

## COMMUNITY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN RURAL INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*School enrolment alone does not ensure that children develop foundational reading and arithmetic skills. In rural India, economic pressures, irregular attendance, limited access to learning support at home and weak communication between schools and families can compound classroom challenges. This paper examines how school management committees, parents, community volunteers and local organisations can work with teachers to support learning. It reviews the roles of community participation and household learning assessments, then proposes a practical partnership framework for rural schools. The central argument is that participation is most useful when it is regular, inclusive and tied to specific evidence about children's learning. Teacher education should therefore prepare future teachers to communicate with families, interpret basic assessment data and coordinate local support.*

**KEYWORDS:** *community school partnerships; school management committees; rural India; foundational learning; teacher education*

## **INTRODUCTION**

India has expanded access to elementary education, but access and learning remain distinct goals. Household assessments such as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) have drawn attention to gaps in basic reading and arithmetic among children in rural areas (ASER Centre, 2017, 2018). These gaps vary by age, location and household circumstances. They call for attention to what children can do, alongside enrolment and attendance.

A child's learning is shaped by experiences in and beyond the classroom. Seasonal migration, household work, limited study space and parents' unfamiliarity with school expectations can interrupt practice and attendance. Schools, meanwhile, may have little systematic contact with families about specific learning needs. Partnerships between schools and communities can help connect these settings, provided teachers and families share clear responsibilities and realistic goals.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act provides for school management committees (SMCs) in many schools. Their potential lies in bringing parents and local representatives into school planning and monitoring. Formal membership, however, does not by itself create meaningful participation. Meetings need accessible information, a focus on children's learning and follow-through on agreed actions.



Figure 1. Schoolchildren in a rural setting. Photograph from the supplied manuscript.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

### School management committees

An active SMC can discuss attendance patterns, identify obstacles to participation, review school needs and help prepare a school development plan. Its contribution to learning is most direct when teachers explain assessment results in language families can understand and the committee helps organise feasible responses. For example, a committee may arrange a reading activity, help reconnect with a frequently absent child's family or identify a safe place for after-school practice.

Research on community participation in education also points to an important limitation: information or committee formation alone may have little effect unless participants have the time, skills and authority to act. The practical lesson is to define an action, assign responsibility and review progress at subsequent meetings.

### USING LEARNING EVIDENCE

ASER's household-based approach asks children to complete simple reading and arithmetic tasks rather than treating grade placement as proof of proficiency (ASER Centre, 2017, 2018). Such assessments can help schools and families see whether a child needs support with letters, words, passages, numbers or operations. A local school should collect and discuss its own results before setting targets. National or state trends cannot establish that a particular community initiative caused a change in learning.

Teachers can make this evidence useful by reporting patterns without naming or embarrassing children in public. A short explanation of the skill being assessed, examples of appropriate practice and a date for reassessment are more actionable than a general statement that performance is weak.

### PARENTS, VOLUNTEERS AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Parents can encourage regular attendance, listen to a child read, discuss schoolwork and alert teachers when family circumstances interfere with learning. These activities should be realistic for households with limited time or literacy. Volunteers may provide supervised reading circles or practice sessions, while local organisations can train facilitators, provide materials or help reach children who have left school. Programmes associated with

Pratham, CRY and Bharti Foundation illustrate different forms of community engagement, but their outcomes depend on implementation and context. Volunteers supplement teachers; they do not replace professional instruction.



Figure 2. A community learning activity. Photograph from the supplied manuscript.

## A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

A workable partnership has five connected elements. First, the SMC meets regularly with an agenda covering attendance, foundational skills and agreed school priorities. Second, teachers use brief assessments to identify specific learning needs and explain them clearly to families. Third, parents choose manageable forms of support at home and communicate barriers early. Fourth, trained volunteers offer additional practice under the school's guidance. Fifth, local organisations and education officials provide materials, training and links to available services where needed.



Figure 3. Key participants in a community school partnership.

The school can begin with a simple cycle: assess a small set of foundational skills, discuss aggregate findings with the SMC, choose one or two achievable actions, record who will carry them out and review children's progress after a defined period. The committee should invite participation from families whose voices are often underrepresented, including those affected by poverty, migration or social exclusion. Meeting records should capture decisions and follow-up rather than attendance alone.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher preparation should include practice in communicating with parents and SMC members, conducting and interpreting simple learning assessments, and planning support for children at different skill levels. Student teachers can observe an SMC meeting, conduct supervised home visits and design a small reading or numeracy activity with community participants. Reflection on these experiences should address respectful communication, confidentiality and the limits of volunteer support.

Teachers also need to understand why families may be unable to attend meetings or supervise homework. Home visits should seek to learn about circumstances and build trust, rather than assign blame. Programmes that prepare teachers for rural schools should give students opportunities to adapt communication and learning activities to local languages, schedules and resources.

## CONCLUSION

Community school partnerships can help rural schools connect assessment, instruction and support at home. Their value depends on sustained participation and concrete action, not committee membership alone. SMCs can coordinate school priorities; parents and volunteers can reinforce learning; and teachers can keep the work focused on children's actual skills. Further local evaluation is needed before attributing measured gains to any one partnership model. Preparing teachers for these relationships is a practical step toward more responsive foundational education.

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