

## Learning from Innovative Programmes in Education: Lok Jumbish – Peoples Movement for Education for All<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

There have been a number of innovations in the education sector in the State of Rajasthan that have aimed at addressing exclusionary practices and gaps within the education system. These have demonstrated the possibility of evolving meaningful strategies to address educational needs of disadvantaged children as well as improve educational planning and delivery.

*Lok Jumbish*, or Peoples Movement for Education for All, was launched in June 1992 by Government of India and Government of Rajasthan with support from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). It began with the basic aim of universalising primary education in Rajasthan. Its main objective — as stated in the 1990 project document was ‘to develop, demonstrate, catalyse and transform the mainstream education system with the objective of ensuring that every child has access to basic education (Grades I to VIII).’

*Lok* is a Hindi word meaning ‘people’ and *jumbish* an Urdu word meaning ‘movement’. Together, they convey the idea of a people’s movement as well as a movement for the people. Lok Jumbish attempted to make education a people’s movement ensuring active and sustained participation of people at every level (Chaudhary, 2003).

Lok Jumbish (LJ) began with a mission to mobilise, motivate and energise the community and education service providers. It was based on the conviction that rejuvenation of the current education system was a key factor to universalisation of education in the State, which was struggling to meet the universal goals of elementary education. It therefore focused on re-examining issues related to access, retention and achievement of children. The first phase of the project was for a period of two years from 1992-1994. In this phase LJ covered 25 blocks. In the second phase of the project (1995-1998<sup>2</sup>), the focus was on strengthening and

consolidating gains made during the first phase. Post 1999, LJ faced a period of uncertainty and there was a gradual decline with the final closure of the programme in 2003.

This article discusses the approach and key strategies adopted by LJ in its effort to bring education within the reach of children across different districts of Rajasthan. It also highlights the key learning’s from the intervention.

### The Approach

The approach adopted by Lok Jumbish was based on principles of decentralisation, consensus building and partnerships, participatory planning and evaluation and commitment to quality through an intensive mission mode (Lok Jumbish Parishad, 1995).

Since LJ was a process driven project there was a clear understanding that the results would directly depend on the processes initiated and delivered in the field. Therefore, the management structure was built on the recognition that the real problem was not one of supply alone, but also of unutilised capacities, as was evident in the low school participation rates.

The project was implemented through the Lok Jumbish Parishad (LJP), an independent autonomous body that was set up at the State level. The LJ personnel and team was carefully selected, and drawn from individuals from within the education department, many among them had experience of working in other innovative programmes implemented in Rajasthan such as the Women’s Development Project and the *Shikshakarmi* Project. It also drew within its ambit persons with proven experience of working across the development sector.

### Focus Areas

Being a process-oriented programme, the operational strategies focussed on maximising

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Shobha Lokanathan Kavoori for her comments on the draft.

<sup>2</sup>In 1998 SIDA withdrew its support to the project in the wake of India’s nuclear testing.

participation of community. The key focus areas included:

- Management of education
- Community participation
- Quality of education
- Ensuring Gender Equity

### *Management of education*

The Lok Jumbish management philosophy was radical, marking a shift towards a decentralised system. Many lower level management structures were established for managing education. The unit of decentralised planning in LJ was the village and the unit of decentralised management, the block. 25-30 villages were clubbed together to form a cluster. Each block was divided into five to seven compact clusters. Personnel at the cluster level were responsible for translating the goals of LJ into action at the village level.

Initially five blocks were identified wherein an effort was made to create bottom-up planning mechanisms that could respond to diverse educational needs of the community. The processes resulted in the introduction of the *Prerak Dal* (core team, with women members constituting one-third to half the membership), formation of the *Bhawan Nirman Samiti* (building committee) and then the Village Education Committees (VECs) and cluster level groups for mobilisation and educational support. At the block level the *Khand Stariya Shiksha Prabhandhan Samiti* (Block level management committee) provided support and monitored the project. At the State level the empowered executive committee reviewed the progress on a quarterly basis (Ramachandran, 2016).

Govinda (1997) notes that the management system of LJ, was 'antithetical to a centralised, hierarchical way of functioning'. Educational planning was not only decentralised, it was also a bottom-up process. Experiences at grassroots level helped to shape the implementation and/or modification of the LJ programmes.

### *Community Mobilisation*

A key aspect of LJ was mobilising the community for education and creating an environment where parents feel motivated to send their children to school. The project document also acknowledged the need to make special arrangements for children engaged in work, girls who could not attend formal schools, children of migrant/nomadic families,

tribal children and children with disability. The emphasis was on enabling children who were left out to join the mainstream.

Some key strategies were evolved in the effort to mobilise communities. These included:

### *School -Mapping and Micro- Planning*

Lok Jumbish chose to adopt school mapping as an effective means of overcoming some of the infirmities of centralised planning in providing primary schools, which had failed to ensure universal access and participation in Rajasthan (Govinda,1998).

School mapping (Shala Manchitran) was a critical tool used for social mobilisation and involving community in analysing the educational situation in their villages and planning for children's access to primary schooling. This process enabled a comprehensive assessment of educational facilities available for children in the area. During this exercise every household in the village was depicted visually on a map. Details of children in the school-going age and their enrolment status was collected and mapped. The location of existing schools and facilities were also represented on the map.

Involvement in school-mapping activities such as surveys, preparation of a school map and school improvement programmes helped to reinforce participation of community members. The collective analysis helped the community to understand the existing educational situation in the village. A major focus in the school-mapping exercise was to understand the situation of girls. Initially, a disproportionately small number of girls was reported; it was then decided that a conscious effort would be made to look for 'unseen' and 'hidden' girls.

Given LJ's commitment to ensuring that primary education is accessible to children across habitations, micro-planning provided mechanisms for planning and ensuring children's regular participation in schools and non-formal centres. Micro-planning usually started after the required educational infrastructure was made available in the village. Micro-planning in LJ was family-wise, while child-wise planning and monitoring undertaken basically by the members of Village Education Committees (VEC) and cluster personnel of LJ with the help of the village community. The VECs identified non-enrolled children, contacted the concerned families and undertook activities to

ensure regularity of attendance and retention of children in schools

The two instruments of micro planning which gradually became the means for effective universalisation of primary education were:

(i) Village Education Register (ii) Retention Register maintained by every school and non-formal learning centre.

The emphasis on micro-planning led to diverse initiatives being taken up in different blocks i.e. planning low cost hostels for children from migrant families, setting up of *balikashivirs* for girls and residential camps in Lunkaransar in Bikaner and providing facilities for Muslim minority children in Kaman in Bharatpur (Rajagopal, 2003)

### Quality of Education

The focus on quality of education involved the training of teachers and teacher-educators to help initiate and promote a curriculum and pedagogic package of reforms based on the Minimum Learning Levels (MLL) that were introduced during that period.

#### *Minimal Levels of Learning*

Lok Jumbish also emphasised the need to achieve minimum levels of learning (MLL) for each stage as laid down by the National Policy on Education, 1986. Thirteen textbooks-cum-workbooks were developed and used in classes 1 to 5. Supplementary teaching learning materials were also developed and teachers were trained. MLL-based textbooks and teaching methodologies were initially introduced in 1992 only in 45 schools.

#### *Teacher Training*

In LJ, teacher training was a key strategy in addressing issues in quality education. The emphasis was on building a positive social image of the teacher and facilitating continuous training. A dialogue was initiated with the teachers prior to their training. The trainings focussed on motivating and sensitising teachers as well as sharpening their pedagogical<sup>3</sup> skills. Competency based trainings on MLL were also organised. The role of Sandhan training and research agency was central to these trainings.

#### *Sahaj Shiksha Kendra (Non-formal learning centres)*

To address the needs of children who were left out

of mainstream education, *Sahaj Shiksha Kendras* (SSK) were established. The SSK initiative was based on the premise that conflicting priorities between education and work could be resolved only when some realistic options were available. The SSKs were initially designed on the lines of government-run NFE centres. Later, the focus of these centres was on providing education that is relevant and easily adaptable and promote holistic and creative learning.

Education was related to the day-to-day lives of the children. Efforts were directed towards greater investment in training of instructors and ensuring infrastructure facilities at the SSKs. The training of instructors focussed on enhancing subject knowledge and pedagogic skills in the context of multi-grade teaching. The child centred approach, the flexibility in timings, adapting the curriculum to children's needs and linking their experience to new knowledge together with the extensive participation of the community helped in providing contextually relevant education to a large number of children, especially girls (Rajagopal, 2003).

### Ensuring Equity

Ensuring gender equity in educational access and outcomes was a priority in LJ. There was a clear recognition that it was not possible to move towards equal education unless issues of gender equity, women's dignity and status are addressed. The key strategies included:

#### *Promoting Women's Collectives*

The *Mahila Samoohs* (women's collectives) formed at the village level helped women to analyse critically the condition and position of women in society and link it to issues of educational opportunities and deprivation. There were several instances where members of the women's groups kept a strict watch on functioning of schools and teacher attendance.

#### *Adhyapika Manch (Women Teachers' Forum)*

The low participation of women teachers in MLL trainings led to the creation of a forum called *Adhyapika Manch*, where women teachers discussed their needs and problems. Women teachers found these forums an effective medium for coming out of isolation and to feel empowered. These forums became an important vehicle for

<sup>3</sup>Sandhan a Research and Training agency was intrinsically involved in teacher training in Lok Jumbish.

building the self-image of women teachers and consequently that of women's groups in villages.

#### *Samvadika*

Another forum set up for discussing issues related to women's development was *Samvadika*. One of the agendas of this forum was reviewing all the field level activities from a gender perspective.

#### *Balika Shikshan Shivirs*

*Balika Shikshan Shivirs* (adolescent girls' camps) were also started for out of school girls, who had missed the opportunity of schooling. This served as a bridge programme for facilitating the re-entry of girls into mainstream schooling. Convincing parents to send girls to these residential camps and retaining them in these camps was a bold step, given the socio-cultural milieu in the state.

#### **Learnings from LJ**

The LJ project was implemented in Rajasthan with a clear intent of universalising elementary education. As against a single point entry, the project aimed at addressing issues at multiple levels. All formal and non-formal learning centres in a block came under its scope of intervention.

Decentralised local level planning and flexibility

in decision-making enabled a large number of children to access the educational stream. In addition, the centrality of gender led to putting in place appropriate institutional mechanisms at various levels.

The project also tried to bridge the gap between community and the educational delivery system by putting in place local level management of educational processes. The focus on both the supply and demand aspects of education also helped in establishing that any educational endeavour has to be a continuum rather than a piecemeal effort.

The project brought together government agencies, teachers, NGOs, elected representatives and the community to function as an interactive group, working towards the goal of universalisation of primary education.

#### **Conclusion**

Though LJ could not sustain itself after 2003, it did create a momentum and reached out to children who were excluded from mainstream education. It was an initiative which evolved gradually and addressed chronic issues in education delivery through community-led processes.

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