and due to diverse sources and pooling of income reached higher income levels (up to ca. 8500 Rs per month)[227].

Adult literacy was tangibly lower than in PS1. Female illiteracy was extremely high. According to the PTA president, there was only one female literate in the village (the daughter of one of the panchayat members, who had passed 8th grade). Among the male villagers, only four had been educated above primary level, and these belonged to the young adult generation below the age of 30. Male adult illiteracy was high in relative terms, with about two thirds of all male household heads being illiterate[228].

Fig. 28 Village of EGS1
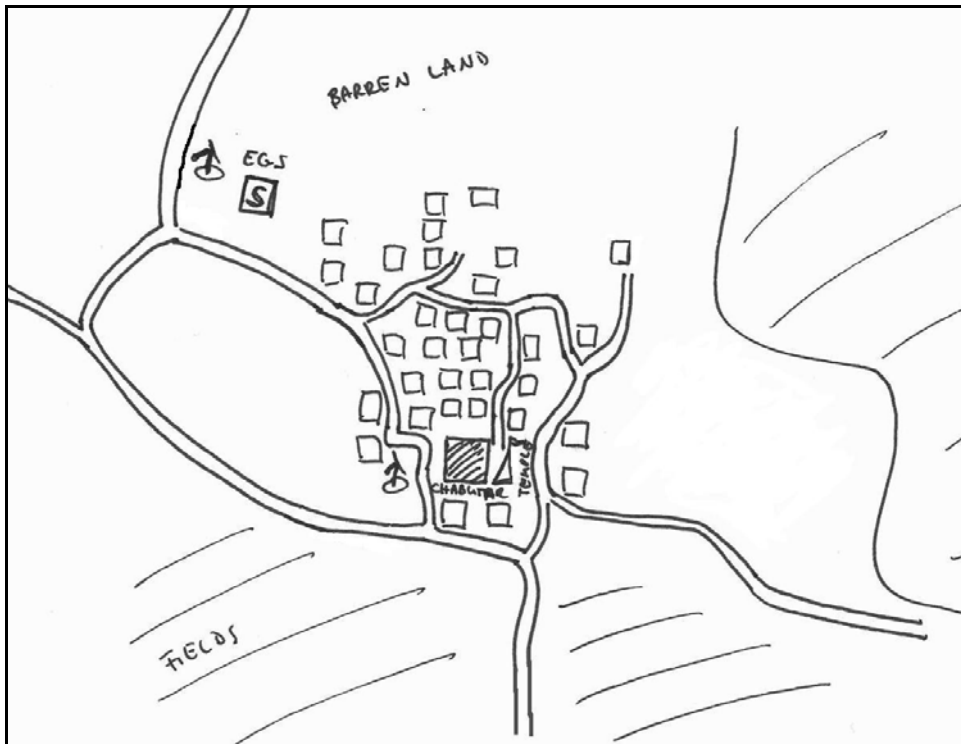
Source: Own (aided by the PTA president)

The village was extremely backward in terms of public infrastructure. Even though there were a couple of comparatively wealthier households, all houses in the village were

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[227] It should be noted that income and landholding among these families was within the margins of 4000 Rs and 8 acres of land if calculated per nucleus family. Joint families tended to have larger and more secure income than nucleus families because they pooled diversified sources of income and shared fixed costs such as electricity and fuel.

[228] According to the *jan shikshak,* there were only 2-3 male adult literates in the entire village. This turned out to be a grave underestimation, as in the households of the limited number of respondents alone ten adult literates were traced. Nevertheless, as functional literacy skills are often low among adults who have completed only the primary cycle, the educational status of the village was indeed very low.

kuccha (mud) and semi-*kuccha* (mud and brick) houses. Neither paved roads nor private sanitation existed in the village. The only public building was the Education Guarantee School, which was located in the northwest behind the village.

There was no landline telephone connection, however the young male members of the two wealthier households owned cell phones, which occasionally were used by other villagers, too.

Access to drinking water was restricted because there was no well. There were two handpumps, one of them located in the school premises. The lack of a well led to serious water shortages, as during the summer months one of the handpumps occasionally went dry when the groundwater levels fell.

In spite of the obvious poverty of a large number of households, there was no BPL-listed family in this village, again due to the fact that every family owned a small plot of land.

The village had been adjoined to a new panchayat centre (the village where PS1 is located) in 2005. Even though the physical distance to the panchayat centre has been significantly reduced (from more than 3km to app. 1.5 km), there have been frictions with the new *gram panchayat*, and respondents stated that relations with the former *gram panchayat* centre had been better. The observed neglect of the village by the *gram panchayat* also affected school functioning, particularly in terms of the provision of the midday meal.

6.3.3.2 *Indicators of school functioning in the education guarantee school[229]*

Enrolment and students' socio-economic background

There were 44 children in the 5-14 age group residing in the village, 27 boys and 17 girls. Out of these, 14 were enrolled in one of the surrounding middle schools, some in the private school in the main village of the *gram panchayat* area, but most in MS1.

29 resident children were enrolled in the EGS school in the year 2005-06. Out of these, seven children were from *balai* households, the remaining 22 belonged to *mewara* families. A notable number of 10 children commuted from a neighbouring village in which both teachers resided. There were two Muslim children enrolled, who belonged to an isolated household located between the main village and the village of EGS1.

Eight of the non-resident children were enrolled in first grade, and five of them were girls[230].

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[229] All data presented here refer to the school year 2005-06 unless indicated otherwise

[230] The female teacher pointed out in this context that more and more parents, especially of girls, find it important that there is a female teacher in school (which was not the case in any of the neighbouring schools). In addition, enrolment in the EGS school was low, thus the student-teacher-ratio (STR) was favourable as

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Table 34: child population (5-14) and enrolment in EGS1 by caste and gender, EGS1

	SC			ST			OBC			GEN			
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	**all**
village	9	3	12	-	-	-	18	14	32	-	-	-	44
EGS school	4	3	7	-	-	-	17	16	33	-	-	-	40

Source: *Jan shiksha register* 2005-06, form 3

Given the comparatively homogenous socio-economic structure of the village, student home backgrounds were less divergent than in PS1 and MS1. Income security declined with declining sizes of landholding. Parents from one of the *balai* households migrated regularly in search of work in agriculture or construction, which severely affected their son's ability to attend school.

Due to the equally homogenously low educational status of most families, it can be assumed that most students faced similar problems in terms of home support and lacking conducive learning environments. Interestingly, this did not reflect in student attendance and achievement levels, as captured by the student attendance and achievement registers, school report cards and the annual education plan of the JSK (*jan shiksha kendra ki yojna* 2006-07).

It was notable that the majority of parents, despite of their own low educational status, appeared to be convinced of the necessity of their children's regular attendance in school, and took care to ensure this. According to the PTA president, there was an agreement among parents that children should be brought back to school when they were found roaming around in the village.

Ensuring children's attendance at school and maintaining an exchange of information with teachers were supportive parenting practices not often found in similar socio-economic conditions in other villages. It was quite apparent, however that these depended on teachers' willingness and ability to maintain regular personal contact with parents.

Teacher qualification and attendance

The fact that the local primary school was categorised as an EGS school was somewhat peculiar. According to the head teacher, the school had been opened in 1996 under DPEP. Both teachers had been appointed to the school as *shiksha karmis* in the same year. The male teacher acted as head teacher in charge.

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compared to the government primary school in the village of residence of these children (interview conducted on 29th March 2006 in the school premises).

The school had been re-categorised EGS school in 1998, however the employment status of teachers was left unchanged[231]. It is not at all clear why this had happened, and neither teachers nor the *jan shikshak* were able to offer an explanation. What is certain is that EGS1 was not the only DPEP-turned-EGS school in 1998 or subsequent years, as a cursory examination of school report cards in Sehore block shows[232]. Whether this was an effort to prop up statistics, or indeed meant to get rid of some of the *shiksha karmis* employed under DPEP, as they unionised to fight for better employment conditions, remains unclear. This appeared not to be an issue readily appraised by (or even known to) RSK staff, as neither anyone in the research section nor other persons interviewed were able (or willing) to offer an explanation for this phenomenon.

In terms of qualification, both teachers were educated up to higher secondary level and had absolved a D.Ed. course as in-service training. Even though *shiksha karmis* by virtue of their employment status are non-transferable, PTA minutes as well as the teacher attendance register document the deputation of the head teacher in charge to another EGS school in the cluster in October and November 2005.

A *didi* (preschool teacher) was employed in the school in October 2005 to teach the 8 children of age 3-5, in line with the government decision to open pre-primary sections in all schools in villages where no *anganwadi* was operating, to reduce absence of children (especially girls) of elementary school age due to sibling care.

Table 35: Teacher attendance July 05-April 06, EGS1

status	PTA meetings attended	training	medical leave	meetings (JSK, Sankul, BRC)	O.D.	C.L/C.C.	total days of absence	% of total school days	total no.of school days
shiksha karmi	18	10	0	14	46 (tra	4	74	34.7	213
shiksha karmi	15	2	0	9	0	1	12	5.6	213
didi (since Okt. 05)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	137

Source: Teacher Attendance Register 2005-06

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[231] Replacing *shiksha karmi*, who at that point of time had not yet secured tenure, with *guruji*, who in the beginning were paid only a fraction of a *shiksha karmi's salary* (the latter again earning only a fraction of what regular teachers were paid), would have been a plausible motive for turning a DPEP school into an EGS school. This indeed is what happened the rural EGS school in cluster 2, where the *shiksha karmi* who had been appointed under DPEP was replaced with a *guruji* in 1998.

[232] I detected 24 EGS schools opened in 1996 – two years before EGS had been started – or before, which makes roughly one third of all EGS schools in the block

The appointment of an additional (but untrained) pre-school teacher was a relief to the female *shiksha karmi*, who delegated the teaching of the 1st grade children along with the preschool children to the *didi* during the period of deputation of the head teacher.

Teacher attendance was stable (apart from the mentioned temporary transfer), and absences induced by non-teaching duties as well as casual and medical leave were documented significantly less often than in the other schools under study.

Leaving the transfer aside, the bulk of absences were caused by the participation of the head teacher in trainings and meetings. The female teacher had significantly lower levels of absence than the *shiksha karmi* in PS1.

Induced by the temporary deputation of the head teacher to another school in the cluster, a single professionally trained and experienced teacher was responsible for all students on 31.9% of all school days. Excluding deputation, teacher absence was significantly lower on average (9.4% of all teaching days) than in PS1 (21%), and also compared favourably with MS1 (10.4%).

However, some margin of unrecorded teacher absence must be assumed in EGS 1, too.

I have observed that on some days the school was kept open only by the *didi*, because the head teacher attended the JSK for a meeting, and the female teacher did not show up for reasons unknown to villagers (including the PTA president).

The absence of the female teacher, however, could not be traced in the teacher attendance records. Significantly, a PTA meeting had been scheduled on one of these days (to which only the PTA president showed up), and was cancelled due to the absence of both teachers.

Such occasional incidences obviously did not affect parental perceptions of school functioning much. There was agreement among parent respondents that teachers were very regular and committed to teaching. Similar to parents in PS1, some were aware that teachers faced non-teaching duties that distracted them from teaching. The panchayat respondent stated:

> "Not all the teachers are there all the time, especially the headmaster is often away on other duties. But the school always opens on time, and the *didi* and female teacher attend almost always."(member1/*panch*, 29th March 2006)

The positive appraisal of teacher performance was grounded in high levels of parental satisfaction with student learning achievement and the quality of teaching in school. While it should be remembered that most parents were ill equipped to substantially judge what their children learn in school, and how good or bad a teaching job teachers did, they were well able to judge how teachers *relate* to their children.

Parents especially appreciated teachers' efforts to advance the weaker children[233]. This positive parental judgement was supported by low repetition rates and the fact that no child had failed to pass the 5th grade board examination in successive years.

Student attendance and achievement

Student attendance was exceptionally high in EGS1. Apart from two children in second grade, all enrolled students had A level attendance, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 36: average student attendance by grade, EGS1

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	all grades
no. of students	9	6	7	9	9	40
below 40%	0	2	0	0	0	2
50-60%	0	0	0	0	0	0
60-70%	0	0	0	0	0	0
70-80%	6	0	0	0	1	7
above 80%	3	4	7	9	8	31
average attendance rate (%)	79.0	85.9	93.4	93.5	89.0	88.2

Source: Student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

Among the two irregular children, one boy belonging to one of the SC households migrated along with his parents. His sister, who studied in 4th grade, stayed in the village with her grandmother and attended school regularly. According to the grandmother, the boy refused to be separated from his parents for several months, which is why his parents took him with them, hoping that eventually he would stay with his sister and catch up in school.

The other irregular boy in second grade appeared to suffer from some sort of learning handicap. His parents (subcommittee member and his wife) stated that he could not manage to remember letters and numbers, had difficulty in concentrating and following classes, and crept out of the classroom whenever the occasion arose. The PTA president, whose daughter was a weak student, too, had reported similar difficulties.

Parents tended to equate learning disabilities with general cognitive deficits, as expressed in the common statement '*us ka kam dimag hai*' ((s)he doesn't have much brains)[234].

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[233] This was brought forward by the PTA president, the subcommittee member, and member3, all of whom had one low achieving child enrolled in the school.

Two factors were conducive to high student attendance in EGS1. Firstly, there seemed to be an agreement between parents and teachers that all children must attend school. The female teacher in this context brought forward that to ensure regular attendance of students, it was most important for teachers to maintain personal contact to all parents, which was feasible in EGS1 due to the small size of the student and parent population.

> "We relate to parents on a day-to-day basis, not only when there are PTA meetings. We keep up contact to each family. That's why student attendance is not a problem. Parents make sure their children attend school" (Female teacher, 29th March 2006).

Parents' control over children's attendance was somewhat enhanced by the fact that most families earned their living from cultivating their own plots of land, and only very few parents regularly migrated or commuted to places outside the village for work. Obviously, the small number of families (20) made it much easier for teachers to relate to them personally and keep up regular contact. The important point here is that teachers considered personal contact to parents important - even superior to formalised interaction through the PTA. Parent respondents pointed out that they were regularly approached by teachers to exchange information on their children's attendance and achievement.

Secondly, both teachers were highly respected by parents. Mothers showed affinity especially to the female teacher. Parent respondents stated that the teachers were committed to teaching and were behaving very friendly with the children. The mother of one of the weaker children in school was convinced:

> "The teachers work well. They are very affectionate and patient with the children, especially the female teacher. She is very nice."(subcommittee member, 6th April 2006)

This may also be an important factor for children's intrinsic motivation to attend school. As far as I could observe, teachers in most schools did not show much personal attachment to the children they taught, students appeared to be exchangeable (which may well have something to do with student absenteeism and changing class compositions). Students only spoke when asked to do so by the teacher. This was observably different in EGS1, where students came forward by themselves to ask questions, and appeared to compete for the teacher's attention. The more informal character of interaction also found its expression in classroom arrangements, with

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[234] It should be noted that some of the medical factors affecting student achievement, such as myopia/hyperopia, ADS, and mental retardations caused by mal- and undernourishment, are not appropriately considered in most analysis of student achievement. The potential impact of such unrealised handicaps is rarely addressed in policy papers.

students grouped in a half circle around the teacher's desk, the youngest ones sitting closest to the teacher[235].

On the whole, the classroom appeared more interactive and less hierarchical than what I have observed in other schools, and it is not unreasonable to assume that high levels of interaction between students and teachers and less authoritative behaviour of teachers have a positive effect on student's motivation to attend school.

With respect to student achievement, evidence was somewhat more mixed. While the school has been ranked first in the cluster (A level) with respect to student performance in grade 5 examinations, overall achievement levels (grade 1-5) were rated significantly lower (C level)[236]. According to the school report card 2006, the number of students passing 5th grade examination with marks above 60% was comparably low (two out of 8), however all children enrolled in 5th grade appeared and passed. This is remarkable in so far as in most schools in the cluster there was a (sometimes significant) number of children who did not appear for examination[237].

More importantly, the repetition rate was low at 7.5%, pointing to a comparatively high level of internal efficiency. There were three repeaters in the school year 2005-06, among them the child migrating along with his parents and the children whose parents expressed concern about a learning disability.

The moderate student-teacher-ratio (STR) and the small size of the school cannot be assumed per se to affect student learning achievement positively, as comparative studies worldwide have shown that class size alone does not account for student achievement[238]. In addition, given the extremely high adult illiteracy in the village, it can be assumed that parental support to children was severely constrained by the inability of parents to follow

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[235] Classes were observed on several days between 23rd March and 7th April 2006. Since the first visit to the school was not announced to teachers, and only two subsequent visits were arranged beforehand to conduct teacher interviews, it is rather unlikely that teachers arranged classes any differently than they usually do. In all other schools visited (including MS1 and a number of schools not chosen as cases) the usual spatial structure in classrooms was a row-wise sitting arrangement on the floor, while teachers sat on a chair behind a desk, facing the students.

[236] Information according to the Cluster Education Plan, educational development indicators (_Jan Shiksha Kendra ki Yojna, shaikshik vikas suchakank_), Cluster 1, 2006-07

[237] Information extracted from school report cards, available at http://www.schoolreportcards.in/.

[238] It should be remembered, however, that class size was found to impact significantly in very early grades (especially preschool), however only if class sizes were reduced to no more than 15 children per class, and that such small classes disproportionately benefited students from socio-economically weak backgrounds (cf. Hanushek 1998). Given that in India the majority of children do not yet attend preschool/kindergarten classes and enter the first grade at age 5 (the usual preschool age in most western countries), it is not unrealistic that small (<15) class effects may be significant in first grade.

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up what children learned, help them prepare for examinations, check their homework etc., as pointed out by some parent respondents[239].

However, the combination of a comparably small number of students (15 in grade 1 and 2 combined, who were usually taught together when both teachers were present), and teacher characteristics did appear to increase children's motivation to attend school and participate in classes. Positive effects of regular attendance in the first two grades can be expected to be carried over into subsequent grades, decreasing the likelihood of repetition in higher grades and increasing internal efficiency.

6.3.3.3   *Parent-Teacher-Association: Composition, parent participation, and scope of activities*

Composition of working committee, frequency of meetings and parent participation

While it is tempting to expect that the PTA in EGS1 would be functioning well under the conditions outlined above, the opposite was observable. The composition of the PTA working committee and the frequency of PTA meetings complied with formal requirements, but parent participation in these meetings was extremely low. 40 parents (including both fathers and mothers) constituted the PTA in the academic year 2005-06. The PTA working committee was elected on 22nd July and consisted of 10 members apart from the president and vice president.

Table 37: Working Committee members by caste, gender and educational status, EGS1

PTA Karyakarini 05-06	gender	caste/ community	educational status	No. of attended meetings
president	m	OBC (mewara)	literate	18
vice president	f	SC (balai)	illiterate	0
member	m	OBC (mewara)	literate	15
member	m	OBC (mewara)	literate	1
member	m	OBC (mewara)	illiterate	10
member	m	OBC (mewara)	literate	14
member	m	OBC (mewara)	illiterate	1
member	m	OBC (mewara)	illiterate	7
member	f	SC (balai)	illiterate	2
member	f	SC (balai)	illiterate	1
member	f	OBC (mewara)	illiterate	1
member	f	OBC (mewara)	illiterate	0

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

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[239] Subcommittee member, member 2, interviews conducted in parents' houses on 6th April 2006.

As can be seen in the table above, participation levels among the majority of working committee members as captured in the meeting minutes were very low. Similar to PS1, female participation was almost non-existent. The low educational attainment of working committee members is striking. Not only were merely four out of 12 elected members literate, but also these four according to the head teacher have only completed primary level education[240].

According to the PTA meeting register, meetings were held at least twice a month; extra meetings were scheduled on the occasion of functions (Republic Day), and because of the deputation of the head teacher in October.

Fig. 29 Participation in PTA meetings among different groups of respondents, EGS1
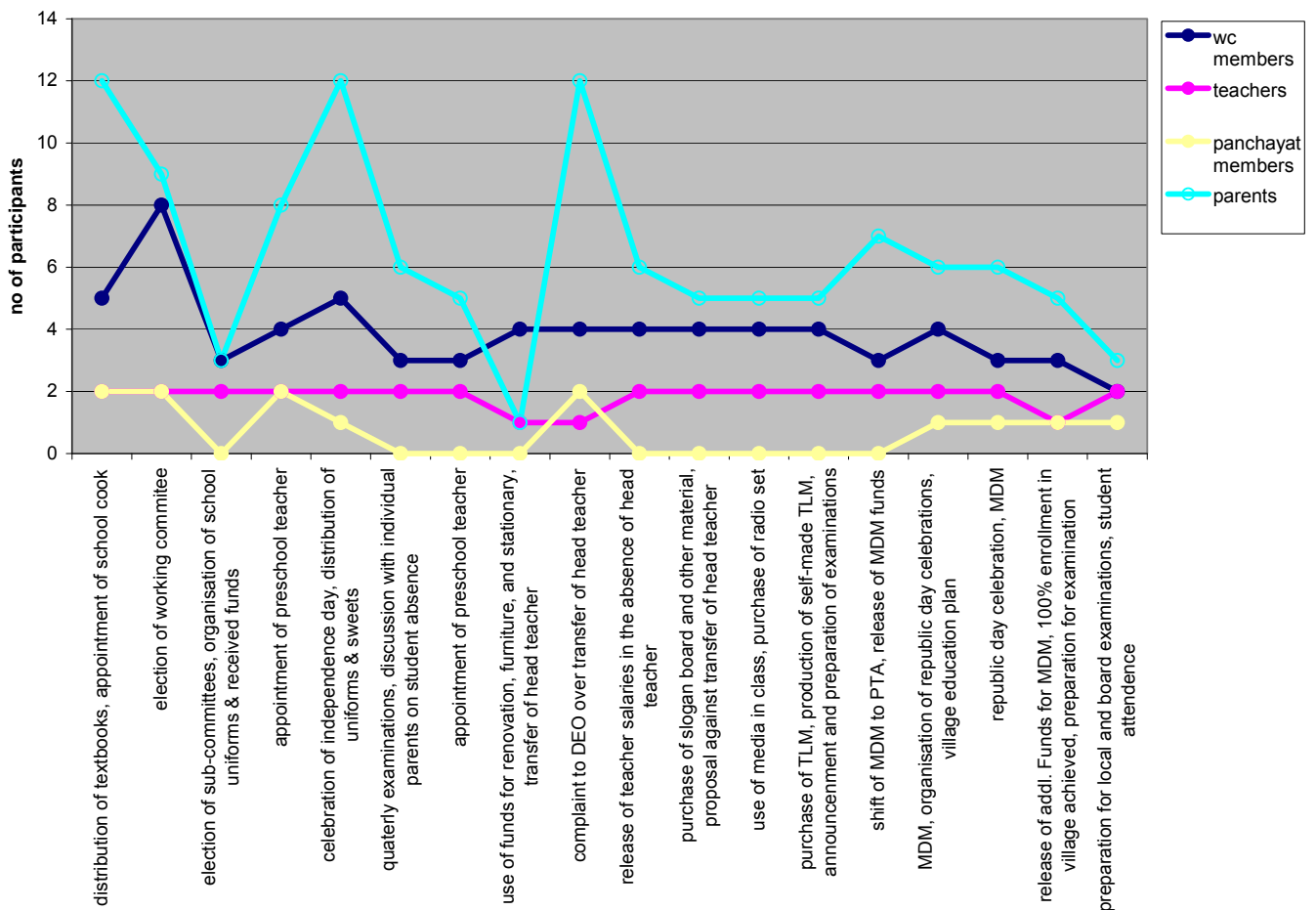
Source: PTA meeting minutes

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[240] Interview conducted on 5th April 2006 after a head teachers' meeting in the JSK premises

A note of caution must again be made with respect to the reliability of meeting minutes. The meticulousness with which meetings were recorded, and the substantial participation as recorded in these minutes (13 parents on average), contradict anything stated by parent and teacher respondents.

While meeting minutes suggest that there were four working committee members who participated at more regular levels, the PTA president has clearly disclaimed this:

> "The PTA in this school exists only on paper. The only ones who sit together and discuss are the two teachers and I. Usually a couple of other parents come to sign the register, but they leave after a short while and do not participate in any discussion." (PTA president EGS1, 29th March 2006)

It is quite suspicious that among the 11 non-elected participants who have signed the register more than three times, only two actually had a child enrolled in grade 1-5 at the time. Two of the signatories were young literate males whose children were enrolled in the preschool section, which was supposed to take up its work in the beginning of the school year in July 2005 (but actually did not do so before October).

In addition, two panchayat members as well as the *patel* (local land revenue officer) belonged to the more regular signatories. However, both the *panchayat* and the working committee members stated that they actually participated no more than occasionally.

Participation levels among parents of children enrolled in grades 1-5 were abysmally low, among both elected and non-elected members. Female participation in meetings was virtually non-existing. In fact, the head teacher stated that election of female members into the working committee was no more than a concession to reservation requirements as prescribed in the JSN. The female teacher confirmed that apart from the PTA president, other parents attended PTA meetings twice in an academic year at most, and that mothers hardly ever showed up.

Obviously (even though none of the teachers explicitly confirmed this), the number of signatures was heavily inflated. The patterns of signatures in the meeting minutes suggest that parents signed minutes en bloc (parents who attended one meeting signed the previous two or three minutes, too). Similar phenomena were observed in other schools, too, and appear to be a common strategy among teachers to evade problems in case PTA records should be inspected.

Parents' motivation to participate: perspectives of respondents

   a) Teachers' perspectives on parental motivation

Teachers perceived parental motivation to participate in the PTA to be generally low. They related the lack of motivation to the same factors as teachers in other schools,

namely the incidence of poverty and the resulting preoccupation with income generation, and high adult illiteracy.

Teachers in EGS 1 felt that parents did not participate PTA meetings primarily because they were not ready to interrupt work to attend a meeting the purpose of which was unclear to many. In fact, teachers pointed out that given high adult illiteracy in the village, many parents perceived the claim that they should be involved in running a school as outrightly absurd.

Teachers emphasised that parents were willing to occasionally contribute labour in construction or maintenance of the school building, but rejected regular and formalised commitments.

It should be noted that in EGS1 teachers, too, seemed to prefer more informal relations with parents. The only concern they expressed about lacking parental engagement in the PTA was related to its inability to find a cook for the school. This was understandable, as the provision of a nutritious midday meal was one of the major quality indicators used by the Department of Education to judge both school functioning and PTA activity. Furthermore, the daily preparation of the meal meant a considerable constraint on the time available for teaching, as it was usually the female teacher (and later on the *didi*) who was responsible for preparing and serving the meal.

The female teacher emphasised that ensuring regular student attendance, keeping parents informed about their children's performance, and occasionally asking for individual contributions did not require the creation of a formal body such as the PTA, at least in schools of the size of EGS1.

As a consequence, no specific efforts were made to mobilise parent participation. The head teacher pointed out that most of his colleagues who acted as PTA secretaries were glad if they found a reasonably reliable PTA president, to whom they could relate on a continuous basis, and did not invest much effort into mobilising the entire working committee. Thus all formal authority of the PTA was projected on the person of the PTA president (adding to the unpopularity of the job), while an aura of formality was avoided to be tangible to other elected members. The female teacher stated that it was easier to win parents over for concrete tasks demanding an assessable investment of time, than for continuous and potentially incalculable engagement in a formal body.

The potential of parent involvement beyond ensuring children's attendance in school and the occasional contribution of labour, especially in parent communities characterised by adult illiteracy, was viewed rather sceptically by both teachers. The head teacher argued that at least in the case of smaller schools, the involvement of the PTA in school governance above all increased the non-teaching burden on head teachers, who are

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required to do all the input- and student benefit-related accounting previously managed by the panchayat secretary. While he acknowledged that in cases where *gram panchayats* have misused the funds under their control, parent involvement in input management might have yielded tangible improvements, he felt that in EGS1, where there were no such irregularities, the necessity to involve parents, particularly in input management, was a burden rather than a relief. He further argued that villagers were passive and had never felt the necessity to become active on issues of common well-being, as all improvements in the village had come without any involvement of villagers at any level: The school had opened under DPEP without parental demand, the midday meal was provided since 2002 without parents having pressed for it, and the handpumps were provided from some government programme without any claims having been made by villagers.

Parents' readiness to settle for whatever is offered to them (which often is less that what they are entitled to get) was perceived to be a great obstacle to parent mobilisation:

> "The problem is that as long as the school opens, the children learn, get something to eat, and transfer to the next grade level parents are absolutely happy. They don't have any claims towards quality. The same is true for the midday meal. Parents don't care that children eat *kicchri*[241] every day, as long as they eat at all. As long as they are happy, they don't ask any questions." (Head teacher, 5th April 2006)

In summary, teachers felt that effective parent involvement in school management was not possible in such settings as prevalent in EGS1. The head teacher perceived current provisions for parent and community participation to be appropriate for larger middle schools, where there are large numbers of parents from more heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds, and where exchange of information between parents and teachers cannot be achieved by relating to parents individually, but not for small schools in homogeneously poor villages with high adult illiteracy.

b) b) perpsectives of parent respondents

Parental responses clearly reflected very low levels of information about the PTA, little positive perception of returns to school education in terms of upward social mobility (which was related to landownership and lacking mobility), and a generally low level of mobilisation on social and political issues.

Parent respondents included the PTA president and two elected members as well as four non-elected members. The sub-committee member and members 2 and 3 had an

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[241] Simple meal made from rice, lentils and spices.

irregular and/or weak child enrolled in the school. The children of the working committee member and the PTA president were particularly well-performing children.

Table 38: Respondent details, EGS 1

Respondent	membership status	gender	caste/ community	edu. status	adult literates in household	no. of household members	estimated income per month*
PTA president	elected	m	mewara	literate	1	4	800 INR
wc member	elected	m	mewara	literate	1	7	4000 INR
sub-comm. member	elected	f	mewara	illiterate	0	5	1000 INR
member 1/ panch	non-elected	m	mewara	illiterate	1	4	1500 INR
member 2	non-elected	m	mewara	illiterate	0	8	2000 INR
member 3	non-elected	f	balai (SC)	illiterate	0	5	1500 INR
member 4	non-elected	m	mewara	8th	4	15	8500 INR

*average monthly household income as estimated by respondents

Source: Interviews

Parent respondents (except the PTA president) were unaware that, firstly, all parents and teachers were members of the PTA, and secondly, that a number of elected parents *other* than the PTA president were supposed to carry out certain functions.

As a consequence, only three respondents apart from the president were aware of their membership in the PTA, and had some conception of its responsibilities (wc member, member1/*panch* and member4). Other respondents either had not heard anything of a body called PTA, or thought that membership in this body was restricted to those members elected in the beginning of the school year.

The subcommittee member, for instance, was unaware of her membership in the PTA. She stated that she had been asked by the female teacher to check the quality of the school uniforms once they were tailored (which is the main purpose for which inspection committees are formed), which she agreed to do. This again illustrates how tasks were delegated in an informal manner, but documented suggesting a formal selection process.

Even the panchayat respondent, who was more exposed to formal procedures by means of his participation in *gram panchayat* meetings, was unaware that all parents were members of the PTA – he had assumed that only elected parents were members. He, too, was not able to name any elected member apart from the PTA president.

All parents, however, had some tacit knowledge that the PTA president was a parent representative who was responsible for "assisting the teachers in running the school". Interestingly, most of them thought he was appointed by the teachers rather than elected by parents (which reflected actual proceedings appropriately).

Parent respondents were also aware that there were occasional meetings of parents and teachers in school, but either assumed a frequency of meetings much lower (every 2-3 months) than the prescribed two meetings per month, or thought that parents were supposed to attend meetings only when personally asked to do so by the teachers.

The PTA president pointed out that teachers' strategy of downplaying the necessity of regular commitment, while being understandable, considering the difficulty of motivating parents towards sustained engagement in the school, has led to an overload of the PTA president, and ultimately to an increased workload on teachers. The fact that teacher projected responsibility for the core functions of the PTA solely on the person of the president did not go unnoticed by parents. This failure to distribute clearly delimited tasks to several parents may be expected to lead to an even greater unwillingness of parents to be elected PTA president in the future.

The current PTA president asserted that he has had little intrinsic motivation to become PTA president, especially because at the time of his first election part of the provision of student benefits (uniforms and textbooks) was made a responsibility of the PTA. This forced teachers to take parent involvement more seriously, as the PTA came under closer purview of the RSK and the District and Block Project Offices (*zilla* and *janpad shiksha kendra*).

He described his 'election' as PTA president as follows:

> "The teachers desperately looked for someone to make PTA president. There are only 2-3 literate parents, and none of them wanted to do it. When they asked me, the other parents present in the election immediately supported the teachers' suggestion. Alas, they were happy it was not they who were made do it." (EGS1 PTA president, 29th March 2006)

He emphasised that he finally had himself talked into it because he was unemployed, and could not fully dismiss the head teacher's argument that the combination of being literate *and* able to spend time in school (when there was nothing else for him to do in the village) made him the inevitable candidate[242].

Quite understandably, he strongly complained about the fact that no compensation at all was offered to PTA presidents, in spite of the substantial amount of time they are required to spend in school (a complaint that was common among PTA presidents in other schools, as well).

The PTA president had a very clear conception of the causes of unwillingness of parents to engage in the body on a regular basis. According to him, parental inactivity was related to the combination of three factors:

- High adult illiteracy
- Landownership and the perceived independence of educational status for subsistence
- The lack of remuneration for PTA presidents and working committee members and the low payment of non-teaching staff in school

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[242] His underemployment resulted from an internal division of labour in the household. His two elder brothers cultivated the four acres of family land, while he contributed to the family's income through occasional wage labour on the fields surrounding the village.

Adult illiteracy was perceived to be the greatest constraining factor of parental activity in the PTA. Since children's attendance in school was no issue requiring substantial action of the PTA (because attendance was high without its intervention), the focus of parental activity would logically shift to student achievement and teaching quality, and/or monitoring of resource utilisation. These latter activities, however, require parental capacity to judge the quality of classroom processes and the levels of achievement of their own children, as well as the capacity to handle letters, accounts etc.

Since there actually was no parent in a position to effectively carry out these functions[243], the PTA president described the procedure of monitoring accounts as follows:

> "All the accounting and record keeping is done by the head teacher. The president only signs the records. Nobody else is involved, and nobody asks to be involved – how would an illiterate be able to oversee an account, anyway?" (EGS1 PTA president, 29th April 2006)

He strongly confirmed the head teacher's assertion that expecting illiterate parents to involve with accounting and government orders was bordering the ridiculous.

The PTA president suspected the cause of parents' lack of interest in participating in the PTA to lie in the generally lacking expectation of returns to education in terms of increasing family income. He related this to landownership and the limits it imposes on people's aspiration for social mobility.

He argued that most people subsist by cultivating their land, and to do so it was not considered necessary to be highly educated. While generally everyone acknowledged that basic literacy and numeracy skills make life easier and should be achieved by all children in the village, there was no expectation of social and economical upward mobility connected to the issue of school education. This argument was supported by parent responses towards their expectation of benefits of school education for their children and the family. Almost all respondents asserted that their children's status of education was not anticipated to change occupational choice and levels of income, as parents generally expected their sons to cultivate family land, and their daughters to leave the house to live with their in-laws after marriage.

Further, the lack of employment opportunities for educated youths should generally be appreciated as a factor decreasing the value parents ascribe to their children's education, at least as far as the expectation of raising family income is concerned.

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[243] The PTA president characterised himself as semi-literate, indicating that while he was able to read and write, he was not functionally literate in the sense that he could read and comprehend official letters and accounts with ease.

The oldest son of the working committee respondent shall serve as illustration: Having graduated from a government high school in the city of Sehore around two years before the interview was conducted, he was one of the most educated persons in the village, and raised the expectation to find a classical white-collar office job in the city. He first applied at all kinds of government offices, and later in private enterprises in the district headquarter. He soon found that competition for these jobs was fierce, and especially for government employment it was an indispensable precondition to have personal relations to other employees – the farther up the ladder, the better. To a lesser extent, this was also true for private enterprise jobs.

As a village youth, he did not have command of the required social capital, but due to his self-perceived social status as an educated young man, he refused to work on his father's plot of land or as an agricultural labourer. According to his own account, he jobbed here and there since then (including cooking the midday meal in school for a month), but has not managed to find an occupation which could earn him more than the costs he inflicted on the family[244]. Thus de facto the investment into secondary education incurred negative returns to the family. Furthermore, the reluctance of the older son to engage in manual work drove his father to take his younger son, who studied in MS1 and should have taken the 8th grade board examinations in 2006, into the fields with him, because he needed support during wheat harvest to maximise gains from his patch of land.

His father in his disillusionment made the following point:

> "They [children] should learn so they can develop further. But honestly, if sending children to a secondary school results in them being unemployed and refusing to work in the fields because they think it's beneath them, than what is the use? Then it is a waste of time and money."(wc member, 6th April 2006)

Not only was this respondent highly insecure about whether or not he should allow his younger children to study beyond 8th grade, this incidence obviously was a deterrent to other villagers - a number of parents in more informal conversations mentioned this instance and wondered if investment in children's higher education was actually worth it.

There was one remarkable exception to the generally sceptical attitude towards returns to education. Member 2, grandmother to one of the weaker students from the SC community, expressed hope that one of her younger sons would be able to find permanent employment (_naukari_) outside the village. Due to marginal landholding, her oldest son and daughter-in-law migrated outside the village, which is why her grandson was absent in school for months on end. Her own youngest son studied in 10th grade in a private school in about 4km distance. This required substantial investment, as fees for

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[244] The son of the working committee respondent joined the interview situation at the respondent's house and gave an account of his perspective on the issue (6th April 2006).

secondary grades according to her cost around 100 Rs per month. In this individual case, investment in education was clearly related to the aspiration of diversified sources and higher levels of income.

Apart from the low importance a majority of parent respondents ascribed to education for raising their families' standard of living, it appeared that the low remuneration of non-teaching staff (in this case the school cook), who are usually recruited from the locality, added to the generally negative attitude of parents towards any sort of involvement in school.

The usual approach for running the midday meal was the employment of one or two village women (depending on the size of the school) for daily cooking and serving of the midday meal, while the PTA president and secretary were responsible for keeping the stocks.

However, remuneration for this work was neither related to the number of children in school, nor the time needed for preparing the midday meal, but compensated with a flat sum of 400 Rs a month.

It should be noted that since the inception of the EGS, salaries for community-based staff has been abysmally low, and motivation to work under such employment conditions has strongly been related to the expectation of *naukari* (permanent employment) and gradual raises in salary (cf. Srivastava 2005, Leclercq 2002).

This phenomenon was observable in the context of the employment of a *didi* in EGS1. The only local female adult literate was employed as *didi* in the school in October 2005, even though the remuneration was equally low as that of the school cook. While she related her motivation to the fact that she enjoyed interacting with small children, and in addition perceived an increase in social status in the village by working as a teacher, her father clearly nurtured a diffuse hope that eventually she would able to upgrade to a primary school contract teacher at a later point of time.

Finding a cook however appeared to be difficult, because obviously there was no expectation of later payoffs. The panchayat respondent made the point as follows:

> "The problem is that there is practically no unemployment in the village, because every body owns at least some land, and those who own less work on the fields of those who own more. That's why it is difficult to find someone for preparing the meals. No one is ready to prepare the midday meal when they earn only a quarter of what they would earn through wage labour." (member1/*panch*, 29th March 2006)

The PTA president brought forward the view that, given the overall low levels of income and the inaccessibility to most government programmes (he mentioned, BPL cards, *Indra Awas Yojna* and employment programmes) as a supplement to income due to land ownership, families could simply not afford deputing a grown up women as a cook who would otherwise generate income on levels at least three times as high as the

remuneration in school[245]. As a consequence of low payment, the cook who had been employed by the *gram panchayat* in the beginning of the school year had quit by October. Two other persons were employed during the following two months, but both quite after only a few weeks, because they felt the amount of work was disproportionate to the low payment. Since the responsibility of the midday meal had been shifted to the PTA by the end of the year, the *gram panchayat* obviously felt no longer responsible for making efforts to employ a cook for the school. Without the pressure of the *gram panchayat* in the background, however, villagers were even less inclined to do this job. The inability to find a cook for the school resulted in a severe increase in non-teaching duties for the female teacher and the *didi*, who were de-facto forced to prepare a meal for the children, because teachers feared a complete discontinuation would have resulted in severe pressure from the BRC, which distributed midday meal funds to the schools and monitored its utilisation.

Given the abysmal participation of parents in PTA meetings, it is not surprising that, except the PTA president and the panchayat member, none of the parent respondents perceived there was a problem with the midday meal.

c) c) Conclusions

The choice not to participate in the PTA regularly in EGS among the majority of villagers interviewed was clearly determined by a combination of lacking clarity as to what this 'school committee' was supposed to do, who was supposed to be in it, and the perception that it was absurd that illiterate parents should 'run' a school.

Obviously, parents' satisfaction with teacher performance and school functioning is at best a supportive condition for higher levels of participation in PTAs under certain other conditions (as observed in MS1). In EGS1, it has proven to be counterproductive in an environment characterised by social inertia, a point that will be substantiated in the context of the neglect of the village by the *gram panchayat*.

Turning a PTA working committee decently functional under such conditions would have required not only continuous training and capacity building, but also a clear transmission of information about the nature and purpose of the body and the commitment required on part of parents.

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[245] It deserves attention that payment levels for wage labour in rural Madhya Pradesh at 35-40 Rs per day only half of the legally determined minimum wage of 75 Rs. The daily wage of a school cook would be less than 20 Rs on average. Even though the government understands the sum of 400 Rs per month as honorarium to an otherwise voluntary engagement (similar to the remuneration of *guriji* under EGS, who were regarded as village volunteers), it does appear cynical to make children's access to a proper midday meal potentially conditional to parents' willingness to renounce income.

Since teachers anticipated that parents would be further deterred from participation by being confronted with the high expectations the legal provisions raise towards parents, they chose to keep a low profile and try to involve parents on a more informal basis. This strategy appeared to have worked successfully with respect to making parents ensure their children attend school regularly, and in mobilising selective support and contribution.

The choice to participate and take over responsibility in the school on part of the PTA president was clearly not based on intrinsic motivation, but on the pressure created by teachers and other parents, who were glad the cup had passed them. However, he appeared to have entered somewhat more readily into his second term of office, as, to put it in his words, spending his unintended spare time in school was "a meaningful waste of time".

Table 39: Determinants of parent participation, EGS1

Variables and Indicators	regular participant in PTA	Characteristics of Respondents			
		irregular participants in PTA (irregular/weak children)		**regular participants in PTA** (regular/achieving children)	
mobilisation by teachers informal interaction and mobilisation	target of mobilisation as one of only 3-4 male adult literates in the village	female, illiterate =>no target group for teacher mobilisation		male, educated/literate => target group for mobilisation	
level of information about PTA educational background: ability to handle information importance ascribed to school-related issues	decent level of information; self-perceived limited capacity to handle accounts, records and govt. orders	no information about PTA; no formal education; low capacity to handle information		moderate level of information, lack of interest in PTA responsibilities	modest level of information, limited capacity to retain information (low educational attainment)
perception of school functioning level of information, perceived importance	high level of satisfaction with teacher performance, dissatisfaction with provision of midday meal and increased workload on teachers	high satisfaction with teacher performance, but low capacity to judge student achievement		high satisfaction with teacher performance	high satisfaction with teacher performance and student achievement, dissatisfaction with midday meal provision
perceived value of school education aspiration for upward mobility; own educational status	no concrete expectation of future gains from educating children, intrinsic value for personal dignity	no expectation of future gains from education, diffuse perception of necessity of basic skills	hope for better employment opportunities and higher income	indifferent attitude towards utility of education, no explicit expectation of upward mobility	disillusioned about chances of upward mobility
interference with income generation level of income and working hours	interference reduced because of under-employment, perceived lack of remuneration for efforts of president	perceived high because of low levels of income and dependence on both own land and wage labour		perceived high because of income generation priority (despite high level of income)	perceived high because of income generation priority

Scope of PTA activity: Perceptions of main responsibilities among parents and teachers

The agenda of PTA meetings was dominated by the tasks delegated to the PTA by way of government order.

These concerned the provision of school uniforms, the use of funds for teaching-learning materials (TLM), the employment of a preschool teacher (_didi_), and the provision of the midday meal. Other tasks achieved related to formal procedures such as electing a working committee and its sub-committees, which clearly were exercises on paper, as discussed at some length above.

Table 40: Issues discussed, decided and accomplished by the PTA according to meeting minutes, EGS1

Type of issue	discussions by issue	noted decisions/proposals	noted accomplish-ments
government orders	7	4	2
elections	3	3	3
use of TLM	7	5	0
employment of additional staff	2	2	1
generation and use of funds	6	4	0
building maintenance	2	0	0
midday meal	6	2	0
distribution of benefits to students	3	3	3
student achievement	5	3	0
student attendence	5	3	2
functions in school	6	6	6
presentation of Jan Shiksha Yojna plan	1	1	1

Source: meeting minutes 2005-06, EGS1

While an impressive number of decisions taken and proposals passed were recorded, actual accomplishment was noted in the minutes only for a small number of issues, and these related disproportionately to the conduction of functions, distribution of benefits, and conduction of elections.

Noticeably, issues revolving around the use of teaching-learning materials (TLM) figured prominently in the discussions, supporting the notion that teachers did place priority on the quality of teaching, as indicated by parent responses (even though here, too, there was no indication in the minutes that decisions were implemented).

It is further noteworthy that the village education plan was a point of discussion in a PTA meeting, which had not been the case in any other school under study, even though participative planning was one of the goals of increasing community participation in government schools. The value of this largely teacher-driven effort to involve parents in educational planning however is diminished by the failure to mobilise parental

participation on the issue, nevertheless it indicates an effort towards transparency and accountability on part of teachers.

As a consequene of erratic parent participation in PTA meetings, individual parents even if they have participated several times can have had only a glimpse of the range of issues discussed in PTA meetings. Adding to this the lacking participation in the annual training provided by the *jan shikshak* (in which only the head teacher and the PTA president participated), it is not surprising that overall parents had little conception of what the PTA should be doing in school.

Table 41: Perceived central tasks of PTA according to respondents from different stakeholder groups, EGS1

	teachers	working committee members	parents
planning	—	—	—
implementation	° ensure regular student attendance ° assist in organising the midday meal °contribute to building maintenance and construction ° take care of purchase of school uniforms	° ensure regular student attendance ° assist in organising the midday meal °contribute to building maintenance and construction	° 'assist' teachers (if any)
decision-making	—	—	—
monitoring	—	—	—

Source: Interviews

I would like to argue that perceptions of responsibilities of the PTA among teachers and the few knowledgeable parent respondents basically reflects what they think parents are *able* to achieve in the PTA. This included sending their own children to school regularly and ensuring children found roaming in the village are taken back to school, contributing labour for construction and building maintenance, and purchasing foods and preparing the midday meal. None of these tasks require sophisticated skills, and thus can be managed by parents of low educational status, who most likely have few institutional exposure and as a result few capacities to manoeuvre in formal settings and deal with 'official' information[246].

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[246] Inability to retain information also surfaced in many interviews when respondents confirmed that they had attended meetings in school a couple of times, but were unable to remember what was being talked about. A similar phenomenon has been observed in context of the establishment of a women's self-help group aimed at accumulating a micro-credit pool for its members. While attending a meeting of this group, it turned out that many of the women present in the meeting neither knew the name of the group, nor who was the official leader of the group, and with what frequency meetings were held. What they did know was that they had to pay a certain amount of money per month to be able to borrow larger sums after a period of 6 months contribution, and this in fact was the information that was important to them.

Explicit statements about the responsibilities of the PTA were made, apart from the teachers, by the PTA president, the working committee member, and the panchayat respondent. None of the other respondents had an idea what the purpose of the PTA was beyond the assertion that the PTA president somehow assisted the teachers[247].

Fig. 30: Individual respondents' perceptions of PTA rights and responsibilities, EGS1

	EGS1Te	EGS1pre	EGS1Par	EGS1Par	EGS1Par	EGS1par	EGS1par	EGS1Par
rights and responsibilities of PTA								
contact parents of irregular children								
monitor teacher attendence								
building maintenance	▪	▪		▪				▪
management of midday meal	▪	▪		▪				▪
purchase of uniforms	▪							
student attendance	▪	▪		▪				▪
monitoring provision of infrastructure								
monitoring student achievement								
no information about rights and competencies			▪		▪	▪	▪	

Source: Interviews

Parent perceptions of responsibilities of the PTA, if they had any, exactly reflected what teachers perceived to be important tasks of the PTA. Similar to MS1 and PS1, teacher perceptions were heavily biased towards implementation. Considering the difficulty in providing the midday meal to the children, it is comprehensible that teachers perceived this to be one of the most important aspects of PTA activity.

Similarly, it is logical that the PTA president and the panchayat and working committee members did not mention the distribution of school uniforms, an issue perceived to be so important in other schools, because only the three girls belonging to the *balai* families were eligible to uniforms, so this has not been an issue of concern to the majority of parents.

Monitoring activities, whether related to teacher attendance, student achievement or school funds, was not perceived a central responsibility of the PTA by any knowledgeable respondent. Teachers in general tended to underemphasise this aspect, arguing that in the face of high adult illiteracy any meaningful monitoring activity was elusive. Given the PTA president's self-perceived capacity limits in this respect, it is not surprising that he did not consider monitoring a priority, either.

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[247] I have talked to six more parents in an informal group discussion organised by the PTA president on 7th April 2006, and none of these parents had heard of the PTA or had an idea of its purpose. This makes 13 out of 16 parent couples who had a child enrolled in the school, so I am rather positive that indeed the statements made above apply to most parents in the village.

It should be noted, however, that the head teacher in EGS 1 (in contrast to most other head teachers in the schools under study) did take care that the PTA president signed teachers' monthly attendance sheets in the teacher attendance register. Whether this was a genuine effort towards teacher accountability or a mere formality is difficult to judge.

Division of labour between different types of members

The lack of reliable parent participation precluded a meaningful division of labour between different categories of PTA members. Teachers relied on the PTA president exclusively for carrying out the mandatory non-implementation functions of the PTA, such as signing teacher attendance records, checking accounts, and reviewing children's examination results.

Fig. 31: Division of functions in school governance, EGS1
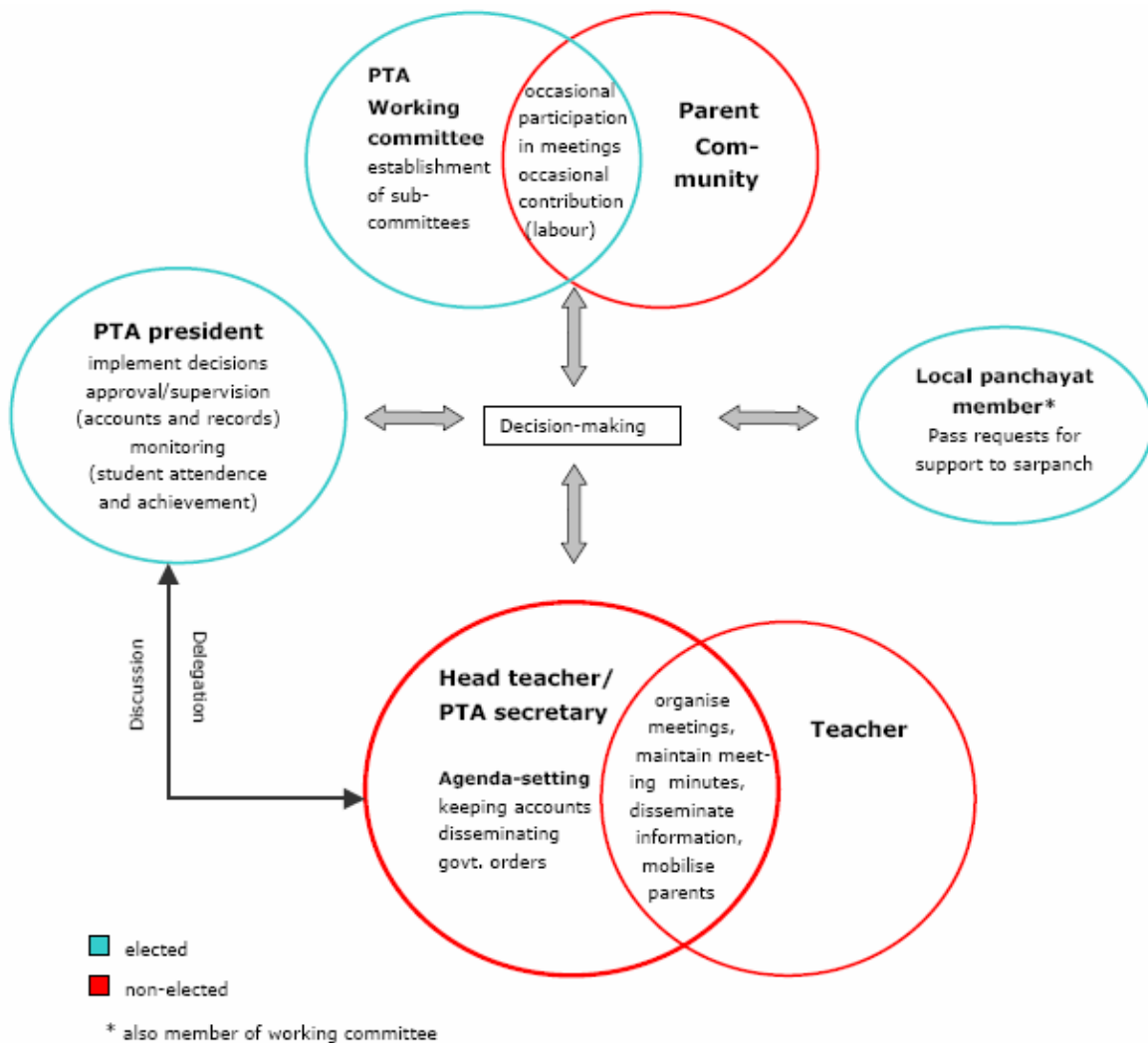
Source: Own

Teachers' preference to keep the level of formalisation and perceived individual commitment low reflected in the lack of information of parents about the institutional character of the PTA, its members and purpose, and, as a consequence, resulted in a division of labour which kept the school functional without any wider parental participation.

In addition, it should be noted that student attendance was of little concern to teachers due to high student attendance rates, and achievement of children was of little concern to parents, because both perceived the respective other to satisfactorily fulfil their responsibilities in this respect. Thus, practically, there was no pressing necessity for wider parent involvement.

The families of the two irregular children were approached by the PTA president and also invited to PTA meetings to discuss reasons of irregularity and low performance, but this required no planned mobilisation effort, in contrast to MS1, where the number of irregular students was so large that concerted strategy and delegation of tasks to different PTA members was necessary.

As a result, the division of functions in school governance, or the rules-in-use, differed significantly from what is envisioned in the JSN.

6.3.3.4   *Effects of lacking panchayat support*

Some of the problems of the negligence of monitoring and supporting responsibilities of the *gram panchayat* towards the school have been pointed out in the discussion of PS1. Since EGS1 belonged to the same *gram panchayat* constituency, the problems PS1 faced in terms of panchayat functioning and accountability towards villagers in general, and lacking support in mobilising parents to engage in the PTA in particular, were exacerbated by physical and social distance between the main and minor villages.

The problem was located in the lack of accessibility of the panchayat authorities (*sarpanch* and the panchayat secretary) to *panches* from the minor villages, rather than in a lack of linkage of the PTA to panchayat members within the village (both panchayat members were present in a PTA meeting once in a while, and were easily approachable by teachers or parents).

Three factors appeared to be important for intra-panchayat distribution of powers:
- Village- and caste-wise alliances in the panchayat
- The gap in socio-economic and educational status between panchayat members (capability gap)
- Lack of political mobilisation in the minor villages

Incidences of biased investment of public resources towards the area of residence of the *sarpanch* have been amply documented in the literature on *panchayti raj*[248]. This issue has surfaced in all panchayat constituencies visited during field research.

For the village in which EGS 1 is located, it seemed particularly unfortunate that not only did it constitute the smallest village in the panchayat area (with less representation), but also neither of the ex officio most powerful persons, viz. the *sarpanch*, *upsarpanch* or secretary, resided in the village.

The panchayat respondent complained that within an entire year since the elections, neither the *sarpanch, upsarpanch* nor panchayat secretary have visited the village, so as to get an impression about the state of infrastructure and priorities for village development[249].

The composition of the *gram panchayat* in terms of representation of villages was conducive to such neglect, in the sense that representatives from the main village were in a marginal majority. According to the panchayat member,

> "For us the problem is that the *panches* from the main village always hold the majority of votes. There are only six *panches* from the smaller villages, but seven from the main village. Even if we vote together we are always overruled by the *panches* from the main village. That's why all funds are used in the main village." (Interview member1/*panch*, 29th March 2006)

It should be noted that caste-wise majorities were less clearly distributed. The *panches* belonging to the *mewaras* and *balais* combined to a majority of 7, so the possibility of overruling the dominant *panches* from the main village existed. However, *panches* from the minor villages were obviously unable to translate this into decision-making beneficial to their villages and community members, possibly because it would have required open opposition towards the *sarpanch* on part of the *balai panch* in the main village, which entailed a high personal risk of losing social capital.

Furthermore, according to the panchayat respondent from the main village (PS1 wc member/*panch*), female members had few independent capacity to act, which especially affected the *balai panch*, whose husband was employed as agricultural labourer by the *sarpanch's* family.

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[248] cf. among others Manor 2001, Johnson 2003, Kumar/Behar 2002, Singh et.al 2003, Harriss 2001. In the villages under study it was obvious that *sarpanches* preferred investing in infrastructure in concentric circles around their own households. As funds are limited, the likelihood of reaching beyond the village of residence of the *sarpanch* (or in fact the areas of residence of other influential *panches*) decreases with distance. Interestingly, as Srivastava has pointed out, it seems that *sarpanches* from disadvantaged sections of the population resort to the same personal benefit-maximising behaviour widely observed among forward sections (cf. Srivastava 2005).

[249] It should be noted that the *sarpanch* contradicted this. He stated to occasionally visit the two minor villages to inspect the state of art and discuss with the *panches* on site (PS1 *sarpanch*, interview conducted at the *sarpanch*'s house on 13th April 2006).

In addition, the *panchayat* respondent from EGS1 alleged that panchayat members from the second adjoined village were not particularly interested in mobilising resources for public infrastructure, as basic amenities such as *pucca* roads, village lighting, and a sufficient number of handpumps had over time been provided independently of the *gram panchayat* by the wealthier general caste households. It appeared that these households had established paternalistic ties with the poorer population, in the sense that they provided basic amenities accessible to all in exchange for political acquiescence.

The second important cause of imbalance within the *gram panchayat* was the low socio-economic and educational status of *panches* from the two minor villages. While in the main village four panchayat members were educated up to secondary level (including the *sarpanch*), and only one was illiterate, there were two illiterate (both female) and two literate (primary level) *panches* from the second minor village, and two functionally illiterate *panches* from the village of EGS1.

The panchayat respondent emphasised that he felt severely restrained in his ability to act in the interest of his village by the lack of information about formal procedures, which information they were entitled to access, and whom to approach if access was denied to them.

This lack of capacity among a significant number of panchayat members was obviously being taken advantage of by *panches* from the main village, who decided on the use of resources without adherence to the rules prescribed for decision-making processes[250].

It has been pointed out that intransparency in the use of funds was an issue of concern to a panchayat respondent in the main village, too, and the dragging of *gram sabha*, in which the annual audit of accounts was due, was indicative that the *sarpanch* anticipated trouble.

Besides the fact that *panches* from the village of EGS1 were obviously not in a position to negotiate gains for their village in the *gram panchayat*, the lack of social mobilisation in the village appeared to be a problem intimately connected to this.

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[250] The panchayat member pointed out that in one of the last panchayat meetings the use of funds for road construction had been debated. According to him, the amount of funds was so small that it was clear it would not last to finish the main road in one of the larger villages. His suggestion to spend the money on paving the roads in his village, for which the fund might have lasted because the village is so small, was neither rejected nor approved of. Apparently the issue had been left pending without further discussion (let alone decision-making) of the use of funds. At the time of the interview the *panch* still did not know what happened to the 10000-15000 Rs released for public construction. In the mean time, the *sarpanch* pointed out that the main road passing the temple in the main village had been paved (but not finished because the panchayat ran out of funds).

It was difficult to understand why two illiterate males had been elected into the *gram panchayat* when there were at least five or six young men above the age of 21 with at least upper primary level education. The panchayat member did not contribute much to answer this question, except stating that the younger men in the village were not interested in being involved in the *gram panchayat*[251].

One of the factors negatively impeding on the degree of social and political mobilisation in the village of EGS1 appeared to be the combination of almost mono-caste population, homogeneously low socio-economic status among village elders, and the fact that eligibility to benefit from government programmes was restricted by universal land ownership. The distribution of BPL passes has been the most contested issue in all *gram panchayat* areas visited, and political mobilisation in villages, claims to transparency, issuing of complaints to higher level authorities, were all centred around this issue. The fact that in this village not a single household was eligible to BPL cards can reasonably be assumed to be an important reason why villagers have been found to be so little mobilised around local government issues.

This also found expression in the fact that *gram sabhas* did not take place in the village. Even though the Panchayati Raj Act prescribes *gram sabhas* to be held in each village of a *gram panchayat* constituency, and joint *gram sabhas* are mandatory only when issues concerning the entire constituency are at stake, the opposite seems to be practiced. Joint *gram sabhas* were observed to be the rule in most *gram panchayats*, and these were being held once in a quarter, while village-wise *gram sabhas* appeared to occur only when a conflict of interest between minor and major villages required the mobilisation of villagers and the coordination of *panches*.

According to the panchayat respondent, neither have *gram sabha* meetings been held since he had been elected into the panchayat, nor did he remember that this had ever happened before. In fact it appeared that he was not aware of this possibility at all. Village-wise *gram sabhas* are an opportunity for the smaller villages in the constituency to focus on their issues, which are in danger to be sidelined in joint *gram sabha* meetings. They also provide an opportunity to get the *sarpanch* into the village and confront him or her with particular problems and issues. However, for decisions taken or proposals passed in *gram sabhas* to be legally binding, the presence of the *sarpanch/upsarpanch* and the panchayat secretary is required. This is an obstacle to the empowerment of *gram sabhas* in cases where the leading troika is not easily approached by *panches* from the smaller villages.

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[251] This was confirmed by one of the concerned young men, who summed up his indifference towards lacking public infrastructure and public action on the matter in a single counter question: "*Kaun dhyan de*?" (Who cares?).

Keeping in mind the generally rudimentary level on which the *gram panchayat* functioned, it is not surprising that mobilisation around issues of education has not taken place, neither in the main nor in the smaller villages. In addition, the transfer of all input management to PTAs was an invitation to withdraw support in *gram panchayats* where the focus of activities was on utilisation of inputs.

Interestingly, while the shift of input management according to state and district level administrators had been initiated precisely to enable the midday meal to function independent of *gram panchayat* activities and interests, the case of EGS1 illustrates how much school functioning depends on panchayat support when PTAs fail.

In fact, it appears that not only the *gram panchayat*, but also the JSK did not feel responsible for filling the vacant post of the school cook in EGS1.

As a result, teachers were left alone with the final responsibility of providing a meal to the children. According to the female teacher, the provision of the midday meal in the school has been on the decline since the panchayat was restructured in 2005. She pointed out that while the *gram panchayat* was responsible for all children in its constituency, it failed to monitor the provision of benefits outside the main village, mainly because the *sarpanch* and secretary were not accessible easily to villagers from outside. According to the head teacher, solving the problem of the midday meal was not only impeded by the inactivity of the *gram panchayat* in the main village, but further hampered by the fact that there was basically no forum for addressing the issue in front of all parents, as almost no one attended PTA meetings, and no *gram sabha* was held in the village.

As a result, the school was deprived of panchayat support in two ways: by the general absence of school issues on the panchayat agenda (as a result of withdrawal of control over funds), and by the limited capacities of panchayat representatives from the village to put their issues on the agenda of the *gram panchayat*.

6.3.3.5 Conclusions

Parent participation in EGS1 suffered from a contradiction of what parents perceived they could reasonably be expected do to improve school functioning (ensuring student attendance and a minimum of supportive parenting practice, occasional contribution of labour and other resources), and what SSA policy expects them to do (implement government orders, monitor teacher performance and resource utilisation, generate additional resources for the school).

Under the prevalent conditions of low adult literacy levels, reliance on landholding for subsistence, and low expectations of/aspiration for upward social mobility connected to

education, there was little intrinsic motivation among parents to engage in the school, especially considering the high levels of satisfaction they expressed towards teacher performance and student learning achievement.

With respect to total enrolment and retention of children in the village, teachers and parents by means of informal cooperation have obviously been successful without the intervention of the PTA. Discontent with student attendance as a driving factor of teachers' motivation to mobilise parents (as observable in MS1 and, to a lesser extent in PS1) was absent, equally there was no parental dissatisfaction with teacher attendance and performance, which could have inclined parents to demand some control over proceedings in school.

The lack of support from the *gram panchayat*, but equally from higher levels of the school administration, impacted particularly negatively on the provision of the midday meal. In a setting were women were substantially involved in income generation, the incentive for preparing the midday meal was so low that without the authority of the *gram panchayat* in the back it was impossible to obligate someone from the village for this task.

Obviously, the expectation that parents would be the ones most concerned with the unobstructed provision of benefits to their children, which underlay the transfer of input management from the panchayats to the PTAs, does not hold under conditions when parents perceive the investment into the provision greater than the benefit itself (particularly because the midday meal was not discontinued, but provided by the teachers).

Further, the most central issue in education, student learning achievement, does not require any involvement of parents in input utilisation and management issues, but necessitates regular personal interaction between teachers and parents centred on the learning achievement of individual children. In a small school such as EGS1, there was clearly no need to establish such contact through a formal body like the PTA.

Fig. 32: Types of conditions by effect for PTA activity, EGS1
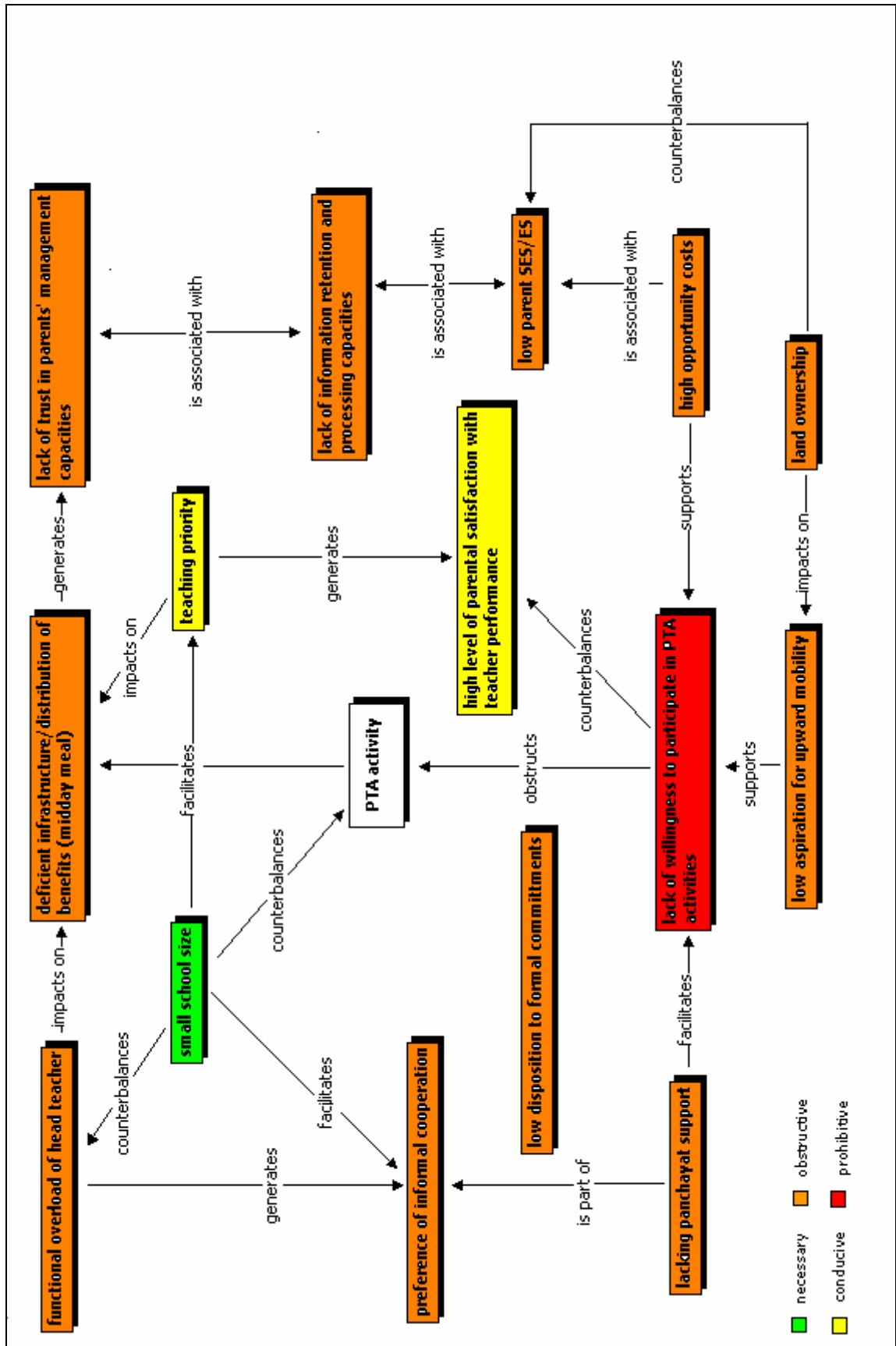
Source: Own

6.3.4 The Government Middle School in Cluster 2 (MS2)

The government middle school in Cluster 2 was something of a counterpart to MS1 in many respects. The PTA of MS2 was infamous for its inactivity up to the district level of educational administration for two reasons[252]. Firstly, the PTA had not been able to fulfil some of its basic responsibilities in ensuring adequate infrastructure, and was notorious for failing deadlines set for specific time-bound tasks.

Secondly, the dysfunctionality of the *gram panchayat* and desolate social structures characterised by low educational status of parents, high un- and underemployment, and male alcoholism, thus far had effectively hampered any effort to unite the community behind issues of common interest, including the state of educational facilities in the village. These problems were perceived by ZSK staff to be somewhat intrinsic to the character of villagers, a perception flavoured with tangible caste prejudice, as there were frequent comments about "these *lodhi* people" who were "drinking away the little they earn", and who were generally perceived to be "*bekar*" (useless).

In contrast to EGS1, where the lack of participation was partly rooted in general social inertia and a lack of mobilisation on local governance issues, local politics in the village of MS2 were deeply fragmented, and villagers were highly sensitised and mobilised on the issue of transparency in local governance and social service entitlements.

However, this increased awareness did not reflect in parental participation in the PTA, partly because the conflict in the *gram panchayat* revolved around issues that were vital for the immediate well-being of families (BPL status, welfare scheme benefits, water and sanitation). As a consequence, parents perceived the immediate stakes to involve in school to be low in relation to other concerns, and opportunity costs to be high in terms of expected outcomes. Teachers on the other hand, whose role in activating parents was argued to be so important in the previously discussed cases, clearly had no interest in mobilising parents to engage in the school in an atmosphere of mistrust, where villagers asserted demand for transparency and accountability, as will be elaborated in the following sections.

6.3.4.1   *Village Population, settlement structure and basic amenities*

MS2 is located in a medium-sized village 7 km south of the district headquarter of Sehore, in a distance of approximately 8 km from the JSK. The village had a population of 1264 persons living in 113 households in 2005[253]. It was the centre of a two-village

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[252] Information provided by the Gender Coordinator of the ZSK, Discussion on 25th February 2006.

[253] Source: Village Education Register 2005-06. The census of 2001 recorded 1955 persons in 329 households. This however included the population of the second village in the panchayat area. Both villages were separated

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gram panchayat constituency comprising of a combined population of 2114 persons. The gender gap (1:1.14) was considerably larger than in the villages in cluster 1 (1:1.06 on average).

The vast majority of families belonged to the *lodhi* caste (OBC). There were three *yadav* households (OBC) and two *malviya* (SC) households.

Most households in the village (apart from the *yadav* and a handful of *lodhi* families) relied on daily wage labour in construction and agriculture for their subsistence. This resulted in considerable migration to Budhni and Ashta blocks during the summer months, when there is no agricultural activity, and due to the lack of water construction is kept up only in the areas close to the Narmada river.

In terms of the socio-economic status of its population, the village was homogeneously poorer than the villages of MS1 and PS1, quite comparable to the village of EGS1, with the important difference that only roughly 15% of all families owned land[254]. As a result, the number of BPL status families was high at about 20% of all households. Villagers complained that many more families were eligible to BPL status, but have not been included in the listing process[255].

Adult illiteracy was high at about 56% among males and 80% among females above the age of 25[256].

At the upper end of the socio-economic scale were the owners of the local PDS shop and the liquor shop, as well as the owner of the grain mill and the few landowning families. Some households were supported by young male family members who migrated and found employment in the industrial centres of Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Ujjain.

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by an artificial lake in 2001 and became separate administrative entities. The number of household as recorded in the census is unrealistically high and contradicts local level data. It is most likely that this is due to an entry error.

[254] The village was inhabited mostly by families who had been expropriated of their land in the northwest of the city of Sehore in 1940 when the Bhopal Sugar Industries purchased land for opening a sugar factory. All these families were inadequately redressed, and their social status declined from small-scale landowning peasants to landless labourers. Part of the redress was the guarantee of employment in the factory, which provided the basis of subsistence to many families for generations. When it closed down in 2002, a large number of families were left without secure livelihoods. The decline of socio-economic status also found an expression in excessive increase in drug abuse. About 70% of all males in the village were estimated to be alcoholics by a key informant (member4), resulting in extremely uneven distribution of household level resource consumption to the detriment of women and children, as male earners spend large proportions of their daily wages on drinking and gambling. I am grateful to Makhan Singh, Samarthan Centre for Development Support, for providing this information.

[255] Irregularities in the beneficiary selection process and mobilisation of villagers around the issue will be discussed in some depth in the context of panchayat functioning.

[256] These estimates emerged from a social mapping process with members of three women's self-help groups conducted in the village on 27th February 2006.

A substantial number of families had been able to benefit from the *Indra Awas Yojna*, and had built semi-pucca houses from bricks, plaster, and tiles. These households belonged to the comparatively wealthier section of villagers.

Houses of the poorer families were made from mud and brick or mud and cement with thatched roofs. The only solid concrete buildings in the village were the government middle school and the community hall, which had just been constructed in 2005 from funds raised by the community with support of an NGO (Samarthan), which had contributed approximately one fourth of the costs.

Significantly, despite of being the centre of a *gram panchayat* constituency, there was no *gram panchayat* building or even office room in the village. This had very relevant logistic implications for villagers, as panchayat records were not kept in the village, but at the panchayat secretary's house in the district headquarters.

Access to the village was becoming weatherproof as the road to Sehore up to the Bhopal Indore highway was under construction under the *Pradhan Mantri Sadak Yojna* in the beginning of 2006.

Within the village, the first part of the main road up to the PDS shop was paved; towards the minor village belonging to he *gram panchayat* it was a broad dirt-and-gravel track. The smaller lanes in the village were mud paths. There was no landline phone connection, but there was mobile phone connectivity, and a number of the more affluent households owned mobile phones, which were used by other villagers in case of urgency.

Similar to the village of MS1, the wealthier households were located between the community hall and the PDS shop in the centre of the village. The poorest households were located towards the west.

The state of infrastructure was particularly dreadful with respect to drainage and sanitation, considering the size of the village.

There was neither open nor covered drainage, and only three households had private toilets. This led to considerable health hazard particularly during monsoon, due to the pollution of standing water with faeces and uncontrolled progeny of mosquitoes, resulting in a high incidence of malaria. Access to save drinking water however was decent, with twelve handpumps (three of them not functional), three wells and five water reservoirs spread over the village.

Besides a PDS store, there were two shops in the village. One was a small general store selling items from toffees to soap; the other was a liquor and cigarettes shop. Dairy products were available on the southeastern edge of the adjoined village in a distance of about 2km.

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Fig. 33: Village of MS2
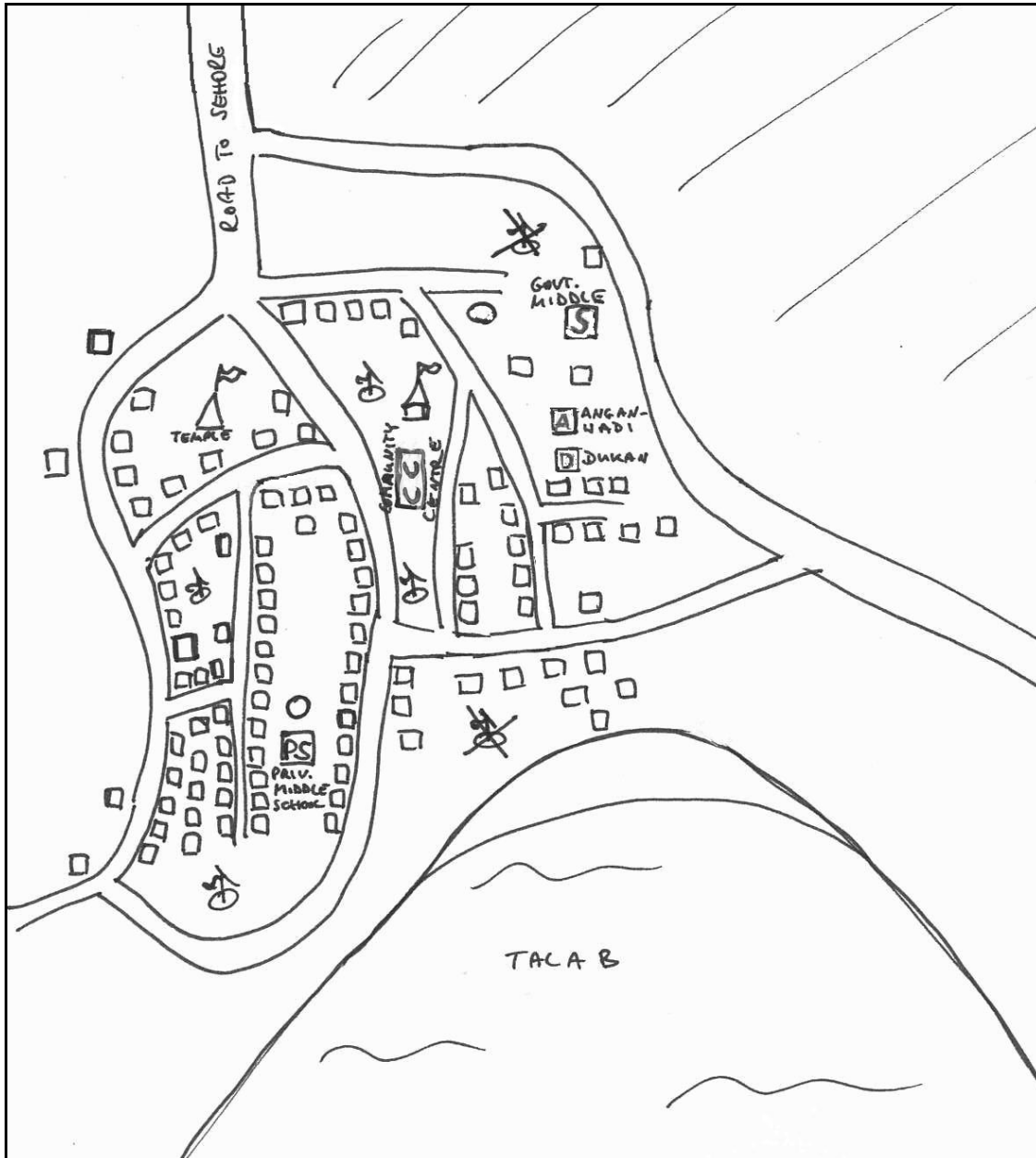
Source: Village map painted on a wall of the community building

Apart from the government middle school, a private unrecognised middle school operated in the village. It had been opened in 2002 by an unemployed business graduate.

A government-run *anganwadi* operated in a rented building in the village, in which according to the village education register all children in the age group of 3-5 were enrolled. Attendance, however, was significantly lower. According to the *anganwadi* worker, many parents enrolled their children because they receive a certain amount of *daliya* (wheat porridge) per day. While actually *daliya* should be served as a cooked meal, rations were given to mothers of enrolled children in irregular intervals, and

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parents were stated to often refrain from sending their children to the _anganwadi_ after _daliya_ rations were received[257].

6.3.4.2   _Indicators of school functioning in the government middle school_[258]

Enrolment and students' socio-economic background

426 students were enrolled in the school in the academic year 2005-06. The primary section was larger with 262 students than the upper primary section, in which 164 students were enrolled. The proportion of girls in primary and upper primary sections was 47.4% and 47.5% respectively. A significant gender gap at upper primary level, as observed in MS1, did not exist in MS2.

The socio-economic composition of the student body reflected that of the village population at the primary level. At the upper primary level, the proportion of children from SC communities was higher, because children from surrounding villages were enrolled in the upper primary section (including one child belonging to the scheduled tribes). The proportion of students from other villages was high at upper primary level (almost 50%). This makes it more difficult to make statements about students' socio-economic background, as it was impossible to visit all the villages from which student commuted and collect information about the families of students enrolled in MS2. It was obvious, however, that students backgrounds were more mixed at the upper primary levels, as some of the middle school students were noticeably better equipped than others with clothing, school bags, and the like. Many students at the primary level were obviously from very poor households. A large number of these children were very small in height, wore very shabby clothes and no shoes or slippers, and the light colour and elflock texture of their hair indicated malnourishment.

Table 42: Child population (5-14) and enrolment in MS2 by caste and gender, MS2

	SC			ST			OBC			GEN			
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	**all**
village	2	1	3	-	-	-	147	135	282	-	-	-	285
MS2(prim)	2	1	3	-	-	-	136	123	259	-	-	-	262
MS2(middle)	16	16	32	-	1	1	70	60	130	-	1	1	164

Source: _Jan shiksha register_ 2005-06, form 3

MS2 had extremely high grade-wise enrolment, which peaked at 74 children in first grade and 60 children in fifth grade; all other grades except fourth had enrolment above 40.

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[257] Conversation with the _anganwadi_ worker in the _anganwadi_ premises, 17th March 2006.

[258] All data presented here refer to the school year 2005-06 unless indicated otherwise

The situation was similar at the upper primary stage, with enrolment in grade 6-8 ranging between 45 and 63 students.

While large class sizes were found in MS1, too, with enrolment in 6th grade being as high as 77 students, the situation in MS2 was aggravated by the fact that it had to cope with an exorbitant lack of teachers. Measured against the standard STR of 40:1 as per SSA norms, the school was lacking three teachers, two at primary and one at upper primary level.

In this situation it was particularly unhelpful that one of the primary level teachers was deputed to another school in the cluster for almost 70% of the school year, while another was on other duties in the *sankul kendra* for 90% of all school days. Thus teachers had to arrange multi-grade settings on a regular basis with classes in which enrolment was exceedingly high, anyhow.

In addition to this, the school utterly lacked space for teaching large numbers of children. There were only three classrooms and one veranda (the latter not weatherproof) for teaching 8 grades, most of which had enrolment above 45 children. This resulted in children being virtually stacked in classrooms, while the lowest grades often switched to the open space and gathered under a tree along with a teacher (which was definitely a more inspiring learning environment than a dark and dull classroom with nothing in it beside the teacher's tesk and a blackboard).

According to the PTA president, the lack of space was the result of repeated delays in the release of funds for construction under SSA, and ever increasing enrolment in the school[259].

A new building comprising three classrooms and a veranda had been completed in the beginning of 2006, however when field research was conducted in February and March, these new class rooms were still not in use, because they were not yet painted.

Dissatisfaction with the state of infrastructure and teaching-learning conditions in the government school drove a number of parents, across all levels of income, to enrol children in the local private school.

Enrolment in the private school according to its manager fluctuated significantly from year to year, which was due to the fact that parents often re-enrolled their children in the government school when they found they could not afford the costs of fees, textbooks, etc., or to reap the benefits provided to students in government schools (uniforms for girl

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[259] Delay in the release of funds is a common malady in the provision of public goods and services. It is hard to detect at which level funds were held back in individual cases. Monitoring reports on the status of SSA indicate that the release of funds is mostly delayed between the state, district and block levels (cf. TISS Monitoring Report, 2006).

students, free textbooks). Currently the school had 65 children enrolled, which was a decline of more than 45% compared to the previous year[260].

Four teachers (including the manager) were employed in the school at extremely low salary levels (between 500-700 Rs per month, depending on the school's cash position). The school according to the manager catered to very poor as well as comparatively better off families. Boys' enrolment was tangibly higher than girls' enrolment (41:24), which again reflected biased parental investment, but according to the private school manager was also related to the distribution of uniforms to girls in the government school.

Many of those parents who enrolled their children in the private school found it difficult to afford the fees of 40 Rs a month, and as a consequence sent their children back to the government school in the course of the school year. Usually, children were sent to the government school in the beginning of the academic year until they received student incentives, viz. uniforms and textbooks, by mid-August. Then they were shifted to the private school, because parents hoped their children would be better able to learn and catch up so they could pass examinations, again in the government school, by the end of the year. One of these parents stated:

> "I had both my children enrolled in the private school last year. They teach well I the private school. I was afraid my son might not be able to pass the 5th grade examination, that's why. But then paying 80Rs a month for school fees, and the textbooks, the notebooks and pencils on top of it was too much. That's why I put them back into the government school." (MS2 member4, 23rd March 2006)

All of this according to the head teachers of both the private and the government school happened without parents giving notice to the head teacher of the government school. An indefinite part of high student absence in the government school was caused by this practise of temporarily shifting students to the private school.

While teachers tended to interpret this tactic as '*makkari*' (wilful deceit)[261], it appeared to be an expression of parents' desperation to have their children benefit from some meaningful education under severe investment constraints. This resulted in a peculiar form of involuntary public-private-partnership in education, with the private school acting as a kind of remedial teaching provider for the government school.

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[260] Interview MS2 private school manager, 28th March 2006 in the private school premises.

[261] The manager of the private school made the following statement: "The people in this village are 90% frauds. They all seek their own personal benefit, and afterwards they buzz off without paying the price. How can you run a school under such conditions?" (MS2 private school manager, 28th March 2006)

Teacher qualification and attendance

As mentioned above, availability and attendance of teaching personnel was a severe problem in MS2. Even though throughout the school year there were nine teachers employed, there were actually no more than seven teachers in school at any point of time. On roughly 70% of all school days, six or less teachers were present to teach all eight grades[262].

Teachers and parents consistently stated that the children in the upper primary section were usually taught grade-wise by three teachers, while multi-grade teaching was the norm at primary level. This means that three or less teachers were responsible for teaching 262 children, which makes a student teacher ratio of 1:87 or higher.

Due to the deputation of two teachers for successive months, and prolonged medical leaves, there was frequent change in the composition of the teaching staff, and consequently in the responsibilities of teachers for specific grade levels.

The head teacher was removed from the school in October 2005 because of prolonged illness, and one of the upper primary section assistant teachers succeeded him.

To compensate for the deputation of a primary teacher to the *sankul kendra* for the entire school year, a primary level teacher from another school in the cluster was deputed to MS2 in September. Since her appeal against the deputation was approved, she was absent in MS2 from October 2005 to February 2006.

To make up for this loss again, an untrained contract teacher was employed by the *gram panchayat* as a substitute teacher for the primary level from November 2005 to February 2006, when the teacher on deputation returned to the school[263]. This means that within

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[262] The PTA president has confirmed that 5-6 teachers were usually present in the school. Interestingly, he perceived this to be an indicator of teacher regularity and a decent level of school functioning – he thought that only 7 teachers were employed in the school, while actually there were nine teachers on the salary list. This indicates that even elected members of the working committee indeed have little clue about the standards set by SSA.

[263] The system of transfer of government employees in general, and teachers in particular, is one of the largest bribe systems in India. Transfers are often legally objected by teachers, which has obviously happened in this case. Here, the objection to the transfer was justified, because the primary school where the teacher was posted was left with 77 students of all grade levels and a single teacher. There were other schools in the urban parts of cluster 2, however, where there were as many as three surplus teachers (as reported in the cluster education plan 2006-07). One may wonder why these have not been transferred to the schools grappling with severe teacher shortages. The DEO has pointed out in this context that teachers fiercely defend their postings in urban areas, which are heavily contested, and due to exceedingly time-consuming legal procedures the district administration is often not able to fill teaching positions in schools at the time of need. This was stated to be one of the major reasons why the government planned to introduce non-transferable fixed-term contracts for all newly recruited teachers (Interview DEO conducted on 17th April 2006 at the DEO office).

one school year, three trained teachers were withdrawn from the school, and the loss was compensated with a single untrained teacher.

This, in combination with high student absence rates and lack of systematic planning on how to tackle shortages in personnel, must be assumed to have severely impacted the teaching-learning process, especially in the primary section.

Table 43: Teacher attendance July 05-April 06, MS2

status	section	training	medical leave	O.D. (incl. meetings)	C.L	total days of absence	% of total school days (213)
head teacher (- Okt.05)	middle	23	42	8	9	72	74.0
assistant teacher/ head teacher (Nov.05-)	middle	22	0	17	6	35	15.0
contract teacher class 2	middle	9	15	0	13	37	16.1
contract teacher class 2	middle	1	0	0	9	10	4.3
assistant teacher	primary	7	0	201 (transfer)	0	208	90.4
assistant teacher	primary	18	0	7	6	31	13.5
assistant teacher	primary	20	15	6	14	55	25.8
assistant teacher	primary	5	6	2	12	25	11.7
assistant teacher (Oct. 05-)	primary	0	0	140 (transfer)	2	142	67.0
contract teacher class 3 (Nov. 05-Feb.06)	primary	7	0	3	4	14	13.1

Source: Teacher Attendance Register 2005-06

In terms of qualification, in MS2 there were a larger number of teachers who did not hold education diploma or higher degrees than in MS1.

In fact, three assistant teachers (including the head teacher) had just finished their D.Ed. training in the DIET in July 2005, and one other primary level assistant teacher had not yet started the D.Ed. programme. Considering the bad reputation of DIETs and the quality of their trainings, however, this does not necessarily mean that trained teachers are better qualified than untrained teachers (especially when the latter hold a degree in their subjects, but not in education).

It should be noted that obtaining data related to teachers in MS2 was quite difficult, as teachers here were extremely cautious, and mistrust towards the intentions of my inquiries and the fear of being externally evaluated were tangible throughout the entire period of research.

This made it particularly difficult to extract any meaningful information from teachers with concern to school functioning in general, and PTA functioning in particular.

The _jan shikshak_ of cluster 2, in the context of teachers' unwillingness to make their attendance records available, indirectly pointed to the possibility that teachers in MS2

"may have something to hide", indicating that irregularities in the school were known or at least suspected by the cluster level administration.

Student attendance and achievement

Student attendance was dismal as compared to the schools under study in cluster 1. In MS1, where student attendance was a severe problem, too, there was a steady rise in attendance with increasing grades. In MS2 in contrast, there was a sharp decline in 3rd and 4th grade. Responses of parents indicated that the decision to shift children to the private school was often taken in these grade levels, if parents felt children's learning achievement was deficient, because they wanted their children to have enough time to catch up before the 5th grade board examination.

As can be seen in the table below, the vast majority (73.8%) of all students attended less than 60% of all school days throughout the academic year 2005-06.

Table 44: Average student attendance by grade, MS2

	average attendance primary grades							average attendance upper primary grades*				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	all grades		6th	7th	8th	all grades	total
no. of students	74	47	43	38	60	262	100%	63	56	45	164	426
below 40%	7	4	12	10	6	39	14.9%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
40 - 60%	26	9	27	25	17	154	58.9%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
60 - 70%	25	12	4	3	9	53	20.2%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
70 - 80%	16	15	0	0	15	46	17.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
above 80%	4	7	0	0	12	23	8.8%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
av. attendance rate	59.9	68.2	45.2	44.7	62.9		56.5	65.1	75.0	73.0	70.7	66.8

* data incomplete

Source: student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

As a result of the lack of usable classrooms, the school was organised in morning and afternoon shifts from August 2005 onwards[264].

According to the teachers, the first and second grades and the third and fourth grades were usually taught together, while the fifth grade was taught separately. At the upper primary level the situation was different, as teachers taught different grades by subject, rather than being assigned to a single grade.

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[264] The decision to operate the school in shifts was taken in a PTA meeting conducted on 4th August 2005. This has obviously not been communicated to higher levels, as neither the cluster education plan 2006-07 nor the school report cards of 2005-06 and 2006-07 categorise the school as shift school. This is important because one of the quality improvement measures of the RSK is the abolition of shift schools.

Student attendance according to teachers strongly depended on the cycle of agricultural production, and was stated to decrease significantly during the wheat and soybean harvesting seasons. According to the student attendance register, however, student absences were spread more or less evenly across the year.

There were two types of student absentees: Those who attended irregularly throughout the entire year, and those who attended rather regularly for a part of the year, and then hardly attended at all for successive months.

En bloc absences were caused by the practise of parallel enrolment of children in government and private school, where attendance in one school automatically causes absence in the other, and by labour migration. Given that there were only few joint family households in the village, most parents had little option to leave the children in the village for successive months so as to enable their attendence in school.

Children who were engaged in agricultural activity usually attended less in harvesting months, but did not quit going to school altogether for a longer period.

It is important to note that absences were almost equally distributed among girls and boys, boys accounting for 54.5% of students with attendance less than 50% of all school days. This indicates that both pull-out (migration, agricultural activity, temporary enrolment in private school) and push-out factors (low level of teaching activity, lack of functional classrooms) impacted boys and girls equally.

With respect to student achievement, different sources of official data were quite contradictive. Generally, it was evident that student achievement was much lower at the primary than at the upper primary stage. This reflected in high failure rates in the 5th grade board examination: Out of 60 children enrolled in 5th grade barely half (32) passed the examination. The pass rates were significantly higher at upper primary level (35 out of 43, 81.4%).

Repetition mostly occurred in the first grade (10) and the 5th grade (21). It was much lower in the upper primary grades (3 in 6th and 7th grade respectively, and 8 in 8th grade). This was quite atypical. In MS1 as well as in the other middle schools in cluster 1 and cluster 2 repetition peaked in 6th grade (when students needed to accustom to the proficiency level of the upper primary stage) and in 8th grade[265]. Several complementary factors had an impact on student achievement: Firstly, at the upper primary level a large number of students (especially those commuting from other villages) belonged to wealthier and higher educated households than the majority of children residing within the locality. Secondly, the student-teacher-ratio was lower, and classes were taught grade-wise. Thirdly, student achievement in the primary section was negatively affected

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[265] Information as provided in the school report cards. School report cards of all government recognised schools in India are available at http://www.schoolreportcards.in/.

by exceedingly irregular student attendance especially in the 3rd and 4th grades, the high fluctuation of teachers due to deputation, and possibly a lack of motivation to teach among primary level teachers, as reported by parents.

Responses of parents concerning teacher performance and student learning achievement were mixed and sometimes contradictive. While respondents from the PTA working committee asserted the familiar argument that deficiencies in student achievement were primarily a cause of teachers' non-teaching duties, which reduced their time spent teaching in the classroom, other parent respondents were more critical. One mother brought forward the following view:

> "These teachers are very smart. They take it easy - if four teachers are there, then two will be teaching and the other two will be taking a brake. How can the children be taught properly this way? Many of them cannot even read properly when they go for the examination in grade 5." (MS2 member4, 23rd March 2006)

The school cook (wife of the PTA president) mentioned that not all teachers were absent often or not teaching the children, but a couple of them (two of the three female teachers) were hardly ever present in school. My own impression confirms this - I have actually met two of the three female teachers posted in the school for the first time on occasion of the end-of-year examinations in mid-April, one and a half months after my first visit to the village.

Low levels of teaching activity were observed in most schools (including those visited but not selected for the case studies[266]) except MS1 and EGS1. In fact, the low achievement levels of students in states with high enrolment and retention figures (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, cf. ASER 2005) attest to the fallacy of assuming that it is enough to ensure student and teacher attendance for learning to take place.

The private school manager made some illuminating remarks on the problem of low student achievement in government schools. He asserted that most teachers posted in MS2 were formally qualified teachers, and in fact he stated that their classes in terms of teaching method and pedagogy were of much higher quality than most private school classes (something difficult to imagine, given the observed tendency to keep children busy with self-study assignments rather than actively teaching).

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[266] I visited a government primary school in a village cluster 1 (23rd February 2006) which was awarded a price for extraordinary levels of student achievement in 2006. While observing a social studies class with students of 4th grade (the teacher entered the classroom and started teaching *after* I reached there and had a short initial conversation with him) I had the impression that the teaching style was rather dull and uninteresting – the teacher had students read passages from the textbook, and then asked questions of students. Some questions related to reading comprehension, some went somewhat beyond the text (giving local examples for the issue discussed in the text). Nevertheless, this appeared to be as active as teaching gets, and it is not unreasonable to assume that students get less attention and personal address of teachers in many schools.

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The problem as perceived by him was that teachers did not take care that all children kept pace with progress in class. While the regular and 'bright' children learned well, a large number of children were left behind, and these were unable to catch up in the absence of targeted remedial measures and efforts to increase regular student attendance.

As a result, there was a similar division of labour between the government school and the private school as observed in PS1: The private school served as a catch basin for many of those children who did not succeed in the government school. In contrast to PS1, however, and largely due to economic constraint, private enrolment appeared to be an interim rather than a permanent solution to many parents, a measure of remedial teaching until they felt their children have caught up with the progress in their respective grades in the government school.

The fact that virtually nothing was done to increase student attendance and initiate compensatory measures for weak students related to the absolute inactivity of the PTA in that matter, as will be discussed in more detail below. For developing an adequate understanding of the functioning of the PTA, however, it is necessary to devote some space to the particularities of the state of local government in the village and some of its effects on the functioning of the PTA.

6.3.4.3 Effects of a devided local government on collective action and the functioning of stakeholder groups[267]

The functioning of the *gram panchayat*, under the jurisdiction of which both MS2 and PS2 fell, was characterised by complete standstill due to a motion of no-confidence against the *sarpanch,* which was pending at the *zilla panchayat* during the time of field study.

The application of this last resort of *panchayati raj* legislation was the result of a process of increasing alienation between the majority of villagers and panchayat representatives, and the *sarpanch* and a group of affiliates in- and outside the panchayat. Increasing irregularities in the allocation of funds and benefits from government schemes (BPL cards[268], *Indira Awas Yojna*, distribution of rations from the Public Distribution System),

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[267] It is important to note that for information about the panchayat, I relied exclusively on the statements of respondents who belonged to opposition front against the *sarpanch*. Despite of several attempts to win over the *sarpanch* for an interview, he refused to participate, which was indicative of the pressure he was under. Thus the information presented here is necessarily biased towards the perspective of opponents.

[268] The determination of the number of families living below the poverty line is based on household surveys conducted by government officers. Villagers who apply for BPL ration cards fill out a form in which data on their income, levels of consumption, private amenities etc. is queried. Indicators are scaled by a system of points (i.e. one point for a certain level of consumption of oil and other basic nutrients, one point for the ownership of

and the reluctance of the *sarpanch* and panchayat secretary to provide villagers with information about deadlines for appeals to the block and district authorities, led to growing unrest and ultimately resistance in the village.

According to a panchayat respondent from the minor village, the panchayat had been 'run' by a small number of families affiliated to the operators of the PDS shop for a long time. Their strategy of establishing patronage ties with successive panchayat secretaries enabled them to influence the utilisation of panchayat resources along the lines of their personal interest, to the neglect of the larger part of the panchayat area. He pointed out that allocations for public infrastructure (i.e. paved roads) were centred on the area in which these villagers lived.

Similarly, villagers were left in the dark about government programmes implemented through the *gram panchayat* for a long time. Thus, benefits were distributed, irrespective of actual eligibility, among persons standing close to the respective *sarpanch* and *panches*[269].

A panchayat member expressed distress about such practices, stating that it was incomprehensible why the weakest and poorest households were deliberately excluded from any benefit, including BPL listing and PDS ration cards, as well as widow pension. He asserted:

> "No one in the village understands why the two-three poorest families did not get a BPL card or an *Indira Awas* house. No one would have opposed that. Who knows why they act that way." (MS2 member 7/panch, 11th March 2006)

Acquiescence of villagers seized throughout the current panchayat term due to a number of factors. Firstly, the *sarpanch* seat was reserved for the scheduled castes, and some villagers expressed they had nurtured the hope that a *sarpanch* who thus far had *not* been allied with the dominant circle of villagers would be inclined to press for a more equitable allocation of panchayat resources.

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a bicycle, three points for the ownership of a television etc.). Families scoring below 14 points are rated as living below the poverty line and are entitled to ration cards which enable them to buy subsidised foods via local PDS (public distribution system) stores, commonly known as 'PDS shops' or 'control'. In addition, holders of BPL cards have easier access to other government schemes such as the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (REGS) or the *Indira Awas Yojna* (IAY). When the lists were first announced to people through the *gram panchayats,* complaints about irregularities were submitted to the *zilla panchayats* throughout the entire state. Because of the reluctance of local officers to make the lists and forms of appeal available to villagers, a second period for appeal was conceded by the state government (Information provided by Shafiq Khan, regional coordinator of Samarthan Centre for Development Support, 24th April 2006). For a critique of earlier BPL assessment methods see Jalan/Murgai 2007.

[269] Information provided by PS2 panch in an interview on 12th March 2006.

Secondly, with the passing of the Right to Information (RTI) Act by the Central Government in the beginning of the year 2005, civil society groups in the state had begun to mobilise citizens to make use of this right and demand accountability of local government institutions and administration. Samarthan, which had started establishing relations with both villages in the *gram panchayat* from 2005 onwards, resulting in the formation of a youth group, several women's self-help groups, and a panchayat water and sanitation committee, supported villagers in their quest for accountablity of the gram panchayat.

According to the consistent statements of several panchayat members from the main as well as the minor village, the panchayat had functioned smoothly during the first ten months after its election - meetings were announced to all panchayat members, and *gram sabhas* took place in the prescribed frequency.

However, proceedings were complicated by the fact that there was no panchayat building or even office room in the village - all panchayat records were kept at the house of the secretary, who resided in the district town of Sehore. Not only did this mean that villagers had to travel some 8km for every little work they needed to get done through the panchayat, but also that elected panchayat members, including the *sarpanch,* did not have unconstrained access to panchayat records, accounts, cashbooks, etc.

A panchayat respondent pointed out that the *sarpanch* was completely unexperienced in local politics, and had no ambition to get active in the *gram panchayat* until the reservation of the *sarpanch* seat required the candidacy of a member of the scheduled castes:

> "In the beginning, the *sarpanch* was supported by all villagers as candidate. His is the only *harijan* household in the village, and we wanted someone from inside the village to be elected. There was another candidate who belonged to another village. It may be that he was better qualified, but we supported our own candidate. It was only later that many people turned against the *sarpanch* because there were so many irregularities." (member 6/panch, 11th March 2006)

The lack of experience of the *sarpanch* apparently resulted in his blind reliance on the advice of the panchayat secretary and one or two other panchayat members, who had prior experience in the *gram panchayat*.

> "The *sarpanch* is a weak and simple man, and the secretary is the link to all that is going on in the village" (member 6/panch, 11th March 2006).

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When PTA members complained about irregularities in the midday meal supplies, especially in PS2[270], a number of *panches* demanded to see the cashbooks of the panchayat. After having been given the runaround several times, villagers submitted a proposal for a special *gram sabha* in which they demanded to see all financial records of the *gram panchayat,* which however was rejected on formal grounds by the district administration. As a result of growing mistrust within the *gram panchayat*, meetings were not announced to all panchayat members anymore towards the end of 2005.

Finally, the next regular *gram sabha* meeting in January 2006 unleashed open hostility between villagers over the issue of irregularities in the BPL-list, which ultimately resulted in a motion of no-confidence against the *sarpanch*[271].

It should be noted that the majority of panchayat members who initiated resistance against the *sarpanch* and panchayat secretary were first time incumbents, and the educational status of most of them was low (primary level or illiterate). They had little experience with filing applications and issuing complaints to higher level authorities, and their access to information was limited. This indicates that the lack of unrestricted and equitable access to information is a major impediment to panchayat accountability. Obstructed access to information also was a problem for the functioning of the PTA in MS2, as will be discussed in some detail in the following sections.

6.3.4.4 *Parent-Teacher-Association: Composition, parent participation, and scope of activities*

Composition of working committee, frequency of meetings and parent participation

The PTA of the primary section in MS2 had 260 parent members. Elections had been conducted in the first meeting of the academic year 2005-06. As the quorum for the constituent meeting (1/3 of all members) was failed, the meeting had to be postponed

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[270] It is surprising that these incidents have not been mentioned as points of discussion in PTA meeting minutes in either school. According to panchayat respondents, the midday meal issue was perceived to be a problem of lacking accountability of the *sarpanch* to villagers in general, and thus required action on part of panchayat members rather than PTA members. In addition, villagers were not sure if teachers were in any way involved in the irregularities, and perceived it unfavourable to raise the issue in PTA meetings. This indicates how difficult it is for villagers to raise issues potentially threatening to teachers.

[271] By mid 2006, the panchayat secretary was suspended because of his refusal to publicise the panchayat cashbook. After the presentation of the cashbook in a *gram sabha,* a case was filed against the *sarpanch* at the Sub-district Magistrate (SDM) Court. Given the long delays of trials in lower courts the case has not been heard by the end of 2007.

for half an hour, so as to render the quorum requirement ineffective. Parent participation in the constituent meeting was tangibly lower in MS2 (18) than in MS1 (29), resulting in a situation where two thirds of all present parents needed to be convinced to get elected into the working committee.

Similar to what has been observed in PS1, none of the female members except the vice-president signed the election minutes, indicating that their husbands, who were present in the meeting, approved of the election in their place (and possibly without their consent, or even information).

Educational attainment of elected members was low in the working committee of the primary section PTA. It was slightly higher in the upper primary section PTA, where the president had passed 8th grade, and only four members were completely illiterate.

Table 45: Working Committee members in the primary section PTA by caste, gender and educational status, MS2

PTA working committee 05-06	gender	caste/ community	educational status	No. of attended meetings
president	m	OBC (lodhi)	5th	16
vice president	f	SC (balai)	5th	4
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	0
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	10
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	2
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	0
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	0
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	1
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	2
member	f	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	0
member	f	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	0
member	f	SC (balai)	illiterate	5

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

Low participation in PTA meetings among elected members was striking. As table 36 reveals, only two working committee members attended meetings regularly. The picture was similarly bleak in the upper primary section PTA, where the PTA president and one female working committee member were the only regular participants in meetings.

Apart from the two each members of the working committees of both sections[272], there were four other parents who participated in more than 50% of all meetings. Notably, three of them were *gram panchayat* members.

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[272] It should be noted that even though both PTAs are supposed to function independently, meetings were conducted jointly, and in fact in MS2 a separate meeting register for the primary section was introduced only in January 2006, because its lack was admonished during an inspection.

The vast majority of participants in meetings (including both elected and non-elected members) participated between one and four times throughout the school year. As depicted in figure 34, participation was highest in the first two meetings and ranged between 6 and 15 throughout the rest of the year, with an upward outlier on the first meeting in 2006 (22 participants), when the responsibility of the distribution of the midday meal was shifted from the *gram panchayat* to the primary section PTA.

Meetings were conducted in the prescribed frequency (twice a month) up to September 2005. In the following months only one meeting was held, in fact in March not a single meeting was recorded.

Fig. 34 Participation in PTA meetings among different groups of members, MS2
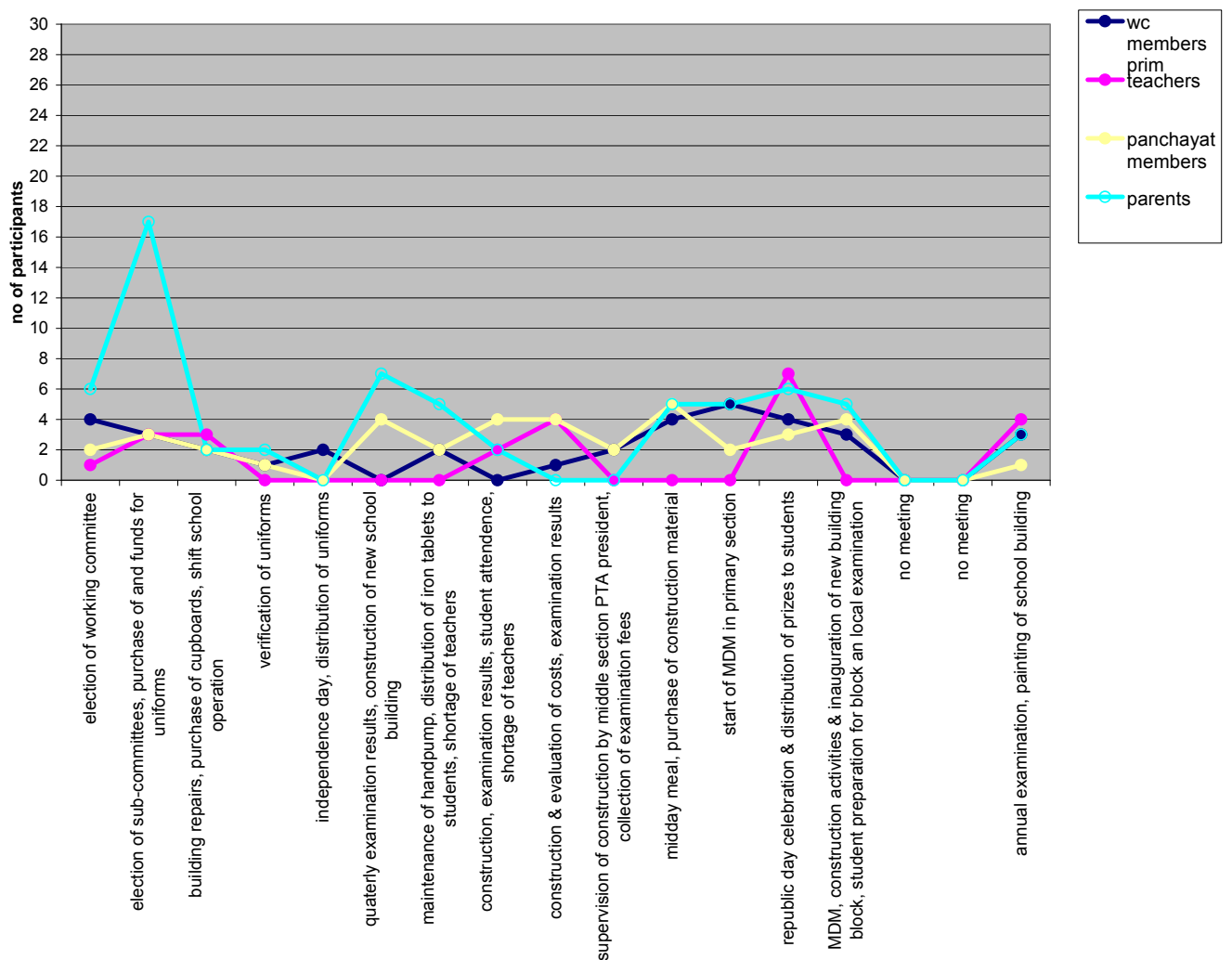
Source: PTA meeting minutes

There was notable incongruence between the statements of teachers and the PTA president with respect to the scope of parent participation in PTA meetings on one side, and participation levels as recorded in the meeting minutes, on the other. Teachers and the PTA president stated that parental participation was quite regular, with 20-25

participants in PTA meetings on average. The head teacher added that during peak harvesting seasons parent attendance can be significantly less. According to the meeting minutes (where parent participation thus far has been observed to be inflated rather than understated), average participation in meetings was 12 parents, and no decline in participation in peak harvesting seasons was indicated. I am not going to repeat my concerns about the reliability of meeting minutes with respect to real participation of parents, but it appears very unlikely that meeting minutes would reflect *less* participation than what has actually taken place.

It was evident in MS2 that the election of the working committee was largely a paper exercise, which concealed the actual domination of the body by those villagers who exert control over other public institutions in the village, too.

The notable extent of panchayat members' involvement in PTA meetings deserves some attention. Those panchayat members who regularly attended PTA meetings belonged to the pro-*sarpanch* faction, indicating their intention to be in control over public institutions in the village. The PTA vice president, in fact, was the wife of the *sarpanch*. It was repeatedly alleged by villagers that the head teacher and the *sarpanch* had an agreement of mutual tolerance with respect to the misuse of school resources for personal benefit: The head teacher refrained from taking action against the *sarpanch* with respect to the misappropriation of food stocks for the midday meal, and in turn the *sarpanch* refrained from inducing the panchayat to exercise its monitoring powers, and did not intervene with the collection of questionable fees[273] and consumption of part of the school contingency funds by teachers.

One of the panchayat members, who had been involved in mobilising opposition against the *sarpanch*, stated:

> "The head teacher takes care to maintain good relations with the *sarpanch* so he can run the school the way he wants to." (member6/panch, 11th March 2006)

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[273] A couple of parent respondents in this context mentioned that teachers demanded contributions of parents without telling them the purpose of collecting money (member 2), or giving them a receipt (member 4). "Once the teachers told parents they have to bring 30 Rs per child to the school. But they did not tell us why. So I went there and asked the master to give me a receipt for the money and to write on it what the fee is for. He very politely pleaded me not to create any trouble, but he did not give me the receipt." (member 4, 19th March 2006)

Another parent recounted that money had been collected from parents to provide school uniforms for the boys (who do not receive uniforms under SSA), but stated that the children never received the uniforms. "Afterwards they said that boys don't get any uniforms anyhow. Who knows what happened to the money." (member 2, 18th March 2006)

In such a setting, the position of the PTA president became particularly unattractive. It was tangible that he was under continuous scrutiny of the *sarpanch* and a couple of panchayat members, especially during my visits in the village.

The position of the PTA president of the primary section was particularly unfavourable because he was no unknown quantity himself: Even though he was not a member of the *gram panchayat* or any other committee, he earned part of his living by acting as *thekedar* (local contractor) in the village, and as such depended on the cooperation with the *gram panchayat* for part of his income.

This intermediary position between villagers (among whom employment opportunities in the village were heavily contested) and the panchayat (as virtually the only local employer apart from the few landowning families) probably became increasingly uncomfortable with growing discontent among villagers with the state of local governance. The dependence on the *gram panchayat* made the PTA president particularly vulnerable to pressure exerted by some of its representatives, and many parents suspected him to somehow benefit from his position in exchange for acquiescence with the misappropriation of funds by panchayat members and (possibly) teachers.

It is important to note that teachers' reluctance to mobilise parents on a wider scale to participate in school governance through the PTA was at least partly grounded in the desire to keep the school out of the local mudslinging which was going on in the panchayat institutions[274], and to avoid drawing the attention of an increasingly sensitised populace demanding transparency and accountability to the school. This had a strongly negative impact on parental motivation to participate in the PTA, as will be discussed in the following section.

Parents' motivation to participate: perceptions of respondents

a) Teachers' perspectives on parental motivation

Teacher respondents in MS2 expressed neither particularly enthusiastic nor adverse attitudes towards parent participation. The head teacher and one of the senior primary level teachers brought forward the view that factors impeding parents' motivation to participate in PTA activities were mainly located outside the school. They argued that the current system of parent participation lacks the ability to address those factors which

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[274] One of the female teachers pointed out that it was necessary for teachers to keep a low profile vis-à-vis *gram panchayat* members, because otherwise harassment by drunk henchmen of the *sarpanch,* as frequently faced by intractable villagers, would not stop before teachers.

were perceived to have the strongest negative impact on school functioning, namely students' poverty and non-teaching burden on teachers.

Poverty was argued to have negative effects on both student learning achievement and parents' willingness and capacity to engage in the PTA.

> "Poor families do not have the money to provide all their school-going children with the materials they don't get from the school. Some children do not even have a single notebook. In addition, parents cannot provide space to children for doing homework and keeping their books and other materials. They lie around in the house somewhere, and then the younger children come and rip the pages of books or break the pencils. So how will these children learn?" (MS2 teacher, 14th March 2006)

He emphasised that for learning basic skills such as reading and writing, it was essential that children had the opportunity to practise, by reading books at home or by writing into their notebooks. Parents, however, were often reluctant to provide these extra materials to children, possibly because they did not grasp how important they were for children's ability to follow classes and study for examinations, or because they assumed that education in government schools did not require any investment on part of parents, and teachers were asking unjustified contributions from them.

Poverty was perceived to curb parents' readiness to devote time to engagement in school because of the need to generate income. According to teachers, parents were not generally adverse to contributions to the school in some way or other, if it was not perceived to impose high costs on them. But the devotion of time, labour or money for the school was always subordinate to the family's subsistence needs and, in many cases, personal consumption preferences of adults (i.e. alcohol and tobacco). This according to the senior primary teacher was the reason why there was no continuity in parent participation, in the sense that the composition of participants was different in every meeting.

Not only parent participation in PTA meetings, but school functioning in general was stated to be entirely dependent on the cycle of agricultural production:

> "Harvesting season is the peak season of income generation. Even *panches* or other influential persons in the village take their children to the fields during this time. If we meet them on the road and ask them 'where is your child?' they say I'm sorry, I can't send him now, I'll send him in two weeks." (MS2 head teacher, 14th March 2006)

Given the superiority of families' subsistence needs over the educational needs of children under severe resource constraints, which poor families typically face, poverty and non-teaching duties were stated to unfold a mutually reinforcing dynamic in terms negatively affecting the educational achievement of the concerned children.

The familiar argument was that an exeeding amount of non-teaching assignments curbed teachers ability to ensure all children get the support they need to progress through the

syllabus (a narrative which appears outrightly cynical considering parents' statements about teaching activity, at least at the primary level).

Since PTAs can neither exempt teachers from non-teaching duties, nor do anything about poverty, student learning achievement was stated to be out of any influence of parent participation, which was regarded as a strong disincentive for parental participation.

In fact, the head teacher pointed out that community participation through the panchayat education committee had been restricted by just the same factors. By and large, teachers appeared to believe that community and/or parent participation, while it may contribute to better infrastructure and resource utilisation, can do nothing to improve the quality of education delivered in government schools.

The question what actually motivated parents to participate in the PTA, for instance as an elected member of the working committee, was not easily answered by teachers.

The head teacher asserted that the election of a working committee always required a significant amount of persuasion, as parents were not motivated to an extent that inclined them to came forward to be elected. He pointed out that the position of the PTA president was particularly unattractive to parents, because of the necessity to devote a significant amount of time for the school – time which cannot be devoted to income generation - for instance when midday meal or construction materials need to be purchased in the market, or when help in the preparation or conduction of examinations (e.g. supervising children during written exams) was required.

The substantial loss of income indeed was perceived by teachers to be a knockout factor for parents' willingness to become PTA president. The senior primary teacher brought forward the argument that at least PTA presidents should be compensated for the time they spend in school, similar to *panches,* who receive a compensation of around 150 Rs when they attend meetings or involve in other panchayat-related work.

The head teacher brought forward the opinion that making parent involvement in school governance mandatory to an extent that the functioning of the school crucially depends on parents' willingness to assume responsibility was a potentially dangerous step, in the absence of supportive measures. He suggested that it would have made sense to temporarily post a social worker in villages, whose task should be the generation of awareness among people about the importance of their children's education, and about the role the government expects parents to play in it.

In the light of this argument for more capacity-building, it is quite astonishing that the PTA president and other working committee members stated they have not even been invited to the one-day training for elected members in the JSK when they resumed office.

The head teacher contested this statement, asserting that the PTA president, vice president and two other PTA members had been invited to trainings:

> "Members have received invitations for the training from the JSK. The president may have been tied up
> in some private business that day, but the vice president and two other working committee members did
> participate." (MS2 head teacher, 14th March 2006)

The two other members turned out to be two of the operators of the PDS shop, who were elected members of the PTA (but subsequently have not attended meetings). It seems unlikely that this constellation (remember the PTA vice-president was the wife of the *sarpanch*) was entirely coincidental, when it has effectively prevented access to information for members who did not belong to the *sarpanch*'s clique.

Given the fact that teachers were obviously determined to convey the impression that parent participation was satisfactory in MS2 under the constraints imposed by poverty and low educational status of parents, it is not overly surprising that they have not made any mention of the tense atmosphere in the village due to the conflict over the motion of no-confidence against the *sarpanch*.

In fact, the head teacher pointed out several times that there was no more institutionalised role of the *gram panchayat* in the management of the school, except that the panchayat may still have command over funds for public works which can also be tapped by the school. The panchayat's responsibility for public works was stated to necessitate the *sarpanch's* attendance of PTA meetings once in a while, especially since new classrooms were being constructed in the current school year, and the construction of a boundary wall was due in the following year. However, he took care to emphasise that other panchayat members participated in PTA meetings not primarily because of their function as panchayat representatives, but as parents of children enrolled in the school.

This statement seems particularly peculiar in the light of the fact that all regular participants in PTA meetings, both in the primary and upper primary section PTAs, were *gram panchayat* members, more specifically *gram panchayat* members who belonged to the circle of confidents of the *sarpanch*. This indicates that the head teacher at least acquiesced to the control of panchayat members over the PTA, possibly in exchange for tolerating minor misappropriations of school resources for teachers' personal use (as alleged by parent respondents) or the neglect of inspection and monitoring functions.

  b) perceptions of parent respondents

Parental motivation to participate in the PTA in MS2 was basically subjected to the same restrictions that have been observed in the other cases under study. These were a widely observable ignorance of parents towards the functioning of the school, the lack of

information about the existence and purpose of the PTA, the low value (relative to other concerns) parents ascribed to education in general, and education delivered in the local government school in particular, perceived opportunity costs to participation, and perceived effectiveness of participation for a potentially valued outcome.

Most of these factors appeared to be reinforced by some of the particularities characterising the village.

Parent responses suggest that lacking access to information gained particular force because neither the group of individuals excerting control over the scope of activities of the PTA, nor the head teacher, who was inclined to limit both parent and panchayat control over school functioning to the absolutely inevitable, in order to retain his own discretionary capacities, had any interest in sharing information and involving the larger parent community.

Parent respondents included the PTA president, one working committee member, and five non-elected members. In addition, three panchayat members were interviewed, one of whom belonged to the closer circle around the *sarpanch*.

Three of the non-elected members had children who were attending school irregularly (less than 60% of all school days, member 1, 6 and 7), while the children of the remaining respondents were fairly regular students (PTA president and working committee member, members 2-4).

Table 46: Respondent details, MS2

Respondent	membership status	gender	caste/ community	edu. status	adult literates in household	no. of household members	estimated income per month*
PTA president	elected	m	lodhi	5th	1	10	2500 Rs
wc member/panch	elected	f	lodhi	illiterate	1	7	2000 Rs
member 1	non-elected	m	lodhi	illiterate	0	8	1500 Rs
member 2	non-elected	m	lodhi	illiterate	1	5	2100 Rs
member 3	non-elected	m	lodhi	illiterate	0	3	1500 Rs
member 4	non-elected	f	lodhi	8th	2	4	1500 Rs
member 5/panch	non-elected	f	lodhi	8th	1	5	1000 Rs
member 6/panch	non-elected	m	lodhi	literate	1	10	3000 Rs
member 7/panch	non-elected	m	lodhi	literate	1	7	2100 Rs

*average monthly household income as estimated by respondents

Source: Interviews

Among the irregularly or non-participating members, decisions to attend meetings depended on whether or not they were aware of them taking place (members 1,2 and 3 were not aware of the existence of the PTA and regular convening of meetings in school),

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and whether or not they had any other work to do when meetings took place (members 4-7).

Two of the three panchayat respondents stated that holding meetings during daytime effectively impeded wider parent participation, because the majority of adults were involved in labour and returned to the village after 5 p.m. (meetings were either held around noon or at 4 p.m., immediately after school hours, or before lunch). They asserted that they only attended meetings when they did not work outside the village on the respective day, or were requested by teachers to attend for a specific purpose.

It was evident in MS2 that the amount of information parents exposed about the PTA depended not exclusively on their own educational status, but, given the monopolisation of information by a small group of people, was also crucially determined by their involvement in other local bodies or groups which provided access to information from different sources.

Respondents who were members in the *gram panchayat* or a sub-committee, or were involved actively with one of the civil society groups (youth group, women's self-help groups) exposed much higher levels of information about the institutional properties of the PTA than other village respondents, irrespective of their gender and educational status.

Villagers who were neither benefiting from membership in any group or body, nor were functionally literate, typically belonging to the poorest households, had a particularly hard time accessing information. Not only did the capability constraints induced by illiteracy render them dependent on the assistance of others to verify information, but it was deliberately not shared with them even when they sought it.

Member 2 made the point as follows:

> "The poorer someone is, the more difficult it is to get benefits that are meant for the poor. If you are illiterate on top of that, everybody thinks they can make a fool out of you. It is so difficult for us to get reliable information." (member 2, 18th March 2006)

Similarly, members 1 and 3 asserted that access to information was the highest hurdle for them because of the partisan use of information by those at the sources[275].

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[275] Accounts of respondents gave an insight into the practice of misinformation and misuse of resources targeted at the poor by incumbents. Member 2 recalled his efforts to obtain money for building a house under the *Indira Awas Yojna*. He asserted that a sum of 9000 Rs was paid to him by the *sarpanch* purely on discretion – neither did he receive a receipt, nor was he shown the cheque from the district collectorate, which was issued on *his* name, so he had no clue about the sum the cheque was issued over, and how much the *sarpanch* had subtracted as 'commission'. He was certain however that a substantial amount had been subtracted, as even in rural Madhya Pradesh it was impossible to build a semi-pucca house from 9000 Rs.

Member 1 (18th March 2006) asserted that while what happened to member 2 was the usual form of betraying the poor of part of their entitlements, in his case a 'commission' of 10.000 Rs was demanded by the *sarpanch* in

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All three illiterate respondents asserted they had never received an invitation to a PTA meeting. This again indicates that the common practise of giving children a slip of paper containing the meeting date and time was completely ineffective in the incidence of adult illiteracy. Obviously, these parents were never invited personally to attend meetings by teachers or PTA members, a practise which was perceived to be so vital for mobilising parent participation by the principal of MS1.

A topic that was frequently brought up by villagers was the imbalance of power between teachers and parents, which was argued to reflect teachers' reluctance to share control with parents (members 6 and 7), or their outright social bias (members 1 and 2).

One of the very poor parent respondents raised serious accusations against school teachers and the *anganwadi* worker, who allegedly drove his children out of school[276]. He stated:

> "The teachers are biased against the poor. At the *anganwadi*, all children get *daliya*[277] as a snack at lunchtime, but mine did not. My child was always the last to be served, and by that time there was nothing left. […] The teachers have thrown my daughter out of the school at lunchtime. They refused to give her food. Why should I send my children there if they are denied what all others get?" (member1, 18th March 2006)

Teachers asserted they denied the midday meal to this respondent's children because they attended school for the midday meal only, but did not participate in classes.

Indeed the statements of member1 clearly indicated that he perceived the value of his children's school attendance to lie in the direct material benefits (food, uniforms, textbooks) they gain from enrolment, not in the acquisition of basic skills and their potential utility for upward mobility. While the policy of providing student incentives anticipated such parental behaviour, teachers, rather than using the opportunity to make efforts to retain these children in school, obviously held the opinion that student benefits should be rewarding attendance, rather than facilitating it.

To some extent teachers' reaction reflected their frustration about their lack of means to enforce student attendance, since students at primary level cannot be expelled for

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advance, a sum which was impossible to raise for a person feeding 10 people on 1500 Rs a month. Thus the respondent was effectively barred from demanding credit for a house under *Indira Awas Yojna*, even though he was entitled to it. Member 3 accounted for similar obstacles.

[276] His three children of school-going age were all still enrolled in the school, but de facto dropped out, with attendance of less than 20%. The two girls were made to do housework and take care of the younger siblings (two girls of app. one and a half and three years). His son had attended classes in 5th grade fairly regularly up to October 2005, but then dropped out to graze the two cows of the family, and attended school for only a couple of days a month.

[277] Ground pulses

irregular attendance, and the *gram panchayat* and *gram sabha* were reluctant to exert pressure on parents of irregular children.

It should be noted that such pressure is likely to be perceived as another means to discriminate poor families, especially when the *gram panchayat* obviously did nothing to facilitate their access to poverty alleviation measures, even impeded it.

However, not all poor parents directed their expectations of gains from enrolment exclusively on immediately tangible material benefits. Member 2, who was head of another one of the poorest five households in the village, asserted:

> "It is important for children to learn something in school. They may not be able to get a better job afterwards, but at least they will know what they are entitled to, and they will be better equipped to claim their rights. People will not think they can be fooled easily when they are educated." (member 2, 18th March 2006)

Nonetheless, he considered the opportunity costs induced by regular participation in meetings high in the face of the perceived inability of parents to enforce or even demand accountability from teachers:

> "What can a person like me say against a teacher or the head master? They have the support of at least ten government officers, and the *sarpanch*. How much weight would a villager's words have for them? (ibid.)"

All PTA respondents, even if they did not share the view that teachers deliberately drove the poorest children out of the school, as brought forward by member 1, expressed the concern that the issue of teacher behaviour could not possibly be addressed by villagers due to the asymmetry of power between parents and teachers.

Indeed, the obvious lack of information among elected members in both the PTA and the *gram panchayat* about the procedures of appeal to higher level institutions, in case the panchayat as the primary agency for grievance issues did not support claims to transparency and teacher accountability, suggests that parents, while amply made aware of their duties as PTA members, were conveniently left in the dark about their rights.

Under such conditions, the lack of parental motivation to get elected into the PTA and participate regularly in its meetings, which incurred significant opportunity costs even under more favourable conditions, can hardly come as a surprise.

While PTA presidents in most cases under study emphasised that their election was a result of relentless urging by teachers and other parents, the PTA president of MS2 emphasised that the decision about whom to 'elect' as head of the PTA had been determined beforehand, and teachers have not played the dominant role in this process:

"The *sarpanch* and *upsarpanch* decided that I should be president of the PTA, and then I was elected by the villagers." (PTA president, 11th April 2006)

In the light of the fact that the state government has transferred increasing management responsibilities from the *gram panchayat* to the PTA with the aim to make the functioning of the latter more independent of the former, the election procedure in MS2 shows that such efforts can be effectively undermined. The coercive character of the (s)election process should be noted:

"I refused, I really did not want to become PTA president. But they made me do it, they put so much pressure on me that I finally gave in. I think the others were just glad they were not made to do it. I'm still not particularly interested in working in the PTA, but I guess I will have to sit through this." (ibid.)

Another remark indicated the dominant role of panchayat members in the way the PTA carried out its functions: According to the PTA president, financial records and accounts were monitored by panchayat members and members of women's self-help groups, rather than members of the PTA working committee. A parent respondent involved in a self-help group (member4) pointed out in this context that the involvement of women was a concession of the panchayat to villagers after irregularities in the use of midday meal funds were discovered.

In MS2, both the fear of being worn down between the fronts of local political factions[278] and high opportunity costs further reduced parental readiness to engage in the PTA as elected member.

The PTA president argued that his obligations required his presence in school almost daily, significantly curbing the time available for income generating activities. Further, he pointed out that he was held responsible by villagers for many shortcomings on which he had no influence, such as delayed released of funds at the district project office (ZSK), or the *gram panchayat*'s neglect of its public works responsibilities, resulting in bad maintenance of the school premises.

The working committee respondent shared the perception that the bulk of the workload was carried by the PTA president exclusively, and pointed out that this reflected first and foremost teachers' preferences, who for the sake of simplifying procedures related to the PTA president and the *sarpanch* exclusively.

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[278] That parents' fear of getting between local political fronts was no singular instance was strongly brought forward by Vinod Raina, founding member of the People's Science Movement in India, the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme, and Eklavya (conversation on the occasion of the AeA Education Thematic Workshop, 9th September 2007 in Hyderabad).

Not only did this contribute to the unattractiveness of becoming PTA president, it rendered membership in the working committee absolutely meaningless, as most elected members played no role different from that of non-elected members:

c) Conclusions

Parent participation in MS2 was evidently happening either on compulsion (PTA president) or for the sake of interests not primarily (if at all) related to the functioning of the local school, namely control over public institutions and bodies of decision-making (members of the *gram panchayat*).

The domination of the PTA by a clique of panchayat and working committee members who with some probability connived in the joint misallocation of public resources for private benefit led to the neglect of all responsibilities of the PTA (ensuring student attendance and achievement and teacher performance) which were not primarily related to infrastructure and/or involved government funding.

Even though some parent respondents pointed out that the school had profited from the shift of management competencies from the *gram panchayat* to the PTA, because it became more difficult for the former to control the flow of resources, the primary tasks of the PTA as defined by the JSA, particularly student attendance/achievement and monitoring, were not even remotely addressed by the PTA in MS2.

Teachers were evidently not interested in communicating to parents the right to monitor and hold teachers accountable for their children's achievement, and precisely this may be one reason why teachers did not go out of their way to increase student attendance: Student regularity would considerably strengthen parents' ability and willingness to hold teachers accountable for what their children learn. It would deprive teachers of the knockout-argument why children leaving grade 5 have not acquired the basic skills of reading and comprehending, writing, and simple arithmetics.

Parents' willingness to intervene and potentially create conflict depended on the importance ascribed to the issue at stake, and in this respect accountability in the provision of elementary education can be expected to rank rather low as compared to issues immediately affecting livelihood, especially - but not exclusively - among the extremely poor.

In addition, the bias of PTA activities towards the implementation of government orders, primarily in the context of upgrading infrastructure, conveyed the impression on parents that participation basically means contribution of unpaid labour, which in most cases was only remotely connected to the question of what their children learned.

In sum, it was evident in MS2 that neither teachers nor members of the PTA working committee made any effort to mobilise parents, or do anything to enable factually

dropped out children to attend school. Those groups of members in the PTA who had sufficient access to information and capacities to use these for their own partisan interest (rather than in the common interest) rendered the PTA effectively dysfunctional for the larger parent and student community.

Table 47: Determinants and influencing factors of parent participation, MS2

Variables and Indicators	regular participants in PTA	Characteristics of Respondents			
		irregular participants in PTA – irregular/weak children	**irregular participants in PTA** – regular/achieving children	**regular participants in PTA** – irregular/weak children	**regular participants in PTA** – regular/achieving children
mobilisation by teachers head teacher determined to retain discretionary power => no efforts towards parent mobilisation; cooperation with sarpanch and PTA president	educated to primary level or above, elected member of panchayat or holding other position in village (thekedar)	no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members		no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members	
level of information about PTA educational status and access to information through membership in panchayat or civil society groups	lack of capacity-building, dependence of status of information among members on PTA secretary	no information about PTA or school meetings; no formal education, low capacity to handle information	high level of information (membership in gram panchayat), low levels of formal education	no information, illiteracy impedes on ability to access and retain information	high levels of information about PTA due to membership in othe organisation, higher level of formal education
opportunity costs amount and security of income, working hours	perceived high because of low in come levels and lack of compensation	high opportunity costs: low and insecure income, long, unregulated working hours		high opportunity costs due to income security and unregulated working hours	high because of low family income and activity in other organisation
valued outcome of parental activity ability to judge children's learning progress, perceived value of school education	effective input utilisation, student learning achievement	none	effective input utilisation, teacher accountability	none	appropriate resource utilisation, teacher accountability, children's equal opportunity to attend and achieve
perceived effectiveness of PTA activities for valued outcome information about rights and duties of PTA, expectations towards the ability of the body to address critical issues	no effectiveness for increasing learning achievement and teacher performance, inability to address infrastructure issues at higher levels	no information	moderately effective in resource utilisation and infrastructure development, ineffective for increasing teacher accountability	no information	none

<u>*Scope of PTA activity: Perceptions of main responsibilities among parents and teachers*</u>

In MS2, the perception of teachers and parent respondents, particularly the PTA president, in terms of the core responsibilities of the PTA diverged significantly. A number of elected PTA members exposed a much broader conception of the goals of parent involvement than teachers. While the latter referred exclusively to implementation tasks related to the provision of infrastructure and student benefits, the former emphasised the monitoring aspect of parent involvement.

Fig. 35 Individual respondents' perception of PTA rights and responsibilities, MS2
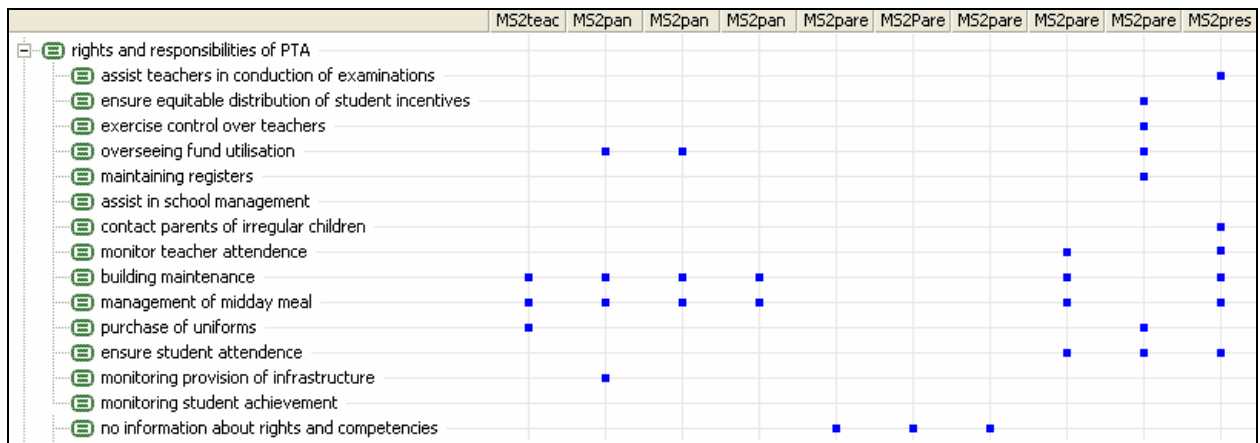
Source: Interviews

Responses of member 5[279] (the only female panchayat member who supported the motion of no-confidence against the sarpanch) indicated that control and decision-making powers were valued much higher than involvement in the implementation of managerial tasks, such as organising the midday meal or building maintenance. Other panchayat respondents also mentioned some control and monitoring aspects, with a particularly focus on the monitoring or resource utilisation. It should be noted that while parents were increasingly sensitised towards their entitlements by processes in the local government bodies, many even among the more educated respondents were rather lax when it came to ensuring their children's attendance in school. This, again, indicates that change in parental behaviour and routines is slow even *if* they realise that their children should be attending regularly.

As in most other cases under study, planning was not an activity parents and teachers felt the PTA should be responsible for. Village education plans were prepared by the head

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[279] 19th April 2006.

teacher and the senior primary teacher more or less exclusively, and approved by the *sarpanch* (but according to other panchayat members was no subject of discussion in the *gram sabha*, which is the approving authority according to panchayat legislation).

Table 48: Perceived central tasks of PTA according to respondents from different stakeholder groups in MS2

	teachers	working committee member(s)	parents (literate and/or members of other organisaitons)	parents (illiterate/no membership)	panches
planning	—	—	—	—	—
implementation	° organisation of midday meal (operational) ° maintain school building ° purchase uniforms	° ensure distribution of student benefits (meal, uniforms) ° maintain school building ° assist teachers in examinations and other tasks related to school functioning	°ensure student attendance ° assist in provision and distribution of incentives ° take care of building maintenance	—	—
decision-making	—	—	° exercise control over teachers ° exercise control over inputs	—	° exercise control over inputs
monitoring	—	° monitor student and teacher attendance ° monitor student achievement °monitor fund utilisation	° monitor student and teacher attendence ° monitor student achievement °monitor fund utilisation	—	—

Source: Interviews

Given rampant student absenteeism[280], it was particularly noteworthy that teachers did not mention increasing student attendance as a core task of the PTA. As has been pointed out previously, the reluctance of teachers to activate the PTA towards ensuring regular student attendance was consistent with their perception that this was a quite useless exercise unless parents' socio-economic status improved, and teachers were less burdened with non-teaching tasks. In addition, irregular attendance was rampant even among working committee and panchayat members' children, and the number of 'role models' among parents was limited.

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[280] It is important to note here that a significant amount of whitewashing of records has been found to have taken place with respect to student attendance in MS2 and PS2: Attendance levels reported to the *janpad* and *zilla shiksha kendra* as reflected in the cluster education plan deviated significantly from attendance as recorded in school level registers. While it is not clear at which level this has taken place (school or cluster level), it raises serious doubts about the validity of the data state level policy makers receive. Even if such practice occurs only in a moderate number of cases, it can be assumed that educational planning from the block level onwards does not match the ground situation of these schools, and as MS2 and PS2 show PTAs are ill equipped to properly address their schools' needs unless they get support from the panchayat or outside agencies.

Teachers' restrictive perception of what parents should do in the PTA clearly reflected in the issues discussed in PTA meetings. All accomplishments related to either infrastructure and construction, the establishment of the PTA and its subcommittees, distribution of student benefits, or government orders. Failure in managing above mentioned tasks was bound to have consequences for teachers, as data on these issues were collected and scrutinised by the block and district project offices.

The problem of student absenteeism was mentioned as an issue of discussion merely once in the meeting minutes, which was glaring in the face of erratic student attendence.

It is equally notable that the issue of teacher shortage was mentioned only twice throughout the entire school year, even though there had been a very high fluctuation, especially in the primary section, because of the simultaneous deputation of two teachers.

Issues relating to teaching arrangements, TLM and pedagogy were completely absent from the minutes, and there was nothing in parents' as well as teachers' responses to indicate that there were any discussions in the PTA revolving around what teachers do in the classroom (the seven items mentioned in the minutes with respect to student achievement all related to the announcement of examination, or the presentation of their results to those few parents attending).

Table 49: Issues discussed, decided and accomplished by the PTA, MS2

Type of issue	discussions by issue	noted decisions/proposals	noted accomplish-ments
elections	4	4	4
government orders	5	3	3
demand for additional teachers	2	0	0
received funds	3	2	1
construction of school building	11	8	3
maintenance and development of infrastructure	7	7	0
organisation of midday meal	4	2	2
student benefits	8	4	4
student attendence	1	0	0
student achievement	7	0	0
school timing	1	1	1
functions in school	8	8	5

Source: meeting minutes 2005-06, MS2

The division of labour between different groups of members (teachers, elected and non-elected members) supports the parental notion that there was a 'deal' between the head teacher and the sarpanch (neglect of monitoring and supervision through the *gram panchayat* for control over the flow of information and, to some extent, resources).

The working committee, which should be the primary decision-making and monitoring body, was basically reduced to an implementation agency of government orders and

decisions taken by teachers, if necessary after informal consultation with the *sarpanch* or allied panchayat or working committee members. The PTA president was essentially responsible for organisational tasks such as the supply of food stocks, construction materials, and student benefits, as well as day-to-day assistance for teachers, e.g. supervising classes during examinations. Other working committee members (unless they belonged to the informal 'kitchen cabinet' of the *sarpanch*) were required to lend their names for the mandatory establishment of a number of sub-committees, which were assigned only minor task (such as purchase and inspection of school uniforms)[281].

It appeared that the wider parent community had no role to play at all except the contribution of time (occasional participation in PTA meetings) and resources, either in the form of fees - the use and justification of which were as questionable as the decision-making process leading to their demand - or labour.

Fig. 36: Division of functions in school governance, MS2
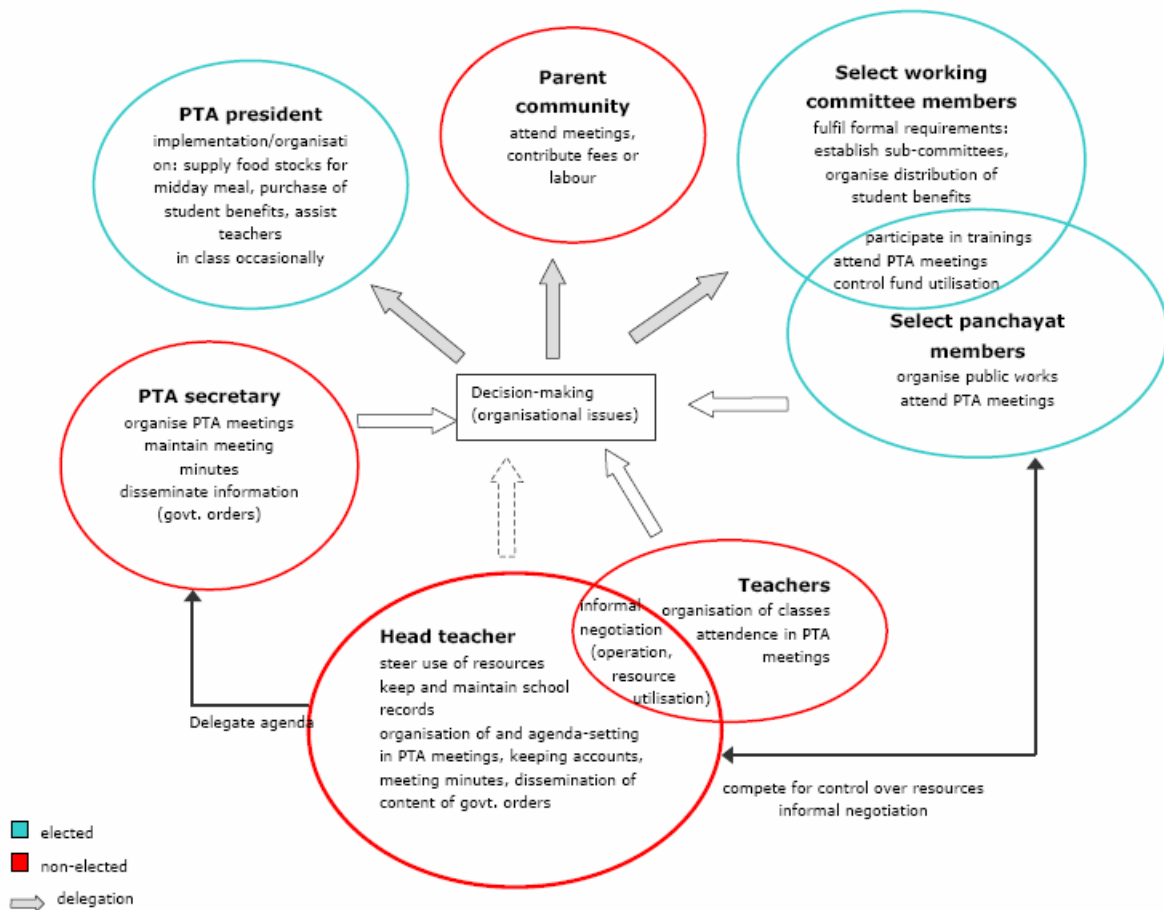
Source: Own

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[281] It is specifically noteworthy that no construction committee had been established in MS2, because construction was the only long-term project in which elected PTA members could have been involved. The sarpanch and the panchayat construction committee however retained control over construction.

6.3.4.5   Conclusions

The case of MS2 highlights two issues which appear to constitute a general weakness of the current institutional setup of PTAs as school governing bodies.

Firstly, the lack of parent representation at higher levels, i.e. in the form of a cluster or block association of PTA presidents, leaves elected members completely dependent on teachers and *jan shikshaks* for information about the scope of rights and duties of the PTA. In MS2, this has had particularly devastating effects, because the PTA president, possibly because the invitation was purposefully not forwarded to him, did not participate in the one-day training. These annual trainings are the only organised opportunity for elected members to get together and exchange information and experiences, and to establish personal relations to the *jan shikshak,* who is responsible for monitoring PTA activity*.*

Secondly, teachers in MS2 had obviously no interest in involving parents beyond the mobilisation of additional resources for the school, the use of which was utterly intransparent to villagers.

The lack of any perceivable professional ethos and ambition on part of senior teachers was reinforced by the absence of any incentive and punishment structures related to indicators of teacher performance, especially student attendance and achievement. It should be noted that low student attendance levels under such circumstances may be quite instrumental and worthwhile perpetuating, because they reduce teachers' workload and effectively circumvent accountability for individual students' learning achievement.

What left parents particularly vulnerable to teachers' arbitrary handling of parent participation through the PTA was the dysfunctionality of the *gram panchayat,* as it is endowed with the authority to inspect school functioning and initiate action against deviant teachers, as well as initiate measures to enforce compulsory schooling vis-à-vis parents. Without sound information about the structure of educational governance above the cluster level – which authority is responsible for which area of school functioning – it was difficult for parents to turn to a higher-level authority when the *gram panchayat* did not fulfil its inspection and monitoring functions. In fact, a number of the more vocal parent respondents pointed out that they simply did not know whom to turn to with their complaints and grievances.

Rampant student absenteeism in MS2 was to a significant extent caused by the poor socio-economic and educational status of the majority of villagers. The preoccupation with livelihood necessities found a very clear expression in the persistent involvement of children in agricultural labour during peak harvesting season, when labour was available

in abundance and families needed to generate income on a scale which would enable them to endure the summer months, when labour activity was low in agriculture as well as construction.

The problem with low student attendance is that it is difficult to hold anybody accountable for it, for two reasons: Firstly, by law the duty to ensure each individual child's attendance in school lies with parents. However, there seems to be a consensus among many, educationists as well as policy makers, that compulsory education (which is, in the common international understanding, in essence the compulsion on children to attend school, cf. Ricking 2003) should not be enforced vis-à-vis parents, at least not in terms of punishment (i.e. paying a fine, filing a case). On the other hand, schools are equally non-accountable for student attendance, because neither the head teacher nor the PTA has the right to enforce it. This power lies exclusively with the local government bodies. In practice, however, it is unlikely that in a *gram sabha* villagers whose own children are regular absentees will charge any person in their midst for not sending their children to school. Thus, placing the authority to give notice to the block and district level authority that a parent should be fined for recurring unexcused absence of a child with the local government body, rather than with the head teacher or principal, proves to be a major stumbling block to the enforcement of compulsory education.

Secondly, there are neither incentives for teachers to ensure student attendance (e.g. monetary or other rewards based on student attendance and achievement), nor are there any sanctioning mechanisms for low student achievement. As long as teachers themselves are physically present in school regularly, do not misbehave severely with children (e.g. afflict severe physical punishment on students), or invite any other reason for complaint, a school may produce high repetition and failure rates in board examinations for successive years without any consequences for teachers.

To sum up, in MS2 the combination of lacking professional commitment of teachers, a partisan *gram panchayat* in which the dominant faction followed interests not remotely connected to the functionality of the local school, and a PTA the members of which lacked any substantial capacity building and support at local or higher levels has led to a situation in which parents had little actual opportunity to do anything more than implement (or refrain from doing so) tasks delegated to them by those primarily involved in decision-making. This amounted to a mutated cross-over between professional control SBM and community control SBM, the joint 'vision' of which was definitely not related to school development, but to personal utility maximation of the dominant actors, to the detriment of the children studying in the school, particularly in the primary section.

Fig. 37: Types of conditions by effect for PTA activity, MS2
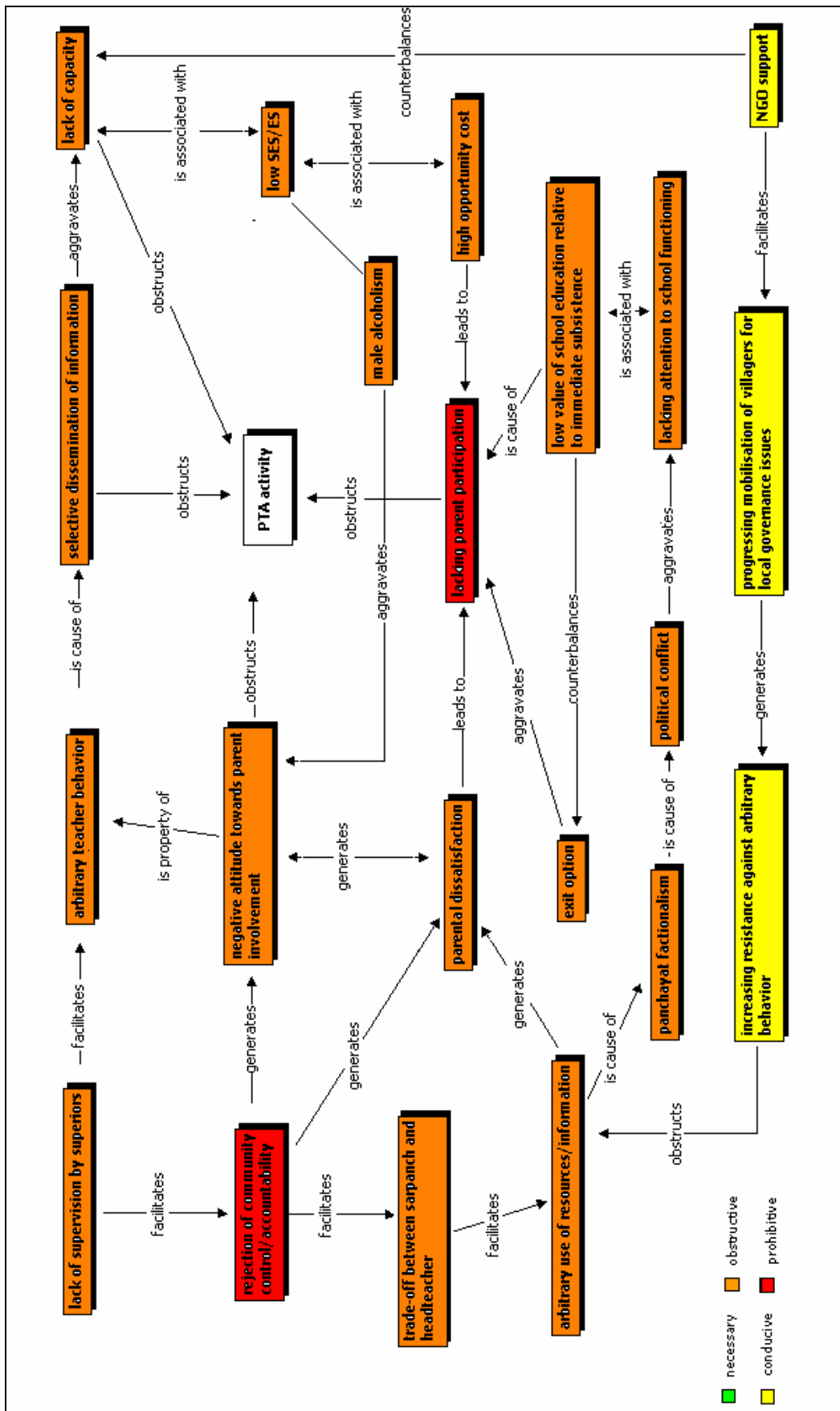
Source: Own

6.3.5 The Government Primary School in Cluster 2 (PS2)

PTA functioning in PS2 was nominal as a result of several factors, some of which were connected to local governance issues and resembled the constraints observed in MS2, as both schools fell in the same *gram panchayat* constituency, while others were specific to the school.

Most villagers regarded the school essentially as a government institution in which parents had no business, and teachers were perceived as government officials who were seldom inclined to share information with citizens, let alone cooperate with them or allow them to exert control (reflecting the relation between the school and the community before the inception of the JSA in 2002).

Similar to MS2, the most visible benefit of SSA, the upgrading of infrastructure and a decent STR, had not yet reached the school - on the contrary, the cutting of one teachers' post actually meant a degradation for the status quo of the school. It was unclear whether teachers were reluctant to mobilise parents around this issue, or parents were indifferent enough to resist such efforts - each group of respondents accused the other of inactivity.

Furthermore, the head teacher, who had been posted in the school long before any form of community participation had entered the government school system, did have a distinctly negative attitude towards community and parent involvement in education, which did not incline him to make efforts to mobilise parental participation beyond the absolutely necessary.

Last but not least, elected representatives in the PTA were alleged of misusing school resources for personal benefit, which led to the perception among parents that neither teachers nor PTA representatives were interested in school improvement.

Being an adjoined minor village of its *gram panchayat* constituency, PS2 faced the same problems as EGS1 in terms of the lack of a functional body of collective decision-making at the local level, as no separate *gram sabhas* were held, and the *gram panchayat* was paralysed by corruption and factionalism.

6.3.5.1   *Village Population, settlement structure and basic amenities*

PS2 is located in a small village in approximately 9 km distance to the district headquarters, and 1.5km distance to the panchayat centre. Distance to the JSK was 8km.

It had a population of 850 persons living in 100 households in the year 2005. The gender gap was high at 1:1.14.

The village had been separated from the main village (location of MS2) by means of resettlement in the process of the creation of an artificial lake for agricultural irrigation, and was dominated by *lodhi* families. In contrast to the main village, no SC family resided in the village, but eight households belonged to *yadav* caste, whose major source of income was the production and sale of dairy products. These households were located on the southeastern edge of the village, and were perceivably wealthier than most of the *lodhi* households.

Public infrastructure was virtually non-existent in the village. There was no paved road, neither within the village nor connecting it to the panchayat centre or other neighbouring villages.

Fig. 38: Village of PS2
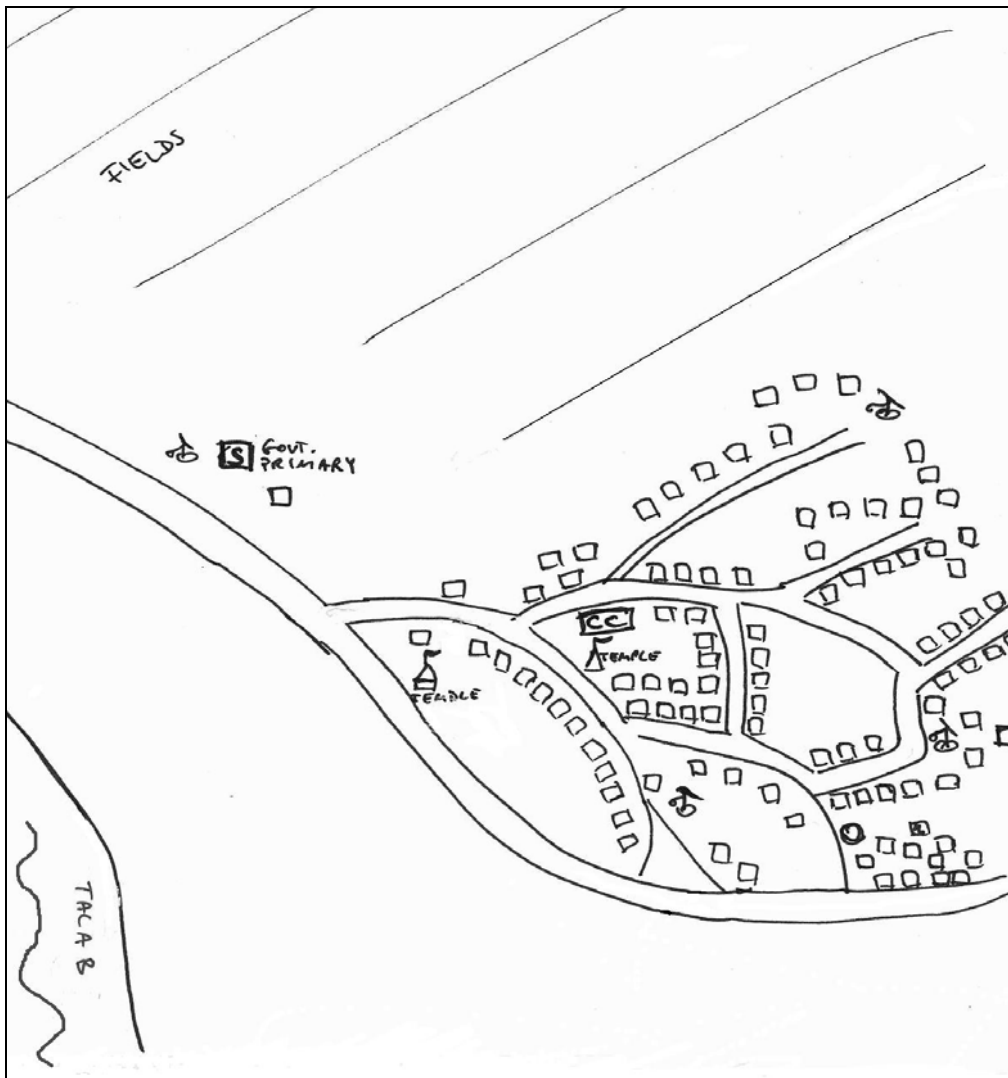
Source: village map, community building

This made access difficult during monsoon, when the dirt roads turned into knee-deep mud. The only concrete buildings were the building of the government primary school, and the small community hall. Most private houses were either *Indira Awas Yojna*-type

buildings (brick and cement), or brick and mud constructions, some with tiled, some with thatched roofs.There were four functional handpumps in the village, one of them located in the school premises. Further, there were two wells and two water tanks.

There was a tiny general store in one of the private houses, and dairy products were available from the *yadav* households. The closest PDS shop was located in the panchayat centre.

About 30% of all households were categorised as BPL, however according to villagers at least half of all households were eligible to BPL status, but due to irregularities in the BPL survey had not been able to make it on the list in 2005[282].

According to respondents from women's self-help groups, there were around 15 families in the village who owned land on a scale of between 2 and 5 acres. Three or four households generated income from fields leased from larger landowners from outside the village for part of the turnover. These families had constructed mud and brick houses close to the fields they cultivated (in a distance of 3-4 km from the village), and lived outside the village during the peak seasons of agricultural activity.

The majority of villagers depended on daily wage labour. Two villagers were employed in government offices in the city of Sehore, and their families, along with the *yadav* households and the owner of the grain mill, presented the uppers on the socio-economic scale in the village.

Adult illiteracy (above the age of 25) was around 35% among males, but significantly higher among females, at an estimated 80%[283].

There was no school in the village besides the government primary school, in which a pre-school (ECCE) section operated since July 2005. This boiled down to the employment of a *didi* – a young woman belonging to one of the *yadav* families in the village – as there was neither additional space nor other additional facilities for the preschool children. As a consequence, only roughly half of the children in the 3-5 age group were enrolled in the ECCE section, and attendance was reported to be low.

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[282] Information provided by the female panchayat respondent (PS2 panch2, 12th March 2006)

[283]. Information on adult literacy in the village was based on estimates given by teachers and information provided during a social mapping procedure conducted on 27th February 2006, in which members of three women's self-help groups were involved.

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6.3.5.2   *Indicators of school functioning in the government primary school*[284]

Enrolment and students' socio-economic background

141 students were enrolled in the government primary school in 2005-06. Enrolment was fairly evenly distributed between the grades, with class sizes ranging from 22 to 37. There was gender parity across grades, with 70 boys and 71 girls enrolled in the school. The student population consisted of OBC (*lodhi*) families exclusively, which reflected the composition of village population.

Table 50: Child population (5-14) and enrolment in PS2 by caste and gender, PS2

	SC			ST			OBC			GEN			
	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	**all**
village (5-11)	1	-	1	-	-	-	94	78	172	-	-	-	173
village (11-14)	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	35	60	-	-	-	60
PS2	-	-	-	-	-	-	70	71	141	-	-	-	141

Source: *Jan shiksha* register 2005-06, form 3

Data in the village education register reveal that there were a substantial number of children of primary school age who were not enrolled in the government school. These included children from the *yadav* households, and a number of children from the landowning *lodhi* households, who were enrolled in the private school in the panchayat centre.

Even though according to the village education register there were no out of school children in the village, inconsistencies in the data suggest that there indeed were a number of boys who were not enrolled: The total child population in the age group 5-11 was 95 (boys) resp. 79 (girls). However, only 91 boys were recorded as enrolled in a school (whether in or outside the village, in private or government school). This actually left four boys missing, which corresponds to several villagers' claims that there were a number of non-enrolled children in the village[285].

Income disparities appeared moderate as compared to MS1 and PS1, ranging between 1000 and 5000 Rs per month according to parent and panchayat respondents. A couple of families were supported by grown-up sons who had migrated to Ahmedabad, where they were employed as diamond cutters.

With respect to families' educational backgrounds, however, there were larger disparities, quite comparable to PS1. Many literate households in the village had family members educated up to upper primary level or higher. It was notable that in a couple of

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[284] All data presented here refer to the school year 2005-06 unless indicated otherwise

[285] Members 4 and 5 (see table 53) 11th and 12th March 2006.

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households there were also female family members who were educated up to secondary level.

On the other hand, there were a large number of illiterate households, whose children currently enrolled in the government primary school belonged to the so-called first generation learners.

As indicated by the high proportion of BPL households, many students came from extremely poor backgrounds. In fact, the head teacher pointed out that the high incidence of severe poverty was distinctly negatively affecting students' capacity to learn. According to him, a large number of children came to school in the morning without having had a proper breakfast, and thus were unable to concentrate and follow classes. Given the generally low nutritional intake of these children, the midday meal was stated to be merely a drop in a bucket, and many of the older children were said to leave the school premises after lunch in search of more food at home.

It should be noted that in this village, too, male alcoholism was a severe problem which aggravated the dismal nutritional status of children, and burded them with emotional strain caused by the experience of household violence (either as victim or as witness) and quarrel between parents. In addition, male role models in the families impacted on the behaviour of boys. According to the head teacher, an eleven year old boy had been caught drunk in the village recently, and many boys were stated to prefer spending their time gambling rather than studying or doing homework.

Girls from these families were disproportionately burdened with household work, as their mothers were forced to generate income to make up for the loss in family income due to male alcoholism.

A significant proportion of children from such desolate home environments would obviously demand a high degree of professional qualification and dedication of teachers, and an increased need of professional support for the latter, especially concerning interaction with parents of these students[286].

Teacher qualification and attendance

There were three teachers and one *didi* posted in the school for the most of the school year 2005-06. All of the teachers were employed as assistant teachers (under the Dept.

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[286] It was pointed out by teachers in both PS2 and MS2 that interaction with fathers was extremely unpleasant when they were drunk, and that teachers avoided to be present in the village after 5 p.m., when villagers were stated (and on several occasions observed) to come home drunk because they have immediately converted their wages into liquor. Occasional verbal abuses were also reported. In MS2, drunken villagers were perceived as particularly threatening by female teachers.

of Education, before 1998) and had received pre- as well as in-service training. The head teacher and one of the assistant teachers held a Bachelor in education, the third assistant teacher had absolved the D.Ed. course offered by the DIETs.

It should be noted that in the beginning of the school year, four teachers were posted in the school, one of them, however, was transferred to a school in another cluster by mid-July, after participating in a two weeks' training at the *sankul centre*. Thus effectively, the school operated with three teachers, without the transferred teacher being replaced throughout the year[287].

Teacher absences were substantial in PS2, in fact they were highest in all schools under study.

Table 51: Teacher attendance July 05-April 06, PS2

status	PTA meetings attended	training	medical leave	meetings (JSK, Sankul, BRC)	O.D.	C.L/C.C.	total days of absence	% of total school days	total no.of school days
head teacher	23	12	0	27	11	10	67	31.6	213
assistant teacher	9	12	9	0	68	10	135	63.4	
assistant teacher	4	4	0	0	22	25	51	23.9	
assistant teacher		14	0	0	transfered from July onwards		213	100	
didi	17						7	3.5	

Source: Teacher Attendance Register 2005-06

Absences of the head teacher were mainly caused by attendance of meetings and administrative tasks at the cluster, *sankul* and block *shiksha kendras*, while absences among other teachers were due to either medical or casual leave in case of short-term absence, and deputation to other schools in case of long-term absence. The longest deputation was six weeks; most temporary deputations however did not exceed three weeks. In addition, one teacher took his accumulated leave for the entire year in the

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[287] In fact, in the cluster report 2006-07 there was no lack of teachers stated even though the STR was 47:1. This indicates that it was not planned to replace the transferred teacher. According to the DEO, this was the result of a new strategy of estimating teacher demand to be applied from 2006 onwards, which was based on average student attendance rather than enrolment (Interview DEO, 17th April 2006). The reduction of one teacher post in PS2 is logical given the low average student attendance, however this means making the functioning of the school depend on the failure to ensure high student attendance, besides having a negative signalling effect on parents if the reasons for the reduction of teachers is not communicated appropriately to them.

month of October. This is remarkable in so far as teachers are required to take most of their leave during the summer vacations when the schools are closed[288].

Multigrade teaching was standard in grades 1-4. Ideally, the first and second grade were taught by the teacher holding a D.Ed., who was also the youngest teacher, third and fourth grade were taught by the assistant teacher with B.Ed. qualification, and the head teacher, who was the most senior and experienced teacher, taught the fifth grade separately.

Given the high level of teacher absence, however, this setup was maintained in less than 25% of all school days, as for roughly 50% of the time students were taught by two teachers and the *didi* (preschool children), and on 20% of all school days only one professionally trained teacher was present in school.

Similar to what has been observed in EGS1, the *didi* on such days taught the first and second grade children along with the preschool children, while the trained teacher organised classes for grade 3-5.

Besides extremely high absence rates of teachers, teaching activity appeared to be low even when teachers were present in the classroom. Parent respondents, especially those of higher educational status, complained that teachers did not take their teaching job seriously, with negative impacts on student learning achievement.

It should be noted that this impression was partly grounded in parents' ignorance about the transfer of one of the assistant teachers and the administration's decision not to fill the position. This led to the impression that one of the permanent teachers simply did not show up for the entire school year without any consequences. It is noteworthy that such important information has not been discussed in any PTA meeting, at least according to the meeting minutes.

Notably (and in contrast to PS1), parental complaints about teacher performance did not relate to teacher absence, but to what teachers did when they were present in the school. Five out of seven parent respondents stated that the teachers did not teach the children 'properly' even when there was nothing to interrupt them. One mother asserted she had found one of the teachers sleeping on the veranda on several occasions, while the children were sitting in the classroom[289].

It was also recognised by some parents that not only teachers' malperformance, but also student absenteeism was responsible for low student learning achievement. Parental indifference to children's attendance in school was perceived to make it very difficult for

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[288] In this case the teacher who was of Muslim confession took his leave on occasion of Ramadan, which lasted from October 4th to November 3rd in 2005.

[289] Member 5, 12th March 2006.

parents to criticise teachers for non-performance. One respondent made the point as follows:

> "How can we criticise the teachers for not teaching our children well if we don't make sure our children go to school regularly? First the parents have to pay their due, and many of them in this village don't." (member 4, 11th March 2006)

The head teacher shared this point of view. He pointed out that the inability to sanction parents for not sending their children to school, e.g. by means of denying them access to benefits from government programmes such as BPL assistance and _Indira Awas Yojna_, made it impossible for teachers to enforce student attendance, and ultimately to teach all children the basic skills as required in the syllabus.

In addition, lacking support from higher levels of educational administration as well as the panchayat in tackling student absenteeism, and parental refusal to participate in the PTA, contributed to teachers' resignation. The distinctly negative attitude towards the decentralised education system, which resulted from the perceived lack of support to teachers, severely distorted the functioning of the PTA and teachers' readiness to activate parents.

Student attendance and achievement

PS2 was the school with the lowest average attendance rates in all schools under study. Similar to MS2, attendance sharply decreased in third grade. What was striking in PS2 was that the largest proportion of students ranged at the ends of the attendance scale, viz. there was a large group of 36.2% children who attended 80% and more, and another large group (26.9%) who attended only very sporadically. This was a very unusual distribution as compared to the other cases under study.

Table 52: Average student attendance by grade, PS2 *

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	all grades
No. of students	32	27	37	23	22	141
below 40%	9	6	13	5	5	38
40-60%	8	2	0	2	4	16
60-70%	3	3	6	1	0	13
70-80%	4	4	5	4	7	24
above 80%	8	12	13	11	7	51
av. attendance rate (%)	58.3	64.5	55.2	62.6	59.3	59.3

*average attendance January-March 2006

Source: student attendance and achievement register 2005-06

Student attendance somewhat seemed to reflect the social divide in the village, notably with respect to parents' educational status. As mentioned above, a comparatively larger

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number of households with at least one member educated above upper primary level resided in the village. Attention paid to children's attendance in school usually correlates positively with parents', and specifically mothers', educational status[290].

In addition, even though households with educated members had only moderately higher incomes than illiterate households, it seemed to be more common among these families that mothers stayed home to take care of the household and children, rather than going out for supplementing the family income by doing wage labour. This gave parents more control over their children's attendance at school.

In the completely illiterate families, the vast majority of mothers contributed to family income by doing wage labour, which means that their children remained unattended all day, and there was no control over their attendance at school.

In the absence of parental control over children's attendance, and tangible consequences of student absenteeism for both student and parents, push-out factors gained particular force in PS2. Similar to MS2, there was a severe lack of appropriate infrastructure and space. The school building consisted of one building block with two classrooms and one veranda. One of the classrooms according to the head teacher was unusable during monsoon, because it rained inside. This means that during the 2-3 months of heavy rainfall from July to mid-September, all 141 children would be crammed into a single room of approximately 20 m²[291]. In addition, the lack of a toilet forced children to leave the school grounds, giving them ample opportunity to abscond from an absolutely unattractive school environment.

While the school had received funds for the construction of an additional building block with two more classrooms, a construction committee had been established, and a technician had approved of the plans for the building, construction has not been started up to March 2006.

Given that the school environment was little attractive to children, the midday meal, one of the most important incentives provided by SSA to increase student attendance, was one of the few potential attractions to children.

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[290] It is remarkable in this context that even though it is common wisdom that mothers' educational status has significant impact on children's development in education as well as related to health (Sen/Drèze 2002: 160ff extensively discuss the impact of female education on human development), there is a conspicuous lack of concerted action towards reducing illiteracy among women.

[291] Teachers asserted that teaching was virtually impossible during monsoon. They added that during soybean harvest in November practically no child attended school regularly, and complained that they were not allowed to close the school during this time. If this is taken to be true, the school was practically dysfunctional for three to four out of ten months in an academic year.

However, there was ample complaint among a number of parents that children did not receive enough food in school to satisfy their hunger. This according to teachers and parents led students to go home after the meal to have more food, or collect berries outside, and either they did not return to school at all afterwards, or their ability to concentrate and follow classes was diminished because they were still hungry.

There were competing explanations for the lack of food supply. Teachers and the PTA vice president, who was simultaneously employed as school cook, stated that the food stocks received from the district collectorate were not sufficient to provide a sufficient food to all children in the school.

Two mothers, in contradiction to these statements, brought forward the view that the shortage of food for the children was caused by the school cook and her assistant, who were alleged to branch off significant amounts of cooked food to feed to their own families, with the effect that the children in school got so little food they remained hungry.

A third possible explanation is misappropriation of food supplies by the operators of the PDS shop in the panchayat centre. This is plausible because irregularities occurred previously; in fact the operators of the shop in conjunction with the *sarpanch* had been convicted of having sold midday meal stocks as well as BPL rations in the regular market before.

It is not unlikely that the provision of the midday meal in PS2 was affected by all three factors to some degree. Delays in the release of food stocks from the district collectorate are common in Madhya Pradesh, possibly because orders are issued afresh each quarter rather than annually[292].

School-level data on student achievement, like in many other schools, suffered from incompleteness, as achievement was not recorded continuously along with monthly attendance. Achievement data in the school report cards and the cluster education plan 2006-07 thus served as a proxy indicator.

The school report card indicates that student achievement in PS2 was lower than in other schools, because in contrast to the primary schools in cluster 1, no child passed the 5th grade board examination with more than 60% of the full score. The fact that the repetition rate in the year following the uncompensated transfer of one of the teachers

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[292] Cf. GOI, MHRD, Dept. of School Education and Literacy (2007): Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Approval Board for Midday Meal, April 11th 2007, available at http://www.education.nic.in/mdm/ mnts_pab_0708/MDM_PAB_11Apr.doc. It should be noted that such complaints were not made in any school in cluster 1, which is supplied by the same district collectorate. This makes it more likely that the 'leak' was somewhere between the collectorate, the local PDS shop, and the school.

jumped up to almost 28% (from about 5% in the preceding year) is an indication that the reduction of one teacher position in the school affected student learning achievement negatively. There was a notable accumulation of repeaters in third grade (20 students), 70% of whom were girls. This corresponded to the high absence rates in third grade, which also were caused predominantly by girls (9 out of 13).

The head teacher pointed out that the lack of classrooms had a disturbing impact on classroom practice, because it was impossible to organise the students into age-appropriate learning groups.

He emphasised, however, that the basic precondition for children to learn was that they attended, which was perceived to be the responsibility of parents, not teachers. In addition, children's capacity to learn was perceived to depend on a number of home background factors on which teachers had little influence, such as children's nutritional status, whether or not children were unattended all day, if they were made to do household work or care for their siblings, and whether or not they were provided with sufficient notebooks and pencils.

While this argumentation makes perfect sense, the critical question is why teachers have refrained from making substantive efforts to eliminate at least the push-out factors related to the lack of infrastructure and ensuring all students receive the benefits they are entitled to, especially the full amount of food through the midday meal programme.

If the complaints of parents with respect to teachers' lack of effort to actually teach the children are taken into account, the overall impression was that teachers indeed did not care much about what children have learned when they leave the school, and tended to hold either parents or 'the system' accountable for the shortcomings of the school.

6.3.5.3 *Parent-Teacher-Association: Composition, parent participation, and scope of activities*

Composition of working committee, frequency of meetings and parent participation

The PTA of PS2 had 190 parent members. The working committee was established in the first meeting of the academic year 2005-06. As in most other schools with enrolment above 100, the quorum for the election of the working committee was not met. Nevertheless participation was presentable (36 parents) compared to the other schools under study[293].

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[293] This may reasonably be assumed to relate to the presence of an inspector, in this case the *jan shikshak.* This indicates that inspections were not unannounced and teachers had the opportunity to make an effort to mobilise parents to attend.

Meetings have been recorded regularly twice a month. In addition, a number of special meetings were organised on the occasion of independence and republic day and incidents requiring immediate action[294]. These increased the total number of meetings as documented in the PTA meeting register to an impressive 23 (as compared to 10 in PS1, 12 in MS1, 18 in EGS1, and 16 in MS2).

Fig. 39: Participation in PTA meetings by groups of members, PS2
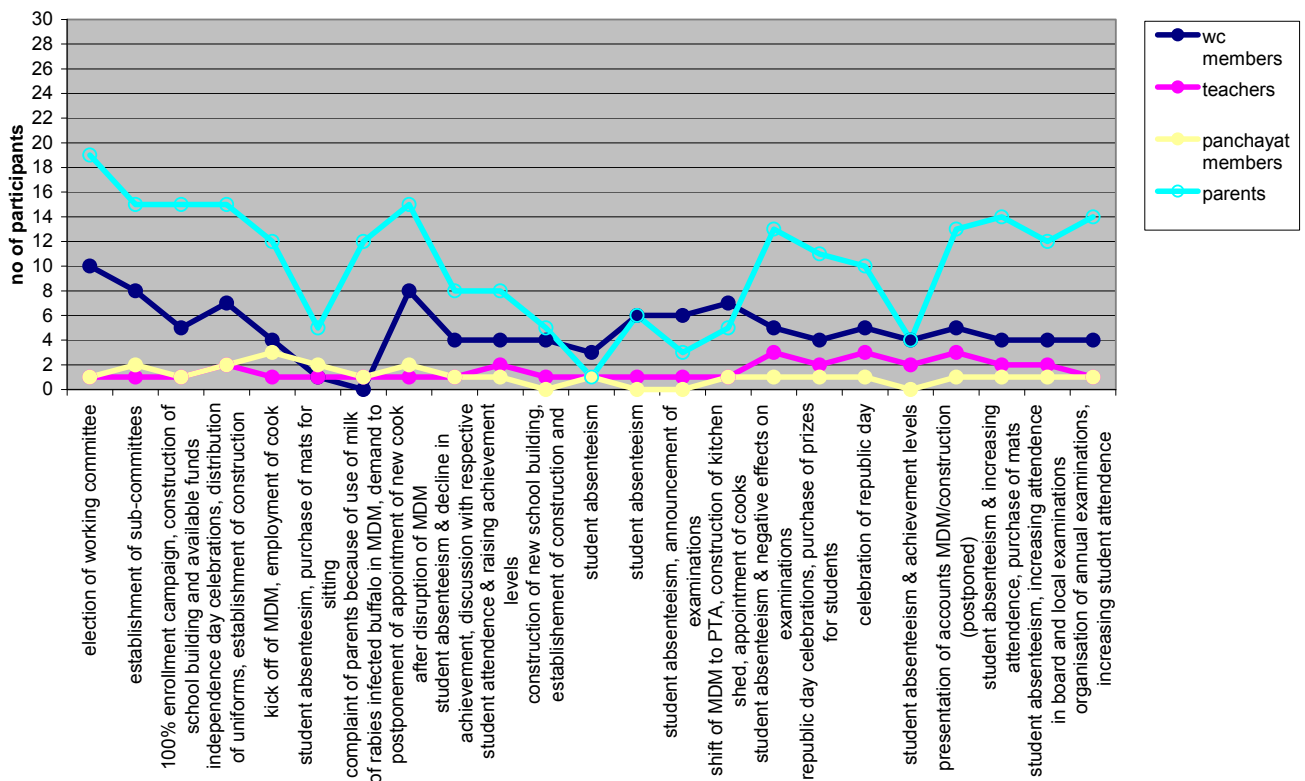
Source: PTA meeting minutes

There are some indications in the meeting minutes that it is doubtful whether all of these recorded meetings actually took place: Successive meeting minutes featured exactly the same text, or consisted of a single sentence, and on two occasions the signatures underneath minutes were exactly the same as under the previous ones (even though the text varied). Indeed, teachers openly asserted that they frequently took the meeting register for a walk through the village to collect additional signatures.

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[294] These were an incidence of rabies (as the milk of a rabies infected buffalo was used for the midday meal) and the delegation of midday meal to parents.

With respect to the educational status of working committee members, it was notable that the number of illiterates was high (as in MS2) at 50%, while the educational status of literate members was higher than in most other schools under study.

Except the vice president, all female members of the working committee were illiterate.

Besides stable participation of six elected members, meeting minutes suggest that three non-elected parents participated in 50% or more of all meetings, and around 20 attended five or more meetings.

Table 53: Working Committee members in PS2 by caste, gender and educational status

working committee	gender	caste/ community	educational status	No. of attended meetings
president	m	OBC (lodhi)	8th	21
vice president	f	OBC (lodhi)	8th	17
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	7
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	10th	12
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	19
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	10th	12
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	3
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	8th	1
member	m	OBC (lodhi)	literate	4
member	f	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	1
member	f	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	11
member	f	OBC (lodhi)	illiterate	3

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06

The head teacher pointed to the incongruence between participation as suggested by school records and real participation in PTA meetings in a very straightforward manner. According to him, the female vice-president (rather than the president) was the motor of the PTA and the most regular participant. Most other elected members were stated to attend meetings rather erratically. The impressive number of signatures under the meeting records was a result of teachers' efforts to walk from door to door in the village to collect signatures ex post. This clearly reflected in the structure of signatures of individual participants, most of whom signed four to six minutes en bloc[295].

In contrast to the head teacher, the vice president stated that the PTA president was active and participating in meetings. She stated that since the first establishment of a PTA in the school in the beginning of 2002, both of them had been elected to lead the PTA for successive years, with a break during the previous school year due to the

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[295] Respondents from the working committee have confirmed this practise. It's value to teachers was quite unclear, as despite of record whitewashing it was known to administrators up to the district level that parent participation in PTA meetings in PS2 was approaching zero, so this practise has obviously not lead to the potentially desired goal of concealing teachers' inability to activate the PTA.

requirement that president and vice president may be elected for no more than three terms successively.

A working committee respondent rejected the claim that only two parents were active in the PTA. While he did confirm that the vast majority of parents participated extremely erratically, he asserted that there were four to five working committee members who showed up in the majority of meetings. It is difficult to say whether the head teacher understated the extent of parent participation (possibly motivated by the desire to underscore his disapproval of community participation in school governance) or the PTA vice-president overstated it (possibly to avoid discrediting the PTA).

In the case of PS2, the scope of activities of the PTA has been extremely limited, as will be discussed in some detail in the following section. The widespread unwillingness among villagers to act collectively was neither limited to the issue of school education, nor was it exclusively the result of indifference or ignorance.

In fact it appeared to be influenced by a strongly perceived power asymmetry between parents and teachers, and an overall standstill in terms of local politics and public action resulting from the undermining of panchayat functioning by individual elected representatives.

Parents' motivation to participate: perceptions of respondents

    a) Teachers' perception of parent motivation

Teachers in PS2 had a similar perception of factors motivating or demotivating parents from participating in the PTA as teacher respondents in other schools.

Generally, parents' readiness to engage in school was directly correlated to their educational status by teachers. Educated parents were stated to have an intrinsic motivation to ensure their children attend classes regularly and reach decent achievement levels. Educated parents also were perceived to be more willing to engage in the PTA in principle, even though this potential willingness was severely undermined by the existence of private schooling, and the perceived comparative worthlessness of government provided services, which induced parents to opt out of the governments system rather than engage in PTAs.

In congruence with teacher responses in other schools, major reasons accounting for lacking parental engagement in school brought forward by the head teacher in PS2 were:
- Extreme poverty and income insecurity resulting neglect of children by parents who left their homes for the entire day in search of labour
- Parents' own low educational status

- A tendency to take government services for granted, and at the same time to ascribe low value to them because they do not require substantial private investment ('if it's for free, it can't be worth much')

The first two factors have been discussed at length before, and given the high incidence of households below the poverty line and adult illiteracy in PS2, it is unquestionable that the lack of control over student attendance due to the absence of adults from home plays a significant role for student absenteeism, while lacking supportive home environments and in many cases malnutrition impact student achievement adversely, even if children attend school rather regularly.

The perception that it is teachers rather than parents who are responsible for getting children to school and ensure appropriate learning achievement was common among parents in PS2. In terms of parent participation, the perception that illiterates are the wrong addressees for participation in school governance, beyond occasional contributions of cash or labour, was as tangible as in other villages under study.

The allegation that parents do not value government provided education (as opposed to private school education) deserves some closer attention.

According to the head teacher, there was a widespread mentality among parents to dismiss any services provided free of cost as being of low quality, if not worthless. To illustrate, he pointed out the unequal treatment of children enrolled in government and private schools within families:

> "Look at those families where some children are enrolled in the government and some in the private school. You will find that the child in private school gets a uniform, a slate, pencils, notebooks and textbooks and a packed lunch, even though all of this has to be paid for by parents. The child in the government school, who gets free textbooks and a school uniform if she's a girl, will not even be given enough notebooks to do homework. In this school many parents even refuse to pay the examination fees. It's 25 rupees per child, and we spend it from our own pockets so the children can take the examination." (PS2 head teacher, 4th March 2006)

While it was obvious that the head teacher felt depreciated in his professional competence, he appeared reluctant to reflect about the possible reasons why parents may perceive government education as worthless.

It is not entirely unreasonable to assume that parents' depreciation of the government school system was firmly grounded in prior experience, not only with respect to education, but social service provision in general.

What needs to be kept in mind is that, except EGS schools, all of the schools under study have been opened under the State Department of Education some thirty to forty years ago. Many teachers employed in these schools have either been posted there before decentralisation effectively started to make an impact from 1994 onwards, or have at

least been employed as assistant teachers in other schools run by the Deptartment of Education for several years.

Consider the head teacher of PS2: In his end forties, he had been employed as assistant teacher more than twenty years back, at a time when education had not yet been made a subject of concurrent competency of the Central and State Governments, and thus not been influenced by central education policies. He had been posted in PS2 in 1989, five years before *panchayati raj* and DPEP were introduced in Madhya Pradesh. Two other assistant teachers, while not having worked in this particular school for nearly as long as the head teacher, have also been posted in the school well before the creation of PTAs became mandatory in all government schools in 2002. Given that community involvement in school has a short history in the village (in contrast to MS1), and some of the personnel was employed long before villagers were considered to be important stakeholders in government schools by policy makers and administrators, it is understandable that parents have not readily changed their behaviour towards the school when there has been no other tangible change (such as change in personnel and classroom practice).

In fact, it was very obvious not only in PS2 that teachers' concern was student attendance and parental interest in and support for their children's achievement in school, rather than parent participation in school governance or even teaching-learning processes– most teachers I have spoken to found it quite ridiculous that their performance should be judged by people who were perceived to lack any qualification for such judgement.

The particularly negative attitude towards parent participation in educational governance on part of teachers in PS2 was reinforced by a combination of an intensely felt ever-increasing burden in terms of training requirements, administrative tasks, and facilitating parent involvement. Lacking support from higher levels to reach the prescribed goals, especially with respect to parent participation, exacerbated this. The head teacher explicitly criticised the *jan shikhak* and JSK coordinator for leaving teachers out in the rain with difficult working conditions and lack of parent participation:

> "Whenever head teachers bring up problems, whether related to student absenteeism or the PTA and the lack of parent participation, the *jan shikshak* says 'it's your fault, you don't work hard enough'. We don't get any support, we just get the blame. So we go and collect signatures from parents after the meetings. What can we do? We cannot force anyone to come to the meetings."(PS2 head teacher, 4th March 2006)

Similar to teachers in the other schools under study, teachers in PS2 strongly held the view that if the government was serious in enforcing compulsory education and activating parents to engage in schools, the first necessary step would be making benefit

from government programmes contingent on children's attendance in school, and making attendance in PTA meetings compulsory at least for working committee members.

The absence of such measures, in conjunction with increasing responsibility of teachers for planning, management, and community involvement, led to an extremely negative perception of the entire process of decentralisation in education.

According to the head teacher, the interference of central politics in education, as marked by the introduction of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986, has led to a continuous decline in the quality of teaching in government schools. While previously teachers were employed exclusively to teach the syllabus to students, the amount of non-teaching tasks was stated to have continuously increased since the DPEP was incepted. The shift of administrative tasks from one agency to another (administration – PRIs – PTAs) and the creation of numerous parallel bodies involved in educational administration resulted in substantial confusion among teachers, caused by a flood of government orders from different agencies:

> "We get orders from the DEO or BEO office, *zilla panchayat*, ZSK, DIET, Collectorate almost daily, and sometimes these even contradict each other. Can you imagine how much time it takes to make sense of this? There is no way a teacher can develop his own routine in teaching and maintaining records. All energy of a teacher should be devoted to teaching students, not to copy information from one register into another, or sit in trainings completely devoid of useful content." (PS2 head teacher, 4th March 2006)

It was obvious that some of the frustration of the head teacher arose from the feeling of constantly being put under tutelage by agencies which appeared to persistently ignore the realities under which rural primary schools operate.

This became particularly evident in the head teacher's appraisal of the usefulness of in-service teacher training.

> "Training is just another thing keeping teachers away from teaching. I have attended many trainings and I can tell you I have not learned anything new there. These trainers they book in the DIETs are sometimes barely 25 years old. They have just come from college. They have no teaching experience whatsoever. They don't even know what is going on in a village school. What can I learn from such a person? No one takes these trainers seriously, especially not the more experienced teachers. But well, it's required that we sit in there." (ibid.)

This perception was strongly confirmed by the senior assistant teacher[296], who added that the content of trainings was completely detached from the working environment teachers face in rural government schools.

The head teacher emphatically made the point that the major problem afflicting government provided education was that it was subject to political interference at all

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[296] 4th March 2006. As one assistant teacher was still present in school, there was a group discussion preceding the interview with the head teacher.

levels – local, state and central. He perceived educational reforms since 1994 to be devoid of any direction, designed first and foremost not to improve academic standards, but to generate political credit to parties and politicians who had no clue of the requirements of a functional education system.

While some of the points made by the head teacher are certainly worth consideration, their authenticity is significantly diminished by the obvious lack of dedication to teaching children in his school, which was observed by parents on occasions where there was nothing to distract teachers from this task[297].

To make a long story short, parents had little reason to assume that teachers' attitude towards their profession in general, and accountability towards parents in particular, has changed, and teachers had little interest in activating parent participation beyond increasing children's attendance and providing a moderately supportive learning environment at home, given the overall negative attitude they exposed towards parent and community participation.

This argumentation is supported by the recurring issue of parental inability to hold teachers accountable for what they (do not) teach children, which was stated to be a major detriment to parental motivation to participate in PTA meetings.

   b) Perceptions of parent respondents

Parental motivation to actively involve in the PTA appeared to be even lower than in other cases under study. While some of the constraining factors for parental participation in PTA meetings observed in other cases (opportunity costs resulting from the convening of meetings during daytime, ineffective transmission of information about meeting dates, high adult illiteracy and restricted self-perceived capabilities of parents to take part in school management) applied to PS2, too, there were a number of factors relating to the behaviour of elected members, which further discouraged wider parent participation.

Among the seven parent respondents, the two elected members were active participants in PTA meetings, while the majority of non-elected respondents was inactive and exposed different levels of information about the existence and purpose of the PTA.

As in most other schools under study, different degrees of parental resistance against being elected into the working committee had to be overcome by teachers - working committee respondents emphasised that they had been asked by the head teacher if they were ready to be elected into the working committee. Nevertheless, their

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[297] It should be noted that most parent respondents explicitly spared the head teacher from their criticism concerning teacher dedication to teaching – nonetheless it was his responsibility to monitor the activities of his colleagues.

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statements about their motivation to get active in the PTA to reflected some intrinsic motivation. The vice president asserted[298]:

Table 54: Respondent details, PS2

Respondent	membership status	gender	caste/ community	edu. status	adult literates in household	no. of household members	estimated income per month*
PTA vice president	elected	f	lodhi	8th	2	4	2000 Rs
wc member/panch	elected	m	lodhi	10th	2	6	4000 Rs
member 1	non-elected	m	lodhi	5th	2	9	2000 Rs
member 2	non-elected	m	lodhi	illiterate	0	5	1000 Rs
member 3	non-elected	f	lodhi	illiterate	1	5	2000 Rs
member 4	non-elected	f	lodhi	10th	3	6	2500 Rs
member 5	non-elected	f	lodhi	8th	2	4	2000 Rs
panch	no member	f	lodhi	illiterate	1	6	2000 Rs

*average monthly household income as estimated by respondents

Source: Interviews

 "It was my own wish. I have been studying in this school and I want my children to learn well, too. The head teacher supported me as vice president. Besides, no one else wants to do it." (PS2 PTA vice president, 4th March 2006)

Similarly, the PTA working committee member stated that he was partly motivated by the belief that there is a social obligation for the better off families in the village to engage for village development:

"I can afford to engage in school because I don't have to leave the village for work. Those who are better off should be taking care that the village can develop." (PS2 wc member/panch, 4th March 2006)

It should be noted that these respondents (as well as the PTA president) did not belong to the vast majority of villagers who depended on daily wage labour for their income. The PTA president belonged to the few landowning families (around 5 acres according to the vice-president), the vice-president was a housewife, her husband was employed in the municipality of Sehore city, and the working committee member owned a flour mill which operated next to his house in the village. All three of them thus belonged to the higher SES families in the village, indicating that opportunity costs for participation were significantly lower for them than for many other parents.

The credibility of the apparent altruism of the two respondents with respect to their motivation to engage in the PTA was challenged by the allegation of some villagers that

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[298] It should be noted that the respondent was never made candidate for the PTA president, even though she had been elected into the working committee for successive terms. Social conventions about women's role in public clearly restrict mothers' activity in the PTA – the respondent stated that she has not been elected PTA president because "People don't like it when a women is president." (ibid.)

just these two working committee members were involved in the misappropriation of food prepared for the midday meal.

Personal benefit was a strong motivation behind individual decisions to hold a public office, as pointed out in the context of panchayat functioning in the discussion of MS2.

Even though not made explicit by respondents, it was tangible that anyone in control of public resources was expected by the others to be taking advantage of this in some way[299], and it appeared that incumbents more often than not did make use of this opportunity.

In stark contrast to the proclaimed intrinsic motivation to engage in the PTA, there was an astonishing reluctance among the more active members to address the critical issues of student attendance and achievement as well as teacher performance in PTA meetings. These not only belong to the core areas of PTA activity according to the JSN, but, given the dismal attendance and achievement levels in PS2, could be expected to represent areas of grave concern to elected PTA members, considering their clearly negative perception of the quality of teaching delivered in their local school:

> "Teachers in the government school take teaching very easy. It's not that they are not qualified, but they have no ambition to teach the children well. (PS2 wc member, 4th March 2006)

The vice president supported the view that teachers were not particularly interested in teaching the children:

> "I think none of the teachers actually teaches the children more than two hours a day. Anyway most of the time only two of them are there. The head teacher is the most regular, and the new teacher is teaching the children well. But one of the teachers does not come at all, and one sleeps on the veranda most of the time." (PS2 vice president, March 4th 2006)

PTA members' claim that teachers were not interested in teaching was supported by the way PTA meetings were handled. While in PS2 the largest number of PTA meetings (23) out of all schools under study were documented in the meeting register, almost all of these were held during school hours (10-16h), at 11 a.m. This has kept at least the head teacher, being ex-officio PTA secretary, busy for at least one hour. Most meeting minutes were signed by one or two other teachers, so possibly there was substantial teacher involvement.

Not only was parent participation severely diminished by this practise, as the majority of parents were out of the village at this time of day, classes were also affected, indicating

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[299] One incidence illustrating this lack of trust was witnessed in the main panchayat village. On the occasion of the planned construction of a well by members of the village water committee, an argument arose between the president and vice-president of the committee (both panchayat members) about the location of the well. When construction was supposed to begin, the president denied his approval on the grounds that the well was to be located in the vicinity of the vice-president's house, and he feared she could restrict access to other villagers (including himself). He then suggested to have the well constructed at a location close to his house, which was rejected by the vice-president on the same grounds. As result, the well was not constructed at all.

that indeed teaching was not ascribed priority by teachers. Interestingly, the JSN explicitly prohibits the conduction of PTA meetings during school hours. This rule was obviously not enforced at all, as PTA meetings were at least occasionally conducted during school hours in all schools under study, except MS1.

The PTA vice president stated that twice PTA meetings had been convened at 8 a.m., with the effect that a few parents showed up. This turnout of participation was obviously too low for teachers to consider holding meetings in the early morning, given that it necessitated earlier attendance in school on their part.

Responses of parents who were not involved in the PTA indicated that they had little conception of what determines the functioning of the school beyond the presence of students, teachers, and a minimum of infrastructure (rooms, blackboards, textbooks).

A respondent from an illiterate household (member2) pointed out that income generation activity made it necessary for both parents to leave the house before the school opened and return long after the school closes, so there was neither control about children's attendance in school, nor a realistic picture of the activities going on.

Still many parents appeared to be tacitly aware that there were shortcomings in teaching activity, even when they asserted they had never thought of directly observing what was going on in school.

Member 3 pointed out that the major problem for villagers was that they did not know where to issue complaints against teachers, and whether or not these were likely to have any effect other than creating conflict between parents and teachers.

> "Everyone in the village knows the teachers are not teaching the children properly. We cannot control the teachers – no one can be in the school all day every day to see what they are doing. And we don't know where to complain. The panchayat does not take care of the village anyway, and we don't know whom to approach for a complaint." (PS2 member2, 7th April 2006)

Parents of lower socio-economic status often expressed a latent fear of conflict and potentially negative effects of confronting teachers, underlining the asymmetric relation between teachers and this section of parents[300].

Two parent respondents (member5 and *panch*) brought forward the view that the main reason why the majority of parents (whether elected or non-elected) were reluctant to attend PTA meetings was the fact that they lacked the courage to raise critical questions towards teachers.

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[300] Francois Leclercq has emphasised this point in the context of parents' role in PTAs and SMCs in tribal and SC communities. He rightly stated that given the dominant role teachers play in conducting PTA meetings, it was hard to imagine any critical issues being brought up by parents in such settings (cf. Leclercq 2002:84f).

It is important to note, however, that parents were willing and able to put pressure on teachers when the immediate physical well-being of their children was at stake. One incident illustrated this.

During September 2005 a number of additional PTA meetings were held in the school because parents had found out that in August the milk of a buffalo infected by rabies had been used for the midday meal. Obviously, the cook had been trying to hide the incidence. Anxious parents reacted immediately by not allowing their children to attend school, and giving notice of the incidence to the *gram panchayat*. In fact, parents threatened to complain to the district administration if the PTA did not immediately arrange a medical check up of their children. The result was that within two days a medical team came to visit the village twice, and it was decided that the midday meal had to be prepared and stocks kept at school, while previously the food had been kept and prepared at the cook's house.

Obviously, neither the cutting of one teacher post in the beginning of the school year, the lack of infrastructure, nor teachers' deficient commitment to teaching the children were issues of immediate concern to parents which would have inclined them to take action the way they did when they feared their children's health was in danger.

Similar to what has been observed in PS1, the exit option into the private system severely diminished the inclination to hold teachers accountable on part of those parents who in terms of educational status and social position in the village were more on a par with teachers (i.e. educated male panchayat members).

This was related to the necessity of bringing issues of their concern to the attention of superiors upwards the administrative ladder, as the dysfunctionality of the *gram panchayat* could be expected to prevent any meaningful intervention on its part.

This requires a notable investment of time and resources (travelling to the cluster or block resource centre/panchayat, waiting to meet the concerned authority etc.) with uncertain prospects of success.

Indeed a common perception was that if teachers closed ranks to ward off complaints of parents, it was impossible for the latter to convince authorities to take action against them[301]. The lack of parent representation at the next higher level, namely the cluster, is a major impediment to PTAs in making their issues heard to higher levels of the

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[301] This was brought forward by the female panchayat respondent in PS2. Member 3 made a similar statement. It should be remembered that the *gram panchayat* can take direct sanctioning actions only when teachers are employed and paid through the *gram panchayat*, which applies only to *guruji* employed under EGS, or substitute teachers employed by the *gram panchayat* to bridge the filling of a vacant teacher position in school. Since all teachers employed in PS2 were assistant teachers, enforcement of compliance was vested in the administration (viz. the DEO) exclusively. In the absence of panchayat support for filing a complaint, the only option for parent representatives to exert pressure on teachers was to directly contact higher level authorities, and these usually insist on compliance to the prescribed procedure before any action is taken.

administration. Further, none of the elected members (neither in PS2 nor elsewhere) were aware that there are parent representatives in the *janpad* and *zilla panchayat* education committees.

Given these obstacles to effective PTA intervention, it is not surprising that exactly those parents who would otherwise seem capable of confronting teachers due to their own higher educational status and position in the village (e.g. wc member and PTA president) considered enrolment of their children in a private school a more viable option with prospects of immediate effectiveness:

> "I have enrolled my son in the private school because there teachers are paid to teach only, and they are directly accountable for what the children learn. They have no excuses." (PS2 wc member, 4th April 2006)

In addition, these members were possibly involved in extracting material profit from their activity in the PTA to some extent (by branching off resources for the midday meal), so there may have been little inducement of being overly critical towards teachers who turned a blind eye to if not openly tolerated such behaviour.

c) Conclusions

In conclusion, parental choices to participate in PTA meetings were inflicted by many of the problems relating to parents' low educational status (lack of ability to judge processes in school, lack of ability to access and retain information), poverty (preoccupation with income generation), and the low relative importance ascribed to school education.

Parental participation was further discouraged by parents' perceived own inability to address critical issues vis-à-vis teachers, or to exert pressure by means of issuing complaints, and the reluctance of panchayat representatives to do so.

Last but not least, it appeared that neither teachers nor those elected PTA members who were moderately active had any inclination to activate wider parent participation in the PTA, as they appeared to be in some way or the other benefiting from the control over resources. In addition, the distinctively negative appraisal of community participation in school governance on part of the head teacher (which was shared by the *jan shikshak of* cluster 2, as will be discussed in the next chapter) explains why there was no substantial effort on part of teachers to mobilise parent participation.

The case of PS2 highlights one important issue, namely the link between the lack of accountability of teachers for student achievement and the lack of commitment to enforce compulsory education vis-à-vis parents.

It has been evident in three out of the five cases that the ability of the PTA to hold teachers accountable for student achievement – the outcome which would be most valued by parents - was severely impeded by a) teachers' ability to blame lacking teaching activity on non-teaching duties, and b) the ability of teachers to counter parental complaints concerning learning outcome with the argument that their reluctance to ensure their children's regular attendance in school, rather than inappropriate teaching activity, was causal to low student achievement levels.

Were parents effectively sanctioned for their children's irregularity in school, this would put them into a much stronger position to pressurise teachers for non-performance – if one group of actors is sanctioned for deviance from the rules, it is much less likely to tolerate the deviance of other groups.

However, it should be noted that teacher accountability can only be effectively enforced if a reliable external evaluation of student achievement is in place – wide-spread teacher-tolerated cheating during local and board examinations prohibits the utilisation of examination results as an indicator for student achievement – to give parents an undisputable basis of argumentation.

Important as constraints in physical infrastructure may have been for the dysfunctionality of the school in PS2, a large number of well equipped classrooms and a proper midday meal would have limited impact on student learning outcome unless teachers' motivation to teach is increased. This is likely to require both the establishment of teacher accountability for the learning achievement of each individual child in school, and effective support in the form of adequate infrastructure, training, and pedagogic trouble-shooting at the cluster level.

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**Table 55: Determinants of parent participation in PS2**

Variables and indicators	regular participants in PTA	Irregular participants in PTA — irregular/weak children		Irregular participants in PTA — regular/achieving children	
mobilisation by teachers negative attitude towards community participation=> selective mobilisation	educated to upper primary level or above, belonging to the wealthier/income-securer households	no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members	no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members	no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members	no mobilisation attempted by teachers or working committee members
level of information about PTA educational status, ability to handle information, importance ascribed to school-related issues	decent levels of information; education beyond primary level; interest in children's learning achievements	no information about PTA or school meetings; no formal education; low capacity to handle information		decent level of information about PTA: high educational status, capacity to handle information, focus on children's learning	low level of information about PTA; primary level education; moderate capacity to handle
opportunity costs amount and security of income, working hours	secure income due to permanent employment/landholding/business	high opportunity costs: low income, long, unregulated working hours in agricultural labour	low opportunity costs: moderate but secure income of husband, housewife	moderate but secure family income (landholding), flexible working hours => low perceived opportunity costs	high opportunity costs: low income
valued outcome of parental activity ability to judge children's learning progress, perceived value of school education	effective input utilisation, student learning achievement, possibly personal benefit from control over school resources	none	control over teachers: making teachers teach the children	teacher accountability; parent responsibility for children's attendance and achievement control over teachers	none
perceived effectiveness of PTA activities for valued outcome information about rights and duties of PTA, expectations towards the ability of the body to address critical issues	limited effectiveness to increase learning achievement and teacher performance, inability to address infrastructure issues at higher levels	none	ineffective: parents lack information about where to raise complaints	ineffective: working committee members' reluctance to mobilise/pressurise parents to send their children to school	none

(The column group headed "regular participants in PTA" and "Irregular participants in PTA" fall under the overall heading "Characteristics of Respondents".)

Scope of PTA activity: Perceptions of main responsibilities among parents and teachers

As pointed out above, the amount of information parents had about the rights and responsibilities of the PTA was strongly determined by their educational status and/or involvement in other organisations in the village, e.g. the _gram panchayat,_ user- or self-help groups.

It was typical across cases that villagers of low educational status who held an office elsewhere, or were involved in civil society groups, were much better informed about the local school and the PTA than parents who were not connected to a group or held a position. This was particularly true for female respondents.

Fig. 40: Individual respondents' perceptions of PTA rights and responsibilities, PS2
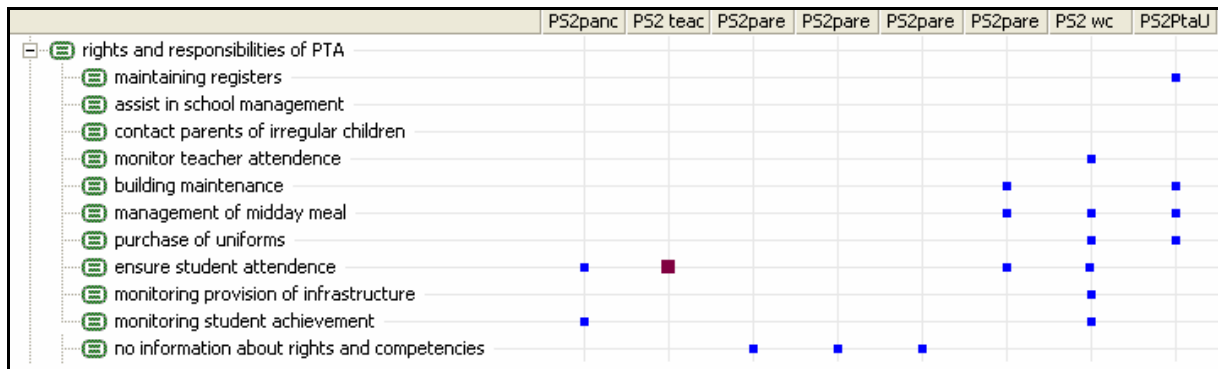
Source: Interviews

As figure 40 indicates, most PTA members, if they had any idea of the rights and responsibilities of the PTA at all, perceived it to be a body mainly involved in the implementation of managerial tasks. The only exceptions to this were both panchayat members, who stated that monitoring student attendance and achievement as well as teacher attendance (wc member) were important tasks of the PTA.

The limited perception of teachers concerning the core responsibilities of the PTA was indicative of both their negative attitude towards community participation in general, and their preoccupation with getting children to attend school.

It should be noted that of course teachers were well aware of other responsibilities of parents in the PTA concerning monitoring and implementation, but they emphasised that ensuring student attendance should be the priority of parent involvement, as the completion of all other tasks was of limited use in the face of high student irregularity.

The lack of concern with planning and decision-making is in line with what has been observed the other schools under study – neither parents nor teachers perceived these to

be areas of PTA involvement, which again is related to the bureaucratic paternalism typical for control-based school management.

Table 56: Perceived central tasks of PTA according to respondents from different stakeholder groups, PS2

	teachers	working committee member(s)	parents	panchayat member(s)
planning	—	—	—	—
implementation	°ensure student attendence ° assist in provision and distribution of incentives	° assist in provision and distribution of incentives: midday meal ° take care of building maintenance	—	°ensure student attendence
decision-making	—	—	—	—
monitoring	—	° monitor teacher attendence ° monitor student achievement °monitor fund utilisation	—	°monitor student achievement

Source: Interviews

The concern with implementation and monitoring reflects the preferences of teachers and elected representatives in the PTA and/or *gram panchayat*, the former emphasising student attendance as the most valued outcome of parent participation, while the latter valued control over teachers, teacher accountability, and control over resources, while recognising that the PTA is ascribed important implementation functions.

More importantly, respondents from low socio-economic and educational status households, who represent the majority of villagers, exposed no or rudimentary knowledge of the PTA and its purpose, indicating both the lack of effort to mobilise parents on part of teachers and elected members, and their lack of attention towards the school and their children's education, in general.

The range of issues discussed in meetings as according to meeting minutes was more extensive than what parent responses would suggest.

Table 57: Issues discussed, decided and accomplished by the PTA according to meeting minutes, PS2

Type of issue	discussions by issue	noted decisions/proposals	noted accomplish-ments
elections	7	0	7
government orders	8	0	4
utilisation of funds	3	1	0
construction and maintenance	5	1	0
student achievement	7	0	0
student attendance	7	7	0
student benefits	4	1	4
organisation of midday meal	8	7	2
functions at school	5	3	5
organisation of local exams	1	0	0

Source: PTA meeting minutes 2005-06, PS2

However, similar to what has been observed in most other cases under study, while much of the discussion in PTA meetings revolved around the issue of increasing student attendance and achievement, tasks which were actually discernibly accomplished all related to the fulfilment of formal requirements (e.g. establishment of sub-committees), provision of infrastructure (building), and student benefits (uniforms, midday meal).

In other words, measurable accomplishments were restricted to those areas that could be verified during inspections by superior officials.

There was no indication that any decision on measures to increase student attendance levels was actually realised. The same is true for student achievement, which has been discussed frequently, but no concrete measures were determined.

While increasing student attendance was indeed the topic most important to teachers, it appears they have not been able to activate PTA members to make efforts to motivate parents to send their children to school.

Several parent respondents emphasised that while teachers did occasionally approach parents of irregular children and urged them to ensure their regular attendance in school (one recently posted teacher was stated to walk through the village in the mornings to collect absent children), no efforts in this direction were made by working committee members. The same inactivity was notable with respect to activating parents to attend PTA meetings.

It was evident that working committee respondents did value their own children's education quite highly, but were not much concerned about other children's ability to learn in school. Administrators (*jan shikshak* of cluster 2 and the BEO) emphasised that the lack of concern for other children in the locality was the major impediment to effective parent participation, because it prevented the PTA from putting pressure on parents of irregular children and establishing social norms which would not tolerate children's regular absence from school[302].

It should also be noted that except the PTA president, not a single parent took part in training for members of the PTA working committee. Even the vice-president, who had been elected for the fourth time, stated that she had never attended a training. The same was true for the working committee respondent, who also had been elected for successive terms. It is not clear if PTA members did not attend the training because they refused to do so, or because they were not invited – parent respondents stated they

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[302] Under the existing constraints of proper space and other infrastructure, it is questionable how desirable regular attendance of all children must have appeared to parents of the more regular children – irregular attendance of some made regular attendance at least a little more comfortable for the others.

have note been invited, and the head teacher stated that except the president no one was ready to attend.

The division of functions between different categories of members of the PTA was determined by the limited scope of activities it actually carried out, and thus deviated significantly from the provisions of the relevant legislation and policy documents.

Fig. 41: Division of functions in school governance, PS2
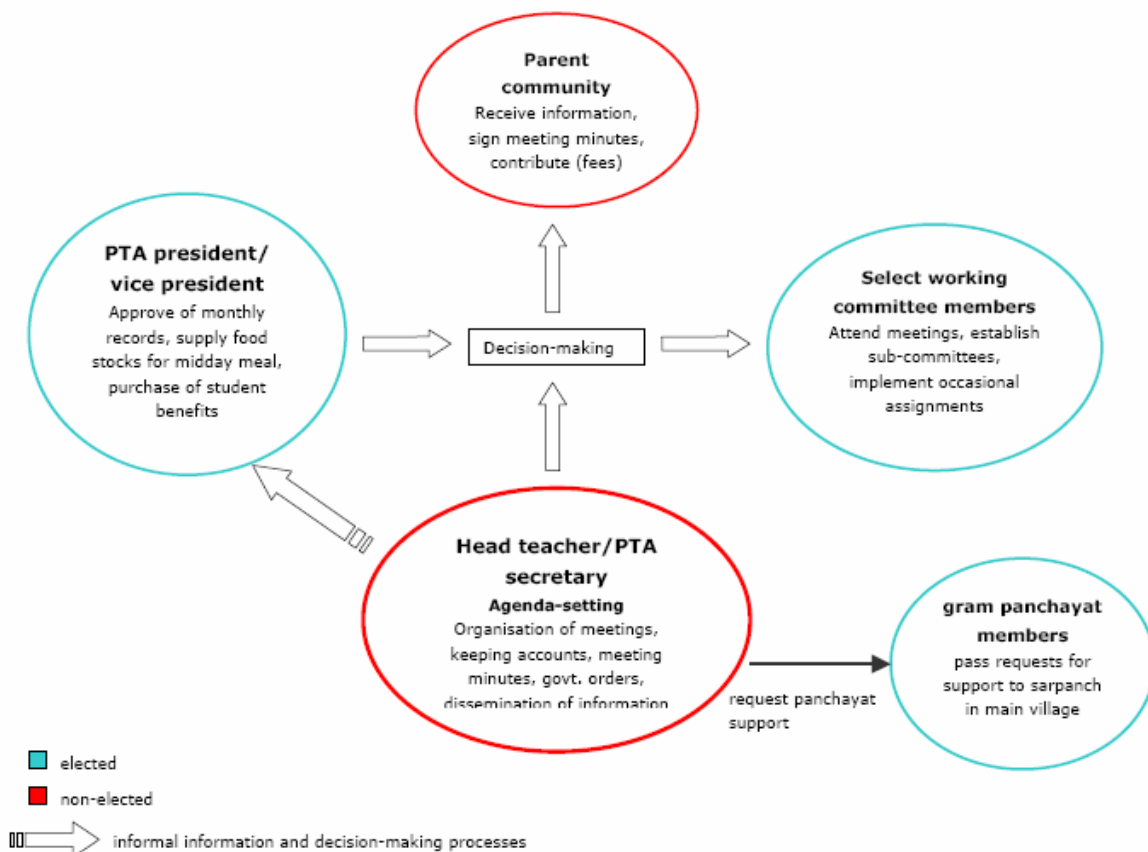
Source: Own

Due to the lack of parent participation in scheduled PTA meetings, discussion and decision-making took place largely between the head teacher and the PTA president and vice-president, and decisions were at best announced to a small audience in the meetings (with the notable exception of those meetings convened because of the rabies-incident, as discussed above).

In addition, parent responses (wc member/panch, member 5) indicate that the approval of records – the only monitoring function which was at least nominally exercised by the president and vice-president – was carried out in the absence of other elected members,

and not made a point of discussion or at least report to other parents in PTA meetings at all.

6.3.5.4   Effects of corruption in panchayat on the functioning of other village level bodies

The dismal state of governance through the *gram panchayat* has been extensively discussed in the context of MS2, which is located in the panchayat centre. This affected PS2 in two respects. Firstly, panchayat and *gram sabha* meetings as a forum to address school issues before the larger community were not available to teachers and PTA members. While teachers were not very inclined to use such an opportunity on most issues, it is not unlikely that the head teacher might have addressed the *gram panchayat* with respect to enforcing children's attendance in school.

Even though there was demonstrable interaction between and even double membership of panchayat members and the PTA working committee (e.g. wc member/*panch*), this was of limited use to the school: *Panches* from the minor village (including the *upsarpanch*) were systematically excluded from decision-making in the *gram panchayat*, and separate *gram sabha* meetings were not held in the minor village, not least because it was unlikely that decisions taken in a separate *gram sabha* would have had any chance of being considered by the *sarpanch* and his affiliates in the panchayat centre.

Given that the *sarpanch* had been convicted of involvement or at least toleration of the sale of midday meal food stocks on the market, it is quite likely that he was not particularly interested in interaction with teachers (even though it was completely unclear whether or not teachers in both villages were involved in the process or not) or PTA members.

In addition, even though considerable resistance against intransparency and corruption had been organised in both villages, people were rather desillusioned with the effectiveness of the procedure. The motion of no-confidence against the *sarpanch* had not been dealt with by the district administration for months, and the rumour spread that there was an official of the same caste community in the district panchayat who ensured the *sarpanch* would not be prosecuted. The only tangible effect to villagers was an increasingly hostile atmosphere in the village and frequent harassment of the organisers of resistance. This has probably not contributed to people's willingness to get together on common issues and confront incumbents of local public offices or government officers.

A panchayat member emphasised that there was a causal connection between people's general unwillingness to get together to solve common problems and corruption in the *gram panchayat*. He argued:

"People do not feel responsible for their own development and growth. They deem the government responsible for it, even though they must know that the government is part of the problem, with all that corruption going on. […] Most people expect that someone should be doing the work for them, either the *panches* or people from outside. But if they don't give any support to us, how can we as *panches* build up pressure on the *sarpanch*?"(PS2 wc member/panch, 4th March 2006)

The female panchayat member in this context pointed out that villagers' reluctance to engage was rooted in a very concrete fear of personal disadvantage if they challenged the *sarpanch*:

"The *sarpanch* pressurises every one who opposes him. No one wants to risk an open confrontation in a panchayat or *gram sabha* meeting, because they fear it will result in being on the *sarpanches* 'black list', and that they will be excluded from any potential benefit as punishment." (PS2 panch, 12th March 2006)

A similar fear of conflict was asserted by a parent respondent in the context of lacking parental activity in the PTA. She pointed out that a major discouraging factor to parents was that most parents were simply afraid of confronting teachers[303]. Parents repeatedly brought forward the view that their voice did not count if the three teachers stood in for each other, and indeed this reflects their experience with elected panchayat representatives and government officials.

The fact that parent involvement was made mandatory by means of government order did not have an impact on the perception of villagers that the school was a government institution in which they have no say, and that teachers are essentially government officials who are not easily approached, let alone criticised, by villagers.

6.3.5.5   Conclusions

The case of PS2 again highlighted that the functioning of the PTA cannot be regarded in isolation of the functioning of other bodies operating at the local level, irrespective of the effort of the government to make the PTA more independent of the *gram panchayat*.

The fierce defence of control over information and public opinion by those who have been dominating local politics for generations by means of disuniting the larger community effectively undermined efforts to facilitate collective action.

The absence of efforts to reconcile differing interests led to an atmosphere of mutual mistrust, in which firstly anyone holding an office in the village was expected by fellow villagers to thrive on it, and secondly most people indeed appeared to be inclined to do so when the opportunity arose.

With exploitation of command over resources to the detriment of the larger community becoming something of an unwritten social norm, it appeared difficult for villagers to establish rules of behaviour more conducive to the common good without support and

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[303] PS2 member 6, 12th March 2006

enforcement from outside, as it appeared that no single individual (e.g. among the *panches*) was at the same time credible and capable in terms of knowledge and leadership.

With respect to the functioning of the PTA, the lack of will to organise collective action was aggravated by the fact that education was perceived a low stake issue by most parents, especially among poorer families, which they were not inclined to devote time and effort to.


Families of the upper socio-economic strata, on the other hand, were able to compensate for the shortcomings of the functioning of the government school by either stepping in the breach themselves (monitoring of children's learning achievement and supporting home study), or opting out into the private system.

Indeed, the existence of a private school option appears to do much to undermine parental demand for accountability in government schools, as parents with higher educational and socio-economic status, who tend to be more willing and capable of voicing demands, systematically select into private schools.

Under such circumstances, teachers' role in activating parental participation becomes all the more important for the functioning of the PTA.

In the instance of a negative attitude towards any form of community involvement as expressed by the head teacher in PS2, the dysfunctionality of the PTA is neither surprising, nor is there any reason to expect that it may improve over time, unless change in one of the determinants of parents' and teachers' behaviour (such as a change in personnel, or a gradual reduction of income insecurity and adult illiteracy over time) facilitates this. In the absence of such change, enforcement costs for ensuring parent participation in the interest of improving school functioning and student outcomes will be high, and given the passivity of JSK staff in this respect, there is no reason to expect effective enforcement under the current institutional setup.

Fig. 42 Types of conditions by effect for PTA activity, PS2

Source: Own

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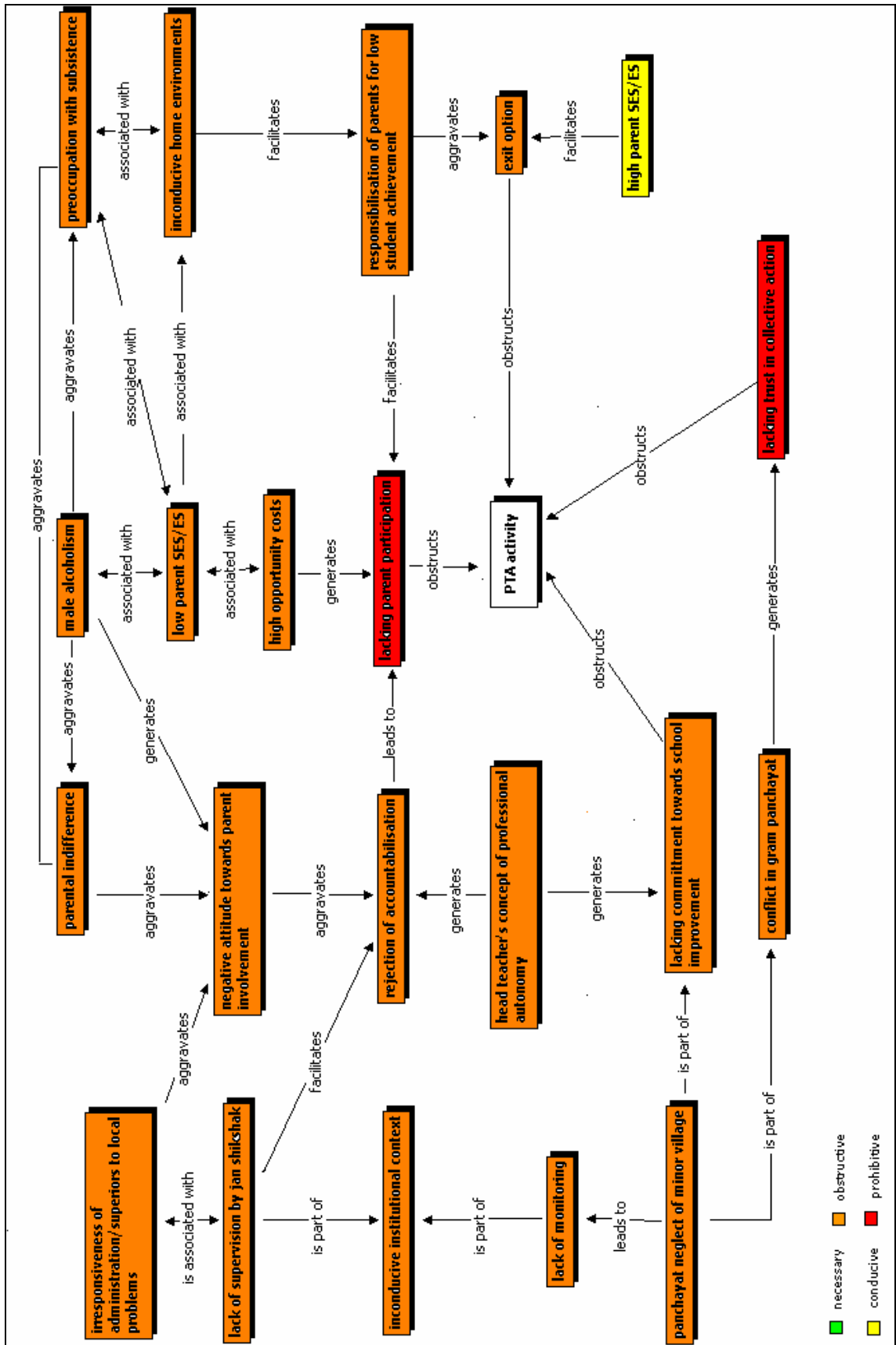
Cross-Case Analysis

7.1 Some common observations from the cases

As the case studies have shown, every school is a microcosm with its particular dynamics between parents, teachers, children, and community members. These are shaped by specific constellations of interest, especially in local governance institutions, and to a large extent by personalities (most prominently the head teacher and the *sarpanch*). Nonetheless, a number of common parameter for PTA functioning, and school functioning at large, emerge from the case studies. Some of these are related to the behaviour of individual actors, some are of more systemic nature. The following observations were made in all schools under study to differing extents:

1. Participation in the PTAs under study was largely contingent on teachers' efforts to mobilise parents, rather than a matter of parents' intrinsic motivation to come forward to engage in the school

2. Teachers' efforts towards mobilisation were determined by their personal appraisal of the usefulness of involving parents for the improvement of school functioning, and their own agenda in terms of enhancing or impeding accountability of teachers

3. Activities of PTAs had a strong implementation bias, the focus of which varied according to what teachers perceived to be the priority area of parent involvement. This is a consequence of school bodies' lack of autonomy in determining necessary steps in school development – they are thoroughly domineered by line department bureaucracy. This found its expression in the practice of issuing government orders on every aspect of school functioning, and of evaluating PTA activity along the line of their ability to fulfil the targets of government orders within the prescribed time frame. This led to a lack of appreciation of the PTAs' (few) decision-making competencies among parents as well as teachers. In fact, in all PTAs, most actual decisions and achievements related to tasks addressed by way of government order.

4. Due to PTAs' lack of enforcement powers concerning such crucial determinants of school functioning as student and teacher attendance and performance, which are

vested in *gram panchayat*s, PTAs were strongly dependent on panchayat institutions for the establishment of accountability of teachers towards parents and the larger community, as well as enforcement of student attendance. The extent to which the panchayat assumed its inspection and enforcement responsibilities largely correlated with the extent of activity of the PTA in the cases under study.

5. All these factors combined led to 'rules-in-use' which differed widely between individual schools, and which were often quite remote from the prescriptions of the JSA and JSN (with MS1 coming closest to the ideal type as outlined in legislation). As a result, PTAs' focus of activity tended to shift from core responsibilities (ensuring 100% enrolment and attendance) to 'other such duties as may be prescribed' (input management and distribution of benefits).

7.2   Parent Participation in PTAs: Capability, Valuation and Choice

7.2.1 Parent Participation across cases

"The basic notion of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is that people in the villages and cities should come forward to participate in managing the educational system in their localities. […] For a better educational environment it is necessary that parents are not only alert to their own children's education, but, by being part of the Parent-Teacher-Association, come forward to keep a firm eye on educational progress in the school, and make its resources sustainable."[304]

Keeping in mind this expectation which policy-makers raise towards parent involvement in elementary education, the most striking observation in all the schools under study was that in none of them did parents come forward *on their own* to participate in the PTA, especially as elected members of the working committee. Rather, teachers had to overcome different degrees of parental resistance against elected membership, particularly as president and vice-president of the PTA.

This is by no means a phenomenon restricted to the schools under study, or a specific problem of certain clusters or blocks, but seems to be quite characteristic for most rural areas in the state, as respondents at district and state levels and adjustments to the

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[304] translated from the PTA training manual 2005-2006 published by the Dept. of Public Instruction (RSK: *Palak Shikshak Sangh Prashikshan Margdarshika* 2005-06)

legislative framework from mid 2006 onwards, discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, confirm.

The lack of parental willingness to participate in PTAs reflected in overall low levels of participation in PTA meetings.

While average participation gradually declined throughout the school year in most schools, participation levels in MS1 were stable, above 35 participants, throughout most of the school year. Both fluctuation and participation levels were lowest in EGS1.

In all schools and among all stakeholder groups, participation tended to peak on meetings conducted on independence day (15th August), not only because all schools held functions and facilitated student performances, but because student uniforms and textbooks were distributed to eligible children on this occasion. Participation tended to be somewhat lower than average during October and November, when soybean is harvested.

Fig. 43: Average parent participation per month in the academic session 2005-06
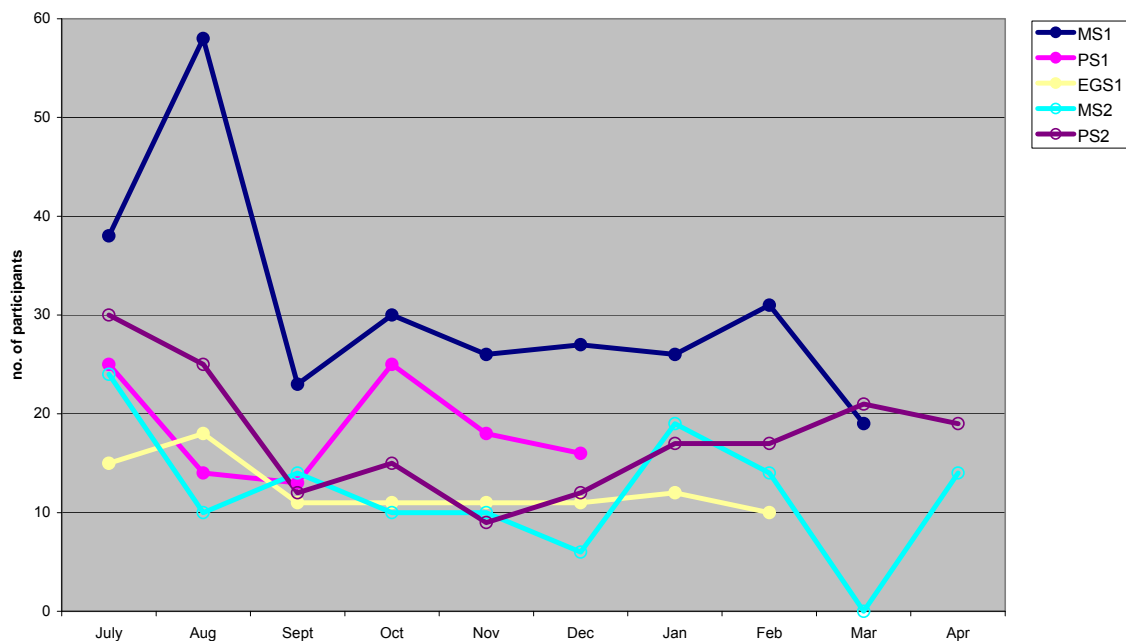
Source: PTA meeting minutes

More indicative for the functionality of the PTA were participation levels among working committee members. Here too, MS1 showed the most stable participation, while working committee members attended at best sporadically in MS2.

Given that in most schools the composition of working committee members in meetings fluctuated, it must be assumed that this constitutes a serious problem for the ability to

establish a working division of labour between the secretary, the president, and working committee members, resulting in an observably disproportionate share of workload on the PTA president.

A look at the issues discussed in meetings with high levels of participation of working committee members indicates that participation choices were no matter of coincidence: Levels of participation were notably high when issues related to fund utilisation were discussed, and notably low when meetings revolved around student absenteeism, a problem which most active working committee members were not affected by personally, but which nonetheless should have constituted a priority area of concern to them.

Fig 44: Average participation of working committee members per month in the academic session 2005-06
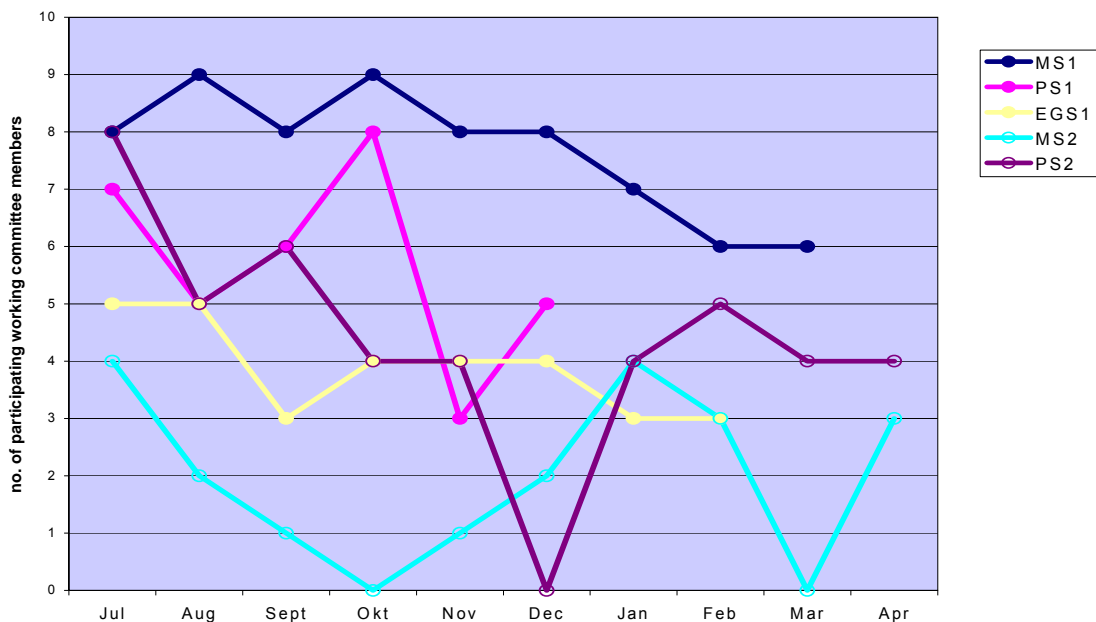
Source: PTA meeting minutes

As has been pointed out in the case discussions, teachers' mobilisation strategies for getting together the full number of working committee members were shaped by the need to balance between parent capabilities and reservation requirements.

As a result, women were elected vice-president rather than president, and often they simultaneously belonged to SC communities (which amounts to killing two birds with one stone in terms of adhering to reservations). Members of SC communities were elected into the working committee, but rather rarely as PTA presidents[305]. The motivation to be

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[305] The patterns were similar in all schools in the two clusters under study. Mothers and parents from the scheduled tribes were rarely elected PTA president. In cluster 1, there was one female SC PTA president (out of 13), in cluster 2 there were 2 male SC PTA presidents (out of 14), and no female president at all. In both

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elected (vice-) president or working committee member was low among parents of higher as well as lower socio-economic and educational status.

'Official' positions on the difficulty to motivate parents to be elected into the PTA working committee differed. A senior officer in the Enrolment and Retention (E&R) Section of the RSK pointed out that this phenomenon was closely related to the weak socio-economic status of parents, and the resulting preoccupation with subsistence[306].

The Block Education Officer, in agreement with the *jan shikshak* of cluster 1, emphasised that the negative impact of parents' low socio-economic and educational status was aggravated by reservation requirements in PTA working committees.

Given that reservation targets the potentially weakest section of village society (SC/ST parents and women), many of whom have neither been exposed to any public office before, nor received formal school education, the overall capability level of the working committee declined.

These parents were also particularly difficult to motivate towards regular involvement, as the key skills necessary for effectively engaging in school governance, such as accessing, retaining and using information when necessary, were lowest among those members 'elected' on the committee primarily for the purpose of adhering to reservation requirements[307].

At the same time, opportunity costs of participation were highest for this group of parents because of their often particularly low socio-economic status. Participation among this group of working committee members was observably low across all cases except MS1.

The low levels of motivation of parents from the entire social spectrum of the school population in general, and the patterns of participation among women and SC members in particular, indicate that so far the expectation that rural, largely poor and little educated parents will be motivated to come forward for participation in school governance has not been met on the ground.

This observation is not trivial, because the argument that decentralisation offers an opportunity to include precisely the weaker sections of society into local decision-making

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clusters, almost all vice-presidents were female *and* belonged to SC communities (except when the president belonged to the scheduled castes).

[306] Interview with a leading officer of the Enrolment and Retention (E&R) section, RSK, Bhopal 21st September 2007.

[307] Interview with jan shikshak cluster 1conducted on 16th March 2006, Interview with BEO at the Block Edcuation Office conducted on 2nd April 2006

processes, so as to improve the services delivered to them, has been one of the most important drivers for the process [308].

People's willingness to participate, however, depends on many factors, not least whether or not they perceive the scope of action they can take as appropriate to reach the outcome they favour.

In addition, in education, in contrast to such areas as watershed management or joint natural resource management, local people (especially of low educational status) can bring in little expertise or even own experience with formal education, which would enable them to develop their own ideas as to how the local government school should function. This makes them particularly prone to serve as mere implementors of those aspects of school management in which teachers deem parental support appropriate.

7.2.2 Determinants of participation: the interplay of information, prioritisation, and outcome preference

Responses of parents as well as teachers across cases indicated that among the large majority of non-elected PTA members, participation in PTA meetings was prone to fail at a number of levels throughout the process of individual parents' decision-making.

The initial barrier was lack of information, the second was the process of valuation of the importance of participation relative to other, often more immediate concerns, and the third was an evaluation of whether or not participation 'was worth it', viz. whether or not it was perceived to do anything to realise the goals of parental involvement as envisioned by the individual parent.

The latter aspect was particularly important for participation among working committee members, who by virtue of position are required to participate on a continuous basis.

Among parents of low educational status, the combination of informational constraint and the preoccupation with subsistence effectively impeded participation in the PTA across all cases – these respondents not only showed the lowest levels of information about the

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[308] It should be noted that by and large this argument is political rhetoric – at the state education department level, community participation in education is regarded a means to reach the goals established by SSA within the time frame set by the millennium development goals, not to 'deepen democracy' or empower local people to hold service providers accountable. Producing conditions under which community participation may offer prospects for increased accountability in service delivery, and inclusion of thus far excluded sections of the population into local decision-making processes is at best a by-product of realising certain outcome indicators.

PTA (see fig.55), but also participated significantly less in PTA meetings, as indicated in figure 46.

Fig. 45: Parameter of parents' decision to participate in PTAs
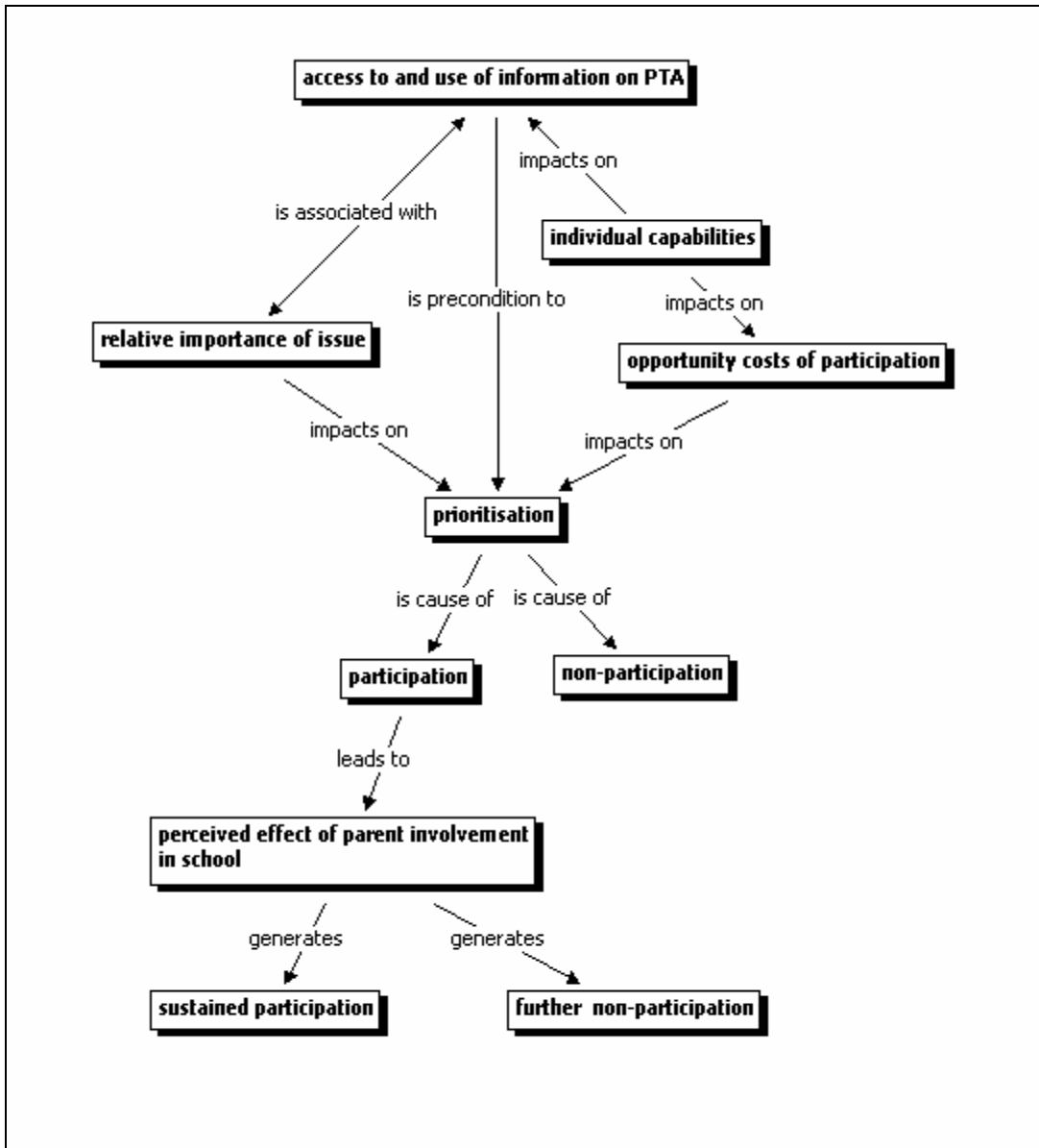
Source: Own

When looking at the characteristics of participating and non-participating parents across the cases, it is evident that indeed parents' educational status played a decisive role for the level of information they exposed about school functioning in general, and the existence and purpose of the PTA in particular.

Among the more educated respondents, levels of information about the PTA (and school functioning in general) were consistently higher than among members of low educational status.
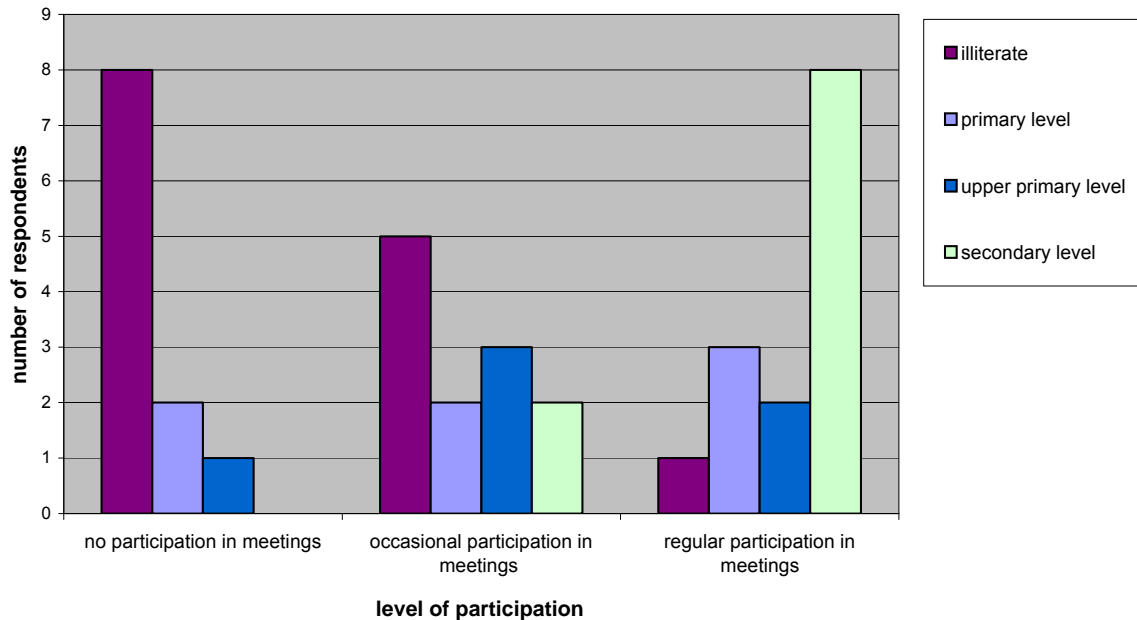
Fig. 46: Participation in PTA meetings by respondents' educational status across cases

Source: Interviews

In fact, out of the twelve non-participating respondents across cases, eight (66%) were illiterate and another three (25%) were educated at primary level. Out of these, six respondents (50%) stated they have never been invited to a PTA meeting, indicating that they have neither received the notice students were supposed to take home for their parents (or have not been able to read what was written on it), nor been invited to participate by a teacher or working committee member.

These respondents also by and large exposed very low levels of information about what was actually happening in the schools - rather there was a tendency to *assume* that if the schools opened regularly and teachers and students attended, a satisfactory amount of teaching would occur somewhat automatically, and student achievement would be appropriate. Especially illiterate parents lacked any indicators by which to judge their children's learning progress, and the only benchmark available to them was whether their children passed the end of year examination[309].

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[309] PS2member2, MS2member1, MS2member2, MS2member3, MS1member1, PS1member2. At least five respondents confused the grades their children studied in, indicating that some parents did not even retain the most basic information about their children's progress in school. The evaluation study of an intervention to strengthen participation in VECs in Jaunpur district in UP by Banerjee et. al. revealed that more than 80% of parents gravely overestimated their children's achievement levels in terms of reading and comprehension as well as arithmetic skills (Banerjee 2008).

The *jan shikshak* of cluster 1 pointed out that educational status was the most important determinant for the ability of the working committee to meet the numerous functions the PTA is expected to fulfil by the government.

He emphasised that even if uneducated parents took ample interest in education and came forward to participate in PTAs, because they attached expectations of escaping poverty and livelihood insecurity to their children's education, these were not necessarily the most desirable participants, given that the ability to access and evaluate information was the key to successful parent involvement. Effective involvement in the PTA above all presupposes skills to receive and control relevant information, a skill that is not strongly developed even among many literate villagers. This makes PTA members potentially dependent on the head teacher/PTA secretary, who evaluates the importance of information on his own terms before passing it on to parents. The lower the skills to access, understand and evaluate information, the more dominant the role of the secretary becomes.

> "In the worst possible case the secretary tells PTA members what has to be decided regarding which issues and takes their assent in form of a signature - or fingerprint - so that decision-making becomes a mere façade." (Interview Jan Shikshak cluster 1, 23rd March 2006)

For this reason utmost priority was placed on making sure that a functionally literate[310] person was elected as PTA president.

The commitment to mobilise as large a number of parents capable of independent decision-making as possible reflected in the composition of the working committee in MS1. However, even here, regular participation of elected members in PTA meetings required constant motivating of parents by teachers and the *jan shikshak*, and here, too, a decline of participation throughout the school year was observable. This indicates how difficult it is to keep the momentum in parent mobilisation.

As the figure below shows, the amplitude of perceived rights and responsibilities of the PTA closely correlated with respondents' educational status. However, membership in other organisations played an equally important role especially for access to information, and to some extent counterbalanced low educational status. PTA members, whether elected or non-elected, exposed higher levels of information about the PTA and

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[310] There was a tendency observable among administrators to equate formal educational attainment with functional literacy. However, this is an inappropriate indicator of functional literacy, because many parents who have finished the primary or even upper primary cycle lose basic reading and comprehension skills over time. This was true for the PTA president of EGS1, who considered himself a 'half-literate', because reading and understanding the content of government orders and other formal documents (the language used in which differs drastically from the language spoken in villages) as well as cash books and accounts presented a considerable challenge to him.

participated more often when they were also members of other organisations, notably the *gram panchayat*. In fact, membership in other organisations frequently outweighed membership in the working committee in terms of both information and participation – except in MS1, a large number of working committee members participated less and exposed fewer information about rights and responsibilities of the PTA than non-elected members who were also panchayat members.

Illiterate and little educated parents across cases were either completely ignorant of PTAs' responsibilities, or perceived the scope of PTA activities to be restricted to infrastructure and benefit distribution issues.

This reflected not only teacher preferences, but also their own priorities, which tended to be heavily centred around material benefit, to the neglect of issues which they either felt incapable of judging (student achievement and teacher performance), or which involved a change of behaviour on their part (ensuring student attendance and providing conducive learning environments at home).

Fig. 47: Information about PTA competencies by respondents' educational status
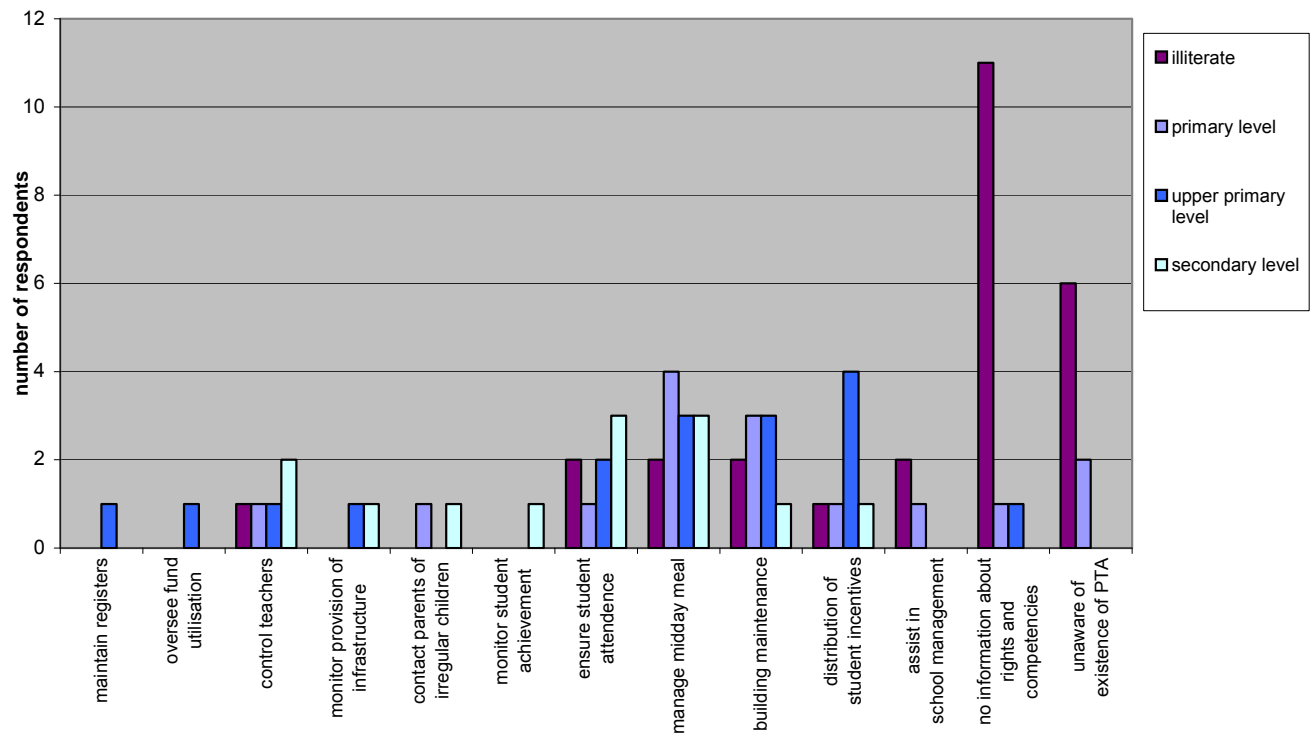
Source: Interviews

Generally, parents of higher educational status (upper primary and above) had a broader perception of the PTA's responsibilities, especially in terms of monitoring functions, and mentioned different issues related to the control of teachers and student achievement as central responsibilities of the PTA. Again, membership in other institutions balanced low

educational status to some extent, and reinforced the informational advantage of higher educated parents.

The mismatch between the rather narrow and managerial perception of teachers regarding core responsibilities of the PTA, and the wider, accountability-centred perception of educated parents was one important determinant of the latters' choice to abstain from participation in PS1, even though the higher levels of education and comparatively better socio-economic status among a section of parents of children in the government school provided a comparatively conducive environment for effective parent involvement.

Lack of information about existence, purpose and meeting routines of the PTA however were not the only impediments to participation, especially among socio-economically weak parents.

PTA presidents and teachers pointed out that parental participation in meetings was heavily constrained by parents' unwillingness to interrupt work to attend, indicating that the opportunity costs of participation are perceived to be high.

Fig. 48 Obstacles to participation in PTA meetings by respondents' level of participation
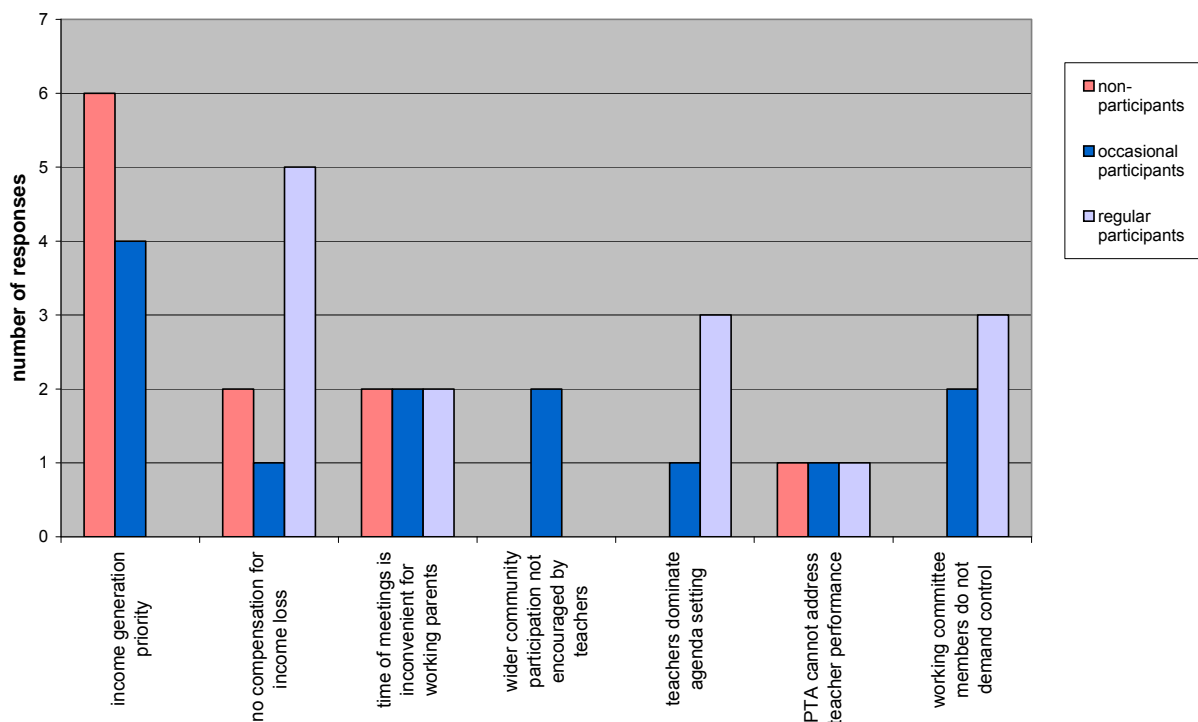
Source: Interviews

Out of the six parents who claimed they have never been invited to meetings, four asserted that they would not participate in the future if meetings take place during daytime when they are engaged in labour. Improvement of the informational status of

these parents by changing the modes and frequency of communication are unlikely to increase participation[311].

It is important to note that there was an equal unwillingness observable on the part of teachers to adjust the timings of PTA meetings to the needs of parents to increase participation levels. This indicates that parents and teachers alike perceived an adjustment of their own routines as costly, and expected the respective other to adjust. While PTAs could have easily decided to hold meetings at a time of day conducive to parent participation, such decisions have not materialised in the cases under study and, according to the BEO, it was common throughout the block that meetings were conducted right after, if not during school hours.

Even though parents' educational status played a significant role for their willingness and ability to engage in the PTA, this did not imply that educated parents were *automatically* more willing to participate in PTAs, especially as elected members. Rather, educated parents' decision to participate in PTA meetings or be elected on the working committee depended crucially on their perception of school functioning, and on the perceived effectiveness of parental participation on the improvement of basic indicators of school functioning, such as student attendance and achievement levels and the time teachers spend on task[312].

It is interesting that dissatisfaction with aspects of school functioning, especially student performance, was observed to be impeding parental participation, rather than inducing it, as one might be tempted to expect. Parents of higher socio-economic status frequently preferred enrolling their children in private schools to addressing deficiencies in the government school via the PTA.

Parents to whom this option was not available either felt that it was not the teachers' fault that many students did not acquire decent levels of basic skills - most prominently because of non-teaching duties, which were perceived to be out of the realm of influence

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[311] It should be remembered that a day of labour earns one adult an income of 35-40 Rs (app. 0.70 €). If one parent with several children in a government school participated regularly in PTA meetings, this would incur a potential loss (provided he or she found employment on these particular days) of 80Rs a month. This a considerable proportion of 10% of a labourers average monthly income. On the other hand, considering the sums of money spend on religious or family festivities, the amount is laughable. Francois Leclercq (2002) has rightly pointed out that education still figures at the bottom of the value scale of many rural families, and that any cost connected to school education, no matter how negligible, is prone to being perceived as unbearable by parents.

[312] PS1panch/wcmember, MS2panch/member5, MS2member4, PS2member5 stated that they were discouraged by the fact that the PTA was unable to address issues of their concern, viz. student achievement and teachers accountability for it.

of parents and teachers alike - or that teachers were too well connected upwards for parents to enforce accountability and induce sanction, especially when the *gram panchayat* was reluctant to exercise its monitoring functions.

Fig. 49: Case-wise responses of working committee members about their motivation to be elected
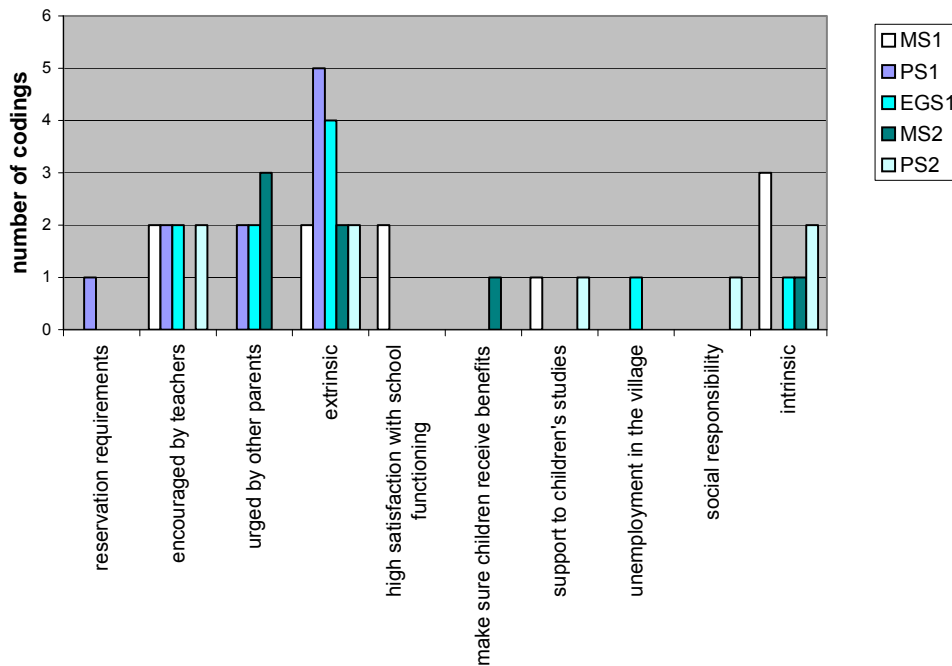
Source: Interviews

In MS1, the main reason why working committee respondents were more willing to assume responsibility as elected members was their perception that the school was being run well by the principal, and that teachers were dedicated to increasing student attendance and achievement levels, thus deserved to be supported in their efforts by parents. Notably, none of these respondents belonged to the high-income section of the village. Nevertheless, opportunity costs apparently played a subordinate role for decisions to be elected and participate in PTA meetings.

In all other schools under study, extrinsic factors played a greater role for parental decisions to be elected on the working committee, most notably encouragement (if not pressure) of teachers and other parents attending the constituent meeting of the PTAs.

Since levels of information about the PTA, patterns of participation in meetings among different groups of the population, and factors determining individual decisions for or against participation within these groups were similar across cases, it is likely that the large differences in the scope of activities of PTAs and levels of engagement, especially

among working committee members, depended on factors *not* primarily related to parents' individual willingness and ability to participate.

Rather, individual decisions were strongly influenced by the insistence with which teachers and *jan shikshaks* pursued parent mobilisation, the space the issue of school functioning occupied in the public discourse, especially in local government institutions, and whether or not the latter took their inspection responsibilities seriously.

7.3 The teacher as key to successful parent mobilisation

Similar to the observed fluctuation in participation among parents, teacher participation in PTA meetings – with exception of PTA secretaries - was rather unstable in most schools.

That individual teachers apparently did not participate in PTA meetings at all, or only once or twice throughout the school year, implies that discussions about student attendance and achievement, as amply recorded in PTA meeting minutes, take place in the absence of concerned teachers, and reduce opportunity for interaction between parents and those teachers who actually teach their individual child, in the absence of other formalised modes of exchange between parents and teachers.

Fig 50: Average monthly participation in PTA meetings among teachers across cases
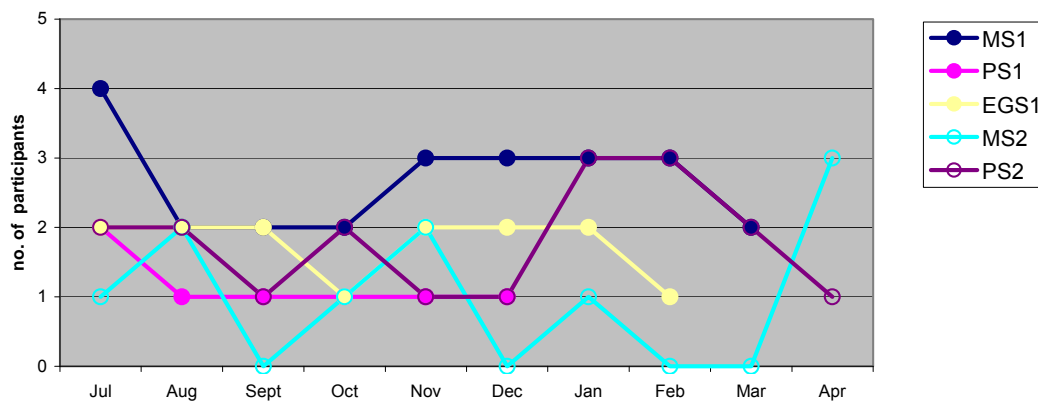
Source: PTA meeting minutes

While in MS1 there was generally more teacher participation in PTA meetings than elsewhere, here too, two of the primary grade teachers attended only the constituent meeting of the PTA, but none of the following meetings throughout the school year.

In PS1, the shiskha karmi, with exception of the constituent meeting, never attended PTA meetings.

In EGS1, both teachers usually attended PTA meetings. While the female teacher emphasised that her presence in meetings was necessary because she carried most of the teaching load due to more frequent absences of the head teacher, it should be noted that many of the meetings took place around noon, and classes continued afterwards.

In PS2, teacher participation seemed to reflect teacher attendance on the respective days, and possibly the time of day at which meetings were held – records indicate that participation was higher among teachers when meetings were conducted during school hours, and lower when they were conducted after school.

Fluctuation in teacher participation in MS2 appeared to revolve around the presence of inspectors. It was conspicuous that more teachers participated either when an inspector was present in a meeting, or in the meeting following the presence of an inspector.

Teacher responses suggest that in the schools under study, the PTA secretary handled the bulk of interaction with parents through the PTA more or less exclusively, and this pertained particularly to the mobilisation of parents for the election of the working committees. Other teachers related to parents either not at all, or in rather informal and largely arbitrary ways, especially in the smaller primary schools.

Given the dominant role of head teachers/PTA secretaries in determining the scope and quality of parent mobilisation, it makes sense to look at head teachers' perception of the appropriateness and desirability of parent participation in school governance.

Professional ambitions and attitudes appeared to play a decisive part in determining teachers' willingness to make sustained efforts to mobilise parents for participation in PTAs.

It has been discussed extensively in the case studies that most teacher respondents expressed a very sceptical view towards the benefits of involving parents in school, and as a result regarded the establishment of PTAs as a necessary compliance to the rules, rather than a viable strategy to improve functioning and outcomes, the latter sometimes appearing to be of very little concern to them anyhow.

Statements on the benefits of having parents involved in schools through PTAs indicated that a number of PTA working committee as well as panchayat members perceived positive effects because it has led to improved attendance records among teachers, and less irregularities in the flow and utilisation of funds.

Teachers largely did not share this view, not necessarily because above statements were perceived to be wrong, but rather because PTA secretaries were involved in areas (infrastructure, midday meal, distribution of uniforms, textbooks etc.) for which they previously were neither responsible nor accountable. Their central concern was not whether these tasks were better managed PTAs, but whether or not this means an increase or decrease of workload on them.

As figure 51 below indicates, the only positive responses towards effects of parent involvement were brought forward by the principal of MS1 – other head teachers perceived no particular benefits, but a number of negative effects resulting from increasing PTA involvement, particularly in input management.

Fig. 51: Positive and negative effects of parent involvement as perceived by teachers
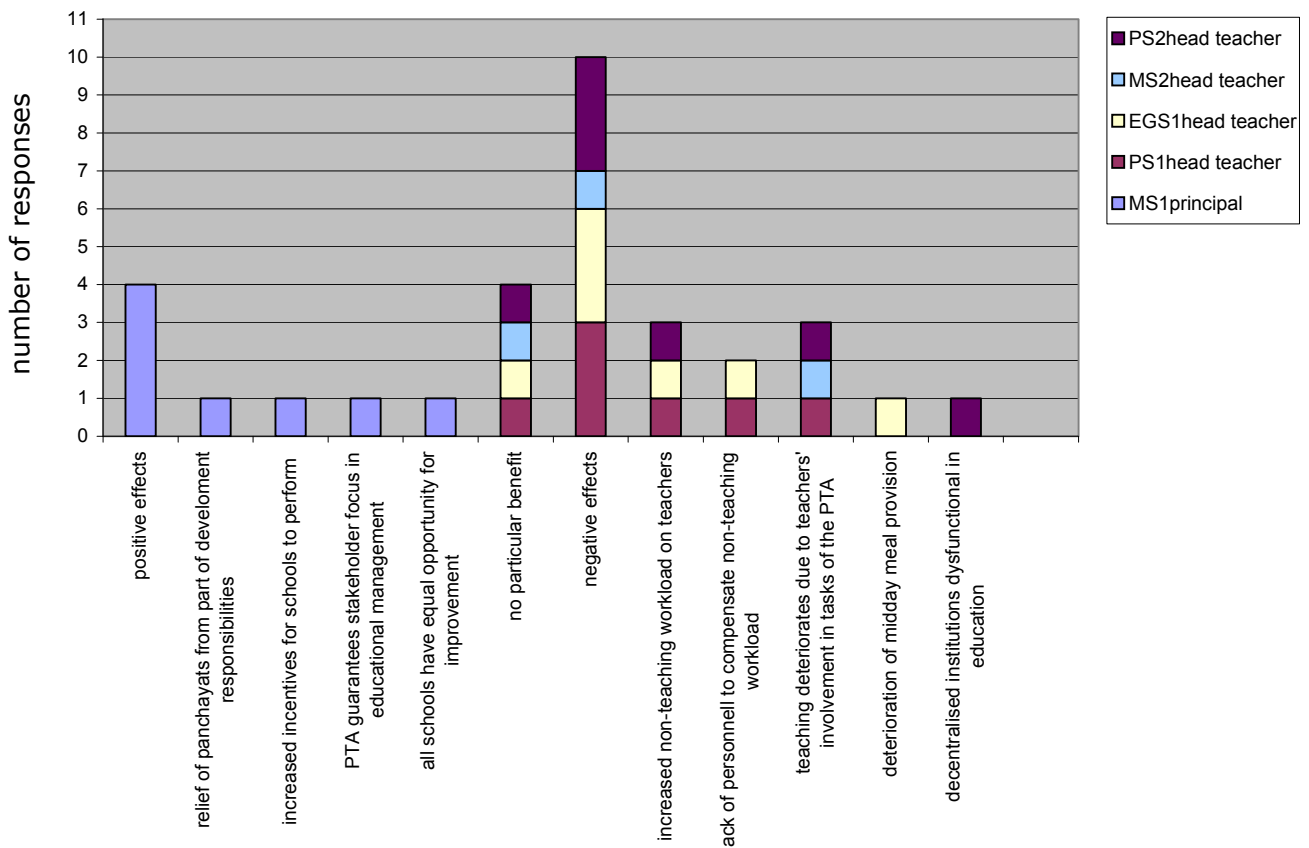
Source: Interviews

Interestingly, positive effects were noticed at the systemic level exclusively, i.e. the *opportunity* for direct stakeholders to involve unbarred by actors in the local government, and the *availability* of incentives to head teachers and PTAs to engage for school improvement (referring to the model cluster programme). The respondent was very much aware that the *use* of these opportunities and incentives was largely contingent on the professional ambition of head teachers, and the availability of parents and/or other community members potentially interested in supporting these ambitions.

Negative responses revolved around the issue of increased involvement of teachers in management issues, to the detriment of teaching activity in school – this was most emphatically brought forward by the head teachers of the primary schools (PS1, EGS1, PS2).

This points to a very basic problem for the functioning of school-based management (SBM) in the context of small operating entities as prevailing in rural India.

MS1 was the only school under study availing of a proper principal position and sufficient teaching staff to ensure the principal could be practically exempted from teaching duties. In addition, it cooperated closely with the *jan shikshak*, who shared the office with the principal due to the location of the JSK in the school. This means that de facto the school availed of two additional, qualified personnel who devoted considerable part of their time to the activation of the two PTAs in the school. In addition, there was a workable and reliable division of labour between PTAs and the *gram panchayat*, which contributed its expertise in public infrastructure and fund raising, while also taking its monitoring functions seriously and ensuring that the status of education in the village remained an issue of public interest and scrutiny.

In all other schools, head teachers were assigned full teaching load, were required to fulfil all additional responsibilities of head teachers - keeping records, accounting, reporting to higher levels, participation in meetings at cluster and *sankul* levels, and were ex-officio secretaries of the PTA, and as such involved in all tasks devolved to this body.

Under such conditions, it is not only understandable that head teachers pointed out they needed either administrative staff (school secretary, PS1 and EGS1) or a social worker who was responsible for activating parents to involve in school (MS2), but it appears impossible to engage in multi-tasking at such scale without negative effects on teaching activity. In an environment where teaching performance is not rewarded and non-performance is not punished - while negligence of administrative tasks is – the overload of head teachers is bound to be detrimental to the establishment of a teaching priority.

Further exacerbating the problem of under-staffing, the concept of SBM as envisioned under SSA, with its massive involvement of parent representatives, is blind to the diversity of local realities. It requires substantial commitment and investment of time on part of parents, and most importantly presupposes skills - literacy, numeracy, ability to handle government orders, accounts, judge student progress etc. - which are elusive in settings of high adult illiteracy and low educational and socio-economic status, even more so if the more affluent parents have, and frequently use, the option to enrol their children in private schools. Thus, the inability of head teachers to manage all their responsibilities is complemented by the inability of PTA members to relieve them, at least of those functions delegated to the PTA.

The fact that teachers perceived teaching to suffer from the overload of head teachers with administrative and management tasks was grounded in the problem that SSA is a policy designed primarily to ensure access to elementary education – targets in SSA relate exclusively to enrolment, retention, and infrastructure. Consequently,

administrators evaluate the success of the policy mainly along these indicators. Failure in fulfilling them causes more pressure on head teachers than low attendance and achievement levels of students.

Quality is a concern second to access: SSA defines the minimum of infrastructure and resources a proper formal government should be endowed with, but it does not define any minimum indicators of the quality of teaching which teachers could be effectively pinned down to, not least because there is no continuous external evaluation of student achievement levels[313]. This became particularly evident in EGS – the dysfunctionality of the midday meal was a pertinent issue of concern to the *jan shikshak* and the PTA president, next to which the remarkably high attendance and achievement levels of students were obviously not worth mentioning.

Teachers' perceptions of the central responsibilities of the PTA by and large reflected this input management bias.

Fig.52: Core Responsibilities of the PTA as perceived by head teachers
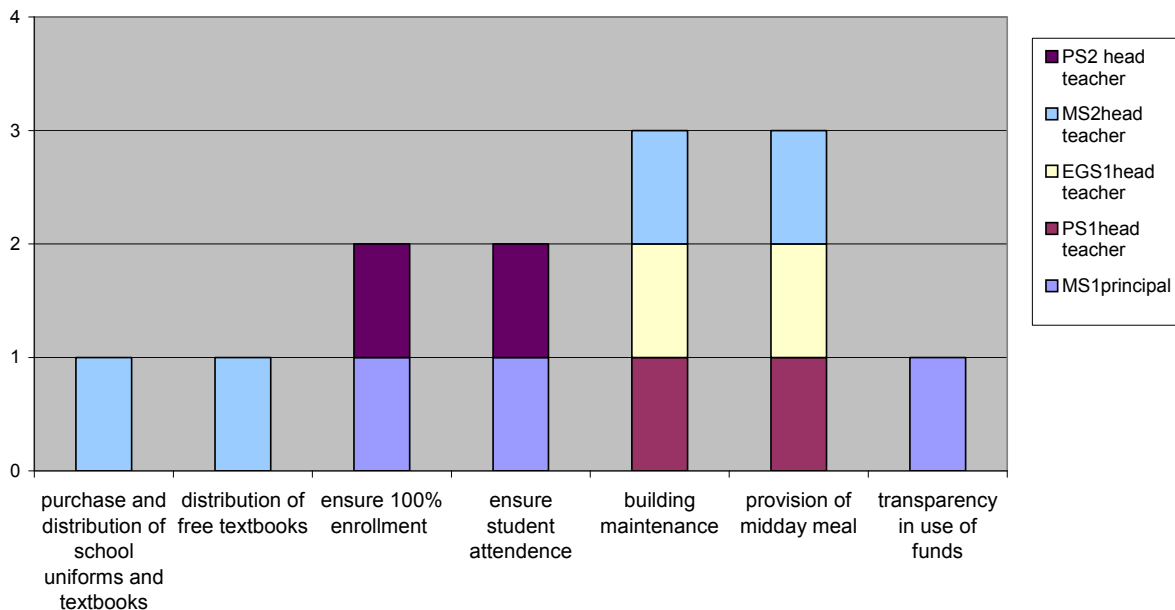
Source: Interviews

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[313] The minimum learning levels (MML) defined in the national curriculum framework are of little use here in the absence of systematic external evaluation. Taking pass percentages in board examinations for face value is misleading, not only because pass rates as given in school report cards are calculated against the number of students who took the examination, rather than the number of students enrolled in the respective grades, but because the expressiveness of examination results in terms of actual student achievement is limited by widespread cheating and frequent prior circulation of examination papers in board examinations (cf. Kingdon 2007).

Moreover, it was clear that most head teachers ascribed special importance specifically to those aspects that kept them particularly busy throughout the ongoing school year. This explains why student attendance was so important to the principal of MS1 and the head teacher of PS2, whereas the midday meal was a priority to the head teacher of EGS1, while construction and maintenance figured prominently in the responses of the head teacher of PS1, and the provision of student benefit was of concern to the head teacher in MS2[314].

The perceived dispensability of PTA activity (except in MS1) was grounded in the fact that parent involvement has not made a substantial difference for those determinants *teachers* perceived to be central to school functioning, namely student attendance levels. In EGS1, high attendance has been achieved without substantial PTA activity, and in the other schools, PTA activity has obviously not done much to improve student attendance.

Teachers detected two flaws in the system appropriate for perpetuating these problems: The lack of enforcement of student attendance vis-à-vis families, and the lack of ability to enforce parent participation in PTAs.
Teachers in all schools (except EGS1, for reasons discussed above) asserted that the problem of low student attendance in government schools would fade overnight if student irregularity were linked to tangible consequences for the affected families.
They repeatedly pointed out that the only thing that was necessary was making access to government assistance, e.g. BPL ration cards or credits from the *Indira Awas Yojna,* contingent on children's attendance at school, and punishing student irregularity by crossing their families' names from the *gram panchayat* beneficiary list[315].
Teachers also widely agreed on the reasons why enforcement of student attendance was not happening, even though *gram sabha*s are endowed with some means to sanction parents of irregular children: The *gram panchayat*, and particularly the *gram sabha*, consisted of the very persons who did not ensure their children's attendance in school, and these were not interested in establishing a norm of sanctioning student absence.

With respect to the inability to enforce participation even of elected members in PTA meetings, teachers pointed to a comparative decline of their own ability to ensure village communities played their role in education. While earlier it had been possible for teachers and parents to issue complaints at the block and district levels if a *gram panchayat* failed

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[314] The school had received funds for less children than were actually enrolled, thus getting additional funds released was one of the first tasks of the newly elected primary section PTA.

[315] This was brought forward by the principal of MS1, the head teachers of PS1 and PS2, the *jan shikshak* of cluster 2, and a number of other teachers casually spoken to in meetings at the JPSK.

to sufficiently execute its responsibilities in the schools under its jurisdiction, there was no way by which teachers - or panchayat members - could raise complaints about lacking support of the parent community, which in effect left them with the prospect of having to do it all alone if they failed to mobilise sufficient support.

In addition, as was emphatically brought forward by the head teacher of PS2, teachers not only felt left alone with the task of getting parents to participate in PTAs, but were sometimes flatly held responsible by superiors for low levels of participation and parents' inability to fulfil complex managing tasks, notably by JSK staff, who are supposed to support them generate parent participation.

Given the lack of trust in parents' ability and willingness to effectively carry out the functions delegated to PTAs, teachers' mobilisation strategy resembled an effort to do the absolute necessary (establishment of a PTA working committee and regular convening of PTA meetings) with as little effort as possible on their part.

Parental responses regarding the perceived core responsibilities of PTAs indicated that the informational asymmetry between parents and teachers, reinforced by the absolutely inappropriate capacity-building among elected PTA members, made it easy for teachers to ensure parent participation happened on their own terms, and along their own priorities. These were often determined by short-term concerns rather than mid- or long-term goals for school development[316].

As a consequence, parents' ability to address critical issues through the PTA, such as teachers' time on task and classroom interaction, and to hold teachers accountable for what students' learn, or fail to learn, was considerably reduced. This in fact was a serious discouragement to participation among higher educated parents, especially in PS1, MS2 and PS2.

The absence of a body representing the interest of parents at higher levels and facilitating exchange between PTAs, such as for example a cluster or block level assembly of PTA presidents, perpetuated the imbalance of power between parent and teachers. The assumption underlying the structure of PTAs according to RSK staff was that parents and teachers should perceive themselves as partners rather than opponents[317]. For this

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[316] Increased mobilisation of parents was observed in EGS1 when the head teacher was frequently transferred to another school, and in PS2 when teachers were afraid that parents raised complaints at the collectorate because of delays in medical check ups of children after the use of milk of a rabies infected buffalo for the midday meal. Francois Leclercq has pointed out that teachers tended to mobilise parents along issues where they expected benefit, i.e. employment of an additional teacher if student attendance increases (cf. Leclercq 2002:87).

[317] This notion was brought forward by the head officer E&R in the RSK, 21st September 2007.

reason they participate in the same trainings, and parents are not represented at higher levels as a separate interest group. Regarding the sometimes diametrically opposed interests of parents and teachers in schools, it is questionable whether such partnership assumption is workable. In fact, it reflects a tendency in popular conceptions of corporate local governance to blind out power asymmetries and internal hierarchy[318].

7.4 Rules prescribed and rules-in-use: emerging issues

As discussed in chapter 4, the establishment and operation of PTAs closely follows the procedures adopted in PRIs. Similar to the provisions made under *gram svaraj*, the general assembly is the authoritative body, while the working committee serves as an executive agency. This may be a workable strategy as long as a) there is enough participation to ensure the quorum is met, and b) elected committee members take their responsibility serious enough to reliably take over executive responsibility. Both conditions have not been met in four out of five cases.

The lack of reliable parent participation in PTA meetings led to the necessity to adapt the procedures so the PTA could operate in spite of the violation of prescribed rules. This adaption was usually initiated by teachers, for the simple reason that it is they who are accountable to the district administration as well as the SSA project offices for the establishment and functioning of the PTA. Since the signature of the PTA president is required under all official school level documents (including teachers' attendance register), teachers cannot simply refrain from establishing PTAs, but need to ensure at least the election of the president, vice-president and working committee.

The adaption of procedures in the schools under study occurred along three lines:

1. Election procedure
2. Circumvention of quorum
3. Definition of core responsibilities
4. Division of labour between different categories of members

1. The formal process of election as prescribed in the JSN (section 9) requires the presence of 1/3 of all PTA members. This quorum was frequently failed, in constituent meetings as well as in regular meetings, throughout the school year. Candidates for president, vice-president, and the working committee shall be suggested by parents.

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[318] See the contributions in Cooke/Kothari 2001 and Hickey/Mohan 2004.

Voting shall be done by raising hands, and all positions are filled by simple majority. Teachers are neither allowed to suggest candidates, nor can they vote.

The rules in operation with regard to the constitution of the PTA were quite different. Firstly, due to the considerable numbers of students and parents in many schools, the quorum was regularly failed, and the provision of postponement to circumvent the quorum was applied.

Secondly, elected members in all five schools pointed out that candidates for elected membership were suggested by the head teacher, and usually supported by the present parents. This is quite a fundamental deviation of the formal rules, which prohibit any teacher involvement in the selection of candidates for the election (JSN sec. 9).

Reservation requirements caused particular concern to PTA secretaries and *jan shikshaks*. These requirements made it hard to fill the elected positions, because head teachers were also directed to ensure elected members of the PTA should have as high an educational status as possible. The requirement of the representation of women and members of the scheduled castes and tribes in areas where illiteracy among these groups is very high was perceived to run counter to the strive for effectiveness of the PTA[319].

2. The quorum for PTA meetings, while making some sense for the purpose of election, posed a serious problem,especially for the larger schools, in the operation of the PTA over time. It is quite astonishing that the legislation prescribes the same quorum for all meetings throughout the school year, and for all schools irrespective of size. Meeting the quorum was actually realistic only in very small schools such as EGS1, where the presence of working committee members was almost sufficient for that purpose.

In larger schools with parent populations of 150 and more, it is extremely unrealistic to expect a participation of 1/3 of all parents in a meeting twice a month, considering the socio-cultural constraints to women's participation, and the fact that meetings took place at a time of day where parents engaged in wage labour were out of the village.

3. The (re-) definition of the core responsibilities of the PTA was mainly driven by the higher level project management and administration. The flood of government orders received by individual schools largely undermined the development of an independent

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[319] It needs to be noted at this point that the process of universalising elementary education has utterly neglected adult education. Even though the *padhna badhna* programme has been accompanying the extension of access to primary schools for children, its impact on adult illiteracy, and specifically female illiteracy, has been limited. One factor serving as a disincentive for adult illiterates to acquire functional literacy is the access to anti-poverty benefits such as BPL cards. The number of illiterate family members increases the likelihood of obtaining a BPL card, rising educational status of family members (including children in secondary school!) is decreasing it. Thus, the aim of targeting anti-poverty benefits to the most needy effectively results in the punishment of poor parents who make efforts to educate their children and acquire education themselves.

capacity on part of both parents and head teachers to prioritise and formulate goals for school development. With the notable exception of MS1, this led to a passive mindset on part of parents as well as teachers in the schools under study, which quite contrasts the development of a 'school mission' as envisioned in SBM. In addition, teachers' lack of interest in strengthening their own accountability towards parents with respect to children's learning achievement prevented parental involvement in genuinely pedagogic issues.

4. Due to the lack of regular participation of both elected and non-elected parent members, the PTA president was confronted with the sole responsibilities for most of the day-to-day tasks of the PTA. This overload spilled over on teachers, who were disproportionately involved in tasks meant for PTA members, especially the provision of the midday meal. In addition, head teachers in some cases preferred to relate to panchayat members or non-elected members, shifting certain decision-making processes outside the PTA working committee.

7.5 Bridging administrational expectations and school level reality: the position of the *jan shikshak*

To understand why in some schools parents are more successfully involved in educational management than in others, it is necessary to look beyond the school level and assess the support mechanisms for generating sustained involvement of parents. It has been pointed out above that the relative success of parent involvement in MS1 was closely related to a) the ability of the principal to advance school development and parent participation without being burdened with significant teaching responsibility; b) the close collaboration with the *jan shikshak* and panchayat institutions, viz. the establishment of a workable local school governance network; and c) being ex officio head of the JSK, he was effectively his own direct superior, significantly broadening decision-making scope and reducing potential interference.

Still it would be misleading to assume that parent participation was more successful in JSK middle schools in general. One of the pertinent problems in the district was the high number of vacancies among academic coordinators, especially at cluster and block levels. In fact, in the two clusters under study, both *jan shikshaks* were designated to their positions temporarily, in the absence of qualified applicants.

This sort of involuntary transfer has severe implications on their motivation to fulfil the responsibilities assigned to them. The BEO considered the success or failure to involve parents in school governance to be determined primarily by the motivation of JSK staff

(*jan shikshak* and JSK coordinator) and by the support of the *gram panchayat*, or, more specifically, the *sarpanch*. He asserted:

> "In those clusters where the *jan shikshak* takes his job seriously and tours the schools in his cluster regularly to provide support to teachers and PTA members, PTAs tend to work better. The problem is that there are not enough qualified candidates to fill these positions. So one of the senior teachers in a cluster is deputed to the post, and if this person is not interested in doing this job because it has nothing to do with teaching, extends working hours, and means increased responsibility but no increase in salary, then it is unlikely that he will go out of his way to do a good job. […] Now at the local level the *gram panchayat* can do a lot to make parent participation work. If a *sarpanch* takes interest in the functioning of the school, he will make use of the panchayat's monitoring rights, and he can put pressure on teachers as well as parents by encouraging the *gram sabha* to exercise its right to file complaints against teachers to the *janpad* and *zilla shiksha samitis*, or to punish parents of irregular children." (Interview BEO, 2nd April 2006 at the Block Education Office)

Both *jan shikshaks* confirmed that lacking monetary incentives are a problem for filling key positions, especially in the academic support system. They complained that under SSA the workload on *jan shikshaks* increased significantly - they are not only assigned monitoring and reporting of educational progress in the schools of 'their' cluster, but are also required to monitor the implementation of the numerous government schemes running under the umbrella of SSA, i.e. the midday meal scheme and distribution of free textbooks (formerly Dept. of Women and Child Welfare), the polio vaccination scheme (formerly Health Dept.), and construction and maintenance of schools (formerly block and district education committees). This includes the distribution of government orders concerning any of these schemes to the schools, and the collection and compilation of school level data to feed back to the block and district offices.

In addition, *jan shikshaks* are supposed to monitor PTA activity and the collaboration between *gram panchayat*s and PTAs, including the conduction of annual trainings for PTA members. Their salary, however, remains on the level of an assistant upper primary teacher, with the important difference that it is not paid by the Department of Education, but by the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission. This is a detail causing further anxiety among those unfortunate teachers who have been compelled into this position, because teachers fear that the shift from one employer to the other will lead to imponderabilities with respect to pension claims[320].

The overall unattractiveness of the positions in SSA project offices from district level downwards poses serious problems for finding appropriately qualified and motivated personnel[321].

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[320] I am grateful to the Principal Secretary of School Education for pointing out this aspect. It explains why in MP so many posts of academic coordinators are filled with teachers on designation (while the post is officially kept vacant) – this is a concession to teachers' fear of losing pension claims because records may not be transferred properly from one employer to the other.

[321] The BEO, the BAC, the DPC and both *jan shikshaks* shared this appraisal.

The *jan shikshaks* in the two clusters under study agreed in their appraisal of the functionality of the system at the present point of time: Both pointed out that effective parent participation *at present* failed because parents lack the capabilities (referring to SES and educational status) to carry out responsibilities assigned to them, which essentially presuppose functional literacy and the ability to access and compute information on independent capacity, if PTAs are not to degenerate to implementors of whatever the PTA secretary tells parents to do.

They differed however in their judgement of the *prospects* of parent participation in the long run. The *jan shikshak* of cluster 1 held the view that teachers and administrators needed to facilitate parent participation by making constant efforts to motivate parents:

> "The most important thing is that head teachers and JSK staff jointly make sure that PTA presidents are functionally literate, and that as many as possible literate parents are elected into the working committee. Then it is important that they constantly motivate elected members to participate in meetings regularly. This means that the head teacher, and if support is asked for, the *jan shikshak*, must personally go to working committee members' houses and convince them to attend the meetings. That's the state of affairs, and this is probably what will prevail until the student generation of today will be parents. *It will take a lot of time to get the system to work.*" (Interview *jan shikshak* cluster 1, 25th March 2006, emph. added)

The *jan shikshak* of cluster 2 in contrast anticipated little prospect for parent participation to take root, because parents perceived government schools as government institutions in which they had no stake, and because the service of public schools was valued so little that even if parents' socio-economic and educational status improved, they would prefer opting out into the private system to engaging towards improvement of the public system.

> "It is not that the conception of SSA is bad. The problem is that it starts with wrong propositions. Creating ownership of government schools through participation presupposes that people are interested in participating. But in fact they are not, parents are by and large not interested in their children's education. It is just another thing the government demands of them. And if they are interested, they send their children to private schools, and they will go out of their way to do that. Government schools are perceived to be for the socially and economically weaker children. You have seen what this means for PTAs – the public system is left with the bottom of the barrel when it comes to parents' ability and willingness to participate. Any improvement achieved in a school, be it the timely construction of new classrooms or the provision of the midday meal, is achieved because of the engagement of the head teacher and teaching staff." (Interview *jan shikshak* cluster 2, 6th March 2006)

Obviously, both *jan shikshaks* were sceptical towards the ability of parents to involve in schools on the scale required by the JSN. Nonetheless the *jan shikshak* of cluster 1 saw a chance for parent involvement to take root in the long run, while the *jan shikshak* of cluster 2 perceived it to be an entirely failed policy, because he expected that government schools will always cater to the lower strata of rural society in the presence of an expanding private sector catering to the children of the better off.

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This negative perception was accompanied by substantial dissatisfaction with having been compelled into the position of a *jan shikshak* – he pointed out that he asked to be replaced several times during the last year, but has not been allowed to return to his teaching post in a government middle school in the cluster, because there was no substitute candidate.

The lack of motivation clearly reflected in inspection activity, which significantly differs between cluster 1 and cluster 2.

School report cards reveal that while at the level of the Block Resource Centre (*janpad shiksha kendra*) the number of inspections in schools was comparable, the activity of both *jan shikshaks* in terms of inspecting the schools in their clusters diverged largely.

Fig. 53: Inspections of schools in cluster 1 and 2 by *jan shikshak* and BRCC
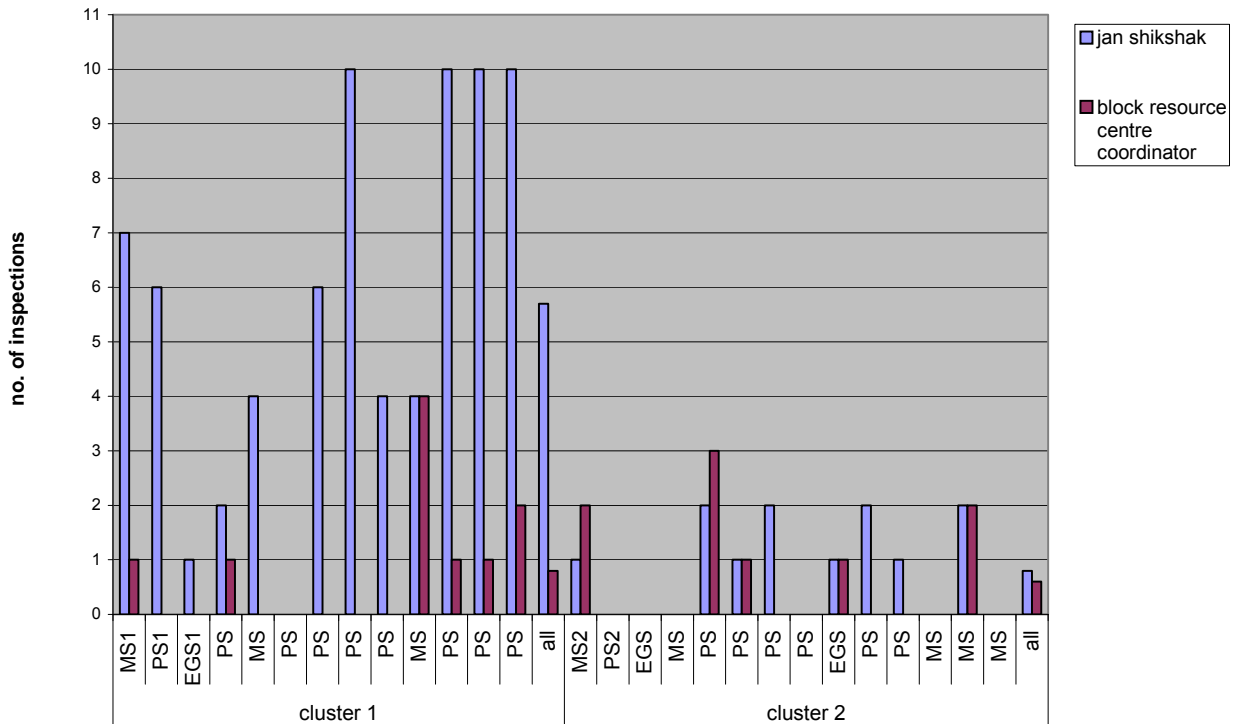
Source: School report cards cluster 1 and 2, 2005-06

The *jan shikshak* in cluster 1 inspected almost every school throughout the academic year, and most of them more than three times, while the *jan shikshak* in cluster 2 inspected barely half of the schools under his supervision, and among these, none was inspected more than twice.

The negative perception of the decentralisation process on part of JSK personnel resonated in the schools under study in cluster 2. Not only did the lack of academic support reflect in the responses of the head teacher of PS2, he also shared the same pessimistic perception of the prospects of involving parents in educational governance.

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This indicates that the position a *jan shikshak* takes on these issues does make a difference in individual schools, and especially in those schools which function under particularly difficult conditions in terms of multigrade/multi-age teaching situations, lack of staff, and a socio-economic environment characterised by high levels of absolute poverty and adult illiteracy.

The effect of irregular inspection and support activities offered from JSKs is devastating in the absence of other regular inspection activities – as figure 53 shows, inspections of individual schools on part of block level officials is necessarily erratic, because they are responsible for 300-400 schools on average[322]. Given that in the schools under study in cluster 1 the *gram panchayat,* too, utterly neglected its inspection functions, it is little surprising that these schools figured bad on all indicators of school functioning, including PTA activity, in the absence of any detectable ambition towards school improvement on part of head teachers.

On the whole it can be said that the original aim of the cluster resource person as installed under DPEP, namely ensuring school supervision, providing academic support to teachers in their teaching environment, and facilitating exchange between teachers in order to build a professional community, has been given a back seat under SSA. J*an shikshaks* spend the larger part of their time dissiminating orders and information from various government departments to schools, and collecting and compiling information concerning the execution of these orders to feed them back to the respective departments.

7.6 The deficiency of capacity-building

With respect to the functioning of PTAs, the *jan shikshak* has another important role to play, namely conducting capacity-building measures for elected PTA members from the schools in their clusters.

Trainings follow the guidelines developed by the RSK for the purpose. These guidelines are revised every couple of years. However, it apparently takes considerable time to

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[322] It should be noted that the school report cards do not include inspections of district level authorities and BEOs, however the chance of being inspected by a block level agency is around 1:400 in Sehore block, for district level agencies it is 1:1806 for each of the three authorities (DPO, DEO, *Zilla Panchayat Shiskha Samiti*). It should be noted that inspection activities are not coordinated between the different levels and agencies, so it can theoretically happen that six different inspectors inspect a single school on a single day, while the majority of others are not inspected at all. Especially during examinations, it appeared to happen at times that different inspectors unintentionally meet in a school - I am grateful to the DPC for sharing this information.

distribute new guidelines to all JSKs. In the clusters under study, the training manuals developed for the year 2004-05 were still in use in the following year. Those developed for 2005-06, which were improved significantly in terms of their practical utility for parents and teachers alike to learn how to handle forms and records, develop a village education plan, issue complaints to panchayats etc., had not been distributed up to the end of April 2006 for the use of training in August.

The problem of delays in the distribution and use of newly developed materials is a general one severely impacting progress in different areas: New data collection registers are distributed with considerable delay, new TLM reach schools mid-term, with the consequence that they are not used until the following term, training manuals delay for sometimes two years until they are actually in use area-wide.

The training guidelines developed for the year 2004-05 were thoroughly deficient in both form and content: Sections were outlined for a duration of no more than 80 minutes per section, and out of a total of about 3,5 hours of training units, a mere 60 minutes were devoted to the actual day-to-day tasks of the PTA.

The larger part of the time was assigned to a rather theoretical discussion of the nature and purposes of PTAs, and the legal framework of the JSA. The latter can be assumed to be not easily comprehended by most parent participants, as the language in use is formal and creates an unnecessary distance between the trainer and the content on one hand, and parent participants on the other. This does little to reduce the information gap between parent and teacher participants.

While the guidelines took the credit of enabling a 'participatory' process, in fact they prescribed the answers the trainer should try to extract from participants[323]. Obviously, the aim was not to have participants develop their own ideas of what a PTA could be and do, but to indoctrinate them with what the RSK wanted PTAs to be and do. This corresponded well to parents' as well as teachers' responses regarding the quality of training – both essentially experienced it as a lecture given by the *jan shikshak*, with little discussion between participants, and even less hands-on exercises for filling out forms, maintaining cash books, handling student evaluation cards, etc.

Given that parent members usually attend such training only once, if at all, they may get some idea about what PTAs can and should do in theory, but in the absence of any

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[323] In the section on tasks of the PTA the manual says: "[…] The trainer should ask for suggestions of participants as to what needs to be done to fulfil these four important responsibilities. He should try to *ensure the following points will be mentioned*: […]" (translated from: *palak shikshak sangh ke sadasyon ka prashikshan 2004-05. prashikshak margdarshika*:10, emph. added)

practical exercises, or at least manuals to take home, it is not unlikely that they will have forgotten most of the content within months[324].

By September 2007, according to the head officer of E&R Section in the RSK, training for PTA members had undergone a complete transformation. Trainings are now devided into five different modules (introductory module, civil works, finances, annual education plan, education quality). These modules are supposed to be conveyed to elected PTA members in a week's training from 2008 onwards. While generally this appears to be a considerable scaling up of capacity-building measures, the question is how long it will take for them to be in use all over the state.

In addition, it appeared to be not quite clear who would be conducting these trainings – *jan shikshaks*, DIET personnel, or external agencies (NGOs). The former two options do not offer much hope for high quality trainings – teachers have pointed to the general uselessness of trainings conducted by DIETs, because trainers recruited by DIETs are either young college graduates with no teaching experience at all (teachers in PS2, 4th March 2006), or stranded government teachers who have been transferred for non-performance (the latter was emphatically brought forward by a leading official of the RGPSM[325]).

PTA training and support at school level is only one among many responsibilities of *jan shikshaks*, and depending on their own motivation and the agenda of the JSK coordinator, they devote more or less attention and energy to the issue, which is bound to lead to considerable differences in the quality of PTA trainings between clusters.

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[324] The head officer of the E&R section shared this view, making the following statement: "Another important thing to activate PTAs is proper, recurrent training. Because you see if we train people today, and these are people who have never gone through such training before and don't know what is expected of them, what happens is that they will not be able to remember the things taught to them in the training when they actually need to use this information." (Officer E&R, 21st September 2007). The Jaunpur study of Banerjee et. al. also indicated that parents forgot rather quickly the information transmitted to them during village meetings in which the role and responsibilities of VECs were discussed (Banerjee et.al. 2008: 15)

[325] "The government employed teachers with the least merit and the least ambition to work get shifted off to the DIETs. That's where they can do the least damage." (Mission Official, RSK, 21st September 2007) A similar remark was made by Vinod Raina in a discussion during the AeA Educational Thematic Workshop, Hyderabad, 11th September 2007. Raina further pointed out that it was the shift of teacher training from university colleges to DIETs, which is primarily responsible for the sharp decline in the quality of teacher training in Madhya Pradesh over the last 15 years.

7.7 The school and the Community: Why Panchayats still matter

There are competing explanations for the motivation of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to shift all responsibilities regarding resource utilisation and distribution of student benefits to PTAs.

In the official reading as brought forward by leading RSK staff, the process has been gradual and was a reaction to several observable distortions in panchayat activities in education throughout the state, at intermediate (district and block) as well as at the local (village/school) level.

It was argued that at the village level, elected representatives on VECs were not necessarily direct stakeholders in schools, because their own children may be enrolled in private schools or larger middle schools outside the *gram panchayat* area. As a result, they may have regarded construction and maintenance funds, midday meal funds etc. as potential sources for creating patronage (i.e. by allowing the use of funds for other purposes). Further, even if VEC representatives were generally willing to assume their responsibilities, they tended to distribute resources unevenly between the schools in the panchayat area. In fact, numerous studies of decentralisation in education in MP and other states, which have devolved significant competencies to lower levels (i.e. Karnataka, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh), confirm widespread misappropriation of school resources and/or uneven distribution between the schools under panchayat jurisdiction (cf. Leclercq 2002, Govinda 2003, Raina 2003, Pritchett/Pande 2006).

To rectify this error, fund utilisation was vested with PTAs as school-based institutions, so as to ensure every school has an equal opportunity to use available resources to the best possible benefit of the individual school, and to generate additional resources for it, knowing they will not vanish in VEC accounts and possibly be used for other purposes[326].

As has been discussed extensively in the case studies, the strategy to take away funding from panchayats has had mixed impacts at the local level.

Those schools which were affected by misappropriation of school resources by the *gram panchayat* (MS2, PS2), by extraction of conversion gains (PS1)[327], or by neglect due to inequitable allocation between schools in the panchayat area (PS2), profited from the shift of resource management to PTAs, albeit at the cost of increased teacher involvement and increased opportunity costs for those few parents actively involved in these processes.

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[326] This was the argumentation brought forward by the *jan shikshak* of cluster 1, the BAC, BEO and DEO, as well as the Principal Secretary of School Education (21st September 2007).

[327] Respondents had pointed out that the *gram panchayat* used to purchase materials of low quality for construction and the midday meal, and used the remaining funds for other purposes.

In schools in which the *gram panchayat* had satisfactorily administered its responsibilities, PTA involvement, particularly in input management, was perceived by parents and teachers alike as a step backwards (EGS1 before the creation of a new panchayat area, especially with concern to the midday meal), because PTAs' incapability to handle these tasks induced increased non-teaching workload on teachers on a massive scale[328].

In schools where the panchayat had been active and supportive of school development, the shift of the midday meal and construction to PTAs has not made much of a difference to the quality of infrastructure, mainly because the panchayat continued to actively support the PTA (MS1). Here, even though the PTA controlled funds, the panchayat still took the lead in construction and maintenance as well as community mobilisation. While the principal and PTA presidents attended to all processes, they were not involved in the organisation of works and recruitment of labour.

Thus, whether or not stakeholders perceived positive, negative or no effects of the shift of managerial competencies to PTAs mainly depended on the experiences they have made when these were vested with the *gram panchayat*.

The *gram panchayat* retains a critical role in the field of monitoring, supervision, and especially enforcement. The fact that PTAs have no enforcement powers whatsoever makes it particularly dependent on the action of the *gram panchayat*, and this concerns such crucial issues as teacher and student attendance and performance.

To effectively exert pressure on teachers, PTA members must be able to rely on the *gram panchayat* to issue complaints and pursue the processing of these complaints at the block and district levels. To ensure student attendance, the PTA depends on the willingness of *gram sabha* members (viz. the larger village community) to exert pressure on reluctant parents and initiate the process of fining them (which is quite elaborate in itself, as pointed out in footnote 114 in chapter 5). If a PTA decides to raise extra resources for, say, levelling or beautifying the playground, or building a separate girls' toilet, it depends on the willingness of the panchayat to make available funds for public works (unless it manages to extract enough private donations from parents, which is rather unlikely in many rural settings). If the PTA decides to fill a vacant teacher post with a contract teacher (because appointment of teachers can take years, or a teacher is temporarily transferred and the post is not meant to be filled), it depends on the *gram panchayat*'s willingness to employ this teacher.

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[328] Remember that in EGS1 the shift of panchayat jurisdiction exacerbated the problem, because the former *gram panchayat* had been sensitive to its responsibilities in school governance, while the new *gram panchayat* was not only rather indifferent to the schools under its jurisdiction, but also neglected the minor villages in attention and allocation quite generally.

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Finally, if a PTA is dysfunctional because of lacking parent participation, it is the responsibility of the *gram panchayat* to address the issue in the *gram sabha*, because it is responsible for monitoring the schools under its jurisdiction.

Political culture and representation of interests in the *gram panchayat* may exert influence on both parents' motivation to hold an office in the PTA, as well as the kind and amount of support extended to PTAs by the *gram panchayat*.

As documented in the case of MS2, it appears that occasionally local contestation for power and influence between different sections of the community (whether along party, caste, or other lines) spills over into PTAs. The *jan shikshak* in cluster 2 pointed out that parents are generally reluctant to be elected as PTA presidents *unless* they have ambitions to use this position as a stepping-stone into local politics, and that in such instances PTA elections can be severely contested (*jan shikshak* cluster 2, 6th March 2006).

Quite in the opposite direction, Vinod Raina argued that the office of PTA president is so unattractive to parents not only because it potentially bears high opportunity costs induced by foregone income, but also because villagers are afraid to get worn down between the fronts of local political factions[329].

The case of MS2 documented such dynamics. While there was no direct contestation within the village for the position of the PTA president, a faction of panchayat members indeed made considerable effort to control who was elected as president and vice-president (remember this position was given to the wife of the *sarpanch*) and into the working committee. The PTA president obviously was under the purview of pro-*sarpanch* panchayat members on one hand, but on the other also felt a need to justify towards the contra-*sarpanch* faction (which was supported by the majority of villagers). Most villagers viewed him on the side of the *sarpanch* (not least because they also suspected the head teacher to connive with the *sarpanch*), and he was tangibly uncomfortable with this position.

The problems to hold the *gram panchayat* accountable in MS2 and PS2 have highlighted another issue that is important for understanding what makes people refrain from assuming office in local level bodies and committees. The administration, as a party ideally neutral to political power plays at the local level, often enough undermines villagers' efforts to ensure transparency and hold local bodies accountable.

Corruption in government and administration at the intermediate levels (block and district) makes it exceedingly difficult for citizens to claim entitlements and hold actors in

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[329] Conversation on the occasion of the AeA Education Thematic Workshop, 9th September 2007 in Hyderabad).

local level institutions accountable. Bribing officers in the administration or members of *janpad* and *zilla panchayats* apparently has become such a well established mechanism that it was almost impossible to intervene, unless there was a strong personality somewhere in these bodies who was willing and able to swim against the current and enforce sanctioning[330]. It is important to note that such personalities appear to have a rather short durability in the system, because the establishment of patronage is an essential prerequisite to remain in office[331].

The shift of focus from panchayats to stakeholders in local school governance can be interpreted as a measure to prevent severe cases of neglect of duties by *gram panchayats*, however, as discussed above, it does not mean that the functioning of schools is no longer dependent on them.

On the contrary, especially the shift of input management to PTAs has some side-effects which are likely to affect school functioning at least as adversely as lacking infrastructure or irregularities in midday meal provision: It distracts the body from those areas which the JSA has genuinely envisioned them to perform, namely

> "(a) To ensure 100% enrolment of all children between 5 and 14 years of age
>
> (b) To ensure regular attendance of students and teachers in school
>
> (c) To monitor the achievement levels of learners in the various competencies of different subjects
>
> (d) Such other duties as may be prescribed" (Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam, Chapter III)

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[330] I am grateful to Makhan Singh and Rajendra Jain of Samarthan for sharing their experiences with local government institutions in Sehore. The DEO has strongly asserted this problem, citing an incidence from the block where teachers were suspended because of a criminal offence (rape), triggering off substantial pressure from local politicians, to whom the concerned teachers were well connected. The DEO and the block panchayat president were pressed not to call the case and refrain from disciplinary action, which was only circumvented by the firm stand of the panchayat president (Interview DEO, 17th April 2006).

[331] The fluctuation of collectors in Sehore district is a case in point. Sehore has seen something like four collectors in five years. The majority of collectors were replaced because they failed to ensure an effective and appropriate utilisation of resources allocated by the state government. The pre-previous collector, a young IAS officer affiliated to the Congress Party, survived only ten months in office because he had interfered with tendering procedures and in the process undermined well established interests of MLAs, who are represented in all district panchayats in MP, and often play an unfavourable role (informal conversation with Makhan Singh, Samarthan project assistant, 14th March 2006). Srivastava (2005) has given an account of the dynamics of creating patronage under what he calls the 'new institutional setup' created in the wake of the *gram svaraj* amendment using, among others, the implementation of the Jawaharlal Rozgar Employment Scheme as an example.

At the present point of time, it appears that many PTAs are caught up in the "other duties as may be prescribed", without paying due attention to the core responsibilities.

7.8 Systemic constraints on the effectiveness of PTA activity for improving student outcome and internal efficiency in schools

In the cases under study, it has been evident that indeed most efforts of PTAs (and, as a consequence, most achievements) have flown into the distribution of student incentives and provision of infrastructure. While it may be argued that these are powerful incentives for parents to send their children to school, and thus to ensure enrolment and retention, the inherent problem is that student benefits are non-excludable, viz. do depend on enrolment of a child, but not on regular attendance at school. The practice of enrolling children in government schools until they have received their textbooks and uniforms, and afterwards sending them to a private school (or simply not sending them anywhere at all) is an indication that the distribution of benefits may be effective for having parents enrol their children, but not for retaining them in the system and enabling them to progress without disruptions[332].

The current structure of PTA activities systematically distracts from those issues parents have an actual and long-term stake in, namely what their children learn in school and how they can effectively support their progress.

This problem needs consideration at two levels. The first is the managerial bias of SSA as such, which is concerned with access and enrolment, or in other words, with logistic rather than pedagogic issues.

The second is the question in which areas participation of which group of stakeholders actually makes sense, and what is to be achieved by it.

7.8.1 The primacy of access in SSA

As has been outlined in chapter 5, SSA has been the result of India's commitment to the Millenium Development Goals, including the obligation to provide universal elementary education until 2015. The time frame to reach this goal has been split into two target deadlines: universal primary education (all children enrolled and retained in the primary

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[332] The midday meal is an exception to this, as its positive effects on student attendance are well documented (cf. among others Drèze/Goyal 2003 and Drèze/Kingdon 2001). However, in some of the villages under study (particularly MS2 and PS2) teachers reported that some children's attendance was restricted to lunch time, viz. they come late in the morning and leave after having eaten.

cycle) by 2007, and universal elementary education (all children enrolled and retained in the primary and upper primary cycle) by 2010.

The binding character of these commitments has been underscored by passing the Right to Education Bill in 2002, which obliges the state to establish free and compulsory education *of good quality* for all children in the age group 6-14. The bill, while having been disputed for narrowing the age group for which the government is obliged to guarantee access (from 0-15 as codified in the Directive Principles of State Policy, Constitution of India), has actually for the first time established compulsory education as a legal norm throughout the Republic of India. Previous legal commitments to compulsory education have been restricted to a few states, and in most of these, they have never been enforced. It should be noted that the Right to Education (unlike the Right to Information) is non-justiciable, as parents have no means to take the state to court for providing low quality education in its schools[333].

Given the problem of access to government schools even at primary level at the time of the ratification of MDGs and EfA, especially in the central and northern states of India, SSA was a policy designed to primarily overcome the access problem. Under given (or rather self-imposed) budgetary constraints[334], resource allocation followed the principle of maximisation[335]: An a priori defined resource commitment was calculated against access demands, and the ratio of these two figures determined the definition of standards. Thus the provision of a minimum of two teachers and two solid classrooms, a book bank, handpump and toilet do not necessarily reflect what policy makers think is necessary for running a proper school, but rather the maximum which can be devoted to an individual school within the frame of budget commitment. The interesting thing is that

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[333] Besides the lack of state accountability for education quality, not a single state has yet translated the national RTE bill into state law. While the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam and Niyam appear to largely agree with the rules laid down in the RTE Bill, many of the subordinate regulations (i.e. collection of examination fees) violate the Bill. As long as the upgrading of infrastructure and teaching staff under SSA is not terminated in all states, it would be highly risky for state governments to ratify complying education acts, because they might be sued for not providing the minimum infrastructure standards. For and overview over the controversy around the passing of the RTE bill see Kumar/Priyam/Saxena 2002, Sadgopal 2004a, and Balagopalan 2004.

[334] It should be remembered that the argument of budgetary constraint reflects a value statement rather than a factual lack of resources, as budgets are a function of the commitment of governments to certain issues relative to others.

[335] The difference between the maximisation and minimisation strategy is that for the former, the initial value statement is 'I don't want to spend any more money than this, so what can I have for it?' rather than 'I want something of this quality, so how much do I have to pay to get it?' The latter is the logic of the minimisation strategy (cf. Böttcher 2007).

the running of Central and Navodaya Schools[336] obviously follows a different logic – spending per student in these schools is roughly ten times as high as it is under SSA (cf. Sadgopal 2004d), and so is the quality of education provided in these schools. Thus, apparently the government of India makes different budget commitments to different sections of its citizenry.

The inherent problem of SSA is that it is a logistic scheme uniting different department programmes under a single umbrella, to reduce coordination and information barriers between departments. As such, it is largely uncoupled from issues of curriculum and syllabi-development, which are handled by the National and State Councils for Educational Research and Training.

SSA at national and state levels is run by officers of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), who are trained in public administration and management, but rarely have an educational background[337]. As a consequence, curriculum and pedagogy-related issues – including the vital area of teacher training – are of secondary concern to SSA planning, and are basically looked at as expense factors which should be kept as low as possible.

In addition, IAS officers are subjected to frequent rotation (every 2-3 years), causing severe delays in the work of the RSK as the main implementing agency at state level, because every new head of the RSK needs at least several months of time to be on top of things. Once RSK Commissioners understand the complexity of the issue at hand, and develop a vision how to tackle it, they are transferred, while the longer term project staff at state, district and block level continuously have to adjust to new leadership styles and implementation preferences. This causes significant disruptions at all levels[338].

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[336] Central Schools are run by the Government of India and spread all over India. They cater to the children of government employees with the aim to ensure their continuous education despite of frequent transfer. Navodaya Vidyalayas are schools for talented children from rural areas, who are admitted after passing a national competitive entry examination after finishing the primary cycle. It should be noted that more than 60% students are from the general castes, and almost 65% of all students are boys, reflecting the usual educational bias in rural areas (data from http://navodaya.nic.in/welcome%20sbs.htm).

[337] A rare exception to this rule was the first Mission Director, who was an academic in education and remained in office for full ten years, from 1994 to 2004. She played a leading role in the institutional development of the RGSM, and the formulation of the EGS. The head of the research section of RSK pointed out that prior to the merger of the Mission with the SCERT, the institution was small and worked in an issue-oriented way. The five to six leading officers all had an educational background and were determined to bring quality education into focus, rather than merely establish effective school management structures. The senior officer in the curriculum section shared this perception, stating that the implementation of SSA depends crucially on the dedication of SSA staff at state and district levels. It should be noted, however, that the relaxation of teacher qualification under EGS had been adopted under this very Mission Director, with far reaching consequences for the quality of education in government schools.

[338] I am grateful to the Head of the RSK research section for pointing out this problem.

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According to a senior staff of the curriculum development section of RSK, the lack of activity of PTAs in genuinely pedagogical issues, such as student evaluation and promotion of supportive parenting, reflects the lack of pedagogic focus at the central and state planning levels.

This input management bias is perpetuated in the training for PTA members, which is also centred on resource utilisation, choice of materials, and fund raising issues.

There is substantial discouragement emerging from parents' perception that the PTA is not a body fit to exert influence on what and how teachers teach and what students learn. This is essentially caused by the disconnection of activities of the PTA from the learning achievement of parents' own children. Being included in decisions about resource utilisation and provision of student benefits may be a good thing to parents, but receiving these is obviously not the ultimate goal of sending a child to school. Therefore, the question is whether input management is the right field of engagement for the larger parent community. The provisions in the JSA offer enough space for PTA involvement in pedagogic issues, but this is unlikely to materialise unless there is a shift of priority towards educational quality and outcome at the central and state levels.

7.8.2 The persistent problem of quality

The very limited scope of decision-making competency of PTAs as school governing bodies, in combination with the weak position of principals/head teachers vis-à-vis department paternalism, clearly contradict some of the basic pre-conditions of the concept of school-based management, as outlined in chapter 4.

Recalling Cheng's comparison of school-based management with 'external control management (table 10 in chapter 5, p.106), it is fairly obvious that educational governance in MP still largely follows the logic of external control management rather than that of school-based management.

This becomes especially clear with respect to the formulation of a 'school mission', which is central to SBM[339].

While at a rather global level the mission of government primary and middle schools is clearly determined by SSA (universalisation of elementary education), at the level of the individual school there are rarely defined common goals guiding stakeholders' actions, which is essentially related to the lack of professional autonomy of teachers and lower level administrators.

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[339] School-based management heavily draws on concepts of organisational learning and organisational development. Organisational mission is a key feature of the learning organisation – the mission of the organisation determines what developments are necessary to effectively and efficiently realise that mission (cf. Leithwood/Menzies 1998, Argyris/Schön 1997).

In fact, I doubt that in any of the schools under study, except MS1, head teachers actually had developed something of a school mission going beyond the goals of 100% enrolment and retention (without any reference to content and quality). Most of them clearly perceived themselves as implementers of whatever the state government was determined to do in the field of education, and many of them complained that the agenda of state governments changed so quickly, without them as teachers being able to maintain a 'read thread' in school development.

One aspect that causes particular problems for the development of a school vision is the lack of agreement of different stakeholder groups on the definition of common goals. Even though the neglect of genuinely pedagogical issues, which are more relevant to the quality of education and the achievement levels of student than mere resource input, has begun to sink in at the level of policy-makers, and even though there is an agreement between politicians, administrators and stakeholder groups that the quality of the service *should* be at the centre of concern in government primary and middle schools, there is an utter lack of agreement on what *constitutes* quality education.

> "The problem with monitoring quality is that there is no common understanding about what teaching quality actually is. What parents think about good quality of teaching is different from what teachers think, and that again is different from what administrators think, so there is no match of perceptions here. Teachers think that if the children sit in rows and read or do the tasks assigned to them then that is good teaching. The PTA thinks that when the school opens on time, children attend, and there are some indications of activity then that is good teaching. Administrators have still different indicators. So what we lack is a common understanding of what makes good quality." (Officer E&R Section, RSK, 21st April 2007)

The definition of common parameter for enabling different stakeholder to judge the quality of education was perceived to be the most important step to improve PTA's ability to monitor student achievement and teacher performance. Upgrading of training, including the devotion of an entire training module to 'quality issues', is expected to achieve this.

The impact of such increased devotion to quality in PTA trainings, however, is bound to create even more dissonance between parents and teachers with respect to the quality of teaching unless a) the entire teaching staff is made to participate in PTA trainings and b) the issue of quality education in rural primary, often multigrade/multi-age settings finally enters teacher training. So far, there are no indications that such measures are planned.

Given that schools lack organisational autonomy, which is one important prerequisite for developing a unique organisational mission, the nature of school activities was essentially determined by the curriculum established at central and state levels, and lacked adaption

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to characteristics of the localities. This especially affected the design of syllabi and use of TLM[340].

Similarly, the approach of the government with respect to management strategies reflects characteristics of external control management, rather than school-based management. Schools are viewed as tools to realise the commitments made under the MDGs, and teachers are viewed as employees, rather than partners, who need to be controlled and supervised to ensure they fulfil the role ascribed to them by the government. It is important to remember that this is sought to be achieved by means of sanction (non-extension of contracts) rather than incentives, and control rather than support.

The discrepancy is most obvious with respect to the use of resources: In school-based management, schools should be self-budgeting according to their individual needs, implying a certain scope of flexibility to adjust the school budget in the course of a financial year, and to prioritise the use of available funds.

This is practically impossible under SSA, as the only untied funds available to the school from the government are the school contingency fund, a mere 1200 Rs p.a.

While schools enjoy budgeting autonomy with respect to the funds *additionally* generated by the PTA (including donations, sponsorship etc.), most small primary schools in rural areas do not avail of many such extra resources, and de facto depend on tied government funding for the operation of their schools.

Most importantly, however, the functional ascriptions of teachers and administrators, whose strategic engagement and commitment has been argued to be so central for enhancing parent participation in the case of MS1, has not experienced any shift in perception away from external control management. In fact, the only change that has occurred appears to be the shift from regarding parents as outsiders to school who are not eligible to participation to (officially) viewing them as 'insiders and partners'.

The divorce between decentralised input management and centralised curriculum and syllabi development prohibits regarding the decentralisation process in education as decentralised educational *governance*. What is decentralised is essentially a part of the *input management* process in government schools.

Moreover, by giving local stakeholder groups and government bodies the power to monitor, but retaining the power to sanction, the accountability link between parents and teachers is effectively disrupted, given the potential for distortion at the local and

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[340] Bjork (2006) in his study on local curriculum policy in Indonesia points out that long entrenched self-perceptions of teachers may counter positive effects of local curricula even where such policies are attempted.

intermediate levels. Sanctioning authorities potentially perceive violators of rules as one of 'theirs', and this applies the Dept. of Education as much as to *gram sabhas*.

7.8.3 Participation by whom and for what purpose?

The lack of systematic interaction between individual parents and teachers at any level addressing what students learn in school and how useful this is for enhancing their chances 'to live the life they have reason to value', to return to Sen's terminology, constitutes a serious problem[341] for the prospects of mobilising parents to take interest in their children's school education. Increased information and training provided to parents can be expected to do little for mobilising sustained participation in PTAs as long as parents feel that participation occurs at levels and in matters which do not translate into positive effects on their children's achievement, and that individual return to such participation is low (unless some other individual benefit is extracted).

Banerjee et.al (2008) made an interesting observation in this respect. Evaluating three NGO interventions to activate VECs in 280 villages of Jaunpur district in Uttar Pradesh, these authors found that people's participation in VECs was largely unaffected by measures to inform parents and other community members about the role and rights of the VEC, as well as to develop simple tools for testing student learning achievement. Even though parents learned about opportunities to participate in school governance, and even though they became aware that their children lacked basic skills, this did not motivate them to participate more actively in the VEC. What did get a substantial number of community members exited was the introduction of villagers to a simple technique for teaching children how to read, which they could then use to improve the reading ability of their own children. The authors emphasise that villagers appreciated this intervention for two reasons: a) they were able to immediately influence student learning achievement, and b) they could do so without engaging at all with the school system or local government bodies (ibid:9).

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[341] In this context Vinod Raina pointed out that exchange of information between parents and teachers over individual students should be a foundation for effective student evaluation, because teachers cannot properly judge children's development in the classroom without knowing how they live and act in their home environment. Establishing such informational links between parents and teachers does not have to be an elaborate procedure. An appraisal of a child's basic status of physical and cognitive development (e.g. does the child speak, does he or she like to sing and dance, play cricket, etc.) at the point of enrolment and transfer to the next grade would go a long way, besides assuring to parents that their knowledge and action matters to the school (Group Discussion with participants of the 'Quality Education' group at the Aide et Action Educational Thematic Workshop on 11th September 2007 at NIRD, Hyderabad).

This indicates that providing more information and training to PTA members may effectively increase parents' knowledge about opportunities for participation and exercising influence, but may not lead to more participation, precisely because parents perceive they are unable to affect student learning outcome as an ultimate goal.

It is also expressive of villagers' lack of trust in sustained collective action through large groups – in the UP case people appeared to be more comfortable when they were put in a position to act on their own[342].

Taking into account that involvement of local (government) institutions may be a potential barrier to villagers' participation, this can have far-reaching implications for the functionality of PTAs in the current system because:

1.   The PTA is a body that is *not* in a position to act on its own, neither in terms of decision-making related to inputs, nor teaching quality. It is dependent on the action of other bodies either directly or indirectly. For instance, the PTA is independent in its decision to extend the contract of a locally employed teacher, but it is dependent on the panchayat for employing this teacher in the first place. It is further independent to decide on the use of the resource accumulated in the *shala shiksha kosh* (PTA account), but (except the school contingency fund of 1200 Rs p.a.) it needs to generate the resources itself in the first place. The PTA has no say whatsoever in teacher posting, and, equally importantly, neither have (head) teachers. There is no veto right if a PTA feels the teacher appointed by the block or district panchayat does not perform or is in any other way not suitable for the school. Further, almost all funds under SSA are tied, so while PTAs may decide independently what kind of raw material they would like to purchase for a certain enterprise, they cannot adjust annual plans (which again are heavily determined by the targets of SSA) according to need and prioritise the enterprise as such. The wide-spread phenomenon of underspending is largely a result of this inflexibility – PTA presidents as well as head teachers tend to refrain from shifting resources from one budget heading to the other according to need, because they are afraid they will be held accountable for this use of discretion later on[343].

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[342] The widely observable lack of participation in *gram sabhas* (cf. Behar/Kumar 2002; McCarten/Vyasulu 2003, Bandyopadhyay et.al. 2003; Kumar 2006) is another indicator of many villagers' lack of confidence that large group collective action can make a sustainable difference for the quality of local governance. Intervention evaluations in other countries and regions have also come to the conclusion that interventions enabling people to act independently were more successful than those which required the involvement of local institutions (e.g. Olken 2005, Banerjee/Duflo 2006, Björkman/Svensson 2007).

[343] I am grateful to Vinod Raina for sharing this information, emphasising the devastating impact of bureaucratic domineering for a more imaginative use of resources for individual school development (NIRD Hyderabad, September 9th 2007).

2.   The PTA comprises of two distinct groups of members, namely parents and teachers, whose interests are often incompatible, especially in view of the aim of holding teachers accountable for what they do in school. Given the power gap between teachers and elected PTA members in terms of the ability to access and use information independently and according to their own terms, teachers clearly had the upper hand in all schools under study, and the influence parents were allowed to exert were largely defined by teachers' agenda. The lack of an institutionalised exchange and support system for elected PTA members is a serious constraint for the current system to gain strength, because a) PTA members cannot systematically exchange experiences and information (while teachers by means of their monthly meetings can), b) it is difficult for PTA members to mobilise parents beyond the school level and to act as a pressure group, and c) there is no possibility for engaging in school education above the school level outside the local government system, and d) there is no systematic monitoring of the interplay of administrative and local government institutions through parent representatives – the nomination of two parent representatives in the block and district education committees appears to be rather arbitrary, and has little scope for mobilising action.

7.8.4 The absence of the teacher as a partner in educational governance

Teachers' position is particularly fragile in this setup. As a result of the long history of failure to discipline government employees in India[344], teachers have come to be fundamentally mistrusted in terms of their working morale and good intentions. A range of administrators at different levels (notably the DEO and BEO, representing the traditional educational bureaucracy) remarked that government employed teachers are basically a bunch of lazy buggers who cannot be disciplined unless rigorous control and sanctioning mechanisms are enforced. The notion that teachers cannot be trusted reflects in the systematic exclusion of teachers from any fundamental decisions regarding the schools in which they teach[345]. This does not only apply to the development of curricula and syllabi (which has often been criticised by educationists[346]), but also to such a fundamental issue as personnel recruitment. In fact, the literature on school-based management and school effectiveness points to the importance of principals'/teachers

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[344] Cf. Arora 2006, Bardhan/Mookherjee 2000 and 2004, Chaudhury et.al. 2006, Banerjee/Duflo 2006.

[345] This is in part a relict from the transfer regime, under which teachers were posted in schools as reward or sanction (or, just as frequently, as a result of bribing administrators). Under conditions of frequent transfer and arbitrary posting it is not overly surprising that teachers have not engaged in developing professional visions for individual schools.

[346] Cf. Batra (2005), Ramachandran (2005), Dyer (1996), Kumar (2008).

autonomy in the field of human resources – if they are expected to build a professional community centred around the teaching-learning process, it is quite implausible why they would have no say whatsoever in the appointment of colleagues with whom they are supposed to form such a community.

Embedded in the concept of SBM are concepts of leadership (instructional/ transformational leadership role) which presuppose either a strong principal as leadership figure, or, in a more comprehensive approach, professional leadership qualities at all levels of the education system[347].

While such leadership figures do exist in some government schools (the case of MS1 has shown that indeed leadership was the decisive factor in making SBM work), the problem is that leadership is not systematically supported. On the contrary, the lack of fully fledged principal positions in primary and middle schools, in combination with the systematic exclusion of teachers in determining the content and methods of teaching discourage sound professional vision and leadership among teachers and head teachers. Under such conditions, teachers will continue to view themselves primarily as government employees who are paid to do what they are told to, irrespective of their mode of employment. The prospects of building a 'professional community' from teachers are very limited under these conditions.

Administrators and policy-makers continue to look at teachers essentially from the principal-agent perspective, rather than a partnership-perspective, and their approach to dealing with principal-agent problems is heavily biased towards punitive measures, rather than incentives. The former, however, are insufficiently centred on teacher performance as measured by actual student learning achievement, a fact recognised by both administrators and policy-makers.

The Principal Secretary of School Education pointed out that there is basically no positive incentive system for teachers to do a good teaching job, except the national and state teachers' awards. The former awards the 13 best teachers in each state with a sum of around 5000 Rs, the latter awards a similar amount to 11 teachers per year (election criteria were quite clear even to the Principal Secretary). In addition, three teachers in a block are awarded a teachers' prize every year. Given the sheer numbers of government teachers - approximately 1500 primary and upper primary teachers in Sehore block alone - such prizes are unlikely to offer an incentive which is moderately realistic to achieve for most ordinary teachers.

Just as problematic as the lack of positive incentives for the issue of student achievement is the absence of disciplinary measures in cases where teachers fail to teach students.

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[347] This includes leadership functions of the individual teacher, the middle management (teachers temporarily entrusted with leadership functions), and functions of principals and school administration (cf. Wissinger 2007:115).

Even though teachers employed as contract teachers face the possibility that their contracts will not be renewed if their performance record is bad in terms of student achievement, this affects only roughly 40% of the entire teaching staff as of now. Sixty percent of all teachers in the state are government employees who have tenure, and these posts will only gradually be filled as teachers retire[348].

The Additional Mission Director, RGPSM, was quite pessimistic about the impact of merit-based contract extension on the system as a whole, because the number of teaching positions to be filled by contract teachers in the next couple of years is comparatively small.

> "Between 1995 and 2001 a maximum of teachers have been employed under EGS. Most of these have been made permanent through unionisation. The rules that apply to contract teachers do not apply to them. They apply only to a very small number of teachers. For the rest of them there is no merit-based contract extension." (Addl. Mission Director, RGPSM, 21st April 2007).

Thus, the problem of gradual replacement of teachers on tenure by teachers on three year contracts is that within the rather long period of transition from one dominant employment mode to the other, there is considerable chance that contract teachers will organise and pressure for tenure. Precisely this happened in the aftermath of massive teacher employment under the Shiksha Karmi Scheme in DPEP districts – *shiksha karmis* were given tenure, a move by which the state government bereaved itself of the most effective tool to keep a thumb on teacher performance.

The Additional Project Director of RGPSM highlighted the problem of lacking focus of incentive and sanction on teacher performance as follows:

> "I have seen teachers in whose classes not a single child has passed the board examination. But nothing happens to that teacher. When a teacher commits a criminal offence, or misbehaves towards a student, or misappropriates resources, then we can file a court case against him. But when a teacher fails to teach the children, we can do nothing." (Addl. Mission Director, RGPSM, 21st September 2007).

It is important to note that even for the 40% contract teachers, the only means to sanction malperformance is not extending the contract, which means that parents and children may have to put up with teaching failure for a period of three years until they have the option to remove the teacher from school.

Meanwhile, the system of non-monetary incentives works quite detrimental to the quality of teaching especially in small, remote rural government schools. As transfer is the primary means to punish or reward tenured teachers, good teachers are systematically transferred away from rural to urban areas, where the standard of living is much more

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[348] The Principal Secretary of School Education estimated that the tenured teaching staff would have retired out of the system until approximately 2025. There are many people who are positive that up to that point of time contract teachers will have unionised to adjust their contracting conditions to those of the so-called 'dying cadre' of government employed teachers.

attractive, while deviant teachers are frequently transferred to the most unattractive teaching positions in remote rural areas, where teaching conditions are potentially the most challenging, and students in most urgent need of a highly qualified and motivated teacher.

In line with the observation that the type of school management as operating in Madhya Pradesh is actually bound to the logic of external control management, the focus of the decentralisation process in education appears to be primarily on disciplining teachers, while at the same time passing accountability for educational outcomes down to the individual school, viz. to all concerned stakeholders, including parents and panchayat members. This might not be a problem for education outcomes, had the effort to control teachers focussed more effectively on improving the quality of teaching offered in government schools.

The combination of a number of factors previously discussed in the context of individual cases has effectively led to a decline of teaching standard in government schools.

Most importantly a) the lowering of pre-service qualification requirements for teachers employed under EGS, b) the shift of teacher education courses from colleges to DIETS, and c) the transformation of the position of the *jan shikshak* into an administrator of SSA components at cluster level, diverting attention away from academic support to teachers.

At the individual school level, allowing parents to control the use of inputs primarily serves to reduce losses related to misappropriation and misuse (even though losses through ineffective planning and use by PTAs may outweigh the former). Given that the transfer of management competencies usually requires substantial involvement of the PTA secretary, the move has burdened teachers and diverted their focus away from the teaching-learning process[349].

Thus, one of the central problems of decentralised educational governance in Madhya Pradesh is that the allocation of competencies to different stakeholder groups does not match their goals and expectations: Parents, on one hand, are involved in the distribution of student benefits, which they definitely welcome, but which do little to enable them to enhance their children's achievement levels and hold teachers accountable for what children learn in school.

Teachers as a professional community, on the other hand, are excluded from developing syllabi and teaching tools at higher levels - but expected to adapt externally imposed syllabi to local needs, skills which are not even remotely touched in teacher training

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[349] To be fair, it should be noted at this point that SBM, wherever its implementation has been attempted, has lead to drastic increases of workload on teachers, and has often diverted considerable time resources away from the teaching-learning process (cf. Leithwood/Menzies 1998:236).

programmes[350] - and they are not involved in recruitment issues in their own schools, which effectively obstructs building a professional community.

The issue of curriculum and syllabi choices made at the state level deserves some more attention because it highlights the mismatch between vision and reality when major actors are excluded from such decisions.

Madhya Pradesh until 2003 produced textbooks and TLM for multigrade settings in cooperation with NGOs such as Eklavya and BGVS, but has returned to monograde syllabi for reasons incomprehensible to teacher respondents.

Concerning that in MP, as in many other Indian states, multigrade teaching is the norm rather than the exception, at least at primary level, it appears that curricula are designed in fact for the schools of the elites – private schools, Central Schools, and Navodaya Vidyalayas – rather than for the schools for the masses. The persistent outperformance of government schools by private schools in terms of student learning outcome should be seen in this light. Private schools match monograde class requirements much better than government schools. It hardly comes as surprise, then, that given the organisational advantage and student background bias, private schools manage to teach a monograde syllabus to monograde classes better than government schools manage to teach a monograde syllabus to multigrade and multi-age classes – and this is something beyond the reach of even the most active PTA.

Given that there is evidence that the multigrade/multi-age classroom actually can offer advantages in learning outcome, as international research on multigrade pedagogy indicates, it is incomprehensible why this potential is not only wasted, but reversed into potentially negative effects on student outcomes by ignoring the reality of government schools and teachers' needs in curriculum design and teacher training[351].

In fact, curricula set the norm of what is generally considered desirable by teachers, and the lack of recognition of the multigrade setting in curriculum and syllabi design results in a distinctively negative perception of multigrade teaching on part of teachers, which evidently decreases teacher motivation (cf. Little 2004:11).

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[350] Cf. Ramachandran 2005.

[351] It should be noted that this step must be seen in context of the mainstreaming of non-formal schools, esp. those opened under EGS. These have been criticised as sub-standard precisely because of their multigrade nature and the low qualification requirements for the employment of local teachers. The perception that multigrade teaching is inferior to monograde teaching persists, which is probably why this 'sub-standard' method was not allowed to become the norm for curriculum development. Mulitgrade teaching is a necessity arising from resource constraint, and the symbolic message of abolishing multigrade syllabi and TLM, and return to monograde designs, is that this is the goal to be reached soon.

7.8.5 The lack of compulsion in compulsory education

Intimately related to the problem of lacking accountability for student outcome is the approach towards compulsory education in India.

The lack of enforcement of compulsory education vis-à-vis parents poses a specific problem, because policy makers regard it as a 'token item' of JSA – something that symbolises a social norm, but that is not meant to be enforced[352]. This lack of enforcement, which is based on the assumption that parents will ensure their children's attendance in school if only the state provides schools that match their expectations, is perfectly negated by the case of MS1, where it was not the functioning of the school which was responsible for high student absence, but the specific problems relating to migration and educational and socio-economic backwardness of sections of the village population. Critical observers have often emphasised that in the Indian context the compulsion to provide education to every child lies with the government rather than with parents.

Some 15 years ago, Myron Weiner in his book 'The child and the state in India' pointed out that government officials and local politicians shared the view that poor parents should not be forced to send their children to school, because firstly they depended on their children's labour force for their livelihoods, and secondly government schools were worthless to an extent that it would be ridiculous to keep children from earning money for a mere waste of time (Weiner 1990). The same type of argument is nowadays brought forward by the same people when it comes to fining parents for not sending their children to school. The factual result of this seemingly benign attitude is a perpetuation of illiteracy and poverty, which in the long term perspective is much costlier to the affected families than effective enforcement of student attendance, besides weakening parents' ability to hold teachers accountable for what their children learn in school.

Indeed, it appears that the entire process of decentralisation in education is essentially a means to control teachers and inputs, tasks which are outsourced to PTAs and PRIs, while the ability to sanction is not vested in the controlling authority – the district administration retains the final word over the enforcement of sanction.

This is particularly problematic because, as responses of administrators suggest, enforcement of sanctions gets weaker with growing distance between the controlling and the enforcing agency. Numerous anecdotes recounted by the DEO and BEO pointed to systematic distortion of sanctioning procedures through corruption, patronage bonds and

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[352] This view was brought forward by the Principal Secretary of School Education in an interview conducted on 21st September 2007.

other forms of 'perverse' social capital, to an extent that enforcement of rules gets coincidental rather than intentional.

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7.9 From equal representation to merit: The 2006 amendments to the JSN

In ignorance of the systemic constraints impeding parent participation in PTAs in both scope and effectiveness, the Government of Madhya Pradesh has amended the Jan Shiksha Niyam in 2006, with the aim to increase parent participation in PTAs and ensure its effective functioning.

The government has adjusted three screws right at the bottom of the system: the quorum requirements for PTA meetings, the process of election of the PTA president, vice-president and working committee, and the term of office of the latter.

The quorum for the monthly/biweekly PTA meetings was adjusted to 2/3 of all *elected* members[353]. This means that (irrespective of school size, and irrespective of the type of issues to be decided in meetings) the presence of 9 elected members will be enough for PTAs to take legitimate decisions and act upon them. There is still no discrimination between meetings of the PTA working committee and meetings of the PTA general assembly, and – apart from the establishment of the working committee - no specification of issues on which the consent of the latter needs to be sought. This would be important, however, in the context of raising additional fees or other resources from the parent community.

The second important feature of the amendment to the JSN is the procedure of election of working committee members and presidents. The state government has obviously noticed the dilemma between complying with reservation requirements and ensuring functionality of the PTA, and it has chosen to opt for functionality rather than equitable representation.

The procedure now prescribed[354] is no less complicated, but completely different in character. 'Elected' members of the PTA are no longer elected, but appointed by virtue of their children's merit in school. Parents of the child with the highest mark in the previous annual examination in grades 1-4 each will be members of the working committee. Representation of SC/ST/OBC parents is allowed for by making the mother and father of one child in each respective category, who achieved the highest mark in the previous annual examination in class 1-4 *combined*, members of the PTA working committee. While in terms of social categories representation is no longer bound to the proportion in the student population, their representation remains ensured.

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[353] This does *not* affect the quorum for the constituent meeting of the PTA in which elections take place.

[354] Amendment to the *Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam* 2003, rule 8 sub-rule 2.

This procedure of member selection follows the assumption that parents of children who achieve well in school take an active interest in their children's education, and potentially are more educated themselves, thus will be more motivated and able to engage in the PTA working committee. The provision that both mother and father be members of the working committee makes female quota dispensable and in fact ensures a 50-50 representation of men and women in the committee[355]. It is needless to say, however, that under given role ascriptions the provision may boil down to female representation on paper (because it is the husbands who attend the meetings). Whether or not this provision has positive effects on female participation in PTA remains to be seen.

The president and vice-president are elected by the PTA general assembly from among the maximum 14 members of the working committee. One of the two positions needs to be filled with a woman and/or scheduled category member.

The term of office of the working committee has been extended to two school terms. This provision owes to the fact that many activities of PTAs, especially those related to construction, exceeded the one-year term of PTAs, so that newly elected working committees had to take over half-finished tasks. The process of training new members caused further delays. Trainings take place during the month of August, so effectively working committees do not become operative before the month of September, incurring a two-month delay in ongoing activities and proceedings. In addition, the extension of the term allows for prolonged and recurrent training of working committee members, which is hoped to have a substantial effect on PTA functioning, thus leading to a relief of burden on teachers. According to the officer in the E&R section of RSK, both appointment procedures and increased capacity-building have already begun to show tangible improvements throughout the first round of these newly constituted PTAs by September 2007.

There are, however, a number of questions arising from the shift of an elected to an appointed working committee.

The first is: can parents be made members of a statutory body with significant responsibilities (the violation of which may have legal consequences) through a procedure (amendment of the education rules) on which they have no influence whatsoever? It may be argued that the state assembly is entitled to pass such an amendment due to its democratic legitimacy. However, if we remember the empowerment rhetoric which accompanies the issue of parent and community participation in schools, one may wonder how empowered parents feel if they have no

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[355] Interview with a leading officer E&R, RSK, 21th September 2007.

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say over neither others' nor their own involvement. In fact, it is fair to say that while above provisions may significantly increase the effectiveness of PTAs, they are effectively an act of authoritative rule, and thus essentially disempowering to the affected parents. Remembering that participation is connected to a significant increase in opportunity costs to schooling for concerned families, the provisions violate the spirit of the Right to Education Bill, which obligates states to provide *free* and compulsory education to *all* children (and, consequently, their parents).

In addition, the change in the legal framework is an expression of the renunciation from the previously declared goal of community involvement to mobilise precisely those sections of the village populace who so far have been excluded from and/or passive towards education. Since weak students are often from poor and illiterate households in the village, there are little prospects that their parents will ever get in closer contact with the school, unless the interaction between parents and teachers is individualised towards the single child and her achievement. As yet, however, there is no indication of a systematic strengthening of such regular student progress-based interaction between individual teachers and the parents of their students.

The somewhat screwed meritocratic selection process reflects the caste elitism and efficiency-oriented, authoritative governing style that is rather typical for the cadre-based internal structure of the BJP. It legitimises the neglect of efforts towards mobilising the weaker section of the parent and student body, thus reinforcing a common trend in parent participation across countries: That those parents who need to come to school (from the point of view of student achievement) don't, while those who do not need to come, do (c.f. Georgious 1997:194, Ricking 2003:140f).

Considering the dearth of parent participation among all sections of the parent community as observed in the case studies, it is clear that there is a fair amount of coercion involved in the implementation of the new rules. Whether or not this is an appropriate incentive for supporting children's achievement in school is a different question.

Imposed participation? Tentative conclusions about participative local educational governance in Madhya Pradesh

8.1 What can be learned from the cases in terms of individual's motivation to join and act in school committees?

The propositions made in chapter 3 suggested to focus on two categories of factors potentially affecting individual choices to join PTAs.

The first was the legal framework as ratified by the Government of Madhya Pradesh, the basic set of rules to define membership and positions and structure action in PTAs, viz. the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam and Niyam. These were captured in the analysis framework as 'prescribed rules' (equivalent to Sen's notion of 'processes'), indicating that the actors operating under these rules were not included in the process of negotiating the rules.

The second category of factors related to characteristics of individual participants who act under the first set of factors under certain constraints (equivalent to Sen's notion of 'opportunity structure'). These constraints were thought to be related to individuals' capabilities (operationalised as educational and socio-economic status, and positions held in institutions), to the information available to individuals about the action situation, and to the value attached to the issue at stake (children's school education) in general, and the outcome of PTA activity, in particular.

The following propositions were made in order to analytically approach parent participation in PTAs:

1. Collective action takes place in situations structured by both *formal* rules (in this case JSA/JSN) and *informal* rules (social norms and codes of conduct).
2. Individuals behave in response to the incentive and sanctioning mechanisms in PTAs
3. People have different motivations to join PTAs which range from expectations of immediate or future benefits to the desire to behave socially appropriately
4. People face different constraints in entering and acting in PTAs which are closely related to their individual capabilities and their access to information

It was further suggested that individual actors, in ways largely contingent on propositions 2-4, as well as formal and informal rules shape the processes within PTAs which lead to a

set of 'rules in operation' which may to differing extents deviate from the formal rules, and that these rules in operation determine the outcome of PTA activity.

The case studies have revealed that while lacking capabilities (as reflected in illiteracy/low educational status, income poverty, or social capital), informational constraint, and low value ascription to (government provided) school education were found to be relevant barriers to first-time participation choices, there were important other factors which immediately affected individual's decisions towards repeated or regular participation in PTAs, particularly as elected member. These related to the diversity of interests motivating or demotivating participation in PTAs, and the lack of congruence of preferred outcomes of PTA activities among different groups of members.

8.1.1 Informational constraint and individual capabilities

With respect to the role of access to information and informational constraint, its importance for decisions to participate was more indirect than assumed.

Informational constraint was found to be a prohibitive condition when the lack of information about the existence of the PTA and/or when its meetings take place precluded the choice to participate or abstain from participation, or in other words, when constraint was absolute (no information).

The occurrence of absolute constraint however heavily depended on two factors, namely parents educational status and the relative importance of children's school education vis-à-vis other concerns. Given that both factors were interlinked by low socio-economic status, which usually accompanies low educational status and leads to the preoccupation with immediate subsistence rather than concern for long-term and rather uncertain future benefits, they acted as mutually reinforcing conditions leading to informational constraint. In such cases, information was not retained even if actively (and sometimes repeatedly) advanced to the concerned persons.

Informational constraint however was relevant for the internal division of power within PTAs. As discussed at length in the preceding chapter, the informational gap between parents and head teachers was at times exorbitant, with parents depending entirely on the channeling of information by the PTA secretary in the absence of availability of copies of the JSA/JSN, manuals, or other materials to be used throughout the school year. This enabled head teachers to promote parent involvement only where it was congruent with their own interests and goals, to the detriment of monitoring by and accountability towards parents.

This negatively affected the parents' perception of the probability that PTA activity will positively affect a valued outcome. Given the incongruence of outcome preferences

between parents and teachers, and the dominance of the latter over processes in the PTA, the lack of trust in reaching a valued outcome through collective action in the PTA was a powerful impeding condition to participation.

What clearly emerged from the study of MS1 was that when parents felt it was appropriate to engage in PTAs primarily for the sake of supporting teachers in operating the school (thus following the 'logic of appropriateness' rather than the 'logic of consequenciality'), participation in PTA meetings was more stable, especially among elected PTA members. The emergence of a 'logic of appropriateness' governing participation choices and adherence to rules was intimately connected to the process of public mobilisation and deliberation on village development issues in general, and school development in particular, which facilitated greater *congruence in valued outcomes* and mutual trust among different stakeholder groups involved.

A similar phenomenon was observable in EGS1, here however, the 'logic of appropriateness' did not surface in participation in PTA meetings (quite on the contrary), but in parents willingness to ensure regular student attendance (something which was more difficult to ensure without the involvement the PTA in a large school such as MS1).

Where parents followed the 'logic of consequenciality', the willingness to participate in PTA meetings essentially depended on the calculation of costs and benefits, which was usually detrimental to participation, in case of which different degrees of persuasion/pressure were necessary to ensure at least some baseline participation.

8.1.2 Incongruent outcome preferences

The most important observation was that the incongruence of preferred outcomes of parent participation between different stakeholder groups was a serious obstacle to parent participation *even if* capabilities, access to information, and value attached to education in general and parent involvement in it in particular were conducive to participation in PTAs. The fact that educated, well to do parents preferred not to participate in PTAs, or even to opt out of the government system altogether, related to their perception that parent involvement cannot address the issues valued by them, namely student learning achievement and teacher accountability for the same.

As has been extensively discussed on the pages preceding this chapter, diverging outcome preferences between the state government (the leading actor in the 'games about rules', (Stoker 1998:2), who shapes the formal rules determining the scope and structure of action in PTAs), teachers and administrators (professionals and agents of the state government), elected representatives in PRIs, and parents (the beneficiaries of a public good provided by the state government) lead to a situation where both primary participants, parents and teachers, were coerced into the establishment of PTAs without

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mutual agreement on its purpose on one hand, and without agreeing to the definition of purpose as defined by the state government, on the other.

The ability of parents and teachers to negotiate and possibly aggregate outcome preferences at their local level was severely constrained by the interference of higher level institutions, most notably in the form of government orders, which left little space for individual deliberation and determination of priorities unless strong leadership facilitated this (MS1).

In such instance, PTA proceedings became a mere ritual, which was carried out rather mechanically, resembling what Mosse (2001:25) called the 'Weberian process of routinisation' in processes of participatory planning and project implementation.

8.1.3 Lack of control over entry and exit

On a theoretical level, the fact that the establishment of PTAs was a consequence of coercion (particularly on head teachers) rather than a voluntary agreement on the necessity to facilitate collective action for the benefit of students, teachers, and parents has some important implications.

According to Elinor Ostrom (2005:21), if participants in an ongoing activity (in this case recurrent participation in meetings and involvement in implementation and monitoring depending on positions) do not have the freedom to enter or leave the situation, it will be difficult to maintain predictability in terms of their readiness to participate. The heavy fluctuation in PTA meetings, especially among working committee members, closely corresponded to the degree of coercion/voluntariness under which parents entered the working committee.

Unpredictability was reinforced by the fact that benefit from the good provided was unexcludable, and thus completely independent from parents' contribution, whether in the form of resources, labour, participation in PTA meetings, or at the very least ensuring children's attendance in school. As a consequence, most parents preferred to benefit from the provision of education to their children without contributing to its smooth production and monitoring.

Under the amended rules for the establishment of the PTA working committee, control over entry and exit has diminished even more, while it is yet unclear whether or not the enforcement of coercion will be successful in the absence of any punative mechanism (such as fines or exclusion from certain other public goods or offices) apart from, in the best of cases, social pressure.

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8.1.4 Lacking means to sanction non-participation

To balance the destabilising effects of the lack of control over membership in PTAs, theory suggests that a strong monitoring and sanctioning mechanism must be in place to ensure members fulfil the functions ascribed to their positions (cf. ibid:22), especially if they do not voluntarily hold it.

The inherent problem is while there are legal mechanisms to sanction breaches of existing rules (e.g. misappropriation of resources), there are no mechanisms in place to sanction the neglect of duties ascribed to positions. This is a problem which affects all institutions in a representative democratic political system – once a person has legitimately entered a position, there is little that can be done about non-performance – as long as it is not connected to breaches of law - *within* the defined period of office.

If acquiring a position is based on competitive elections, it can be expected that persons enter positions on their own motivation and with an agenda of what they want to do (however partisan it may be). In the case of PTAs however, the sobering reality is that in most schools, there is no competition for positions in the PTA, and different degrees of persuasion (sometimes bordering coercion) are necessary to fill them[356].

In such circumstances, the neglect of functions ascribed to a position is bound to increase with declining effort invested in monitoring and enforcing their exercise. This explains why PTA presidents usually fulfil at least the most indispensable functions ascribed to them, while other elected members do not. In other words: lacking participation cannot be addressed unless the consequences of non-participation outweigh the costs of participation. This is rarely the case in PTAs, with the exception of PTA presidents, on whom head teachers as well as *jan shikshaks* usually focus their efforts to ensure at least nominal parent participation.

This situation however would change fundamentally if participation in PTA meetings were, for instance, encouraged by incentives (such as additional scores in the BPL ranking for involving in community activities incurring opportunity costs, or at least compensation of lost income for very poor families, as suggested by a number of parent respondents).

In fact, high levels of participation in *gram sabhas* when the selection of beneficiaries is at stake, or in PTAs when student incentives are distributed, support this notion.

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[356] Mancur Olson in his 'Theory of Collective Action' has pointed out that in the event of non-excludability from a public good (such as education, or public order, or village development) once it is produced, "[…] unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interest.*" (Olson 1965:2)

However, given that there are no incentives to engage except the honour of it, and factually costs of non-participation are almost non-existent (especially because parents generally felt their chances of achieving a valued outcome through participation in PTAs were little), thus far there are few means by which to encourage parent participation.

8.1.5 Can coercion solve the problem? The 2006 amendments to the JSN

In the wake of the 2006 amendments to the JSN, the coercive character of participation in PTAs has been enshrined in the formal rules governing the body by making membership in the PTA working committee dependent on the educational merit of students. Thus teachers have been relieved from the necessity to persuade (as a milder and less threatening form of coercion), something which, in combination with the changes in aggregation rules (quorum), may have grave consequences for teachers' willingness to mobilise wider parental support to the school and make efforts towards involving the parents of weak students.

Nevertheless, parental negligence of duties associated with a position on the working committee does not induce any other consequence than exclusion from the body (and that, too, applies only to the PTA president, who can be removed from the position if he has failed to attend scheduled meetings three successive times). In fact, given the lack of control over membership in the PTA working committee induced by the change in rules, negligence of duties may become a strategy of coerced PTA presidents to get out of the position before the end of the term.

The adaption of rules is unlikely to have any effect on what PTAs actually do and achieve in schools unless a convergence of preferred outcomes of collective action is achieved.

What has been discussed above is not trivial because it is a problem afflicting all governance institutions created under a paradigm of 'decentralisation from above'.

When the 'games *about* rules' are closed to significant groups of actors centrally involved in the 'games *under* rules', chances are that outcome preferences are not sufficiently aggregated, leading to what Srivastava (2005) has called a "reinterpretation of incentives" to enter and act in institutions. In addition, the costs of monitoring the functioning of institutions and sanctioning deviances from established rules are substantial, and where both are lacking, collective action may either fail altogether, or fail to achieve the outcomes preferred by the agency involved in crafting the rules (central and state governments).

In basically non-excludable organisations such as *gram sabhas* or PTAs, the combined problems of lacking control over membership and dependence on voluntariness for participation, exacerbated by a wide-spread lack of trust in large-group collective action,

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point to the fact that in direct democratic, non-excludable governing institutions no individual can be forced to participate on pain of penalties, unless democratic rule is to degenerate into authoritarian rule.

Thus the only screw which can be adjusted is the 'incentive-screw', either in terms of grounding a 'logic of appropriateness' which makes the readiness to participate in collective action more independent of the actual personal benefit from such participation, or by ensuring that the benefit of participation is higher than its costs (something which is almost impossible for parents to determine because of the high insecurity about future returns to education). Given that incentives, again, are subject to individual interpretation and preferences, the exercise of 'getting incentives right' is bound to yield unpredictable outcomes.

8.1.6 The impact of informal and 'old' institutional norms on rules in operation

Particularly interesting to observe was the impact of social norms and hierarchies on formal procedures. The most obvious expression of the clash between criteria for eligibility to membership/position and norms of behaviour was the lack of female participation in PTA meetings, in spite of adherence to formal rules 'on paper'. Further, positions in PTAs as created by the JSN were less significant for the exercise of control in the body than positions held by virtue of profession (teachers), or social, economic, and educational status (the latter most often being related to membership in the *gram panchayat* or other institutions).

Particularly the dominance of head teachers over the proceedings in PTAs reflected their position and behavioural habits towards parents in the previously dominant 'external control management' (Yeng) system in government schools.

Giving up this position, which was essentially connected to retaining control over their own working routines, would have required a substantial shift in teachers' professional self-perception and the definition of appropriate behaviour of parents, teachers, children, and community members connected to it.

Manoj Srivastava (2005) has convincingly argued that 'old institutional norms' are a powerful obstacle to the process of change in institutions and the taking root of newly created institutions or newly established rules in existing institutions in a system of governance. Teachers' self-perception as government employees who are accountable to their superiors only, and parents' self-perception of passive receivers of (low quality) government provided services reflect such old institutional undercurrents which impede new sets of rules to take root.

8.1.7 Effects of exit options on participation choices: the private sector

A factor which has been neglected in the initial framework of analysis, but which was found to be exceedingly important for the ability to mobilise parent participation in PTAs, was the exit option from the government system into privately provided education.

The existence of a private school system is a problem for the public system on several fronts.

Firstly, the exit option offers an immediate solution for evading the shortcomings of the government school system on the quality front, as compared to the time and energy that needs to be devoted to induce change in the often long established behavioural routines in government schools. The trap is that by trend those parents who attach high value to their children's education are concerned with children's learning achievement and the acquisition of skills that will enable them to move upwards the socio-economic ladder. The fact that PTAs thus far are not well equipped to address student achievement and teacher accountability appropriately systematically discourages these parents from engaging in PTAs, and pushes them into the private sector.

Ostrom has pointed out that in repeated social dilemma games, players' ability to exit the situation has consistently made a difference in the amount of cooperative behaviour exposed by them, and consequently in the rate of cooperation reached over time (Ostrom 2005:198). This was observed to apply to parent participation in PTAs as well, either at the level of non-participation in PTAs, actually opting out, or in the worst case, cheating (collecting student benefit from government school and afterwards enrolling children in private school, where such benefits are not available).

Encouraging private providers in elementary education, as many state governments in India do, thus to some extend undermines the purpose of enhancing parent participation in education. With those parents best capable of monitoring school functioning and pressing for provider accountability systematically selecting into the private sector (cf. Kingdon 2007:23), parent involvement through PTAs can be expected to be much less effective than it could be if the exit options were limited rather than extended.

8.1.8 The preference for individualised accountability

The central issue that drives parents to enrol their children in private schools is dissatisfaction with their children's learning achievement, and their inability to effectively hold teachers accountable for it. Parent responses indicated that parents quite generally preferred a contract-type relation to the school, which clearly defines the quality and amount of service provided in exchange for the fee paid by parents. It is this contract that enables them to complain and demand adherence to the agreements. The important

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thing here is that to do so parents do not depend on collective action. They can individually enforce their claims (i.e. by withholding payment or terminating the contract). Whether or not parents have an upper hand in the enforcement of abidance to the agreement (a private school may chose to expel a student if parents withhold payments, whether on justified grounds or not) is an entirely different question, but parents *feel* better equipped to demand accountability of teachers in private schools.

This preference for direct, individual, contract-regulated provider accountability parallels what Banerjee et.al. (2008) found out in regard to parent's willingness to participate in VECs: Parents clearly preferred to involve in modes which enabled them to act independently of school or local governance bodies (ibid:9), precisely because they felt that these bodies would not be willing or able to act in their interest.

In addition, the fact that a fee is paid to private education providers is an incentive for parents to ensure their investment yields optimal returns, thus inducing them to monitor in the first place. This explains the observation that parents take ample interest in the achievement of a child enrolled in private school, while completely neglecting the progress of another child in the government school (head teacher PS1 and PS2, *jan shikshak* cluster 2).

8.1.9 The problem of ineffective enforcement

The literature on decentralised delivery of public goods puts a lot of emphasis on the process of monitoring institutional achievement for ensuring transparency, accountability, and compliance to the rules (predictability).

In early public choice theory, the predominant view was that rational egoists participating in collective action will not be interested in monitoring compliance and enforcing sanction, given that their aim is assumed to be the extraction of as much individual benefit as possible, without concern for the common good and the sustainability of the good/resource (cf. Olson 1965). For this reason, the dominant policy recommendation was that monitoring and enforcement must be vested in a central authority (or its agency, cf. Ostrom 2005:8ff).

Quite in contrast to this, research on local common resource governance has shown that monitoring of compliance to established rules is most effectively done by those individuals who are worst effected by the consequences of cheating, rather than by a remote central authority (cf. Ostrom 1990:204). The delegation of the day-to-day monitoring of school functioning from panchayat committees (previously vested with the state government, later with the DPEP district project office, and last with the panchayat education committee) to the PTA follows this logic.

The problem that appears to be insufficiently addressed is the location of the power to sanction once the monitors have detected a breach of rules.

In our case of local school governance, problems with the enforcement of sanction in the event of a detected breach of rules occur on multiple levels, depending on the position to which the breach of rules is connected.

In terms of the enforcement of student attendance, sanctions target parents, rather than students themselves, as these are minors and cannot be held accountable for their actions.

The ability to sanction is vested in the *gram sabha*, which is the least exclusive all-purpose collective action body at the lowest tier of local government. The monitor (PTA) informs the members of the *gram sabha* of a breach of rules, and the *gram sabha* is obliged to verify whether or not a breach of rules has occurred, and on that basis decides over the initiation of a sanction (fee). In the event of a breach of rule on part of a parent or student (i.e. student absenteeism), the mechanism is basically a self-sanctioning one, given that delinquents are members in the *gram sabha*.

In her extensive studies on governance of common resources, Elinor Ostrom observed that one of the criteria found in robust institutions of self-governance was the existence of gradual sanctions in the event of repeated breaches of rule (2005:266f).

Such gradual sanctions are missing in the dealing with parents who fail to ensure their children's attendance in school. Even though there is an increase of sanction relating to the quality of the offence (actively hindering a child from attending school can be punished much more severely than mere ignorance towards a child's attendance), there is no tightening of penalty in crease of repeated offences.

Given that the penalty for indifference toward student attendance is symbolic rather than substantial (a fine of 10 Rs), and can only be imposed once throughout the school year (actually defying any possibility to deal with repeated breach of rules), it is not surprising that *gram sabhas* make no use of it, especially given the substantial paper work involved in issuing notices, calling a showcase, etc.

With respect to sanctioning teachers for breaches of rule, the procedures are entirely different, because the power to impose a sanction is vested in a higher level (the block or district authority, depending on the employment status of the teacher). Thus while the monitor is entitled to report a detected breach of rules to the *gram panchayat*, which is authorised to forward it to the concerned authority, the latter is not directly affected by the breach of rules (as the monitor is). Thus, the block or district authority is bound to attach less urgency to the issue than the PTA or *gram sabha* would be inclined to do, and, given that the concerned authority is the employer of the deviant teacher, the deviator (or some intercessor) may try to avert the enforcement of sanction. In other

words: Given that the enforcer is not directly affected by the breach of rules, that he operates at a level more or less remote from the actual setting, and that there are multiple intermediary agencies (*gram panchayat*, JSK, *janpad panchayat*) to which the potential deviator (teacher) may nurture individual relations, growing distance between the monitoring and the enforcing agency increases the potential for distortion of the process, without the monitor (PTA) being able to excert any influence (because his scope of activity is confined to the local level)[357].

Furthermore, neither the monitoring nor the enforcing agency have been involved in the deliberation of rules governing the 'payoff rules' (Ostrom), nor are they able to directly induce a change in these rules (this applies to all sub-state level agencies). The 'games about rules' structuring local educational governance are played at the apex (state) level, and even there in an extremely exclusionary process, as discussed in the previous chapter.

8.1.10 The lack of autonomy of lower level institutions to adapt rules

For the sake of clarity, it is useful to apply Ostrom's distinction of different levels of action situations: The lowest level is the operational situation, in this case the operation of PTAs under given rules regulating their proceedings (games *under* rules).

The second level is the collective-choice situation, the process of establishing the rules governing collective action in PTAs (games *about* rules).

The third level is the constitutional situation, the process of defining who will be involved in the 'games about rules' for collective action at the operational level, and the rules to govern this process.

Rules governing local educational governance are mostly crafted at the second level, the 'games about rules' for collective action in local bodies. The power to craft these rules is delegated by the State Government to the Shiksha Mission/Department of Public Instruction (as a subunit of the Ministry of School Education), and the legislative assembly needs to approve of all changes to these rules.

The same is true for all local government bodies in Madhya Pradesh, and in fact most of India: The 'games about rules' are played at the state level. This is not to say that the process of negotiating does not include any actors from lower levels in the system – the Government of Madhya Pradesh increasingly incorporates the knowledge and advice of NGOs and Mission officials operating at local levels into its decision-making processes.

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[357] Girish Kumar supports this argument, stating that the success of PRI engagement for the functioning of schools in their jurisdiction across states crucially depended on an efficient system of *on-the-spot* supervision and control (2006:255).

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However these agencies have no formalised power to actually alter decisions, they are assigned an advisory function.

The important point is that whether PRIs or local user groups are concerned, the 'games about rules' usually take place at higher levels with at best marginal involvement of those who will be required to act under these rules.

Thus, a *zilla panchayat* has no options to modify the rules for nominating members of its education committees, or broaden the scope of its actions, or inducing changes in sanctioning procedures.

Similarly, most user groups, e.g. in common resource management, operate in the context of a central or state government project, under rules determined by the project authorities at the state level, which they have no option to alter if they find them inappropriate.

The systematic exclusion of lower level agents from 'games about rules' has significant potential to undermine the legitimacy of these rules for those governed by them.

Ample empirical evidence from experimental game theory proposes that monitoring and enforcement costs rise when rules are imposed externally, without the option to be changed by those governed under the rules (Ostrom 1990, 2005). This is the prevalent situation in local government settings in Madhya Pradesh, and in fact in most other Indian states.

Given the problem that sanctioning, even where monitoring mechanisms are moderately operative, is obstructed by the distance between monitoring and enforcing agencies and the number of intermediaries involved in the process, it can be assumed that the very purpose of bringing monitoring closer to the providers of public goods is undermined, because the risk of being sanctioned is at best uncertain, if not low.

Further, the rather exclusionary process in which the entire decentralisation process was crafted, especially in Madhya Pradesh[358], while it may have led to more ambitious and daring policies, also offers much more potential to obstruction: Significant groups of 'players' who operate under these rules (bureaucrats, teachers, parent representatives, MLAs and party leaders), but have been excluded from deliberation and decision-making, may not share the norms underlying those rules - especially if their own position in governance processes is weakened - and can be expected to be less compliant than in the event of having been incorporated in the negotiation of the rules.

For much of the processes of multi-level, decentralised educational governance in India, there seems to be truth in Gerry Stoker's observation that

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[358] This does not only concern the education sector, see Kumar 2006 for a discussion of the hasty and deliberation-hostile ratification process of the state panchayat legislation in state assemblies.

"Faced with the complexity and autonomy of a system of multi-level governance there is a strong tendency for political leaderships to seek to impose order and issue directives. Government in these circumstances becomes a vast and unresolvable principal-agent problem." (Stoker 1998:24)

The denial of substantial autonomy to lower level institutions discourages the very dynamics and adaptations according to local preferences and demands that the process of decentralisation was intended (at least rhetorically) to induce in order to make the provision of public goods more efficient and sustainable.

At the same time, the lack of a consequent and physically proximate sanctioning regime invites to non-compliance and unpredictable ways of pursuing interests which have not been incorporated in the 'games about rules' in the first place.

8.2   Beyond this study: Some important questions arising from research

While the conclusions drawn from the research in the preceding section of this chapter aimed to show that the frictions and constraints in local educational governance in the cases under study are part of the constraints in decentralised governance processes in Madhya Pradesh – and large parts of India - quite generally, in this section I will situate the state of government provided elementary education in the wider context of economic and social development in India, and address some of the unanswered questions which call for further inquiry.

8.2.1 Disempowerment of PRIs – trial and error or hidden agenda?

While decentralisation of education in the state of MP has undoubtedly been a learning process, in the course of which there have been numerous shifts in legislation to rectify erroneous trends in implementation, some observers maintain the view that the withdrawal of competencies from local government institutions reflects a hidden agenda of the party in power[359].

It is no secret that the BJP has a strong content-based agenda in education, which questions the foundations of the dominant post-independence definition of the Indian state and identity, particularly its commitment to (and definition of) secularism and federalism. The discourse frequently erupts in controversies about the content of school textbooks on Indian history, which regularly results in revisions of textbooks at state and

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[359] Vinod Raina has brought forward this point emphatically. Other authors have also commented on the distorting interventions in the education sector on part of the BJP where it is in power in several articles (cf. Krishna Kumar, 2001 and 2002, Bhargava 2003).

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central levels according to the worldview of the party in power (Congress/left parties – BJP)[360].

The strategy to withdraw competencies in education from local government institutions and vest it back in the administration is viewed as an expression of the mistrust the state government nurtures towards local governments, because these are often dominated by parties other than the ruling party at the state level.

The dynamics between different levels of governments are turbulent (sometimes virulent) in India, with states being governed by parties in opposition at the centre, district governments dominated by parties in opposition in the legislative assemblies of the state (but not seldom with good connections to the ruling party at the centre), and so forth, down to the village level.

The administration, however, is always dominated by the ruling party at the state level, because all central administrative posts are filled with staff of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and these are subject to frequent transfer, especially when state governments change[361].

Following the argument that the state government is reducing ideological interference with the educational agenda by reducing the influence elected members can exert on the school system, the PTA is a comparatively non-threatening body, because it does not have any immediate political backup.

Further, it must be noted that the withdrawal of competencies in education has not only occurred at the village level. Since funds for construction and maintenance are no longer distributed via *janpad* and *zilla panchayats*, but flow from the district to the block project offices and from there to the schools, panchayats have been excluded from resource management at all three sub-state levels of government, and thus essentially transformed into an inspection and grievance redress agency[362].

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[360] I have provided a detailed analysis of depictions of the struggle for Independence in Hindi textbooks published by the NCERT and the SCERT of Uttar Pradesh under Congress-/BJP-led governments respectively in my unpublished MA Thesis (Hillger, 2001)

[361] That SSA project staff at block and district levels are appointed in accordance with political considerations was confirmed by the BAC of Sehore block, who pointed out that the post of the Block Resource Coordinator has been vacant for two years for political reasons. Applications had been received by the RGSM in Bhopal, but no appointment took place, allegedly because of quarrels between the *zilla panchayat*, the MLA of the district, and the State Implementation Society.

[362] It should be noted in this context that the punctual withdrawal of powers from local and intermediate levels of government and its temporal relocation with the centre might actually serve to strengthen lower level government institutions. Harriss has convincingly argued that functional decentralisation requires central governments to play a more active role in certain respects, most importantly in mobilisation of people's participation in local governance, and occasionally the withdrawal of powers from intermediate LGIs (Harriss 2001:9ff). The distrust between central and local governments in Madhya Pradesh may be interpreted in this light. The dependence of LGIs at all levels on the state government for funding, and the state government's

In terms of actual decision-making power, intermediate panchayat committees were left with the power to appoint *shiksha karmis* and contract teachers for primary (block level) and upper primary (district level) teachers. Here, too, by way of changing the procedure of pre-selection of eligible candidates from among whom the district/block panchayat education committee appoints, the scope of decision-making of elected members of local bodies has been significantly reduced.

Block and District Education Officers pointed out that a pre-selection of eligible candidates for teaching positions in government schools by the district and block project officers was necessary because elected members, who usually had no expertise whatsoever in education, tended to vote for candidates based on their caste, local, or party affiliation, rather than professional merit. The appointment of teachers would thus regularly reflect the social composition of the education committee rather than applicants' qualification. According to the DEO of Sehore district, next to the lowering of qualification requirements for contract teachers and the shift of teacher training to the DIETs, this practise has contributed significantly to the deterioration of quality standards in government provided education in MP.

To avoid such partisan appointment of teachers, from 2006 onwards the secretaries of education committees were endowed with the power to select the ten most eligible applications according to strictly merit-based criteria, and present these to the education committee for appointment. The deplorable part of the story is that a) there is no control whatsoever on the process of ranking by the project officers (who may be informally instructed to adhere to certain political considerations) and b) teacher employment has happened on such a massive scale during the *shiksha karmi* and EGS schemes that the number of contract teachers to be appointed in the next 10-15 years is comparatively negligible[363].

It is particularly the power of pre-selection of District Project Officers which is somewhat suggestive of the argument that indeed the BJP government in MP tries to control who gets into the teaching business. District Project Officers are appointed by the Shiksha Mission, which is in turn under tight control of the Chief Minister. It is not at all unlikely that apart from professional merit, political and ideological merit may play an increasing role in teacher appointment.

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institutionalised right to interfere with any decision taken at lower levels, as discussed in some detail in chapter 4, however do not support such argumentation.

[363] According to an RGSM officer, 28000 teachers were appointed under the EGS scheme between 1998 and 2002. With the upgrading of EGS schools to regular primary schools, a significant number of contract teachers were appointed during 2004 and 2005. With less than 10% of EGS schools in the state not having been upgraded until 2006, the bulk of teacher appointment has taken place before the new appointment procedures were in place.

While Shivraj Singh Chauhan is definitely a moderate among state BJP leaders, the autonomy state party leaders enjoy in terms of the educational agenda is rather limited. Curriculum battles are usually fought at the centre, and the discourse within the BJP is thoroughly dominated by the cultural conservatives (some would say fascists) of the Sangh Parivar and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Public education is the strongest vehicle for transporting ideologies, which the frequent resurgence of textbook controversies between BJP and Congress Party amply attests to[364].

The recent amendments to the Jan Shiksha Niyam to some extent support the notion that party ideology drives the educational agenda, not only in terms of content and transmission, but also in structure.

Thus far, there is no comparative research about different approaches to decentralisation between parties in India across the political spectrum.

A systematic assessment of dominant readings of 'decentralisation' within Indian parties could be of great service to understand the different approaches taken throughout states in India, and in assessing potential path dependencies resulting from them.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyse whether institutional changes in decentralised educational governance in BJP-led states broadly run into the same direction, and whether such changes occur in other policy sectors, such as health and poverty reduction, as well. If it is true that the amendments to the JSN to some extent reflect the logic of the primacy of service to (Hindu) society over empowerment of the individual, then it can be expected that such institutional changes are also traceable in other sectors.

8.2.2 Some reflections on the value of school education for survival in the labour market

As the case studies have confirmed, one of the determinants of decisions to participate in local educational governance among parents and community members is the immediate value they attach to school education. The calculation of value is grounded in on both the perception of intrinsic and instrumental value. While the former is rather independent of any expected gains from education, because here education is perceived as a 'good thing'

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[364] The latest such contestation over Indian history broke out over the Sethusamudram ship canal project, which was stalled by rock formations in the Palk Straits area. Hindu leaders claimed these rocks to be the ruins of the mythical *ramar sethu* (bridge built from rocks by the monkey army of god Rama to enable him to cross over to Sri Lanka to rescue his wife Sita from the clutches of the demon Ravana), and demanded that the canal project be stalled.

per se, the latter is grounded in an estimation of expected immediate and future benefits calculated against immediate and future costs.

One of the main determinants of the value of school education as perceived by parents is long-term benefit deriving from an expected access to employment in the formal labour market, or, in other words: upward social and economic mobility. While parents are well aware that primary education will not secure their children any better employment opportunities (but nevertheless by many is ascribed the intrinsic value of being able to read and write), upper primary and especially secondary education is strongly associated with an expected increase in employment opportunity, resulting in improved income security for the whole family[365].

The ability of the local labour market to absorb school graduates strongly affects this cost-benefit calculation. A number of problems result from this.

Firstly, most secondary school graduates (whose number can be expected to significantly grow in the event of universalisation of elementary education) strive out of the agricultural sector into the industrial and service sectors. This is intimately connected to the backwardness of modes of agricultural production, especially in small scale farming, and the fact that during the last 10-15 years growth has accelerated in industries/manufacturing and services exclusively, while the in the agricultural sector growth has declined (cf. World Bank 2006:126ff).

Fig. 55: Sectoral GDP growth rates 1980-2005

Sectoral GDP Growth Rates, 1980–2005

India

average annual growth rate (%)

1980–85   1995–2000
1985–90   2000–05
1990–95
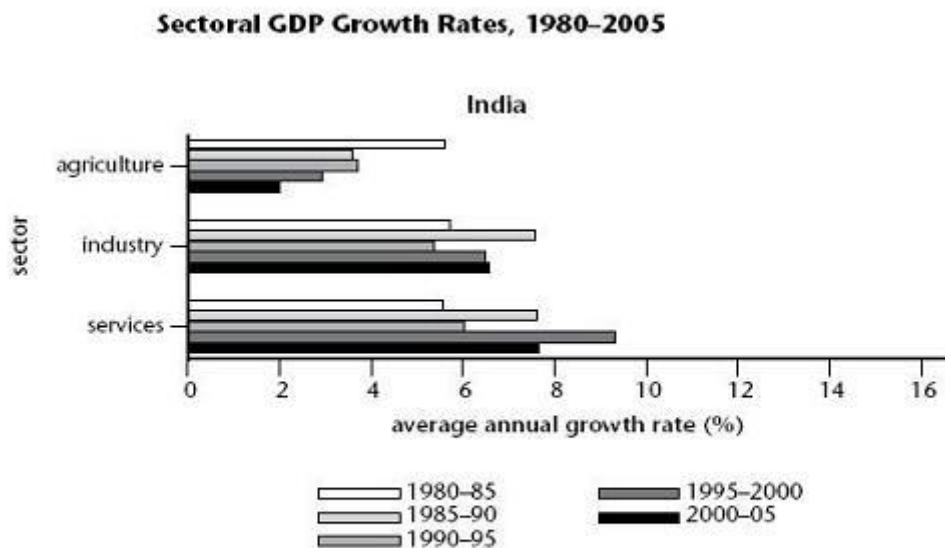
Source: Government of India Central Survey Organization

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[365] It is important to note that this calculus is applied to boys exclusively, on the ground that girls' will leave the family after marriage and thus, if allowed to, contribute to another household's income.

What does than mean in a country where 58%[366] of the labour force is absorbed in agriculture?

It means firstly that a growing work force in agriculture generates a declining proportion of GDP, with all its implications for the distribution of wealth in society.

This can be at least partly attributed to the utter neglect of the agricultural sector in labour market and economic development policy. Having achieved food self-sufficiency by the end of the 1970s through high price supports and input subsidies and generally highly regulated markets[367], the central government has failed to adapt prevalent policies along with the liberalisation efforts made in other sectors from the end of the 1980s onwards. As a result, lacking productivity-enhancing investments in rural infrastructure and increasing transaction costs, reduced competitiveness and discouragement of private investments resulting from a strict and inflexible regulation of markets have curbed productivity as well as technical innovation in agriculture, besides leading to widespread environmental degradation (soil and ground water contamination, falling ground water levels, cf. ibid:127).

It means secondly that lacking prospects of generating modest wealth through agricultural activity, especially among small and marginal farmers in states with highly unequal land ownership patterns (such as Madhya Pradesh) pushes the larger number of educated youths out of agriculture. This is a problem, because access to labour and markets in these sectors is very limited in many rural areas across states.

In the absence of targeted political effort to a) expand the non-agricultural rural labour market and b) encourage technical innovation for increasing productivity, in combination with a land reform which enables marginal farmers to acquire land (i.e. through easily available credit and encouragement of larger cooperatives) on a scale where such innovation offers prospects of significant increase of yield, and c) expand the access to markets (agricultural and non-agricultural) by upgrading rural infrastructure, rural un- and underemployment is bound to become a source of social unrest.

This raises another problem: Cross-sectoral labour movement in India has taken place in the unorganised/informal sector, while the proportion of the formal sector in the labour

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[366] Government of India, Department of Census and Statistics: Provisional Population Totals: India, Census of India 2001.

[367] The success of these policies yielded widely disparate results across states, which largely related to the efforts state governments made to promote irrigation and fertiliser input and, most importantly, access to adequate farm credit. Furthermore, growth accelerated disproportionately in those states where land ownership patterns allowed for large landholdings, thus in the socially more conservative states such as Punjab/Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, where no land reforms ensuring a more equitable distribution of land have been implemented (cf. World Bank 2005).

force has declined. The informal sector is characterised by insecure labour conditions and the lack of a social security system (including pension, health and unemployment insurance), which is currently covering employees in the formal sector exclusively.

We need to remember that the formal labour market absorbs a mere 28 million of the more than 400 million strong labour force (cf. Raina 2006b). There are two disturbing, because mutually exacerbating, trends: the decline of employment rates in the formal sector associated with 'jobless growth', and the simultaneous rise in demand for employment in the formal sector resulting from the undisputed successes in raising access to education and (even though only moderately) transition into the secondary and tertiary levels. This hits rural areas particularly hard, because increases in enrolment have been steepest here, but so has unemployment among the educated. According to Christo (2006), the post-liberalisation period between 1993 and 2000 produced 27 million additional job seekers in the formal sector, 74% of whom were in rural areas, and 60% of whom were educated, and estimates current unemployment somewhere between 50 and 100 Million.

As discussed in the context of the unemployed son of a panchayat member in the case study (EGS1), this may have severe livelihood consequences for families who have invested in their children's education. The perception that such investment is not worth anything if there are no job opportunities later on, that the education acquired alienates children from manual labour, and that it raises aspirations in children which they will not be able to realise, leading to frustration, aggression, and potentially social unrest, delegitimises the claim for compulsory elementary education in the eyes of many poor parents in rural areas.

In this macroeconomic context, the question Vinod Raina justifiably raises is: Where do children go after class eight? This question can only be addressed by cross-sectoral calibration of policies, particularly in the areas of vocational education and rural labour market policy, a topic seriously lacking substantial research so far.

Absorbing millions of first generation educated young people (how ever deficient the education system may be at this point) in the primitive modes of road construction through the Jahawar Rozgar Yojna and Employment Guarantee Schemes will in any case not be the solution.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Chronological List of Interviews

Date	Location	Respondent	Content
15.02.2006	Secretariat School Education	Principal Secretary School Education	permit to conduct research in MP state
16.02.2006	RSK	diverse respondents	workshop on cooperation between state agencies and NGOs for quality education
17.02.2006	RSK	Commissioner RSK	Choice of district for field research
17.02.2006	RSK	Staff member, Research Section, RSK	Choice of district for field research
18.02.2006	RSK	District Project Coordinator, Sehore	Choice of blocks for field research in Sehore district
18.02.2006	RSK	Participation in DPC meeting	Participation in DPC meeting on utilisation of SSA funds
20.02.2006	Pratham Bhopal	District Project Coordinators several districts	Case selection strategy and target blocks, sounding out possibilities for field assistence
22.02.2006	Samarthan Bhopal	Shraddha Kumar, Researcher, Education Section	Case selection strategy and target blocks, sounding out possibilities for field assistence
22.02.2006	ActionAid Bhopal	Dr. Aishwarya Mahajan, Coordinator Education Unit	Case selection strategy and target blocks, sounding out possibilities for field assistence
23.02.2006	JK Primary School, NK Primary School, cluster 1	Head teacher and teaching staff	Introductory visit, discussion about PTA activity in the schools
24.02.2006	Samarthan Sehore	Shafiq Khan, regional office coordinator	Choice of schoos and support in entering the field
25.02.2006	ZSK	Pulvati Rathore, Gender Coordinator	Choice of schools and support in entering the field
27.02.2006	MS2	Head teacher and teaching staff	Introductory visit
27.02.2006	MS2	Members of women's self help-groups	Introduction to villagers, pre-test interview guides, social mapping
27.02.2006	PS2	Head teacher and teaching staff	Introductory visit
27.02.2006	PS2	Members of women's self help-groups	Introduction to villagers, social mapping
28.02.2006	Samarthan Sehore	Sarpanches Sehore block	Janpad Sarpanch Samiti: corruption in BPL beneficiary selection, realisation of Right to Information in Gram Panchayat
03.03.2006	JSK cluster2	Jan Shikshak	Introductory visit
04.03.2006	PS2	Head teacher, teacher	Group discussion, guideline interview
04.03.2006	PS2	PTA vice president, wc member/panch	Guideline interview
06.03.2006	JSK cluster 2	Jan Shikshak	Guideline interview
07.03.2006	PS2	Members 1-3	Guideline interviews

Date	Location	Respondent	Content
11.03.2006	MS2	PTA president, member 6/panch, member 7/panch	Guideline interviews
11.03.2006	PS2	Member 5	Guideline interview
12.03.2006	PS2	Member 4, panch	Guideline interviews
14.03.2006	MS2	Head teacher and teaching staff	Guideline interview, group discussion
16.03.2006	JSK cluster 1	Jan Shikshak	Introductory conversation
16.03.2006	PS1	Head teacher	Introductory visit
17.03.2006	MS2	Wc member/panch, anganwadi worker	Guideline interviews
18.03.2006	MS2	Members 1- 3	Guideline interviews
19.03.2006	MS2	Member 5/panch, member 4	Guideline interviews
21.03.2006	MS1	Principal	Introductory visit
23.03.2006	EGS1	Teachers, PTA president	Introductory visit
24.03.2006	MS1	Principal, sarpanch, PTA president	Group discussion, guideline interview
24.03.2006	MS1	Panchayat secretary	Guideline interview
25.03.2006	JSK cluster 1	Jan shikshak, principal	Guideline interviews
28.03.2004	MS2	Head teacher private school	Guideline interview
29.03.2006	EGS1	Teacher, PTA president. member 1/panch	Guideline interviews
02.04.2006	MS1	Head teachers private schools	Guideline interviews
02.04.2006	Block Education Office	Block Education Officer	Guideline interview, school inspection tour
04.04.2006	MS1	Wc member2, members 1-2	Guideline interviews
05.04.2006	MS1	Member 3	Guideline interview
05.04.2006	JSK	Head teacher EGS1	Guideline interview
06.04.2006	EGS1	Subcommittee member, wc member, member 2	Guideline interviews
07.04.2006	EGS1	Attendance in PTA meeting, members 3-4	Guideline interviews
11.04.2006	PS1	PTA vice president, subcommittee member	Guideline interview
12.04.2006	PS1	Teachers	Group discussion
13.04.2006	PS1	Wc member2, members 1-2	Guideline interviews
14.04.2006	PS1	Sarpanch, wc member 3/panch	Guideline interviews
17.04.2006	PS1	head teacher	Informal discussion
17.04.2006	District Education Office	District Education Officer	Guideline interview
17.04.2006	Janpad Shiksha Kendra	Block Academic Coordinator	Guideline interview
18.04.2006	PS1	PTA president	Guideline interview
19.04.2006	EGS2	Head teacher	Guideline interview
20.04.2006	Janpad Shiksha Kendra	Block Academic Coordinator	Problem-centred discussion
20.04.2006	Zilla Shiksha Kendra	DPO, accountant	Problem-centred discussion
10.09.2007	Hyderabad	NIRD, Vinod Raina	Results of field research in Sehore district and generalisability for MP
18.09.2007	RSK	Officer Curriculum Section, RSK	Access bias of SSA policy and education quality improvement
19.09.2007	RSK	Head of Research Section, RSK	Recent RSK evaluation research on PTA activity
20.09.2007	Secretariat Panchayati Raj & Rural Development	Secretary Panchayati Raj & Rural Development	Guideline interview
21.09.2007	RSK	Addl. Mission Director RGPSM	Guideline interview
21.09.2007	RSK	Officer Enrolment and Retention Section, RSK	Guideline interview
21.09.2007	Secretariat School Education	Principal Secretary of School Education	Guideline interview
22.09.2007	phone	MLA Betul constituency	Education agenda in the state legislative assembly

Appendix 2 Indicators for Interview Guides

Stakeholder	Indicators			
	Information	Motivation	Value	Capability
PTA working committee members	Who are other members of the working committee, who participates regularly in meetings, who sets the agenda for meetings Rights and competencies of the PTA involvement of PRIs/other bodies in school education Sources of information on PTA (Existence of and access to guidelines/ manuals/administrative orders defining the role and competencies of the PTA) training received for office	motives for being elected PTA karyakarini member (intrinsic or extrinsic; perceived benefits from holding the office) perceived degree of regularity of own participation, reasons does the PTA fulfil the functions mentioned satisfactorily, what are constraints perceived benefit from shifting management responsibilities from panchayat to PTA perceived funtioning of the school the child visits	perceived importance of education for own children; ambitions perceived importance of education for own children; ambitions attention paid to child's school career (checking attendence & performance, talking to teachers) perceived most urgent issues in household/village (competing issues)	gender, educational status, sources of income, occupation, est. monthly income, working hours, household size, caste/community,membership in organisations
PTA members (parents)	knowledge about PTAs (what do these bodies do, how many members, who are the members, when, where and how often do meetings take place) perceived functioning of the school parents' rights concerning the school (checking teachers' attendence, shala kosh, knowlegde where to raise demands or complain)	reasons for (non-) attendence at PTA meetings reasons for (non-) attendence at PTA meetings	perceived importance of education (up to which grade should own child to study, anticipated benefits) perceived most urgent issues in household/village (competing issues) attention paid to child's school career (checking attendence & performance, talking to teachers)	gender, educational status, sources of income, occupation, est. monthly income, working hours, household size, caste/community, institutional membership
Panchayat members	core responsibilities of gram panchayat in local governance core responsibilities of gram panchayat in school governance monitoring activities (input utilisation/teacher attendence/student attendence by GP/GS)? rights of Gram Panchayat vis-à-vis higher levels of local government and/or Shiksha Kendra, regarding the functioning of the schools in the panchayat area	motivation for standing panchayat elections	perceived most important responsibilites of a gram panchayat accomplished tasks of GP regarding schools in panchayat area position of educational issues on panchayat agenda	gender, educational status, sources of income, occupation, est. monthly income, working hours, household size, caste/community, institutional membership

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Stakeholder	Indicators			
	actual parent involvement in school	goals of parent/ community participation	responsiveness of higher level institutions	professional status
Teachers	description of PTA functioning (announcement and holding of meetings, agenda setting) perceived parent motivation for participation /non-participation	perceived core competencies of PTA perceived goals of govt. strategy to involve parents in school perceived appropriateness of the institutional setup to reach goals perceived benefit of decentralisation and community participation for own school	responsiveness to perceived difficulties in teaching (multi-grade-teaching, student irregularity) responsiveness to perceived difficulties in school management	training employment status years of employment in school

Stakeholder	Indicators		
	division of competencies	goals of parent/ community participation	institutional constraints
Administrators	responsibilities of academic, administrative, financial, regulatory and democratic chains at different levels coordination between different institutions (vertically/horizontally) perceived most important authority in educational governance	perceived core competencies of PTA perceived goals of govt. strategy to involve parents in school governance perceived appropriateness of the institutional setup to reach goals perceived benefit of decentralisation and community participation for school functioning in cluster/block/district	perceived factors interfering with effective school management major strenghts and weaknesses of participative educational governance

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<u>**Appendix 3 Interview Guidelines**</u>

PTA Working Committee Members

<u>I Introduction</u>

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the government school in your village and the role parents and the larger community play in ensuring its proper functioning.

I am particularly interested in the roles the Parent-Teacher-Association and the gram panchayat play in your local school, what parents can and cannot do, and how teachers, parents and panchayat members cooperate.

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. In the report, no names, neither of your village, your school, or yourself, will be made public.

<u>II Personal information:</u>

Name

Age

Caste

Gender

<u>III Individual capabilities</u>

No. of persons in household

No. of persons earning

No. of children in household/school-going

Sources of income

Estimated monthly household income

No. of adult literates

Are you member in any organisation (gram panchayat, self-help group, user committee or other)?

III School functioning

First, I would like to ask some general questions about the school your children study in.

In which grades do your children study?

Do they like the school?

Do they attend regularly, or have they missed classes recently, for instance because they were sick, or their teacher was absent?

Are they doing well in school? Are you happy with what they are learning?

Does the school open regularly?

How many teachers are present in the school on average?

How many subjects are taught in the school?

Do your children have lunch at school?

What do you think about the teachers? Do your children like them?

How often do you talk to a teacher about your children's progress in school?

Do you feel there is any deficiency in your school?

Is it important that your children go to school?

How long would you like your children to study? Why?

If you had the choice, would you rather enrol your child in a private school, and why (not)?

Do you think there is any difference between the way the private school functions and the way the government school functions?

Whose children are enrolled in the private school?

IV Participation, rights and compentences of the PTA

Is this year the first time that you have been elected into the working committee?

How many members are in the working committee of your PTA? Can you name them?

How often do PTA meetings take place in your school?

How do get to know when a meeting takes place?

How many parents participate, on average? How many teachers participate, on average?

Do working committee members participate in every meeting? Who participates regularly, who does not, and why?

Do you participate regularly? Why (not)?

When you hold a PTA meeting, is there a meeting agenda? Who prepares it?

Please describe the last meeting in which you have participated. Who was there? Who spoke? Was there discussion, and what was it about? Is this how it usually is?

Who presides over/leads the meeting?

What in your opinion are the most important tasks of the PTA?

Do you think it is appropriate that parents should do these things? Are there any other institutions that you think should be responsible?

What were the main tasks and achievements of the PTA during the last school year?

What are the most important topics that are discussed in PTA meetings?

Are you satisfied with what the PTA has accomplished, or is there anything else you would like to be addressed by the PTA?

How do parents get to know about the rights and competencies of the PTA?

Do elected PTA members get any manuals or guidelines in which the rights and competences are written down, or are any such guidelines accessible in the school?

Can you name any law or rules or government order in which the rights and responsibilities of PTAs are laid down (Have you heard of the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam/Niyam)?

Have you participated in a training for PTA working committee members?

Have you ever interacted with PTA working committee members from other schools? If yes, what have you discussed?

V Motivation

Please describe the election situation when you were elected into the PTA working committee.

Do you remember how many parents were present in that meeting?

Where there parents who came forward to be elected as president/vice president/working committee member?

Who suggested who should be a candidate for the election?

Why have you decided to run for an office in the working committee?

Do you feel that you have had any benefit from doing this work?

Do you feel the creation of PTAs and the participation of parents in running the school has brought any improvement?

VI Panchayat Involvement

Do you know if there are any areas concerning the school, which fall into the responsibility of the gram panchayat?

During the last school year, has the gram panchayat been involved in any task concerning the school?

Do panchayat members participate in PTA meetings?

Have you ever attended a gram sabha meeting? Has anything concerning the school been discussed in this/these meeting/s?

VI Relative importance ascribed to education

For you personally at this point, what are the three greatest concerns/problems your household faces?

What in your opinion are the three greatest concerns/problem your village faces?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

PTA Members (non-elected)

I Introduction

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the government school in your village and the role parents and the larger community play in ensuring its proper functioning.

I am particularly interested in the roles the Parent-Teacher-Association and the gram panchayat play in your local school, what parents can and cannot do, and how teachers, parents and panchayat members cooperate.

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. In the report, no names, neither of your village, your school, nor yourself, will be made public.

II Personal information:

Name
Age
Caste
Gender

III Individual capabilities

No. of persons in household
No. of persons earning
No. of children in household/school-going
Sources of income
Estimated monthly household income
No. of adult literates
Are you member in any organisation (gram panchayat, self-help group, user committee or other)?
Do you work outside the village? If yes, when do you usually leave/come back?

III School functioning

First, I would like to ask some general questions about the school your children study in.

In which grades do your children study?

Do they like the school?

Do they attend regularly, or have they missed classes recently, for instance because they were sick, or their teacher was absent, or any other reasons?

Are they doing well in school? What were their last examination marks?

Do your children get any homework? Do you check if they do homework?

Does the school open regularly? For how many hours?

How many teachers are present in the school on average?

Do your children have lunch at school?

Do you think the school building is in good condition?

What do you think about the teachers? Do your children like them?

How often do you talk to a teacher about your children's progress in school?

Is it important that your children go to school?

How long would you like your children to study? Why?

Optional: private school

If you had the choice, would you rather enrol your child in a private school, and why (not)?

Do you think there is any difference between the way the private school functions and the way the government school functions?

Whose children are enrolled in the private school?

IV Information about the PTA

Do you know if there is a parent committee in your school?

Do you know who are members of this committee?

What are these committees supposed to do in the school?

Can you name any members of the PTA working committee?

Have you ever been at a meeting of the parent committee? Do you remember what was discussed in this/these meeting/s?

How often do meetings take place?

How did you get to know of the meeting?

Why did you decide to attend/not to attend the meeting/s?

V responsibilities of gram panchayat

Have you attended a gram sabha recently/ever?

What where the topics discussed in the gram sabha meeting?

Can you name any members of the gram panchayat?

Do you know if the gram panchayat is involved in any activities concerning the school (i.e. building a new classroom, installing the hand pump, or other)?

V relative importance ascribed to education

For you personally at this point, what are the three greatest concerns/problems your household faces?

What in your opinion are the three greatest concerns/problem your village faces?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Panchayat members

I Introduction

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the government school in your village and the role parents and the larger community play in ensuring its proper functioning.

I am particularly interested in the roles the gram panchayat and Parent-Teacher-Association play in your local school, how teachers, parents and panchayat members cooperate, and if there is any interaction between the gram panchayat and the education committees in the janpad and zilla panchayat or any government agencies (DPO, BEO; DEO).

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. In the report, no names, neither of your village, your school, or yourself, will be made public.

II Personal information:

Name

Age

Caste

Gender

III Individual capabilities

No. of persons in household

No. of persons earning

No. of children in household/school-going

Sources of income

Estimated monthly household income

No. of adult literates

Are you member in any organisation other than the gram panchayat (self-help group, user committee or other)?

IV Functioning of the gram panchayat

Is this the first time you have been elected into the gram panchayat?

How many elected members are there in your gram panchayat (males, females, caste affiliation)?

What do you think are the major tasks of the gram panchayat?

What have been the major achievements of the gram panchayat since you were elected?

Are you satisfied with processes of decision-making in your gram panchayat?

How often does the gram panchayat meet? How and to whom are these meetings announced?

How often are gram sabhas convened? How are gram sabhas announced to villagers?

Which were the most important topics recently discussed in the gram panchayat/gram sabha?

V Role of gram panchayat in school governance

Are there any responsibilities of the gram panchayat with respect to running the local school?

Since the midday meal and construction issues have been shifted to the PTA, is there any other involvement of the gram panchayat?

Why do you think have construction and the midday meal been shifted to the PTA? Has this been beneficial to school functioning?

Is there any regular interaction between PTA members, the head teacher or other teachers, and the sarpanch or other panchayat members?

Have you ever interacted with members of the janpad and zilla shiksha committees or panchayats?

Which body do you think is the most important and powerful in educational governance at the district level and below?

Can you name any law or rules or government order in which the rights and responsibilities of panchayats in school governance are laid down (Have you heard of the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam/Niyam)?

VI School functioning

First, I would like to ask some general questions about the school your children study in.

In which grades do your children study?

Do they like the school?

Do they attend regularly, or have they missed classes recently, for instance because they were sick, or their teacher was absent, or any other reasons?

Are they doing well in school? What were their last examination marks?

Do your children get any homework? Do you check if they do homework?

Does the school open regularly? For how many hours?

How many teachers are present in the school on average?

Do your children have lunch at school?

Do you think the school building is in good condition?

What do you think about the teachers? Do your children like them?

How often do you talk to a teacher about your children's progress in school?

Is it important that your children go to school?

How long would you like your children to study? Why?

Optional: private school

If you had the choice, would you rather enrol your child in a private school, and why (not)?

Do you think there is any difference between the way the private school functions and the way the government school functions?

Whose children are enrolled in the private school?

VII Relative importance ascribed to education

For you personally at this point, what are the three greatest concerns/problems your household faces?

What in your opinion are the three greatest concerns/problem your village faces?

Are these problems that need to be addressed by the gram panchayat? Does the gram panchayat do so appropriately?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Teachers

I Introduction

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the government school you teach in, and the role support the PTA and gram panchayat extend to you in running the school.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which you cooperate with the PTA and the gram panchayat, what this means for your working routines, and if you agree to the expectation of the Government of Madhya Pradesh that parents and community members are better able to support school functioning than government agencies in the block and district headquarters are.

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. In the report, no names, neither of your school, the cluster, nor yourself will be made public.

II Personal information:

Name

Age

Gender

Caste

Employment status

Career path/years of teaching experience

Training

III School functioning

How many students are enrolled in your school?

How many teachers are employed?

What is the distribution of labour between you and your colleague(s) concerning teaching and administration?

What is the social and economic background of the students in your school?

Are students attending regularly?

Are you satisfied with the learning progress of your students?

What are the greatest challenges for you in organising classes?

What are the greatest challenges for you in managing the school? (head teachers)

IV PTA functioning

When has the current PTA been elected?

Please describe how the election meeting proceeded, who participated, who came forward to be elected etc.

Have parents elected on the working committee participated in any training?

Who conducts these trainings? What do you think about the quality of these trainings?

How often are PTA meetings convened in you school?

How are meetings announced to parents?

Who are the most active parents in the PTA?

How would you characterise parent participation?

Why do you think parents participate/do not participate in PTA meetings?

What in your opinion are the major rights and responsibilities of the PTA?

Do you think it is appropriate that parents should be involved in these activities?

What topics has the PTA been busy with during the past school year?

With respect to the three greatest challenges in teaching and managing the school you have mentioned, has the PTA taken any action?

Do you personally feel that you/the school benefits from parent involvement through the PTA?

What do you think are the government's goals of promoting parent involvement in school governance? Do you agree with these goals?

Do you think the institutional setup as it is now is appropriate for reaching these goals?

What are your own priorities in school management and development?

Is there anything you think needs to change so you can reach these goals?

V Panchayat involvement

Please describe the type of cooperation between you and the members of the gram panchayat.

What role does the gram panchayat play in local school governance after the midday meal has been shifted to the PTA?

Have you ever attended a gram panchayat or gram sabha meeting, and for what purpose?

What rank do you think does education hold on the gram panchayat agenda?

Are you satisfied with the kind and amount of cooperation with the gram panchayat?

VI responsiveness of higher levels

What role do the jan shikshaks play as academic supporters?

Is there any institutionalise forum where you can address problems you face, pedagogical as well as managerial, and if so, does it offer any concrete support to you?

If there were any problem/conflict with parents, the PTA, or the gram panchayat, whom would you turn to?

Are you satisfied with the professional support structure?

Which authorities do you think are most important in educational governance from the cluster level upwards?

Are these authorities accessible to you, and can you expect any support if you face difficulties?

Finally, if there were three things you would change so that the functioning of your school would improve, what would these be?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Jan Shikshak

I Introduction

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the status of community participation in educational governance in the schools in your cluster.

I am particularly interested in the role PTAs and the gram panchayat play in the management of inputs and monitoring of school functioning, and if you agree to the expectation of the Government of Madhya Pradesh that parents and community members are better able to support school functioning than government agencies in the block and district headquarters are.

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. In the report, the names of clusters and schools will be anonymised, and no respondent's name will be made public.

II Personal information:

Name

Age

Gender

Caste

Employment status

Career path/years of teaching experience:

Training:

III Position and functions of the jan shiksha kendra

What position does the JSK hold in educational governance, what are its major functions and responsibilities?

Please outline the chain of authority of the different institutions (panchayats, BEO/DEO, BRC/DPO, district administration) in educational governance from the state level down to the school level.

What is the division of labour between the *jan shikshak* and the JSK coordinator?

How have you become *jan shikshak*, and what has motivated you to do so?

IV Status of PTA activity in the cluster

Please outline the changes in the institutional framework with respect to community participation since you have been *jan shikshak* in this cluster.

What do you think is the rationale behind these institutional changes?

What do you, from your experience as jan shikshak, perceive to be the major responsibilities of parents and community representatives with respect to local government schools?

Please outline the status of PTAs in the schools in your cluster: Does every school have a PTA and elected working committee? Are meetings held regularly, and how many parents participate?

How are meeting announced to parents?

What do you think motivates or demotivates parents to participate in PTAs?

How do teachers in your cluster respond to parent involvement? What are the major challenges they face?

What is the content of trainings for PTA members, and do working committee members participate?

What are the major indicators along the line of which you would define a PTA as 'active' or 'inactive'?

Please rank the schools in your cluster according to the activity of their PTAs. What are the characteristics of the more active and the more inactive PTAs?

What do you perceive to be the biggest challenges in ensuring PTAs fulfil the tasks delegated to them?

What measures would you suggest to activate inactive PTAs?

What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the current institutional setup?

What prospects do you think does parent and community participation have for school development and improvement?

How important do you think parent/community participation is for managing a decentralised education system efficiently?

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Block and district level administrators

I Introduction

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time. I would like to speak to you about the status of community participation in educational governance in government schools in your block/district.

I am particularly interested in the role PTAs and the gram panchayat play in the management of inputs and monitoring of school functioning, and if you agree to the expectation of the Government of Madhya Pradesh that parents and community members are better able to support school functioning than government agencies in the block and district headquarters are.

This interview is part of my PhD research project on community participation in elementary education in India. All your responses will be treated as confidential. Respondents will be referred to by function only. Names of clusters, schools and villages will be anonymised.

II Respondent's position and functions in the system of educational governance

- Please characterise the position of your institution in the system of educational governance
- Please characterise the functions of your own position in the institution
- Please outline the chain of authority in educational governance from the district level down to the individual school
- Please elaborate on the role of the panchayat education committees at the block and district levels
- Please rank the institutions you mentioned at each level according to their authority in educational governance
- How do the institutions you mentioned cooperate and coordinate vertically as well as horizontally?

III Status of parent/community participation in the block/district

- What in your opinion are the core rights and responsibilities of PTAs in school governance?
- What in your opinion are the core rights and responsibilities of gram panchayats in school governance?
- How would you characterise the status of PTA and panchayat activity in school governance in your block/district?
- What indicators do you use to measure the degree of activity/inactivity of PTAs and panchayats?
- Can you name the cluster/block in which the most active and the most inactive PTAs are located, and outline factors leading to this differing activity?
- What do you think needs to be done to activate inactive PTAs?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system of local school governance?
- Which factors are conducive, which are impeding on effective school management at the local level?
- What do you think is the rationale of the state government with respect to strengthen parent involvement vis-à-vis panchayat involvement?
- Do you agree to the goals of this strategy?
- Do you think the institutional setup is appropriate to reach these goals, and if not what factors are interfering?
- Has decentralisation in general, and community and parent participation in particular, brought any benefit for
  a) Functioning of schools at the ground level
  b) Effective governance at the block, district and state levels

Thank you very much for your time and sharing your experience!

Principal Secretary of School Education/Officer Enrolment and Retention (RSK)/ Additional Mission Director, **Rajiv Gandhi Prathmik Shiksha Mission**

I Introduction

My name is Doris Hillger, I am a PhD student at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies. My PhD project has focussed on the question how community participation is conceptualised in policy (SSA) and legislation (JSA/JSN), and in what ways this conceptualisation materialises on the ground, viz. what the actual scope of community participation and parent involvement is and how this involvement is perceived by different stakeholders.

I have conducted my field research at school level in Sehore district last year with the support of Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT, and Anshu Vaish, then Principal Secretary of School Education.

Based on the observations I have made during field research, I would like to talk to you about some challenges the current governance framework is bound to encounter on the ground level. If you do not want to be quoted on any particular statement, please give notice to me.

The SSA is a very complex policy with multiple layers of aims and strategies to achieve them. I would like to start with the concrete and observable targets of SSA, namely the provision of physical infrastructure, of administrative and teaching staff, the availability of quality TLM, operation of the midday meal and the targets regarding enrolment and retention.

II Status of SSA in the state

Could you give an estimation of the status of SSA policies in MP – to what extent have the targets set by SSA been reached?

- provision of physical infrastructure

  ° According to the district report cards, the status of physical infrastructure is declining from 05-06, with more rooms being in bad shape and requiring repair, the number of toilets (both general and girls') declining, and also the average number of teachers declining and enrolment in single teacher schools rising

  ⇨ What are the reasons behind this?

  ⇨ Why are one-time exercises like building toilets or boundary walls progressing so slowly?

- ## Operation of midday meal

° Teachers have frequently complained that since the midday meal has been shifted to the PTAs they are heavily involved in its provision. Is this complaint common across district, and is it justified?

° The salary paid for the cooks is so low (400Rs) that there is no incentive for villagers to do it – why is the salary not paid from the midday meal funds directly, as for instance in A.P.?

- ## Purchase and use of TLM

° In many schools TLM are not used and are not accessible to children, and neither are children involved in preparing TLM such as cards and models

° Why do you think do teacher funds for TLM remain unspent so often?

- ## Enrolment and retention

° Once 100% enrolment is achieved in a school, what strategies are followed to make sure that the children retain up to grade 8, and attend regularly throughout that time?

° Are there any strategies developed to retain children mainstreamed from the bridge courses?

° I have observed that in many villages there are a number of children enrolled in school, but attending less than 40% of classroom hours. How are these cases statistically documented, and what is the policy response?

° I have been given contradicting information about what happens when a child does not pass the end of year examination. Has automatic promotion up to grade 5 been introduced, and what are the strategies to ensure that weak students will be enabled to pass grade 5 examinations? What happens when they fail these in terms of promotion into middle school?

- ## Administrative and teaching staff

° MP shows a significant deviance from most other states in terms of the composition of its teaching corps: the percentage of head teachers and acting head teachers is at about 9 %, while it is around 20% in most other states. Why is this so?

° In addition, as a legacy of EGS there still is a large number of para teachers. What are their employment modalities (merging with contract teachers?), and how are they integrated into the trained teaching staff?

° Does new recruitment of para-teachers take place at this point of time (i.e. for temporarily filling vacant teacher posts)?

° How much recruitment of contract teachers is expected to take place throughout the next five years?

° How do you evaluate the status of recruitment of administrative personnel in the decentralised setup?

° Are there any problems with finding qualified personnel?

° Are there any problems for the efficiency of the system due to a lack of personnel?

° What do you estimate are the impacts on the system, esp. on monitoring and inspection, when more than 50% of all administrative posts are vacant or executed by other personnel (as in Sehore)?

° What do you think is the reason behind these vacancies (weak incentive structure, remuneration does not match responsibility, political interference)?

° Assuming that large numbers of vacant positions impact on the ability of the system to function, is community participation targeted at partly solving these problems, e.g. by transferring the responsibility of continuous monitoring to both PTAs and gram panchayats?

III Parent and community involvement in school education

What do you perceive to be the most important areas in school education where parents and other community members can contribute to the benefit of the school? Which parts of the community should participate for what purpose?

° Has community participation through panchayats failed? Why have the majority of responsibilities in school management been transferred to the PTAs?

° What do you perceive to be the scope of decision making in PTAs? (no decision-making powers over items that impact classroom situation => PTAs as cheap implementation agencies of state and district government/administration =>neglect of core functions like ensuring student attendance and achievement and teacher performance)

° Do you think that in general parents are fit to fulfil the numerous responsibilities of the PTA? What is done to enhance parent capabilities? With what success?

° Would you say that withdrawing some of the competencies from PRIs and redelegating them to the department (e.g. employment issues) is a strategy at block and district levels, too? Why?

° Have other social sector policies gone through a similar development (e.g. health, joint resource management), viz. is community participation through PRIs currently on the retreat for the sake of improving outcome?

° In Gram Sabhas as well as in PTAs it can often be observed that their functioning is restricted by a lack of popular participation. In which settings do you think are direct democratic institutions viable and effective?

° Educational planning is not an exercise carried out with wider community or even parent participation, but largely through teachers (both govt. and private schools), panchayat members, and other govt. employees (i.e. anganwadi workers) => what should be the role of the PTA in this process?

IV motivation of parents/community members to involve in educational governance

What is your perception of people's actual motivation to get involved in PTAs, or panchayat member's motivation to monitor the local school? What are the incentives to get active, what motivates inactivity?

Could you comment on the following observations I have made during field research:

° Parents' socio-economic status prevents them from participating in meetings and monitoring children's and teachers' attendance

° Parents settle for minimum because they have no criteria to judge school functioning (lack of capacity building)

° Parents perceive that the scope of their activity in school is limited by teachers (dependence for information, reluctance to question own teaching performance)

° Parents feel that confronting teachers can lead to the disadvantage of their own children

° PTA has to function within highly party-coopted local institutions => since PTA presidents have no party backings (as panchayat members) they are afraid to be grinded between local party interests

V effects of community participation on educational outcome

Is there any correlation between PTA functioning and educational outcome?

° Schools where PTAs are labelled active do not necessarily show high educational achievements (viz. student attendance and achievement), and vice versa
° Similarly, districts with higher than average literacy rates according to ASER often show very low student learning levels => what accounts for these contradictions?

VI Enforcement of compulsory education

The term compulsory has two different notions: it usually points to the responsibility of the state to provide equal opportunity for all children to receive education, but it also points to the compulsion of the child (and in case of minors compulsion of the parents) to use this opportunity. In the current institutional and legal framework, what mechanisms ensure both of these aspects of compulsion?

° What role do you think do parent involvement and community participation play in ensuring compulsory education of all children between 6 and 14?
° How do you interpret the term compulsory: does it mean that every child has to go to school, or does it rather mean that the government must ensure every child has _the opportunity_ to go to school?
° What are the consequences of your interpretation for the enforcement of compulsory education?

Summing up, for the state as a whole, what do you perceive to be the greatest successes and failures of SSA in its current shape?
° Are there districts in the state that do particularly well and particularly bad on the education front, and what accounts for these differences?

Thank you very much for sparing your time and sharing your experience!

Secretary of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development

I Introduction

My name is Doris Hillger, I am a PhD student at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies. My PhD project has focussed on the question how community participation is conceptualised in policy (SSA) and legislation (JSA/JSN), and in what ways this conceptualisation materialises on the ground, viz. what the actual scope of community participation and parent involvement is and how this involvement is perceived by different stakeholders.

I have conducted my field research at school level in Sehore district last year with the support of Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT, and Anshu Vaish, then Principal Secretary of School Education.

What I would like to focus on in this conversation is the shifts in involvement of panchayat institutions in educational governance. I am particularly interested in the rationale underlying the GoMP's decision to abolish VECs and narrow the decision-making scope of janpad and zilla shiksha samitis. If you do not want to be quoted on any particular statement, please give notice to me.

II Performance of PRIs in education

Earlier, panchayat education committees played an important role in the distribution of resources to the schools and in teacher employment, and at the village level were responsible for all input management. How do you appraise panchayat performance in this area of educational governance?

Why has the GoMP shifted input management into the hands of the PTA, and narrowed the scope of decision-making of education committees in teacher appointment?

Why is the GoMP currently planning to again shift the midday meal away from the PTAs and delegate it to local women's self-help groups?

III weak sanctioning and enforcement

Based on my own observations, I would say that panchayats tend to neglect inspection and monitoring and focus on areas where they have command over funds or employment. Could you comment on this?

With respect to panchayats' power to enforce rules, my impression is that enforcement is occasionally distorted by patronage interests, or simply indifference. Would you agree that sanctioning and enforcement are distorted, and is this a problem for the functioning of the system of local governance?

° By-passing of enforcement of compulsory education vis-à-vis community members
° Interference with the enforcement of sanctions against teachers by panchayat shiksha samiti members
° Appointment to vacant positions (e.g. in JPSK/ZSK) is dragged due to competing patronage ambitions
° Teacher appointment reflects social composition of shiksha samitis rather than merit of candidates
° Close link between panchayat presidents and CEOs leads to political influence on the approval of demands from schools

IV role of panchayat secretaries/CEOs in local governance

Could you please comment on the role of CEOs and panchayat secretaries? These are government employees, and as such not directly accountable to the electorate. Still as far as I can judge they have a powerful position in the panchayats, and frequently even dominate the panchayat president.

Would you agree that a general problem is that those bodies representing the 'checks' in the system (i.e. the gram sabha at the village level) lack the capacities to enforce elected members or secretaries' compliance?

V Capacity building for panchayat members in educational governance

What kind of and how much training is convened to education committee members, and who conducts these trainings?

What is done to enhance the capacities of local user-, self-help and stakeholder groups, who are bound to suffer from the same lack of capacities as members of the gram sabha and of the PTA?

Summing up, what in your opinion are the major achievements and constraints of panchayat involvement in decentralised educational governance?

Does this match the overall picture in other policy sectors?

Thank you very much for sparing time and sharing your experience!

Member of Legislative Assembly

I Introduction

My name is Doris Hillger, I am a PhD student at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies. My PhD project is concerned with community participation in elementary education, particularly involvement of PTAs and panchayat institutions.

I have conducted my field research at school level in Sehore district last year, and there are some questions concerning the involvement of MLAs in panchayat institutions for which I turn to you.

Please note that I may quote your statements, however I will refer only to your position without publicising your name.

II Role of MLAs and Ministers

What is the role of MLAs in policy implementation in their constituencies?

What is the role of the minister in charge of a district?

Do MLAs exert any influence on the distribution of positions in panchayat institutions in their constituencies?

III Importance of education on LA agenda

How important would you say is school education on the agenda of the Legislative Assembly?

What are the five most important issues on the agenda of the LA?

IV Role of elected representatives in educational governance

When you look at the different 'branches' of local government (academic, financial, democratic, administrative, regulatory), how important do you think is the democratic branch?

What are its major functions?

From your point of view as MLA, what are the major achievements and constraints of the current local governance system (in education as well as generally)?

Thank you very much for sparing some of your time and sharing your experience!

Appendix 4 Definitions of Governance and Good Governance

Definitions of governance and good governance

Source	What is governance?	What is good governance?
World Bank (n.d.)	'the process and institutions through which decisions are made and authority in a country is exercised' (p. 3)	Inclusiveness and accountability established in three key areas: 'selection, accountability and replacement of authorities (voice and accountability; stability and lack of violence); efficiency of institutions, regulations, resource management (regulatory framework; government effectiveness); respect for institutions, laws and interactions among players in civil society, business, and politics (control of corruption; rule of law) (pp. 3, 7)
UNDP (1997)	'the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences' (p. 12)	Characterised as 'participatory, transparent … accountable … effective and equitable … promotes the rule of law … ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources' (p. 12)
IMF (2005)	For IMF purposes, 'limited to economic aspects of governance … in two spheres: improving the management of public resources …; supporting the development and maintenance of a transparent and stable economic and regulatory environment conducive to efficient private sector activities …' (p. 4)	'ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption' (p. 1)
DFID (2001)	'how the institutions, rules, and systems of the state – the executive, legislature, judiciary and military – operate at central and local level and how the state relates to individual citizens, civil society and the private sector' (p. 11, note a)	'seven key governance capabilities: to operate political systems which provide opportunities for all people … to influence government policy and practice; to provide macroeconomic stability … to promote the growth necessary to reduce poverty; to implement pro-poor policy; to guarantee the equitable and universal provision of effective basic services; ensure personal safety and security …; to manage national security arrangements accountably …; to develop honest and accountable government …' (p. 9)
USAID (2005)	'The ability of government to develop an efficient, effective, and accountable public management process that is open to citizen participation and that strengthens rather than weakens a democratic system of government' (p. 1)	Democratic governance: 'transparency, pluralism, citizen involvement in decision-making, representation, and accountability; focusing particularly on five areas: legislative strengthening, decentralisation and democratic local governance, anti-corruption, civil-military relations, and improving policy implementation' (p. 1)
Hyden et al. (2004)	'The formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions' (p. 16)	Can be measured along five dimensions ('participation, fairness, decency, efficiency, accountability, and transparency') in each of six arenas (civil society, political society, government, bureaucracy, economic society, judiciary)
Kaufmann (2003)	'the exercise of authority through formal and informal traditions and institutions for the common good, thus encompassing: (1) the process of selecting, monitoring, and replacing governments; (2) the capacity to formulate and implement sound policies and deliver public services, and (3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them' (p. 5)	Can be measured along six dimensions (voice and external accountability; political stability and lack of violence, crime, and terrorism; government effectiveness; lack of regulatory burden; rule of law; control of corruption) (p. 5)
Hewitt de Alcántara (1998)	'the exercise of authority within a given sphere … efficient management of a broad range of organisations and activities … involves building consensus, or obtaining the consent or acquiescence necessary to carry out a programme, in an arena where many different interests are at play' (p. 105)	Processes through which there is incorporation of more creative and less technical understanding of reform, more dialogue about institutional and programmatic change, more concern with the public sphere (state and civil society) and how to strengthen it, more integration of economic policy and institutional reform, more attention to both national and international factors that affect governance (pp. 112-13)

Source: Grindle 2007, table 1

Appendix 5 Competencies of different bodies according to JSA/JSN

	Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam	Jan Shiksha Niyam
Parent/guardian of children between 5-14	Ensure enrolment and attendance of child in govt./priv./alternative school and Ensure completion of elementary education Inform GS president about prevention of other children from attending school	Inform PTA in case of withdrawal of the child from school for legitimate reasons Sanctions against parents who deviate from their duty to send their children to school: A show case notice shall be issued by the GS/VEC; if after 15 days the parent has not enrolled/ensured attendance of the child in school, the GS can consider finding the parent guilty of the violation of the JSA and can order the parent to present the case personally before the GS; the GS can consider the case and in case the parent is found guilty a fine of 10Rs can be imposed (but not more than once a year!)
Teachers/HM	Prepare quarterly and annual achievement reports for each student Pass reports to parents Ensure easy access of parents to answer books as prescribed Present reports to PTA and VEC Establishment of shala shiksha kosh Other duties as prescribed	Maintain records pertaining to academic activities: student/teacher attendance register, learner's record, transfer certificate register Responsible for village education register (HM of nodal school) Maintain records pertaining to school resources (resource register, incentive distribution register, financial registers (cash book, voucher register, cheque register, bank account register, shala shiksha kosh register) Maintain other records: scholar register, teacher profile register, school observation register) Make all information available under RTI Report status of VER and actions taken to improve status of education to PTA once in a quarter Display certain information on monthly basis in school premises: dropout and non-enrolled children, timetable, class wise enrolment and attendance of students and teachers, class-wise and subject-wise syllabus and achievement against target, status of irregular children Prepare annual academic report in the month of May and present it to the VEC, send to JSK and JPSK after approval
PTA	Ensure 100% enrolment	Prepare village education register (jointly in case of more than one school in the village), identify dropouts and ensure their enrolment Encourage education of girls and children of the deprived sections Help in enrolling migrating children

		Encourage education of handicapped children and provision of aids and appliances
	Ensure regular attendance of students	
	Ensure regular attendance of teachers	
	Monitor learning achievement	Review results of quarterly/annual examination
		Help parents review answer sheets of children
		Monitor the development of children
		Present AAC to parent community/PTA (PTA president)
	Initiation of JSY in accordance with guidelines	Prepare JSY to ensure quality education in school and in literacy programme
		Conduct door-to-door survey in village to collect family information on students (part I of VER)
		Update VER annually
		Implementation of JSY (supervision by nodal school PTA)
	Suggest measures for remedial action and improvement of students	Monitor status of education once in a quarter, initiate corrective measures
	Supervise and control utilisation of shala shiksha kosh	Decide over the use of funds in SSK
		Decide upon school development fees
	Mobilise resources for SSK from panchayat and private sources for establishment of library, playground etc.	Mobilise additional resources for shala shiksha kosh, esp. from village kosh/development programmes for provision of school building, drinking water, toilet
		Prepare list of persons interested in teaching voluntarily and get it approved by VEC
	Encourage voluntary teaching free of remuneration by retired teachers and suggest candidates	
	Other duties as prescribed	Verify information entered in school records (president and secretary)
		Decide over non-academic use of school-building during holidays and calculate and collect amount of money for this
		Verify annual activity calendar of school
		Be responsible for maintenance and management of the school
		Encourage sports, cultural and other extra-curricular activities
		Ensure distribution of incentives (MDM, scholarship, uniforms)
		Award talented children
		Coordinate health check-up of school children
		Review status of implementation of suggestion in school supervision reports
		Decide over contract extension of gurujis in EGS schools

		Advise VEC to take disciplinary action against irresponsible teachers Coordinate activities of the padhna badhna association
VEC	Monitor regular attendance of teachers Direct concerned authorities to impose sanction on teachers Review student achievement reports Suggest measures for remedial action and improvement of students Approve candidates for voluntary teaching Ensure basic learning of every community resident between 15 and 50 Other functions as prescribed	Review achievement levels from time to time and take remedial measures Review and approve annual academic report Approve of the list prepared by the PTA Functions under panchayati raj act: Efforts for improving learning levels of all children Update VER and facilitate its effective use Ensure regular supervision of all schools under jurisdiction Ensure distribution of incentives Ensure enrolment of all children between 5-14 in village Encourage enrolment of migrating children Encourage education of girls and children of deprived communities Ensure regular attendance of all enrolled children Help in preparing/updating VER and review status of enrolment Approve of JSY Make efforts to increase resources in SSK Review activities of adult education once in a while and encourage efforts of padhna badhna association and other literacy-related community efforts Review status of academic and extra-curricular activities Review status of health check-up of school children Make parents aware of their duties towards non-enrolled, dropout or irregular children Review and monitor PTA activities and extend support to them
Gram Sabha	Ensure 100% enrolment in 5-14 age group Imposition of fine not exeeding 10 Rs	Receive information on prevention of children from school and issue show case

	on parents/ guardians who do not ensure children's attendance in school Imposition of up to 1000Rs fine on parents/guardians actively preventing a child from accessing school Consideration and approval of JSY Forward approved JSY to JSK	Only if more than 2/3 of members are present and in favour of resolution Ensure deposition of fine in SSK Notification of collector in case of non-compliance
Gram Panchayat Janpad Panchayat Zilla panchayat	Review JSY and place it before Gram Sabha along with its recommendations Responsible for school functioning in its jurisdiction as prescribed by govt. order	Ensure enrolment and regular attendance of all children 5-14 in their area in schools Ensure the achievement of target learning levels Prepare JSY and annual academic report for the schools in their jurisdiction and submit to ZSK Mobilise additional resources for Shala and Zilla Shiksha Kosh Ensure that PTAs carry out assigned responsibilities Ensure cleanliness in school Provide infrastructure such as school building, infrastructure etc. Ensure 'smooth functioning' of activities of adult education
JSK (middle school designated by state government; responsible for all primary, EGS and middle schools within and 8km radius) Accountability to JPSK	Forward all village JSY to JPSK and ZSK As prescribed by state government	Prepare annual cluster level JSY on the basis of school-wise JSY and submit to JPSK Jan Shikshak: Make efforts to improve learning levels of children in cluster schools Help in updating VERs Re-verify all information entered in school records Identify nodal schools in all villages with more than one school Review status of enrolment, attendance, and achievement Ensure distribution of incentives to children Help in preparing JSY and annual academic records of all primary and EGS schools in cluster Identify nodal schools Provide academic support to primary and EGS schools Provide guidance during school supervision Support organisation of monthly meetings of teachers and prepare agenda for these meetings based on academic indicators

		Supervise at least once a month every primary/EGS school/section in the cluster
		Submit school supervision reports to JSK coordinator and JPSK coordinator
		Analyse school supervision reports Help teachers analyse evaluation results and provide academic support for solving identified 'hard spots' in syllabus
		Encourage/help implementing/replicating innovative activities
		Coordinate training programme for PTA/VEC
		Participate in PTA/VEC meetings
		Coordinate compilation of information required per order by JSK coordinator, JPSK, ZSK or RSK
		Help VEC in approving the list of voluntary teachers
		Encourage use of IT and library, sports and cultural activities
		Coordinate with activities of adult education
		Help mobilise additional resources for shala shiksha kosh
		Review accounts of SSK every month
		Monitor compliance to JSN in cluster schools
		Make all information available under RTI
		Responsibilities of JSK coordinator:
		Internal audit of school accounts of primary schools: school contingency, shala shiksha kosh, cash book, school registers
		Help in updating VERs in cluster and facilitate effective use
		Ensure regular supervision of all schools in cluster
		Coordinate between EGS/primary/middle schools in cluster
		Organise monthly meetings of teachers of primary schools in cluster
		Coordinate activities for providing academic support to schools in cluster
		Assess training needs of school teachers and coordinate organisation of training programmes
		Encourage area-based studies for qualitative innovation
		Compile annual academic reports of all schools in cluster
		Identify and address subject wise 'hard spots' of teaching in middle schools in coordination with JPSK
		Conduct annual audit of accounts of primary and EGS schools
		Sanction casual leave of teachers in JSK and primary schools in cluster

		Make alternative arrangements for teaching during periods of leave or absence of teachers in primary schools in cluster
		Approve school supervision programme of JS together with JPSK coordinator
		Review school supervision reports of JS and identify issues to be taken up in monthly JS meetings at JPSK
		Certify travel and medical allowances for teachers in primary schools in cluster
		Coordinate implementation of schemes of adult education
		Arrange annual training for members of PTA/VEC
		Be responsible for information flow
		Execute all tasks entrusted to him by JPSK or ZSK
		Propose three eligible teachers from the cluster for post of Jan Shikshak
JPSK (former block resource centre of the shiksha mission under DPEP) Accountability to ZSK and DIET	Coordination, supervision and support of Janpad Jan Shiksha Yojna (as prescribed)	1 and 2 of JSK for block level
		Guide functioning of JSKs in block
		Nominate Jan Shikshaks on recommendation of nomination committee (DPC, Incharge DIET, JPSK coordinator)
		Remove JS in case of incompetence or violation of duties Coordinate activities related to elementary education and adult literacy
		Provide academic support to teachers esp. of middle schools after school supervision in the block
		Conduct monthly meetings of JS and JSK coordinators
		Approve school supervision programmes of JS together with the resp. JSK coordinator
		Ensure regular supervision of all schools in the block
		Continuously review formation of PTAs, trainings and activities
		Review training and activities of VECs
		Coordinate preparation of AAR, compilation, analysis and submission to ZSK
		Support distribution of incentives and review implementation
		Analyse school supervision reports of JS and minutes of JSK meetings, identify problems and offer support for solution
		Guidance in planning remedial measures based on analysis of quarterly and annual examinations
		Organise monthly meetings of JS and JSK coordinators and submit minutes of meetings to ZSK for intervention where necessary
		Coordinating school infrastructure development with other implementing agencies of govt. schemes

		Help mobilising additional resources for Shala and Zilla Shiskha Kosh Implement activities of adult education in the block Follow the relating rules of shiksha mission to implement administrative, financial and academic activities and ensure elementary education in the block
BEO		Issue annual calendar of audit for middle schools
ZSK (consists of collector (head), CEO ZP. DAEO, DIET, DPO) Accountability to RSK	Coordination, supervision and support of Zilla Jan Shiksha Yojna (as prescribed) Review village level JSY and submit to dist. Planning committee (zila yojna samiti)	1 and 2 for JSK at district level Prepare Zilla Jan Shiksha Yojna on the basis of village/block level JSY, approve and send approved ZSY to RSK Prepare annual academic report for district and submit to ZYS and after approval to RSK Review status of quarterly evaluations in district from time to time and ensure effective remedial action Provide academic support to JPSK and JSK Approve school supervision programmes proposed by JPSK/JPAC Review and analyse school supervision reports of JPSK, proved support for resolving identified issues Communicate issues in need of state intervention to RSK Organise monthly meetings of JPSK coordinators and academic coordinators Organise quarterly review meetings of all KS in district Organise teacher training Present proposals for teacher posting and rationalisation (transfer) to ZSY or competent dist. Authority (DEO) Make efforts to mobilise additional resources for zilla shiksha kosh Mobilise resources required for school building, drinking water and separate toilets Review key educational indicators (as JSK) for district Review STR and ensure the norm of 1:40 Review and monitor programmes of elementary and adult education every month Issue annual calendar for audit of the JPSK Permit removal of JS in case of incompetence or violation of duties Review demands for additional EGS/middle schools and submit report before ZYS
ZYS	Approval of zilla shiksha yojna Establishment of zilla shiksha kosh	Decide over demands for opening of additional EGS or middle schools

	Control of account maintenance and utilisation of Zilla shiksha kosh	
Collector		Appoint officer for internal audit of middle schools Ex-officio head of ZSK
RSK	Coordination, supervision and support of state level Jan Shiksha Yojna Planning, budgeting, monitoring, academic and financial management of elementary education Prepare state level JSY on basis of dist. JSY and submit to state government	Ensure regular supervision of schools Review status of educational indicators
	Prepare core curriculum and academic plan for elementary education	Prepare LA constituency-wise AAC on basis of district AAC Develop curriculum and textbooks for elementary and adult education Evolve suitable teaching methods and techniques Coordinate with districts for preparation of modular training materials Organise training programmes for teachers and other functionaries Identify subject wise difficulties in learning and initiate measures to address them Implement and account for adult and alternative education programmes Implement centrally assisted, state and other schemes related to elementary/adult education
	Establishment, control and utilisation of Rajya Shiksha Kosh Other functions as discharged by state government	Maintenance of Rajya Shiksha Kosh Review activities of ZSK, JPSK and JSK from time to time Coordinate with other govt. departments carrying out activities related to elementary education (i.e. WCD, PRRD) Coordinate with other agencies operating in the field of elementary education (i.e. NGOs) for sharing academic experience
Shiksha Mission	Planning and coordination in implementation of elementary and adult education programmes Other works as deemed necessary by state government to universalise elementary education	State project office of shiksha mission is accountable to RSK for activities in elementary education
State government	Designate Jan Shiksha Kendra Designate JSK coordinator Designate Jan Shikshak Develop prototype TLM and	Open additional schools where these are not available as according to the Right to Education Act

	evaluation processes		432
	Conduct public examination for certification at the end of each educational stage		
	Declare an academic session for each year		
	Regular assessment of teacher competence and knowledge		
	Promote opportunities for professional development of teachers		
	Encourage establishment of libraries, labs and computer labs		
	Monitor administrative, financial and academic achievement of schools and planning/management institutions as prescribed		
	Provide incentives to merited teachers and students as deemed fit		
	Make efforts to education of challenged/disabled children as prescribed		
	Place state annual academic report before LA in winter session		
	Prepare, implement and support adult literacy programmes		
	Power to issue direction to all subordinate institutions in consonance with Act/Rules		
	Make rules for carrying out the Act and submit them to LA		

Sources: Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam 2002, Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam 2003, Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Evam Gram Svaraj Adhiniyam 1994 (as amended up to Act No. 20, 2005).

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