

Maharashtra Schools Raise Rs. 310 Crores through Community Contribution to Upgrade Learning Levels

Sketchy online details of *Thadezari* village inform only that the village, with 90 households and 400 people, is situated inside the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary in Gondiya district in Maharashtra, and lies 45 kilometers away from the district headquarters.

However, Thadezari that has only a nominal existence in the digital world has a Digital Zilla Parishad School. This upgradation is supported by villagers who are all labourers. Feeling responsible to contribute to school development, villagers decided to raise money through their labour as they couldn't have made it otherwise. Adult villagers worked on Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and donated their payments - together Rs. 50,000 - to school.

By May 2017 Gondiya's District Education Department achieved its goal of introducing digital education in all its 1069 schools, which was possible because of trust and support extended by people like Thadezari villagers in the district.

Mr. Ulhas Narad, District Education Officer, Godiya shares, "We have revamped the educational scenario all through public support. Government funds can support the very basic needs, but if we want to upgrade educational levels we have to have more facilities. It is not like Government Schools can not compete with private schools because of their moderate budgets, we explored other options. But every appeal is backed with a concrete plan for school development."

Gondiya has raised a total of Rs. 5,16,80,000 in the last two educational years (2015-16 and 2016-17), the amount that has been utilized to equip schools with digital aids, hand washing stations, dedicated reading corners, among other.

Movement of Community Participation

This isn't an isolated story in Maharashtra. Data available with the Maharashtra Academic Authority (MAA) shows that between July 2015 and May 2017, Zilla Parishad schools in the state managed to raise an impressive amount of Rs 310 crore from the public. These funds have been utilized to upgrade schools and enhance learning levels.

What has inspired public to come forward to help schools? The answer lies in the ambitious initiative of School Education Department, Government of Maharashtra - Pragat Shaikshanik Maharashtra (PSM) - programme that was launched on 22 June 2015 to ascertain pre-planned, concrete, dedicated and sustained efforts to improve learning achievement in government schools in the state.

PSM befits the Key Result Areas set by Hon'ble Shri. Devendra Phadanvis, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Maharashtra, after taking to office in October 2014. Concerned with the falling standards of education in the government schools, and subsequent swing of students towards private schools, the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Maharashtra, asked for concrete steps to change the situation. Hon'ble Shri. Vinod Tawade, Hon'ble Minister

for School Education and Sports, Government of Maharashtra took on this challenge and inspired making of PSM.

Shri. Nand Kumar, Principal Secretary, Education explains how PSM and community contributions go together. "Contributions per se is not a new thing. Earlier also schools and parents have worked together. However, PSM gives special emphasis on public support for school development and therefore contributions - in cash as well as in kind - started to come on record through monthly process reports of the districts."

Additionally, PSM has set definite educational goals, such as adoption of constructivism approach and integration of digital learning aids in schools, among other. "This new approach is child-friendly and helped to boost learning levels. State feel proud that teachers have contributed in the initial phase to prepare needed facilities for taking constructivism and digital learning ahead. Once the outcomes were evident, the teachers felt confident to approach the public for support," he shares.

Each School Tells a Story

Amounts raised by all 36 districts in Maharashtra may vary- Pune (Rs. 29.17 Crore), Nashik (Rs. 22.84 Crore), Ahmednagar (Rs. 12.06 Crore) , Aurangabad (Rs. 10.14 Crore), Thane (Rs. 7.39 Crore), Dhule (Rs. 7.29 Crore), Hingoli (Rs. 2.76 Crore), - but each one has a significant story.

Gevrai in Beed district is one of the pioneering blocks to raise public donations. Rs. 1.70 Crore in two years span from till May 2017, all though self-motivated parents, community members and teachers.

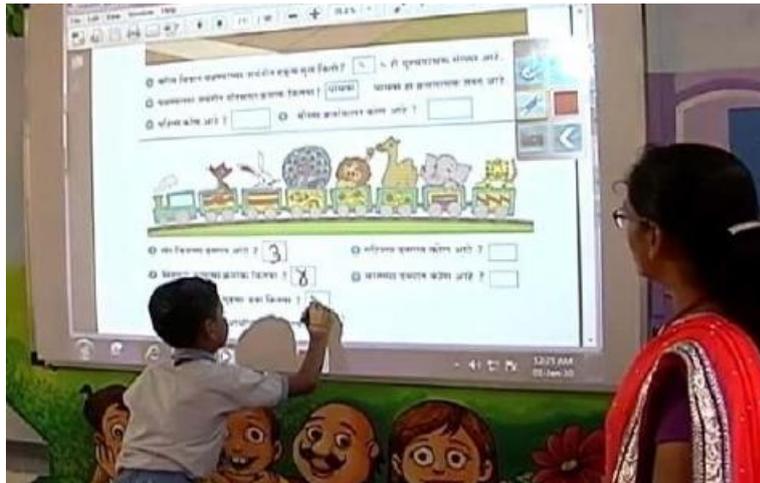
Kasarwadi School in Gevrai has 32 students. Villagers are mostly labourers who migrate for work. Being aware the economic condition of the village the two school teachers decided a novel initiative to raise amount for school upgradation. They developed a plant nursery ahead of the annual plantation drive that is observed from 1 - 7 July. All their 2000 plants were sold when they explained that the amount will go for school needs.

Shri. Pravinkumar Kalam Patil, Extension Officer (Education), Gevrai tells, "Such positive stories are widely shared through Whatsapp Groups and mainstream media, as a token of appreciation and as a means of motivation as well. This created positive and encouraging environment. We received donations in the form of computers, e-learning facilities, and other needed resources along with monetary support."



Digital School

Wabalewadi Zilla Parishad School in Shirur block in Pune district with 107 students is equipped with all amenities from science laboratory, digital classrooms, learning aids to solar panels and playground - all developed through community support. Pointing at the stone wall compound around the school Mr. Dattatray Ware, Head Teacher says, "The school does have a compound, but no boundaries. In all sense it is a community school, open to parents and community members all the time, because they have contributed in bringing it to its present state." The contributions by parents and by community in Wabalewadi totals over 50 lakh, and 32 guntha land for school expansion, which is worth 2.5 crores as per current market price, is a recent testimony to the community generosity. This will be used to upgrade school to international standards.



Zilla Parishad School, Ukkalgaon, Manvat Educationally Backward Block in Parbhani District is another best example of Community and school Management Committee support and contribution towards development of School. Community and SMC both are actively involved in day to day activities of the school. They have set up Digital School along with Solar Power System and ensuring it is being used. They are taking care of maintenance of school infrastructure, cleanliness of the toilets, purified drinking water, fresh vegetable in mid may meal and child friendly atmosphere in the school etc. After detailed discussion with them, it found that teachers and Head Teacher are well connected with them. The school is imparting best quality education and good spoken English, children are confident and hence parents are withdrawing their children from neighboring schools and sending to this school.

Jamkhed is a drought prone block in Ahmednagar district with 11 clusters and 180 primary schools. More than fifty percent schools have ISO certification, all upgraded with community support. Jamkhed used annual school gathering to showcase the student achievements and present plans for school development. Mr. Popat Kale, Block Education Officer, Jamkhed said, "Every child in the school takes part in some program or the other. Parents are happy when they see their children perform with joy and confidence. On their own they come forward to help the school," Now the community looks forward to annual gatherings. In two years span Jamkhed has been able to raise Rs. 2 crore.

Ainapur Zilla Parishad School in Belgundi cluster in Gadhinglaj block in Kolhapur district has 145 students from Class I to Class VII. Mr. Jagannath Patil, one of the leading teachers in the school recalls the situation two years ago. "We did not have enough cupboards to store the office files and educational equipments. With bare minimal infrastructural facilities in place, there was a lot of scope for improvement. Then the teachers and School

Management Committee worked out a plan to well equip schools. ISO certification was used as vehicle to have all required facilities in place. With this plan in hand we appealed for community support.” In two years time the school raised donations worth Rs. 3,80,000 in cash and in kind.

In a village named Varvandi Tanda in Paithan Taluka, Aurangabad District, 100% of the parents migrate to other districts to work on sugarcane harvesting. However, in the last year it has been observed that despite their migration, their children continue studying in the same school in their village. Further, children from neighbouring villages come to this school in spite of having a school in their respective villages.

In Shillegaon Vasti, Gangapur Taluka, Aurangabad district as well it is observed that children attend a school in Shillegaon Vasti in large numbers, despite having a school in their respective villages. Also, the students are found to be attending regularly.

The main factor responsible for the successes detailed above, is the fact that the schools provide excellent quality of education. It emerges that educational quality in the schools is the most important factor that influences children dropping out of schools. It is seen that in schools have excellent quality of education and in which 100% of the children are declared ‘Pragat’, no child is seen to be out of school, nor do they migrate. Since parents’ trust has been established in these schools, substantial financial help is made available to the schools by the parents and community.

In many villages Gram Panchayat has also donated for their funds. Especially in Tribal (adivasi) areas governed under Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act or PESA, the Gram Sabha allotted amounts from their untied funds for school facilities and digital devices. This is evident in Special Focus Districts Tribal and LWE dominant areas like Dhule, Nandurbar and Gadchiroli (Bhamragad).

One of the main reasons for successful crowd funding by Maharashtra Schools is the vision behind it - enhancing learning achievements. In fact, the impressive amount raised through crowd funding is a clear evidence of enhanced learning levels of students in our schools. By April 2017 number of Pragat Schools have risen to 41564 - there are schools where every student in every class scores minimum 40% and above in Summative 2 test and fulfils set of prescribed 25 indicators under PSM. When the results are evident, people are willing to support. They look at it as an investment in the future of their children.

Involvement of District Administration

Involvement of district administration gave the needed boost to initiative of community contribution. A state level workshop with Chief Executive Officers, Zilla Parishad was organized on 13-14 January 2017 to seek their support in various initiatives by the District Education Offices.

Many participants, like Dr. H. P. Tummod, CEO, Hingoli, found the interactions enlightening. “Workshop helped me to decide my focus and make a work plan with education department. Series of meetings with teachers, cluster heads, and Gram Sevak helped to give a momentum to the ongoing work. I made visits to schools and students who accomplished despite odds. Success stories were shared and appreciated widely. All this together built a conducive environment within the district, both for educational enhancement and community contribution.”

Chief Executive Officer of Beed district Mr. Namdeo Nanavare also makes school visits as often as he can. He has allotted his morning time for school visits, so that he can get back to office by 10 am. Mr. Nanavare not only encourages teachers for their self -motivated initiatives, but also contributes to school fund from his pocket.

Prerna Sabha has played vital role for enhancement of motivation level of community. This activity is being supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Community mobilization funds sanctioned in the Annual Work Plan and Budget.

When officers and senior leaders like District Collector, CEO and District Education Officers visit schools it conveys the seriousness about the entire effort to community.

Support by Voluntary Organizations and Individuals

Voluntary organization and private trusts are also contributing for developing specific facilities for schools, such as toilets, water connections, libraries and so on.

Mr. Harshal Vibhandik, a banker based in New York, who hails from Dhule district wanted to give back to his district. Initially he wanted to support for setting up digital classrooms in a few schools with limited resources in his hand. When he teamed up with District Education Department his strength grew manifold.

“I proposed that I would support 30% if the villagers raised 70%. I raised my funds through the donations from friends and contacts in USA and donations from DESHBANDHU MANJU GUPTA FOUNDATIONS. Aspiring to go digital and ensure a good education for children the communities responded very well; a total of Rs. 2.7 crores collected in donations from teachers, villagers and Grampanchat in respective villages.” Today, all 1103 Zilla Parishad schools are equipped with digital learning solutions to offer to 60,000 children studying with them.

The impressive amount together is only one significant aspect of crowd funding. Mr. Ulhas Narad points out at yet another dimension. “Since people have contributed in developing schools to their present levels, they have now become partners and stakeholders in their village schools. Community will always keep a watch on where their resources have been utilized in a proper way or not. This will create a moral pressure on teachers to perform to get better. Community support thus is a sustainable way of school enhancement.”
