

# When Community Invests in Child Education

***"As a member of the School Management Committee, my belief is that all students, not just my own children, should have access to high-quality education."***

*--Smt. Sunita Yuvraj Bhadrage, SMC member, Rampuri Kh. ZPPS School*

Ensuring that every child has access to quality education is not solely the responsibility of the education system. It is imperative that all children attend school regularly and receive quality education. To achieve this, parents and local community structures must also play a crucial role in creating an environment that is conducive to learning, starting from the village level up to the school. Rampuri Kh. village from Pathri Block in Parbhani district of Maharashtra provides an excellent illustration of how the local community can become deeply engaged and involved.

Gyan Prakash Foundation has been working towards system-led and community driven transformation of education in Parbhani district of Maharashtra since 2016. GPF has worked with stakeholders in education at the cluster, block and district level to strengthen their capabilities, and improve existing processes in the system to sharply focus on child learning outcomes. One such process is the School Management Committee (SMC). GPF has worked with rural government schools to strengthen SMCs and make their functioning effective. GPF also worked with Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) in facilitating the local community to take ownership of school development.

In September 2022, the SMC in Rampuri Kh. school was reconstituted. Some of the young and educated parents from the village, who had been working for the development of the school, were given an opportunity to be a part of the committee.



The President of the SMC, Shri Siddharth Bhadrage, and the committee members decided to organize a meeting for all parents, community members and the Gram Panchayat in the village to seek cooperation and involvement in the development of the school and to improve children's learning outcomes. A parent-community meeting was held on 20th December 2022. In this meeting, SMC members deliberated on the significance of community-wide participation in school development. Teachers discussed the learning levels of the children and demonstrated some innovative activities through which parents understood the current status of education in the school.

The process of involving the community had already commenced in this village. However, the focus of the involvement was primarily on enhancing the school's infrastructure and amenities. The Gram Panchayat had started building the paver block and also extra classrooms for the school. Based on the discussions with the SMC members, the Gram Panchayat decided to take on the additional responsibility of cleaning the rest of the school premises.

The SMC members expressed that similar involvement from parents was required to improve the educational status and learning conditions in the school. They raised the issue of insufficient teachers in the school. Although the school had 201 students from Grades 1 to 7 and 8 teachers in all, 2 teachers are currently on leave. The remaining teachers constantly struggled to keep up with the learning needs of the students.

To safeguard the continuity of their children's education, the parents discussed the need to recruit 2 volunteer teachers for the upcoming year. During the discussion they realized that arranging for two full time volunteer teachers would cost Rs. 80000. This was a huge amount for the community to accumulate.





This is when the SMC members raised the idea that the community can engage in various forms of support, not limited to financial assistance. Instead of looking for two full time volunteers, community members could be actively involved in the school and offer their time and assistance to the teachers in the classroom. This would also be an important way of being involved in the progress of the children without worrying about raising funds for full time volunteers.

Consequently, 30 literate men and women from the community offered to be available for one day of the month to support the school teachers in their daily activities. Parents from a range of professions, including artists, carpenters, painters, musicians, journalists, toy makers, and more, volunteered to interact with the children, sharing insights about their respective professions. The women in the community volunteered to help out with other activities such as cleaning up the school environment for one hour every Saturday.



*My children are in grades 1, 4 and 7. I volunteered to teach grade 4 students for one day in a month. Before volunteering in the school I always wondered if my children were learning anything in school or just coming back home and whether the teachers were teaching anything or not. When I went to teach the grade 4 students, I started asking them questions, and the children were able to answer them. That's when I realized that the children were actually learning well in school. I was very happy to see this.*

---Smt. Sunita Yuvraj Bhadrage, SMC member, Rampur Kh. ZPPS School

As soon as these parents began volunteering, the positive impact on the students and the overall quality of education in the school became apparent. The support extended by the parents also served as a source of encouragement for the school teachers. The success of this initiative serves as a model for other schools and communities, demonstrating the importance of community involvement and engagement in promoting quality education for children.

*I have completed my B.A. and D.Ed. My child studies in grade 1. I decided to volunteer and teach grade 3 in the school with the intention that we all need to take time out of our regular work to support the school. Once I went into the classroom, I interacted with the children and started teaching them. I also understood what the teachers were teaching the children and how they were teaching it. I feel very proud that I am able to contribute to my community by helping the students.*

---Shri Vitthal Uttamrao Panjanjaal, Parent Volunteer, Rampuri Kh. ZPPS School



Date: Feb 2023

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Based on the learnings from the Collaborators for Transforming Education (CTE) program operating in Maharashtra, funded by EdelGive Foundation since 2016.