



Assessment | Survey | Evaluation | Research

**The role of VEC/PTAs/SMDCs/Urban Local Bodies in School  
Management and Supervision in the Context of SSA:  
Case study of Bihar**

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and Administration (NUEPA)**

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

## **1. Background**

In the last few years concerted efforts have been made to establish structures for community participation in primary education as a means of furthering progress towards achieving universal primary education. Under SSA, institutions such as Village Education Committee/School Management and Development Committee, urban slum level education committees/Parent Teacher Associations etc. have been set up at village or school level in most states to help in the development of educational facilities and to oversee the functioning of schools. Their roles and functions are clearly defined and efforts have been made to involve these and other grassroots level structures in the management of elementary education as delineated under the framework of SSA. The SSA framework was amended in July 2006 to ensure centrality of Panchayats in supervision and monitoring of the Elementary Education/SSA programme through the following arrangements:

- School/Village-wise Committee to be linked with Standing/Sub-Committee of Gram Panchayat to ensure overall supervision of Gram Panchayats.
- All tiers of PRIs to be given role of supervision of elementary education/SSA.

Although states have been working in this direction for the last few years, it is not known how efficiently and effectively these institutions are functioning and to what extent they have achieved the objectives for which they were created. The present study focuses specifically on the state of Bihar. The overall objective is to assess the role of Village Education Communities<sup>1</sup> in school management and supervision and to find out to what extent they have achieved their objectives and what kind of problems or difficulties they have been experiencing in their work.

## **2. Objectives**

The present study has the following objectives, as defined in the Terms of Reference provided by the National University for Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA):

- I. To provide information on the roles, functions, rules, regulations and power delegated to VECs.
- II. To gather and provide information on the policy of formation of VECs, their tenure and composition and linkages with PRI and other such bodies.
- III. To find out the VEC members' awareness of their role, functions and responsibilities and the extent to which they actually perform the functions expected of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Known in Bihar as Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis, or VSS

- IV. To evaluate the content and methodology of training programmes for VECs and to assess participation rate in training and effectiveness of the training programmes.
- V. To find out how frequently and for how long VECs meet, agenda and attendance and the issues discussed in these meetings.
- VI. To assess the contribution made by the community and VEC members in cash or kind for improvement of educational facilities.
- VII. To study the problems and constraints encountered by VECs in general and in the flow of funds, in particular.
- VIII. To provide information on the activities organized by VECs for community mobilisation (e.g. Bal Mela and enrolment drives) and to assess the impact of such activities.
- IX. To find out how Village Education Registers and other records are maintained by VECs.
- X. To assess how the concerns of CWSN are taken care of by VECs.
- XI. To assess VEC's involvement in school activities and management of the affairs of the school, and whether and how they oversee the academic programmes, teacher attendance, etc. in schools.
- XII. To assess their role in management and supervision of civil work, maintenance and repair work and use of school grant.
- XIII. To assess their role in management and control of AIE centres and recruitment of para teachers.
- XIV. To find out whether measures for transparency and accountability are taken (e.g. by displaying information on use of funds for various activities).
- XV. To find out if any monitoring mechanism for VECs is in place and how the work and accountability of VECs is assessed.
- XVI. To suggest measures for more effective functioning of VECs/SMDCs/PTAs on the basis of study findings.

### **3. Coverage**

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the study was conducted in a sample of four rural districts and two urban areas in the state of Bihar. Within each district, two blocks were selected

and within each block, ten primary schools (Std 1-5 or Std 1-8) were chosen.<sup>2</sup> In this way a total of 100 schools (80 rural and 20 urban) were included in the sample.

Districts and blocks were purposively selected to provide variation in socio-geographical composition as well as educational and economic conditions. The sample districts and blocks are briefly described in Chapter III.

#### **4. Methodology**

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through schedules designed especially for the study at the national level, and secondary data was collected from office records, plan documents, progress reports, existing data, etc. Documents such as State Panchayat Act, policy reforms on decentralization of educational administration, VEC Guidelines, and Training Modules were examined to access information on planning and implementation of the community participation related activities under SSA. Information on the policy, rules and regulations and roles and functions of VECs was collected from state and district level offices, both in the form of existing documentation and through Focus Group Discussions with officials.

In each school/village included in the sample, information was collected from the following respondents:

- Head teacher of every school,
- Another teacher in every school who was not a VSS member,
- Parents of two children currently enrolled in the school,
- Mukhiya or village head of the village in which the school was located,
- BRC and CRC functionaries from the selected blocks and clusters,
- Trainers responsible for capacity building of VSS members,
- Five members of each VSS,<sup>3</sup> and
- Staff from NGOs working in the field of education in the village, where these existed.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the original schools was randomly selected, given the objectives of the study, the sample was later amended to include as many schools as possible which had, at the time of fieldwork, a functioning Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti (VSS). See Section 5 below for details on the special situation of Bihar which made this change necessary.

<sup>3</sup> In schools where the VSS had been replaced by an ad hoc committee, members of the earlier VSS were interviewed.

A set of structured schedules was designed at the national level to collect specific information from each respondent relating to objectives of the study. The schedules utilized were as follows:

- *School Information Schedule*: for collecting information on the nature and functioning of the school and facilities provided by the school, besides internal and external monitoring established vis-à-vis the village community;
- *VSS Schedule*: for collecting information on different aspects of school management, community involvement with regard to day to day functioning of the school;
- *Parents Schedule*: for collecting information on the formation and functioning of the VEC/SMC and other participatory structures, and overall functioning of the schools.
- *Teacher Schedule*: for collecting information on the functioning of the VEC/SMC and other participatory structures, and overall the community and School interface.
- *Mukhiya Schedule*: Collecting information on the roles and responsibilities undertaken by the Panchayat for improving the functioning of the schools; and also information on various features (including demographic, socio-economic, political, educational etc.) of the selected village;
- *Schedules for BRC and CRC functionaries*: collecting information about the support and guidance provided by the BRC and CRC functionaries to the School Management bodies in improving the functioning of the school.
- *Schedule for Trainers of VEC members*: collecting information on the transaction of the VEC training in terms of content and methodology
- *Schedule for NGO*: collecting information about involvement of particular NGOs in community mobilization related activities and capacity building of the VEC members in improving the functioning of the school.

In addition, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted at the village level in 3 districts to elicit information on perceptions of community members and parents on the functioning of VECs/SMCs, and to prioritize the problems faced by the community in managing the schools. FGDs were also conducted with cluster, block and district officials in 4 districts. These discussions focused on the linkages between the educational administration and the VSS at the village level, the monitoring and supervision structure, overall performance of the VSS, constraints faced etc.

Finally, detailed field notes and records were maintained by the research team pertaining to the economic, political, social and educational situation in each village. This information was generated through unstructured observation and conversations conducted by the researchers over the period of two to three days that they spent in each village.



## 5. Special context of the study in Bihar

Implementation of the study posed particular problems in Bihar given that it was conducted during a period of transition in the state. The Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000, which had governed the operation of the VSS in the state throughout the decade 2000-2009, had been replaced by the Bihar Elementary School Education Act in 2007 (see Chapter 2 for more details). During 2008 and 2009, existing VSS were dissolved as and when their three year term expired and were replaced with an ad hoc committee comprising the school principal and a senior teacher pending fresh elections under the new guidelines. During 2009, therefore, primary schools in Bihar had either a VSS constituted under the earlier (2000) guidelines or an ad hoc committee, neither of which was scheduled to continue to operate for very much longer, given that the timeline being discussed for fresh elections was at that time (July-August 2009) three to four months away.

The new policy governing VSS in Bihar involves the election of members through secret ballot conducted under the aegis of the Election Commission in accordance with the same rules that apply to Panchayats.<sup>4</sup> According to Mr. Tiwari, the state in-charge of VSS under the Bihar Education Project Council, during the period of fieldwork for this study voters' lists were being drawn up on the basis of the catchment area of each school so as to include all parents/guardians of children attending the local school in that area. As of the date of writing of this report (February 2010), electoral lists are still being prepared and election dates have not been announced.

Once elections are held and the new guidelines are implemented, Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis in Bihar will undergo significant changes in their formation, composition and structure. In this context, the present study tries to address the additional issues of awareness of these policy level changes as well as their implications for the work of the VSS in Bihar from the point of view of the respondents (headteachers, teachers, parents and others). During fieldwork for the study, 67% of the surveyed schools had a VSS functioning under the older guidelines whereas 33% had an ad hoc committee.

**Table 1.1.** VSS and Ad hoc Committees in the sample schools

District	VSS	Ad-hoc committee
East Champaran	10	10
Darbhanga	20	0
Purnea	5	15
Nalanda	20	0
Vaishali	10	0

<sup>4</sup>The evolution and content of the new policy is discussed in Chapter 2.

<b>Patna</b>	2	8
<b>Total</b>	67	33

The fieldwork methodology and schedules were therefore modified to be relevant in both situations. In schools where an ad hoc committee was functioning, the research team interviewed members of the previous VSS. In addition we tried to address the situation of transition as well by introducing some additional questions pertaining to the future committees.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **PROFILE OF BIHAR**

#### **a. Introduction**

##### **History of Bihar**

Ancient Bihar, known as Magadha, the birthplace of Buddhism, home to the world renowned Nalanda University and the seat of one of the most powerful kingdoms in ancient India was the center of power, learning, and culture in India for a thousand years. India's first empire, the Mauryan empire as well as one of the world's greatest pacifist religions, Buddhism arose from the region that now comprises Bihar. Many ancient Indian texts, written outside of the religious epics, were also written in ancient Bihar.

However, Bihar lost much glory during the medieval period. Bihar went through uncertain times during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, suffering at the hands of the Muslim invaders, and then underwent further damage with the advent of foreign aggression and eventual foreign subjugation of India.

Under the British Raj, Bihar and particularly Patna gradually started to regain some of its lost glory and emerged as an important and strategic centre of learning and trade in India. Bihar remained a part of the Bengal Presidency of the British Raj until 1912, when Bihar and Orissa were integrated into a separate province. After the separation of Orissa as an independent province in 1935, Patna continued as the capital of Bihar province under the British Raj.

Bihar played a major role in the Indian independence struggle and was home to notable events such as the Champaran movement against the Indigo plantation owners and the Quit India Movement of 1942. In North and Central Bihar, radical peasant movements also gained ground on the sidelines of the freedom movement. The Kisan Sabha movement, started in Bihar, intensified and gradually spread to other parts of the country to mobilise peasant grievances against zamindari attacks and aimed to overthrow this feudal system instituted by the British.

In the first two decades after independence Bihar was run by successive Congress governments. The state was characterized by tremendous political instability, resulting in little government attention to the welfare of the people of the state. More than twenty Chief Ministers came and went between 1961 and 1990 without completing their term in office. Only two Chief Ministers have ruled the state for long periods of time: Sri Krishan Sinha from 1946- 61 and Laloo- Rabri from 1990 – 2005.

Other factors which contributed to the poor state of development of the state were its complicated caste structure which promoted divisive politics and political instability, rampant corruption and misrule. In addition very little was invested in agriculture, infrastructure and education. According to 1999-2001 figures released by the Planning Commission, rural poverty in Bihar was 44.3% and urban poverty was 24.7% but with 9 out of 10 persons living in villages,

poverty has largely been a rural phenomenon. At close to 40% of the total population of the state below the poverty line, Bihar's poverty figures were the highest in the country.

Various people's movements aiming to strengthen the socioeconomic conditions of tribals and demands for a tribal homeland culminated in a movement for the separate state of Jharkhand, which became reality in 2000. At this time the current state of Bihar was reorganized into 38 districts.

The new government led by Nitish Kumar that came to power in 2006 has made concerted efforts to tackle the challenges of the state and has made significant strides in education, road development, health care and law and order. Intensive efforts focused on better implementation and good governance has resulted in the much publicized double digit growth figures recently announced by the state.

### **Geographical Features of Bihar**

Bihar is mainly a vast stretch of very fertile flat land. It is drained by the Ganges River, including northern tributaries Gandak and Kosi originating in the Nepal Himalayas and the Bagmati originating in the Kathmandu Valley that regularly flood parts of the Bihar plains. The total area covered by the state of Bihar is 94,163 km<sup>2</sup>.

The state is located between 21°-58'-10" N ~ 27°-31'-15" N latitude and between 82°-19'-50" E ~ 88°-17'-40" E longitude. Its average elevation above sea level is 173 feet (53 m). The Bihar plain is divided into two unequal halves by the river Ganga which flows through the middle from west to east. Other Ganges tributaries are the Son, Budhi Gandak, Chandan, Orhani and Falgu. The Himalayas begin at foothills a short distance inside Nepal but influence Bihar's landforms, climate, hydrology and culture. Central parts of Bihar have some small hills, for example the Rajgir hills. The Himalayan Mountains are to the north of Bihar, in Nepal. To the south is the Chota Nagpur plateau, which was part of Bihar until 2000 but now is part of Jharkhand. Bihar has notified forest area of 6,764.14 km<sup>2</sup>, which is 7.1% of its geographical area.

### **Demography**

Bihar is India's third most populous state with an 8.07% share in the country's population. Of the total population of 83 million, approximately 90% resides in rural areas. The male to female ratio in the state is 919:100. The total percentage of males is 52.06% and the total percentage of females is 47.04%. The total population is 16,80,6063. (Census 2001)

### **Occupational structure**

According to the Census 2001, 25% of the total population in Bihar is classified as 'main workers', 8% are 'marginal workers' and 66% are 'non workers'.<sup>5</sup> According to NSSO data, the occupational structure of rural and urban persons per 1000 persons is given in Table 2.1. From these numbers it is evident that Bihar has a predominantly agrarian economy. Trade and services make up the largest urban employment sector, but the second largest industry amongst the urban population is also agriculture.

**Table 2.1.** Occupational Structure in Bihar

Industry	Rural	Urban
Agriculture	77.9%	18.5%
Mining and quarrying	0.1%	0.2%
Manufacturing	5.7%	11.6%
Electricity and water	0.1%	0.3%
Construction	2.5%	7.3%
Trade, hotel and restaurant services	7.5%	33.9%
Transport	2.2%	7.3%
Business	0.2%	5.1%
Public administration, education	3.7%	15.9%

Source: Census 2001

### Social Structure

Of the total population of the state, Scheduled Castes comprise 15.7% and Scheduled Tribes comprise 0.91%. After Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, Bihar has the largest Scheduled Caste population in the country. This population group in Bihar is overwhelmingly rural with 93.3% residing in rural areas. The five most populous and politically significant castes are the Chamars, Dusadhs, Musahars, Dhobhi and Bhuiya. The literacy rate of Schedules Castes in Bihar is extremely low at 28.5%, well below the state average.

The work force participation rate of Scheduled Castes in Bihar is 39.7%, similar to the rest of the rest of the country (40.4%). Of the working population among Scheduled Castes more than three quarters work as agricultural labourers, also well above the national average of 46%.

### b. Education development in the state of Bihar

#### Overview

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<sup>5</sup> The Census defines "main workers" as those who have worked in some economic activity for the major part of the year, that is for a period of six months (183 days) or more. "Marginal workers" refers to those who had worked for some time during the previous year, but not for the major part, that is, less than 183 days.

Elementary education in Bihar has been characterized by low enrolment, low retention and a high drop-out rate, giving the state the unenviable distinction of being one of the most educationally backward states in the country. According to the 2001 Census, the literacy rate for Bihar stands at 47.3% which lies below the national average of 55%. Female literacy rate of Bihar is one of the lowest in the country at 33%. However, this situation needs to be viewed in the context of the larger backdrop of acute backwardness that has afflicted Bihar since independence. Poor agricultural and industrial growth, high population density, an exploitative socio-economic structure, lack of infrastructure, breakdown of administration and law and order, lack of political leadership have collectively contributed to this state of 'non development' (Sharma 1995).

However, recent years have seen a decline in poverty as well as improvement in some education indicators. There has been a 10% increase in the literacy rate of the state since 1991 as a result of a general expansion of education policies and sustained education interventions that have been introduced by the state government. According to ASER<sup>6</sup> Bihar shows the greatest decline in children out of school in all age groups across all states, from 12.8% (2006) to 4% (2009).

To be able to understand these changes, it is necessary to analyse changes in the state's education policies and programmes, particularly during the decade of the 1990s. In order to contextualize the rest of this report which focuses on Village Education Committees (VECs), the next section will analyse these changes through the lens of community participation and decentralized education planning and administration. A brief historical account using this parameter follows.

### **Decentralization of Elementary Education in Bihar**

#### Pre-Independence period

The view that there is a need to promote community participation in primary education and local decision making in school management is not recent. Various historical accounts from colonial times such as William Adam's education survey in 1823-24 indicate that an extensive indigenous system of education functioned in the interiors of Bihar and acknowledged by S. Macintosh, the then principal of Patna High School, that for education to succeed in the province, it needed to 'be closely connected with the habits of the people' (Kantha & Narain 2004). However with the gradual appropriation of power and authority by the colonial state, the sphere of education saw a definite ousting of the community and subsequent suppression of the traditional knowledge system.

Despite being a site for strong tribal uprisings and mass movements including Gandhi's Satyagraha in Champaran during the anti colonial struggle, Bihar never experienced the Bengal

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<sup>6</sup> The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), is the largest annual survey of rural children conducted by citizen of India every year since 2005. In 2009, ASER was conducted in 575 districts, over 16000 villages and 300,000 households. Almost 700,000 children were surveyed.

type of renaissance. It also remained untouched by early modernization in British times. Given that Bihar was characterized by the subaltern more than its elite, the role of the 'community' was not recognized even in the post independence development discourse.

### Post-independence

Although Bihar did not experience the same economic transitions that the rest of the country was undergoing, some reforms were introduced in the 1950s. Of these the most significant were land reforms and some expansion in educational infrastructure. However state- community synergies were still premature and the government continued to rely heavily on the bureaucracy to carry out its development programmes.

The two wars that followed and severe drought that hit the state in the mid 1960s led to an economic crisis that in some ways reversed the progress achieved through planned development during the previous decade. In 1960, Bihar was at the bottom of the list of states in terms of per capita income. With a negligible growth rate of 0.35% till 1985, the state continued to suffer from economic stagnation. In responding to the crisis and recovering the economy of the state, the idea of 'community' remained elusive.

### Evolution of Panchayats in Bihar

Thus, although Bihar was one of the first states in the country to introduce Panchayats through the Bihar State Panchyati Raj Act 1948, the history of decentralization in the state has been anything but smooth. After an initial series of elections held at irregular intervals after the introduction of the Act, Panchayat elections in Bihar stopped after 1978. This was also one of the bloodiest elections in the country's history with 500 persons losing their lives. 'In rural Bihar polarised on caste lines, candidates go to any extent to win the battle of ballots' explains Chaudhuri (2001).<sup>7</sup> Decay began to set in to system of local governance in the state as a result of poor coordination with other administrative bodies, lack of resources and the gradual capture of power by the dominant castes and other powerful elements of the village feudal elite (Bharti 1989).

Following the suspension of Panchayat elections, several petitions were filed in the Supreme Court for holding early elections with no tangible results for years. It was only after the intervention of the judiciary that in 2001, after a lapse of 23 years, elections to 8,452 Panchayats were held in Bihar. These Panchayat elections marked a turning point in the history of decentralization in the state primarily because they were characterized by new social and political equations at the provincial level. There was a perceptible rise in political consciousness among the backward castes who as a consequence had a greater presence in the Panchayats (Gupta 2001). This is important because it sets the context for understanding the relationship of PRIs and VECs in subsequent years.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/fline/fl1810/18100380.htm>

### Decentralisation and education

Even before the 72<sup>nd</sup> and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendments were passed, the National Policy of Education (NPE) of 1986 and thereafter the NPE of 1992 had already stressed the need for promoting community participation and involving the local community in decentralized management of schools. The NPE of 1992 took a concrete step in this direction by proposing the adoption of the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution which calls for entrusting PRIs with major powers and responsibilities related to various aspects of education. This move was given further impetus when the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment finally came into force in 1993 (Govinda & Diwan 2004).

The impact of these developments could be seen in Bihar in the form of various education interventions introduced in the early 1990s. Of these the Bihar Education Project Council or Bihar Education Project (BEP) is the most exceptional. The BEP was launched in 1991 to bring quantitative and qualitative change in the elementary education system of Bihar. A decade later, the national flagship Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme built upon the vision pioneered by the BEP – to ‘provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children, through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode’.<sup>8</sup> The BEP had adopted a ‘mission mode’ from the very beginning as it aimed to overhaul the entire education system in the state through composite processes of expanding access, enrolment, retention and imparting quality education through formal and non formal schooling.

Taking the block as the unit for their programmes and activities, participatory planning and implementation are cornerstones of the BEP. The major programmes undertaken by the BEP since it came into being include the District Primary Education Programmes, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGVB), and the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL).

Other important educational interventions of the 1990s which promoted community participation include the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) initiated in 1992 which saw the genesis of Mata Samitis and the State Programme for Elementary Education Development (SPEED) which aimed to deal with teacher absenteeism and teaching quality. The Lokshala programme which ran on a much smaller scale aimed ‘to explore and establish a decentralized, disaggregated, and location specific approach to planning and management in education’. (Kantha and Narain 2004)

### **Policy Reforms, Norms and Regulations**

VECs were first constituted in Bihar by a notification in 1988 but they were not borne out of a democratic process and hence were not truly representative of the local community. All its members were nominated by the Block Education Extension Officer (BEEO) and the Mukhiya

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bsppssa.org/ssa/ssa.htm>



was its president. This posed the further problem of the Mukhiya not being able to commit enough time to the activities of the VEC. Other members were drawn from different categories; 3 parents, 2 donor members, 2 women members, 1 retired government official with an interest in education, 1 person who has made an exception contribution to society or to the nation, 1 head teacher, 1 other teacher.

After the BEP was launched in 1991-92, efforts were made to reorganize VECs school-wise. The president was then to be elected by the Gram Sabha and need not have been the Mukhiya. Other members of the VEC were also elected through a general meeting of village members. Of the 15 members, 50% were reserved for women.

At this juncture, the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act was introduced which replaced its 1948 predecessor and strengthened the local self governance bodies further. Panchayats were entrusted with the responsibility of creating awareness around primary, secondary and adult education in the community as well as ensuring increased enrolment and attendance and management. Institutions at the Zila Parishad level were also expected to execute a range of education related activities such as monitoring and evaluation of education programmes, conducting adult literacy programmes etc. Despite the reenactment of the Panchayati Raj Act, elections were stalled for a host of reasons such as the need for fresh delimitations and reservations for OBCs.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis on the need for community participation in primary education was not diluted.

Further reforms took place in 1995-96 and concerted efforts were made towards the organization and training of VECs and their functionaries until all members of the VEC were democratically elected by the community. VECs became one of the key components of the BEP's activities and programmes.

In 1997, new strategies for the process-based formation of VECs were developed through a series of workshops involving the BEP and other representatives of the educational administration of the state. The first was a teacher based campaign envisaged by the school system. The second, an *utprerak* (mobiliser) based campaign, engaged interested people from outside the school system. The third was an *abhiprerak* based campaign which involved facilitators who had a deeper understanding of the conceptual framework and process of micro planning. This campaign required more intensive involvement of villagers in the entire process. In addition *preraks* or village based conductors who would actually implement the plan of VEC formation and micro-planning were also identified. A study by Ed CIL in 1999 revealed that most VECs in Bihar were *utprerak* based and approximately one third had completed micro-planning. By 1999, 31,718 VECs had been formed with micro planning completed in only 914 of these VECs. The study also points out that community involvement was the least in the teacher based campaign.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/20000901/ina01045.html>

VECs in Bihar were replaced by Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis (VSS) under the Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act which was passed by the legislative assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2000.<sup>10</sup> The Samiti was expected to work in accordance with the directives of the Welfare Committee constituted under the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act. A more detailed discussion of provisions will follow but briefly, the 15-member Samiti consisted of 9 parents, 3 non- parents, 2 members nominated by the Gram Panchayat and the headmaster. At least one third (5 members) of the Samiti were mothers and either the Secretary or the President of VSS was required to be a woman. All members were elected by the Aam Sabha. A further provision also called for the participation of other community leaders such as Anganwadi workers, members of women's groups etc.

Subsequently, the VSS act, 2000 was replaced with the Bihar Elementary School Education Act 2007. While most of the functions of the Samiti remain the same, the norms guiding its constitution and composition are perhaps the most progressive in the country. The most radical feature of the new policy governing VSS in Bihar involves the election of members through secret ballot conducted under the aegis of the Election Commission in accordance with the same rules that apply to Panchayats. This process of constituting the VSS marks a significant shift from the previous practice of constitution through an Aam Sabha or public meeting.

To make the VSS more democratic, among the 15 members of the committee, a total of 10 will be elected through secret ballot including the secretary and president. Further, to decrease the likelihood of influential community members taking over the committee, only parents of school going children would be eligible for these posts. The remaining 5 members will include the headmaster, ward member, Mukhiya or Nagar Panchayat member, donor and a retired government official from the area.

Another distinguishing feature of the new Act is the increased representation given to women. The new VSS will have 5 women members and in the first year the post of secretary would also be reserved for a woman, while the president's post would be open to both men and women. In the second round of elections, however the president's post would be reserved for women.

Measures for increasing accountability have also been included in the new norms. An interesting provision pertains to the withdrawal of funds which specifies that the first withdrawal will take place with the consent of the secretary and the president as well as the approval of the other members of the VSS. This provision seeks to address the earlier issue of misuse of funds.

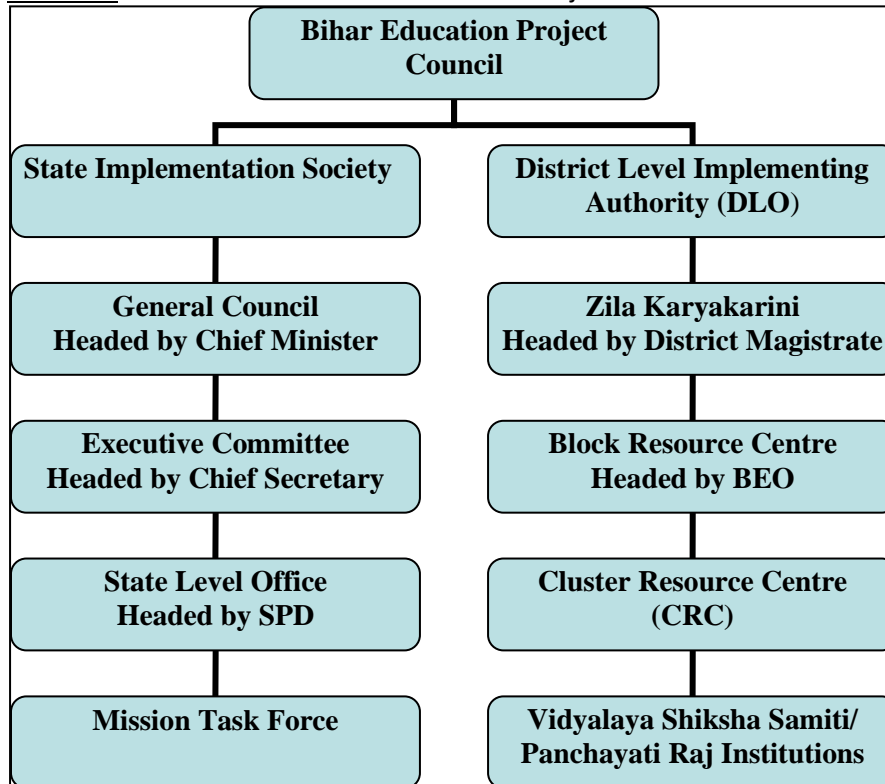
Currently (July 2010), the new Act is under review once more in order to bring its provisions in line with the recently approved Right to Education Act. The timeline for completion of this process and the subsequent scheduling of fresh elections is not available at this time.

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<sup>10</sup> The VSS observed during the present research project were constituted and functioning in accordance with the norms outlined in the 'Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Adhinyam 2000'.

## Current Structure of Educational Administration in Bihar

**Chart 2.1.** Structure of the Bihar Education Project Council



Source: [www.bsppssa.org](http://www.bsppssa.org)

The state's Ministry of Human Resource Development Department is headed by the Principal Secretary. The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) is a registered society under this department and has been entrusted with the responsibility for implementing all elementary education programmes including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

At the state headquarters of the BEPC is the State Implementation Society which provides an overall vision to the elementary education programmes in the state and is led by General Council headed by the Chief Minister. The Executive Committee is headed by the Chief Secretary and oversees the implementation of programmes and also undertakes monitoring and evaluation activities. The State Project Office of the SSA, headed by the State Project Director, is responsible for everyday decision making regarding programme implementation. Under the SPD is the Mission Task Force team which comprises of various programme officers such as Alternative and Innovative Education, Elementary Formal Education, Civil Works, MIS etc.

Administratively Bihar is divided into 38 districts and 9 divisions. At the district level, the District Level Implementing Authority (DLO) comprises the Zila Karyakarini headed by the District

Magistrate. This office is involved in planning and executing district level education programmes and creating district budgets. Therefore there are 38 DLOs in the state. The district is divided into blocks and a Block Resource Centre (BRC) headed by the Block Education Officer is located in each block. There are 533 BRCs in the state which are directly responsible for implementation activities. Each BRC has 3 Block Resource Persons on average who are responsible for different aspects of the elementary education activities in the block.

Under each BRC are approximately 11-12 Cluster Resource Centers (CRC) which amounts to approximately 6,000 in the whole state. Each CRC is headed by a Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator (CRCC). CRCCs are expected to provide academic and non-academic support to each school in their cluster such as strategies for reducing the number of out of school children, teacher training, residential camps, textbook distribution etc. Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis are situated at the level of the school and are linked to Panchayati Raj Institutions. An institutional relationship between the VSS and other rungs of the administrative structure has not been clearly articulated in any education policy document. A more detailed analysis of these administrative linkages with the VSS will be done in the latter part of this report.

### **Current scenario**

According to DISE 2007-08, Bihar has 66,663 government schools (primary and secondary level) of which over 63,000 are in rural Bihar. The total enrolment in government schools is 17,349,687. There are 322,271 government school teachers; but despite large scale recruitment of new teachers in recent years, Bihar has one of the highest pupil-to-teacher ratio at the primary and upper primary levels at 54 and 59 respectively. The student to classroom ratio is also one of the highest at 96.

With expanded school coverage and new education initiatives undertaken by the state government, the number of out of school children has dropped considerably and enrolment at the primary level is nearing universal enrolment at 99%. An important performance indicator of a successful education system is its accessibility to children from socially excluded groups. The BEP has also actively worked towards the goal of inclusive education by introducing a host of programmes and incentives for girls as well as SC, ST and OBC children. This is reflected in increased enrolment for girls in the primary school level to 45% of total enrolment. Of the total enrolment, SC children constitute 18%, STs 2.4% and OBC 59%.

Enrolment rates alone are not indicative of whether children continue to be a part of the education system after they join. This is reflected in the retention rate which for Bihar is still quite low at 53% at the primary level. The highest percentage of drop outs can be seen in Std 5 (32%) when children make a transition from primary to upper primary school.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH SETTING

#### 1. Profile of selected districts

The four rural and two urban districts selected for the present study are briefly described below.

**Darbhanga** lies in the Maithil heartland in north Bihar and was at the epicenter of the erstwhile Darbhanga Raj, one of the most important landed estates of pre-independence India. In addition to its formidable history of administration and control, Darbhanga which is home to the new Mithila University, has also been an important centre of Hindu learning. Three rivers, Kosi, Gandak and Bagmati criss-cross the district, badly affected it by floods every year since 1998.

According to the Census (2001), the literacy rate in Darbhanga is 44.3%, below the state average, and has actually declined since the 1991 Census. Darbhanga is included in the SSA's list of special focus districts<sup>11</sup> for containing more than 50,000 children out of school and as one of the Prime Minister's 121 minority districts with a Muslim population of over 20%.

Within the district, two educationally backward blocks -Biraul and Hayaghat- were selected of the total 19 blocks.

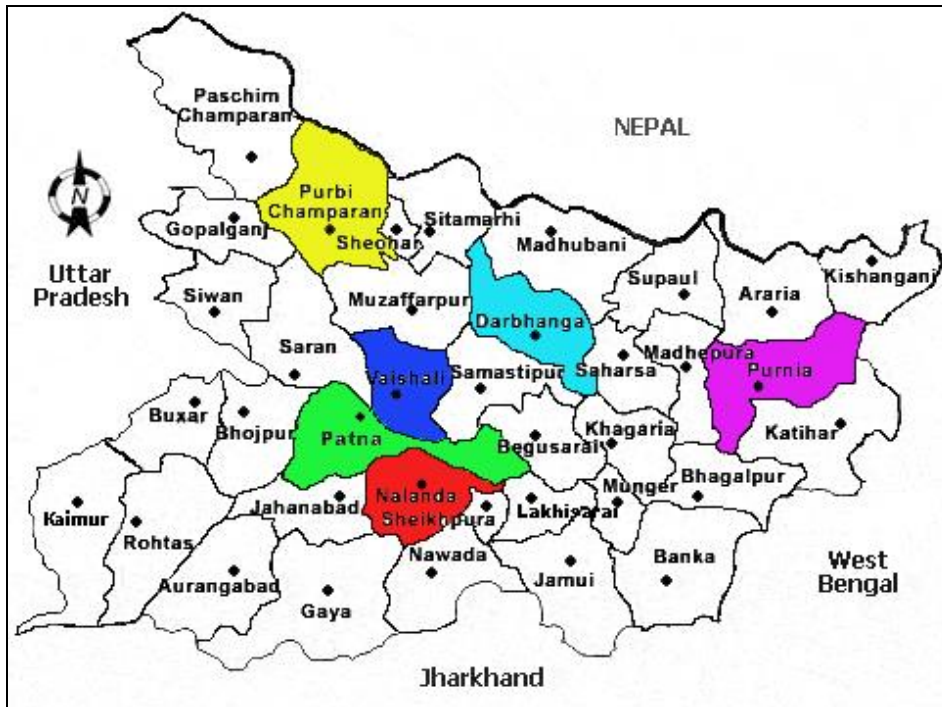
**East Champaran**, also in the northern part of the state, shares its northern border with Nepal. Earlier part of the former Champaran district within the Bettiah subdivision, it came into existence in 1972. Champaran was an important site of struggle in India's independence movement. The rise of nationalism in Champaran is linked to the indigo plantations in the district and the exploitative conditions of the cultivators under the British planters which were highlighted by Gandhi with the Champaran Satyagraha Movement.

According to the Census (2001), the literacy rate of the district is 37.5% and female literacy is extremely low at 24.3%. Of its 27 blocks, Kalyanpur and Piprakothi, both educationally backward blocks were chosen for the survey. In the SSA's list of special focus districts East Champaran's status has been highlighted because of its out of school figures which are more than 20,000, a retention rate of less than 60% and a schedule caste population which is greater than 25%.

#### **Chart 3.1.** District map of Bihar

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<sup>11</sup> This list was drawn up for SPDs of all states along with guidelines for the formulation of Annual Work Plans and budgets in 2010-11. See <http://ssa.nic.in/guidelines-awp-b-2009-10/guidelines-for-formulation-of-annual-work-plan-budget-awp-b-2010-11>



Source: [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com)

**Purnea** lies in the north eastern corner of the state and shares a border with West Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The ST population in the district is 4.4% which is the fourth highest in the state. The district has one of the lowest literacy rates (35.51%) in the state after Katihar, Araria and Kishanganj which were all carved out of this district in 1951. Female literacy rates are alarmingly low at 23.71%. The SSA list of special focus districts indicates that Purnea is one of the PM's 121 minority districts with a Muslim population of over 20%; and a retention rate of less than 60%. Jalalgarh and Banmankhi, both educationally backward blocks, were chosen of the total 14 blocks in the districts.

**Nalanda** which lies close to the capital city of Patna was founded in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and was an important centre of Buddhist learning. Home to the ancient Nalanda University which was established by the Gupta kings has attracted scholars from across the world. Nalanda's literacy rate of 53.64 is above the state average and is the district with the highest literacy rate among the rural districts surveyed in the study. Scheduled castes constitute 19.9% of the total population of the district (Census 2001). Nevertheless, the SSA list indicates that more than 50,000 children are out of school in the district. Silao and Rajgir, both educationally backward blocks, were chosen for the survey.

**Patna** district with an urban population of over 40% lies in the heart of southern Bihar. The district has the highest literacy rate in the state at 62.9%. The administrative headquarters of the district lies in Patna city which is also the capital of Bihar. Like Nalanda another relatively

high literacy district, Patna also scores low in terms of enrolment with over 50,000 children out of school.

**Vaishali** district which was earlier a part of Muzzafarpur district came into existence in 1972. Also an important ancient town, the city of Vaishali finds numerous references in Buddhist and Jain texts as an ancient metropolis and the capital city of the republic of the Vaishali state, which covered most of the Himalayan Gangetic region of present-day Bihar. According to the 2001 Census, Vaishali has a relatively high scheduled caste population (20.68%). The literacy rate of the district is 50.5%.

## 2. Profile of sampled villages

### Village size and infrastructure

Of the 100 villages visited for the present research study, about half had between 150 and 500 households (as reported by the Mukhiya). Darbhanga district had the highest number of small villages with the number of total households ranging from 40 and 150. East Champaran had the highest number of big villages with more than 1000 households.

**Table 3.1.** Sample villages by number of households

District	40-150	150-500	500-1000	>1000	Total
East Champaran	2	9	0	9	20
Darbhangha	13	5	0	2	19
Purnea	3	12	0	5	20
Nalanda	8	8	3	1	20
Vaishali	0	10	0	0	10
Patna	1	5	0	4	20
<b>Total</b>	27	49	3	21	199

The state of village infrastructure is another useful indicator of the context in which the study was situated. A total of 100 schools were visited across all districts and therefore facilities for 100 corresponding villages were recorded.

Anganwadis were the most commonly found facility across all districts. Of the rural districts Purnea had the most anganwadi facilities and East Champaran the least. In the urban Vaishali district, all 10 villages had anganwadi facilities. A weekly market was found in only 22 of the 100 sample villages. The highest number of villages with pacca roads leading to it were found in Nalanda district.

**Table 3.2.** Village infrastructure in sample villages

Services	East Champaran	Darbhangha	Purnea	Nalanda	Vaishali	Patna
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	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Anganwadi / Balwadi	13	17	14	19	17	23	15	21	10	14	4	6
PHC	5	19	2	8	3	12	12	46	1	9	3	6
Private Clinic	2	7	2	7	1	4	12	41	8	28	4	13
Post office	10	23	9	21	8	19	10	23	0	0	6	14
Wkly Mkt/ Bazaar	7	32	4	18	4	18	1	4	3	14	3	14
Pacca road	6	13	8	17	7	15	11	24	10	22	10	9

### Number of children by age group

Across all 6 districts and 100 sampled schools, information on the the number of children below 6 years and 6-14 years was taken from Village Education Register (Bal Panji). On an average, each village has 50 children below 6 years of age and 294 children between 6-14 years old. The number of OBC children is the highest followed by children from the SC community. The number of ST children is the lowest at 229.

**Table 3.3.** Sample villages by child population

Category	<6 years		6-14 years		Total	
	B	G	B	G	B	G
1. Gen	378	338	1475	1731	1853	2069
2. SC	688	545	3325	3041	4013	3586
3. ST	26	19	260	210	286	229
4. OBC	924	916	7355	7186	8279	8102
5. Muslim(others)	641	519	2450	2380	3091	2899
<b>Total</b>	<b>2657</b>	<b>2337</b>	<b>14865</b>	<b>14548</b>	<b>17522</b>	<b>16885</b>

### 3. Profile of sample schools

During fieldwork for this study, head teachers of all the sampled schools were asked to provide basic information on the facilities available, student enrolment, teacher backgrounds etc. This information presents a picture of the state of education in the school to some extent and helps to understand the context in which the VSS functions.



### School level and student characteristics

Within the sample 80% of the surveyed schools were only up to the primary level. Only 12 schools were up to the upper primary level and most of these were in Nalanda and Vaishali districts.

**Table 3.4.** Sample schools by highest level

District	Primary		Upper primary		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
East Champaran	18	90	2	10	20	100
Darbhangha	20	125	0	0	16	100
Purnea	20	100	0	0	20	100
Nalanda	15	75	5	25	20	100
Vaishali	5	50	5	50	10	100
Patna	10	100	0	0	10	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen in Table 3.5, the vast majority of children enrolled in the sample schools are from the OBC social category (61%), followed by the SC category (27%). Together, children from these two social groups comprise almost 90% of the total children enrolled.

Boys outnumber girls in every social category, comprising 54% of the enrolled children in Std 1-8, whereas girls comprise 46% of the total.

**Table 3.5.** Enrolled students by class and social category in sample schools

Enrolment Category	Class 1		Class 2		Class 3		Class 4		Class 5		Class 6		Class 7		Class 8	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>Gen</b>																
<b>SC</b>	1044	851	717	675	558	448	488	339	319	232	82	74	88	79	66	52
<b>ST</b>	150	122	158	82	74	117	115	95	82	56	21	23	36	3	0	0
<b>OBC</b>	1548	1360	1404	1304	1118	1090	963	887	845	694	454	422	433	366	340	284
<b>Muslim</b>	171	137	179	150	160	131	118	91	94	76	31	34	31	41	21	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>2913</b>	<b>2470</b>	<b>2458</b>	<b>2211</b>	<b>1910</b>	<b>1786</b>	<b>1684</b>	<b>1412</b>	<b>1340</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>363</b>

### School facilities

While drinking water was available in 72% of all schools, the situation of toilets was quite poor. Over 60% of the schools visited did not have a common toilet let alone a separate toilet for girls.

**Table 3.6.** Sample schools by basic facilities

District	Drinking water		Common toilet		Separate girls' toilet		Girls' toilet in use	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
East Champaran	15	21	11	30	8	24	6	27
Darbhangha	10	14	2	5	5	15	3	20

Purnea	18	25	6	17	5	15	3	20
Nalanda	15	21	10	28	8	24	4	18
Vaishali	6	8	3	8	4	12	2	9
Patna	8	11	4	12	4	12	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>

It was encouraging to find that mid day meals were being served in 80% schools. In Nalanda district, the MDM was served in almost all sample schools.

Medical checkups were not carried out regularly in the sample schools. 75 out of a total of 100 schools did not conduct medical checkups and only 13 conducted them sometimes.

Furniture was not generally available for children to sit on who were usually provided with durries or tat patties (low tables to place books on).

**Table 3.7.** Midday Meal status in sample schools

	MDM served	MDM not served
	N	N
<b>East Champaran</b>	16	4
<b>Darbhanga</b>	13	6
<b>Purnea</b>	17	3
<b>Nalanda</b>	19	0
<b>Vaishali</b>	6	1
<b>Patna</b>	9	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 3.8.** Medical checkups in sample schools

District	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
<b>East Champaran</b>	1	5	16	90	1	5
<b>Darbhanga</b>	0	0	15	75	5	25
<b>Purnea</b>	0	0	17	85	3	15
<b>Nalanda</b>	3	18	12	71	2	11
<b>Vaishali</b>	0	0	7	88	1	12
<b>Patna</b>	1	10	8	80	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>

**Table 3.9.** Furniture provision for students in sample schools

District	Furniture available for students					
	All students		Some students		No students	
	N	%	N	%	n	%
East Champaran	0	0	6	30	14	70
Darbhangha	8	40	9	45	3	15
Purnea	1	5	11	61	6	34
Nalanda	5	25	10	50	5	25
Vaishali	1	13	5	61	2	26
Patna	1	10	7	70	2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>

The Mukhiya was asked what the on-going educational schemes in the village were. Responses included free uniforms, NPEGL, scholarships and distribution of cycles to girls in upper primary. While these responses are not indicative of the facilities in the sampled schools they provide a larger context of education programmes and schemes in the village. The distribution of free uniforms seemed to be the most commonly running scheme in villages. However the number of observations is too small to make a comment on the overall picture in the sampled schools.

**Table 3.10.** Ongoing educational schemes in sample villages

Scheme	East Champaran	Darbhangha	Purnea	Nalanda	Vaishali	Patna	Total
Uniforms	5	3	0	4	0	2	14
NPEGL	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Scholarships	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cycle	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>

### Teacher Information

Background information on all teachers in a school was collected which revealed that largest number of teacher belonged to the General category, followed by Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and finally Scheduled Tribes and Muslims/other minorities<sup>12</sup>. The male to female ratio across castes and across district is more or less the same. A stark gender disparity can be seen amongst OBC teachers in the rural districts.

In addition to the head teacher, 1 other teacher was interviewed in all sample schools. Of the 100 teachers interviewed, the majority were assistant teachers, followed by 'other' categories such as para teachers. Only a few senior teachers were interviewed.

<sup>12</sup> Caste information was not available for 75 teachers.

**Table 3.11.** Teachers by social category in sample schools

District	Social Group	General (N =144 )	SC (N =74 )	ST (N = 10)	OBC (N = 167)	Muslim / Other (N = 10)
		%	%	%	%	%
East Champaran	M	56	52	66	69	61
	F	44	48	34	31	39
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
Darbhanga	M	66	55	64	70	54
	F	34	45	36	30	46
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
Purnea	M	62	66	0	66	0
	F	38	34	0	34	0
	Total	100	100	0	100	0
Nalanda	M	59	65	0	67	0
	F	41	55	0	33	0
	Total	100	100	0	100	0
Vaishali	M	62	66	57	56	0
	F	38	34	43	44	0
	Total	100	100	100	100	0
Patna	M	58	55	58	61	61
	F	42	45	42	39	39
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>	M	60	58	52	56	58
	F	40	42	48	44	42
	Total	100	100	100	100	100

**Table 3.12.** Teachers in sample schools by teaching post

District	Regular teacher		Asst teacher		Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>E Champaran</b>	1	5	7	35	12	60	20	100
<b>Darbhanga</b>	0	0	17	85	3	15	20	100
<b>Purnea</b>	3	15	6	30	11	55	20	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	0	0	12	60	8	40	20	100
<b>Vaishali</b>	0	0	8	80	2	20	10	100
<b>Patna</b>	0	0	6	60	4	40	10	100
<b>Total</b>	4	4	56	56	40	40	100	100

In terms of the highest qualification of these teachers, it was found that the bulk of teachers (52%) were graduates and above, whereas 39% had studied up to secondary school and 8.5% had completed high school.



## CHAPTER IV

### VSS FORMATION, COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONS

In order to understand the gaps as well as adherence to norms and examples of best practice, this chapter will discuss the survey findings in the context of the VSS policy norms set out in the Bihar Rajya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000. Each section will first outline specific clauses of the Act followed by corresponding findings from the survey. The first section will discuss the formation and composition of the VSS, the second will look at the tenure, meetings and decision making processes, the third will discuss the roles, functions and activities of the VSS and the fourth will focus on finance-related activities and processes.

#### 1. Formation and Composition

##### *Policy guidelines*

According to the Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000, every primary and middle school in the state will have its own Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti which will be constituted through a public meeting in the village. The 15-member committee will comprise:

- 9 members from the parents' community, election through an aam sabha
- 3 non-parents, elected through an aam sabha
- 2 members nominated by the Mukhiya of the Panchayat or the Ward
- The Principal of the local school.

Importantly, all elected and nominated members must belong to the catchment area of the school. Of the 9 elected members, 5 must be women including women from the SC, ST and OBC community. There must be at least one male and one female member from the SC community respectively and one member (male or female) from the ST community and one member (male or female) from the OBC community. The Secretary and President of the committee will be elected by all members of the VSS through simple consensus. The guidelines also specify that either the Secretary or the President must be a woman.

##### *In practice*

With respect to the composition of VSS in the sample schools, the survey revealed that on an average 38% of the 1250 elected VSS members across districts were women. There was a much higher gender disparity when it came to nominated members with only 20% of nominated members being women.

**Table 4.1** VSS composition in sample schools

	Elected	Nominated	Ex-officio
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		N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>East Champanan</b>	M	150	62	27	77	11	61
	F	93	38	8	23	7	39
	Total	243	100	35	100	18	100
<b>Darbhanga</b>	M	137	57	32	89	11	65
	F	105	43	4	11	6	35
	Total	242	100	36	100	17	100
<b>Purnea</b>	M	175	64	12	80	9	90
	F	100	36	3	20	1	10
	Total	275	100	15	100	10	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	M	145	61	5	71	2	50
	F	92	39	2	29	2	50
	Total	237	100	7	100	4	100
<b>Vaishali</b>	M	92	67	8	89	1	100
	F	46	33	1	11	0	0
	Total	138	100	9	100	1	100
<b>Patna</b>	M	72	63	13	68	4	57
	F	43	37	6	32	3	43
	Total	115	100	19	100	7	100
<b>Total</b>	M	771	62	97	80	38	67
	F	479	38	24	20	19	33
	Total	1250	100	121	100	57	100

As prescribed by the VSS guidelines, SCs and OBCs member were well represented in all districts. OBCs constituted 45% and SCs 25% of the total VSS membership across the sample schools. The population of STs in the state is small and this is reflected in their low representation in VSS membership across districts. Of the rural districts SC membership was the highest in Darbhanga at 28% and lowest in East Champanan at 13%. OBC membership was the highest in Purnea at 29% and lowest in Nalanda at 5%.

**Table 4.2** VSS members by social category

District	N	Social category (%)					Total
		GEN	OBC	SC	ST	n.d.	
<b>E Champanan</b>	296	27	55	16	1	0	100
<b>Darbhanga</b>	295	11	44	34	0	12	100
<b>Purnea</b>	300	6	63	26	3	2	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	248	8	14	18	2	59	100
<b>Urban 1</b>	148	18	46	34	1	1	100
<b>Urban 2</b>	142	4	41	25	4	26	100
<b>Total</b>	1,429	13	45	25	2	16	100

Of a total of 1429 VSS members, 24% were illiterate and had had no formal schooling. 20% had studied only upto the primary school level and 18% had studied up to the higher secondary level. Among the rural districts Darbhanga had the highest percentage of illiterate VSS members

and Purnea the lowest. Close to 60% of all VSS members had only studied only upto Std 8. Less than 20% had studied upto Std 12 or above. This is interesting in the context of the VSS members' responses when they were asked to make suggestions for improving the functioning of the VSS in the future.

**Table 4.3** VSS members by highest education level

District	N	% of VSS members by highest educational level achieved									Total
		None	Below Std 5	Std 5	Std 8	Std 10	Std 12	Graduate	Postgrad	No data	
E Champaran	296	26	22	8	11	16	8	9	0	0	100
Darbhanga	295	51	13	4	5	16	6	4	1	0	100
Purnea	300	11	26	4	14	20	11	7	1	6	100
Nalanda	248	22	21	5	4	21	8	12	1	6	100
Urban 1	148	11	8	9	10	15	8	11	6	21	100
Urban 2	142	8	24	10	6	24	6	11	0	10	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1429</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of occupational status, 32% of all members were marginal farmers who owned some land, 19% were landless labourers and 16% were daily wage earners/casual labourers. The highest percentage of VSS members who were marginal farmers were found in East Champaran and the highest percentage who were landless labourers were found in Darbhanga and Nalanda (29%). Predictably, in the urban districts of Patna and Vaishali a higher proportion of members were engaged in daily wage labour, small business, service and other non-agricultural forms of employment.

In addition to this basic information on all VSS members of the sample schools visited, in depth interviews were conducted with 5 VSS members per school amounting to a total of 490 members<sup>13</sup>. As explained in chapter 1 VSS members were chosen for interviews based on their availability at the time of the survey. These respondents were asked questions related to their awareness of the functions and activities of the VSS; their responses are summarized below.

**Table 4.4** VSS members by primary occupation

District	N	% of VSS members by occupation									Total
		Land owner	Small land holder	Landless labour	Daily wage earner	Small trader	Services	Teacher	Other	No data	
East Champaran	296	8	48	18	4	6	3	5	8	0	100

<sup>13</sup> Of the VSS members interviewed, 64% were parents, 21% were other members of the village community, and the rest included teachers and mukhiya nominees. The figures below are collated from the answers of these respondents.



Darbhanga	295	2	25	29	31	4	1	6	2	0	100
Purnea	300	8	42	15	10	3	1	6	15	0	100
Nalanda	248	1	46	29	11	2	0	2	3	6	100
Urban 1	148	0	5	6	16	18	9	4	43	0	100
Urban 2	142	1	1	6	27	15	7	6	27	10	100
Total	1429	4	32	19	16	6	3	5	13	2	100

Of these respondents, OBCs constituted 54%, SCs 17%, General 15% and STs 12%. The educational status of respondents was fairly evenly distributed across districts. 21% had studied up to Std 8, 18% up to Std 5, 16% had never attended school, and 12% had been to school but had not completed Std 5. Farmers (37%) and casual labourers (33%) formed the bulk of respondents interviewed. The rest were self employed or engaged in some form of service.

Notably, 90% of all VSS members interviewed were aware of the formation of the VSS. The difference between male and female awareness levels was marginal. In terms of the process of formation as well, close to 90% of all VSS member interviewed said that the VSS had been constituted through a public meeting in accordance with policy norms. Given that the majority of VSS members interviewed were from the parent community, it is perhaps not surprising that 86% said that they had been elected which is in keeping with the VSS guidelines. However, to ensure that the election process is in compliance with state norms and its results therefore legitimate, a system of monitoring needs to be implemented.

Across all districts, we found that it was the HM who played the most significant role in facilitating the formation of the VSS, followed by the Block Education Officer. However there were some exceptions. For example in East Champaran, the Mukhiya and other elected representatives such as the local MLA and in Darbhanga, the Cluster Resource Coordinator also helped in the formation of the VSS.

In a discussion with district administrative officials in Darbhanga, Purnea and East Champaran we were told that a monitor and/or an election in-charge is deputed by the Block Education Officer. The Mukhiya is also informed about the election but is not obliged to attend. The VSS in charge in East Champaran added that "the Block Extension Officer (BEO) himself goes to as many election sites as possible as well".

**Table 4.5.** Individuals who helped in VSS formation

	HM	Teacher	MLA/ Pradhan	BRCC	CRCC	BEO	Other	Don't know
East Champaran	16	2	30	10	3	2	2	2
Darbhanga	15	1	6	14	21	43	5	8
Purnea	57	1	1	4	3	1	13	11
Nalanda	54	0	0	1	1	25	10	1
Vaishali	7	7	4	1	1	7	16	3
Patna	33	15	6	0	0	3	5	1
Total	182	26	47	30	28	111	54	26

## 2. Tenure, meetings and decision making

### *Policy guidelines*

The Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000 specifies that the tenure of the VSS will be for 3 years. VSS members are required to meet once a month and their decisions are to be taken through consensus or voting depending on the issue. The proceedings of monthly meetings and all decisions taken in the meeting must be written down in a notebook by the secretary/school principal/literate VSS member.

### *In practice*

#### Tenure

When VSS members were asked what the tenure of the committee was, responses varied from 1-5 years and 11% gave no response. However 83% of all respondents gave the correct answer of 3 years.

However, of 490 respondents, only 30% said that twelve meetings had taken place in the past year. Responses ranged from 0-24 meetings a year, and a significant 21% gave no response. This is despite the fact that, according to officials in charge of the VSS in Darbhanga and East Champaran districts, dates for VSS meetings are fixed.

#### Regularity of meetings

When asked who informed them about meetings most respondents said it was the school principal who intimated them. Some said that they would be informed by the chairperson or secretary of the VSS. A few respondents referred to a fixed date when meetings were supposed to be held. For example several VSS members in Nalanda were aware that VSS meetings were to be held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of every month. A small number of respondents said that they received notices from their children.

In terms of actual attendance of these meetings, only 12% of the 459 respondents said that all members generally attend meetings. However 59% said that more than half of the 15 members of the committee attend meetings. In Nalanda and the urban districts, the participation of all members appears to be much higher than the other districts.

**Table 4.6.** Attendance at VSS meetings

District	All		More than half		Half		Less than half		Don't know		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
E Champaran	2	2	71	73	9	9	6	6	9	9	97	100
Darbhangha	6	6	57	59	29	30	2	2	6	6	96	100
Purnea	0	0	56	60	18	19	13	14	9	10	93	100
Nalanda	24	27	55	62	4	4	5	6	9	10	89	100
Urban	22	26	32	38	16	19	4	5	26	31	84	100

<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>100</b>
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### Participation in meetings

In addition to attendance, the level of participation is an important indicator of whether the VSS is a truly representative and democratic body. It was encouraging to find that 85% of all respondents said that women members participated in meetings and 78% said that SC/ST members participated. Darbhanga and Nalanda districts had the highest percentage of respondents affirming women's participation in VSS meetings and East Champaran had the lowest. Again Nalanda had the highest percentage of respondents saying that SC/ST members participated in meeting, while Purnea had the lowest.

**Table 4.7.** Participation of women and SC/ST members in VSS meetings

District	Women's participation						SC/ST participation					
	Yes		No		Total		Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>E Champaran</b>	67	75	21	24	89	100	67	76	21	24	88	100
<b>Darbhangha</b>	80	94	5	6	85	100	60	70	26	30	86	100
<b>Purnea</b>	68	76	22	24	90	100	54	65	29	35	83	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	77	92	7	8	84	10	71	92	6	8	77	100
<b>Vaishali</b>	35	87	5	13	40	100	37	93	3	8	40	100
<b>Patna</b>	29	93	2	7	31	100	31	91	4	12	34	100
<b>Total</b>	356	85	62	14	418	100	320	78	89	22	409	100

Those respondents who felt that women and/or SC and ST members did not participate fully in VSS meetings cited different reasons for this situation. Most cited lack of interest and housework as the main reasons for women's non participation and lack of interest as well as a variety of other reasons for non participation of SC/ST members.

**Table 4.8.** Reasons for non participation of women members in VSS meetings

District	No information			No interest			Not appropriate for women			Housework			Others		
N=	25			57			14			54			11		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
E Champaran	33	67	100	50	50	100	40	60	100	67	33	100	100	0	100
Darbhangha	100	0	100	64	36	100	67	33	100	60	40	100	50	50	100
Purnea	88	13	100	82	18	100	33	67	100	77	23	100	50	50	100
Nalanda	25	75	100	73	27	100	100	0	100	40	60	100			
Urban 1	57	43	100	100	0	100				75	25	100	100	0	100
Urban 2	100	0	100	100	0	100	100	0	100	60	40	100	33	67	100
<b>Total</b>	64	36	100	72	28	100	57	43	100	65	35	100	67	33	100

**Table 4.9.** Reasons for non participation of SC/ST members in VSS meetings

District	No Info			No interest			Caste discrimination			Other		
N=	29			57			5			52		
	SC/ST	non	Total	SC/ST	non	Total	SC/ST	non	Total	SC/ST	non	Total

		SC/ST			SC/ST			SC/ST			SC/ST	
E Champaran	40%	60%	100%	33%	67%	100%	20%	80%	100%	60%	40%	100%
Darbhanga	0%	100%	100%	35%	65%	100%				23%	77%	100%
Purnea	40%	60%	100%	21%	79%	100%				0%	100%	100%
Nalanda	33%	67%	100%	100%	0%	100%				100%	0%	100%
Urban 1	14%	86%	100%	33%	67%	100%				0%	100%	100%
Urban 2	33%	67%	100%	40%	60%	100%				50%	50%	100%
Total	31%	69%	100%	32%	68%	100%				25%	75%	100%

### Decision making

It was a reassuring finding that 74% of all VSS members interviewed said that decisions were taken unanimously or by consensus. 11% said that decision making was dominated by influential committee members and 7% said decisions were taken based on majority opinion.

Finally, there was no clear verdict on whether the agenda for VSS meetings is prepared before hand with 41% saying it was and 38% saying it was not. This practice was best followed in Purnea district and most poorly followed in Patna district. Here urban districts did not fare as well as the rural districts. Overall, the VSS seemed to have a good practice of record keeping with 80% of all members saying that the proceedings of meeting were written down. There was not much variation between the rural and urban districts.

### Record keeping

More than 85% of interviewed BRCCs and CRCCs affirmed this by stating that VSS regularly maintained the meeting register.

## **3. Roles, functions and activities**

### ***Policy guidelines***

The Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000 outlines the role and functions of the VSS in a fair amount of detail under the broad head of 'rights and responsibilities'. These include ensuring 100% enrolment of all children in the catchment area of the concerned school, overseeing the arrangement and serving of the mid day meal, ensuring regular attendance of all students, fixing the school opening and closing timing and informing district, block and cluster education officials of such decisions. Broadly, the Act empowers the VSS to take any decision it considers necessary for promoting primary education in the village. Further functions specified in the Act are as follows:

### Ensuring teacher attendance

- Ensuring regular and timely attendance of all teachers

- If a teacher including the principal is absent without giving notice or taking prior permission or arrives an hour after the school's start time, the VSS has the right to register the teacher as absent.
- The VSS can also impose fines on teachers in case of unapproved absences. At the same time, teacher can also present their case to the VSS which will then be expected to make an appropriate decision
- The VSS will also approve emergency leave taken by all teachers include the principal.

#### Organizing extra-curricular activities

- The VSS is expected to organize sports, cultural events and any other extra-curricular activities considered important for all round student development.

The VSS guidelines also suggest issues that can be discussed in the monthly meetings. These include:

- Total working days in the month
- Student enrolment status
- List of out of school children
- Percentage of student attendance
- Percentage of teacher attendance
- Number of days teachers spent teaching
- Number of days teachers spent on non-teaching activities
- Topics covered in the syllabus
- Use of TLM in the classroom
- Number of days school principal was absent due to official/administrative work
- Status of mid day meal and distribution of scholarships
- Use of school grant (Rs 2000) and school maintenance grant (Rs 4000/Rs 7500 per year)
- Protect and maintain material resources and infrastructure of the school
- Planning for organizing various fund-raising activities for the school development fun
- Fix parent teacher meetings

- Organise cultural programmes every Sunday and assembly/prayer in school every day
- Involving interested government officials/businessmen/other experienced community members to address the school community on any education related issue

***In practice***

Awareness of functions

Overall, 66% of all VSS members interviewed were aware of the role of the committee in increasing student enrolment in schools and 60% of its role in monitoring teacher attendance. Awareness of all other functions seemed to be much lower, with the lowest levels of awareness of the VSS's role in teacher motivation (24%), mobilizing resources (31%) and preparing the school work plan (30%).

**Table 4.10.** VSS members' perceptions regarding the functions of the VSS

Functions	Districts						
	East Champaran	Darbhanga	Purnea	Nalanda	Vaishali	Patna	Total
N	97	100	96	97	50	50	490
Child enrollment (%)	9	16	13	17	8	4	66
Effective schl functioning (%)	7	5	10	11	4	1	38
Motivate parents (%)	7	4	6	14	2	1	33
Improve school admin (%)	6	6	9	11	4	0	36
Teacher attendance	11	13	14	13	6	3	60
Motivate teachers (%)	3	3	6	10	3	0	24
Prepare school work plan (%)	6	1	7	11	3	1	30
Mobilize resources (%)	6	4	8	11	1	1	31
Other (%)	1	2	1	0	1	2	6

Don't know (%)	3	1	1	0	1	3	0
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However, Table 4.9 shows that there is some variation in awareness of functions across districts. Nalanda district stands out with VSS members showing high levels of awareness of a range of roles and functions. Notably, Patna district stands out for the lowest levels of awareness among all districts and across most functions. The highest percentage of 'don't know' responses was also found in Patna district.

#### School visits and activities

When asked more concretely about how often they visited the school, 62% of the total respondents said they went more than once a month, 11% said on special occasions, 9% once a month, 8% less than once a month and 9% never. In other words, well over half of all VSS members interviewed do make regular and frequent visits to the school.

**Table 4.11** Frequency of visits to school by VSS members

District	More than once a month		once a month		Less than once a month		On special occasions		Never		Don't know		Total	
<b>East Champaran</b>	49	51	7	7	4	4	12	13	24	25	0	0	96	100
<b>Darbhangha</b>	59	61	9	9	8	8	17	18	3	3	0	0	96	100
<b>Purnea</b>	50	53	12	13	18	19	6	6	8	8	0	0	95	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	72	77	3	3	3	3	13	14	3	3	0	0	94	100
<b>Vaishali</b>	33	72	8	17	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	7	46	100
<b>Patna</b>	25	68	5	14	1	3	2	5	4	11	0	0	37	100
<b>Total</b>	288	62	44	9	35	8	51	11	43	9	3	1	464	100

When committee members were asked what they did during these visits, the majority of responses pertained to monitoring teacher attendance and punctuality, followed by overseeing the mid day meal. This finding corresponds to committee members' awareness of the functions of the VSS, as described above.

Monitoring student attendance and ensuring that teaching and learning takes place assumed similar importance in terms of the activities undertaken during school visits. 66% of all VSS members interviewed said that they had undertaken measures for children who did not attend school. Surprisingly, very few responses referred to the monitoring of civil works. When asked whether the VSS had undertaken any construction work and/or its supervision in 2008-2009, 63% said that they had not.

**Table 4.12** Principal activities of the VSS

Activity	East Champaran		Darbhanga		Purnea		Nalanda		Vaishali		Patna		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Monitor teachers	13	15	18	21	31	36	22	26		0	1	1	85	100
Monitor teaching/learning	9	22	11	27	10	24	3	7	2	5	6	15	41	100
Monitor MDM	12	16	10	13	27	36	22	29	1	1	3	4	75	100
Monitor civil works		0	4	67	1	17	1	17					6	100
Monitor stu. attendance	7	17	12	29	16	38	5	12			2	5	43	100
Monitor cleanliness	4	36	1	9	4	36	2	18			0	0	11	100

Shikshak theek se padha rahein hai ya nain' (Is the teacher teaching well), 'Bachon ki padhai likhai dekhte hain' (we look at children's reading and writing), 'bachon ki padhai likhai ki vyavastha par dhyan dete hai' (we focus on the study arrangements of the children in the school) were some of the responses that indicated that VSS members were aware of their role in ensuring teaching and learning takes place in the school.

#### 4. Finance related functions and activities

##### *Policy guidelines*

In addition to the functions mentioned above, the VSS has also been entrusted with the management of the VSS development fund. The Act outlines the finance related functions of the VSS as follows:



- The VSS can create a development fund by collecting individual contributions from the community and other sources, organizing cultural programmes etc.
- The money from this fund will be used according to prescribed guidelines.
- The money from this fund will be deposited in a nationalized bank or post office and will be jointly operated by the principal or a senior teacher and the secretary of the VSS

### ***In practice***

Questions related to financial activities of the VSS were directed only to the secretary of the committee and a few other members of the committee based on their involvement in and understanding of the finances of the VSS. A total of 196 members were interviewed under this section.

Almost all (93%) of respondents were aware that the VSS had a bank account. The majority of respondents said that financial record keeping for the VSS was done by the school principal.

86% of all respondents said that financial transactions of the VSS were discussed in monthly meetings. Of the rural districts, this practice is followed most regularly in Nalanda district. Purnea district shows the poorest practice of discussing financial transactions in monthly meetings.

**Table 4.13** VSS members' familiarity with financial records

District	Yes		No		Don't know		Total respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
E Champaran	25	96	1	4	0	0	26	100
Darbhanga	38	76	0	0	12	24	50	100
Purnea	18	86	3	14	0	0	21	100
Nalanda	76	90	4	5	4	5	84	100
Vaishali	5	71	2	29	0	0	7	100
Patna	6	75	1	13	1	13	8	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>

In response to a question on whether the VSS's accounts get audited, it was found that 74% did. Once again Nalanda shows the best practice of auditing accounts.

**Table 4.14** VSS members' knowledge of whether VSS accounts are audited

District	Yes		No		Don't know		Total respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
E Champaran	25	96	1	4	0	0	26	100
Darbhanga	21	42	7	14	22	44	50	100
Purnea	18	86	3	14	0	0	21	100
Nalanda	73	87	4	5	7	8	84	100

<b>Urban 1</b>	3	43	3	43	1	14	7	100
<b>Urban 2</b>	5	63	2	25	1	13	8	100
<b>Total</b>	145	74	20	10	31	16	196	100

However, the majority of responses indicated that no external agency audits the accounts of the VSS and it is primarily the VSS members including the secretary and chairperson who check accounts themselves and in some cases the school principal or other teachers.

An important function of the VSS is to prepare the annual work plan and budget for the school. However barely half of all respondents (54%) said that a school plan and budget had been prepared while the remaining said it hadn't or didn't know. Of the respondents who said that a school plan had been created, some said that a meeting was called and the budget and plan emerged from a discussion and collective agreement of all members present. Others said that the school plan was decided by the school principal, secretary and chairperson. The majority of respondents also said that financial transactions, accounts and other financial records of the VSS were discussed in meetings.



## CHAPTER V

### FUNCTIONING OF VSS IN URBAN AREAS

The VSS in urban areas function in a different context, with different socio-economic dynamics and within a different administrative set up. However, the VSS Act does not differentiate between the two areas and outlines the same structure, norms of composition and functions of committees in urban and rural areas. So while the tables above indicate figures separately for each sample district, an independent analysis of the structure and functioning of VSS in urban areas will help in understanding the difference in functioning of the same committee in two different contexts. This analysis has been limited to a few important indicators since all tables in this report separately indicate figures for urban districts.

#### Formation and composition

10 wards from each of the urban districts, Patna and Vaishali were selected for the survey and a total of 100 VSS members were interviewed. From the information provided by the head teacher on all the VSS members, it was found that like in the rural areas, men dominated the VSS even in the urban areas, with only 34% female members.

**Table 5.1.** Composition of VSS members in urban areas by gender

Male		Female		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%
189	66	99	34	288	100

**Table 5.2.** Composition of VSS members in urban areas by social category

General		SC		ST		OBC		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
33	13	86	34	7	3	126	50	252	100

The same pattern of caste composition is seen even in the urban VSS with the predominance of OBC members followed by SC members. The type of membership follows the same pattern as rural areas with 87% of members being elected.

**Table 5.3.** Composition of VSS members in urban areas by type of membership

Elected		Nominated		Ex-Officio		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

251	87	28	10	8	3	287	100
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The VSS in the urban areas had a high proportion of illiterate members compared to the rural areas and almost 3/4<sup>ths</sup> of members having only studied up to the primary level or below.

**Table 5.4.** Composition of VSS members in urban areas by highest education level attained

Illiterate		Up to Upper Primary		Up to Higher Secondary		Graduate and above		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
227	38	190	32	132	22	41	7	590	100

The level of awareness with regard to the formation of the VSS was relatively lower at 75%. Members of the General category were the least aware. Further, awareness of the tenure of the VSS was also lower in the urban areas with only 51% of respondent giving the correct answer of 3 years. A similar pattern was observed when it came to awareness of the number of VSS meetings to be held in a year. Only 16% of the respondent gave the correct answer of 1 meeting per month i.e. 12 meetings per year. Another interesting observation was that the level of awareness of women was considerably higher than men.

Participation of women and SC/ST members reported was also lower in the urban areas.

**Table 5.5.** Awareness of VSS members in urban areas by gender and social category

Sample Size (N)	Awareness about formation of the Committee						
	Total (%)	Gender-Wise		Caste/Category Wise			
		Male (%)	Female (%)	General (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	OBC (%)
100	75	80	72	67	71	75	82

**Table 5.6.** Awareness of VSS members in urban areas regarding tenure, by gender and social category

Sample Size (N)	Awareness about tenure of the Committee						
	Total (%)	Gender-Wise		Caste/Category Wise			
		Male (%)	Female (%)	General (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	OBC (%)
100	51	59	53	56	50	63	50

**Table 5.7.** Awareness of VSS members in urban areas regarding frequency of meetings, by gender and social category

Sample Size (N)	Awareness about Number of Meeting in a year						
	Total (%)	Gender-Wise		Caste/Category Wise			
		Male (%)	Female (%)	General (%)	SC (%)	ST (%)	OBC (%)
100	16	13	22	22	21	13	14

**Table 5.8.** Women’s and SC/ST participation in VSS meetings, according to VSS members

Women’s Participation				SC/ST Participation			
Yes		No		Yes		No	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
64	64	7	7	68	68	7	7

In terms of attendance of members, 54% responses indicated than more than half of all members are present at meetings. Compared to the rural district a higher proportion of members (22%) said that all members attend meetings.

The VSS in urban areas do not have a good record of preparing the meeting agenda beforehand. Only 27% respondents said this practice had been adhered to. In terms of recording the minutes of the meeting, the trend was similar to what was found in the rural districts. Close to 70% respondents said the minutes of the meeting were documented in writings.

**Training and functions**

While overall there has been a poor record for conducting training for VSS members, this number was shocking in the urban context. Only 10% members stated that they had received training. This raises serious concerns about the ability of the VSS to function in the absence of any capacity building.

**Table 5.9.** Responses of VSS members in urban areas regarding functions of the VSS

Sample Size in Urban Area (N)	Functions of the Committee						
	To enroll all the children in the school	Ensuring effective functioning of the school	Motivate parents to participate in school activities	Improvement in school administration	Motivation of teachers to perform their duties	Solving problems related to enrolment, attendance and other educational issues	Mobilize resources required for school development

	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
100	58	58	24	24	16	16	22	22	61	61	29	29	12	12	44	44

Surprisingly, motivating teachers to perform their duties was the VSS function the highest proportion of members were aware of followed by enrolling children in school and ensuring teacher attendance. The lowest levels of awareness were with regard to the financial function of mobilizing resources for school development and motivating parents to participate in school activities.

A relatively high percentage of VSS members (58%) said that they visited the school more than once a month. As for the actual activities performed, answers varied from rural districts. The highest proportion of VSS members said that they help by improving school management (71%) followed by monitoring activities in the school (58%) and encouraging parental involvement in the school (57%).

When asked whether concrete action had been taken to bring drop out children back to school, 62% responded in the affirmative.

**Table 5.10** Responses of VSS members in urban areas regarding activities with respect to drop out children

Yes		No		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%
62	62	38	38	100	100

Finally, there is not much of a distinction between the functioning of the VSS in rural and urban districts. While relatively lower levels of awareness are an important finding, composition, functions and activities are similar in the two contexts.

## CHAPTER VI CAPACITY BUILDING, CONVERGENCE AND LINKAGES

### 1. Training

#### *Policy guidelines*

The Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000 specifies that for capacity building of VSS members, the secretary and chairperson of all Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis will be invited for a day-long seminar conducted at the block level. In addition to this other programmes for capacity building of VSS members will be regularly organized at the block level.

#### *In practice*

##### Structure of trainings

From group discussions with various district, block and cluster level officials in the different sample districts we learnt that the government conducts two types of trainings. The first is a two day training module for community leaders called 'Lok Sashaktikaran ki Pahal' which takes place once a year at the cluster level and to which the VSS chairperson and secretary, 1 female member, the school principal, the Mukhiya's nominee and 1 anganwadi worker are invited.

On the first day of this training, participants are introduced to the objectives and provisions of the SSA and specifically the Bihar Education Programme. This is followed by a discussion on out of school children- causes, concerns and how to address them. Participants are then familiarised with all the education schemes and programmes that are being implemented and for which money is being allocated and spent eg. Mukhya Mantri Samagra Vidyalaya Vikas Yojana. Participants are explained the importance of mapping the catchment area, regular and accurate filling and monitoring of the *Bal Panji* or the student register, financial papers and other forms of documentation. On the second day, training focuses on the constitution, role, responsibilities etc. of the VSS which include developing a school education plan. The need for coordination between the VSS with the panchayati system is also addressed. Participants are also familiarised with the RTI and its application.<sup>14</sup>

The training manual is comprehensive, very systematically organized, and is good resource for both the trainer and trainees. Interestingly, the district administration in Purnea and Darbhanga had even created their own training material which included a handbook, pamphlets, songs, education related slogans etc.

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<sup>14</sup> Summarised from the 2 day training module for community leaders manual, 'Lok Sashaktikaran ki Pahal'. The manual includes policy documents and notes on the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, NPEGL, KGBV, Bal Sansad, school cleanliness and health education, mid day meal scheme, Right to Information Act, computer based education etc.



The Darbhanga district VSS in charge told us that ‘Training takes place for 40 people at a time and is conducted by two trainers. It takes place at the Panchayat level and happens once a year. Where ad-hoc committees are working, both members attend training’.

The second type of training offered is a one day orientation programme which takes places at the school level to which all VSS members are invited. The Darbhanga VSS in charge explained that ‘For the 1 day orientation, one trainer goes to every school and 10-15 schools in total’.

A discussion with the state VSS in-charge helped us to go beyond the policy norms to better understand the planning that goes into organizing and planning VSS trainings.

#### Implementation of training programmes

However, despite the definition of training content and the availability of materials, the survey revealed that 68% of the 490 VSS members interviewed had never received any training. Of the 32% who had received training, responses for the duration of training varied from 1-3 days. 7% of all VSS members did not respond to the question which may be is perhaps an indication that they did not receive any training either.

‘The training schedule needs to keep in mind wedding dates, the harvesting season and other such local circumstances. We revise our training every year. This year we have added the RTI, Supreme Court’s order that teachers should not be involved in non-teaching activities, how to fill a fund utilization certificate etc. We add experiences from the community and weave it into the training. There is a need to create a learning environment in the village’

-State VSS incharge,  
Patna

Although BRCCs, CRCCs and trainers were asked how many participants were invited and how many attended, responses were unclear. For example, one BRP in Darbhanga candidly declared that ‘there is never 100% attendance. No one is willing to give more than 2 hours of their time’, while a BRP in Purnea’s experience was that ‘many people don’t come on the second day. Many VSS members are farmers and work in labour intensive jobs’. When the content of the 1 day orientation involving all VSS members was being discussed with the district official, a senior teacher from a primary school Darbhanga district who was also present, confessed, ‘I haven’t heard about this happening in my cluster!’

**Table 6.1** Duration of training for VSS members according to different respondents

District	N=	VSS member		BRC coordinator		CRC coordinator		Trainer		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
			458			10		20		10	
E Champaran	0 days	62	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	62	12
	1 day	1	0	0	0	3	15	0	0	4	1
	2 days	25	5	2	20	0	0	0	0	27	5
	3 days	8	2	0	0	1	5	2	20	11	2

<b>Darbhanga</b>	0 days	63	14	0	0	1	5	0	0	64	13
	1 day	16	3	0	0	1	5	0	0	17	3
	2 days	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	10	3	1
	3 days	15	3	2	20	2	10	2	20	21	4
<b>Purnea</b>	0 days	45	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	9
	1 day	1	0	0	0	3	15	0	0	4	1
	2 days	24	5	1	10	0	0	0	0	25	5
	3 days	24	5	1	10	1	5	0	0	26	5
<b>Nalanda</b>	0 days	53	12	0	0	0	0	1	10	54	11
	1 day	2	0	0	0	2	10	1	10	5	1
	2 days	21	5	1	10	0	0	0	0	22	4
	3 days	16	3	1	10	2	10	0	0	19	4
<b>Urban 1</b>	0 days	45	10	0	0	1	5	1	10	47	9
	1 day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2 days	0	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	1	0
	3 days	1	0	0	0	1	5	1	10	3	1
<b>Urban 2</b>	0 days	30	7	1	10	0	0	0	0	31	6
	1 day	1	0	0	0	1	5	1	10	3	1
	2 days	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	3 days	2	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	3	1
<b>Total</b>	0 days	298	65	1	10	2	10	2	20	303	61
	1 day	21	5	0	0	10	50	2	20	33	7
	2 days	73	16	5	50	0	0	1	10	79	16
	3 days	66	14	4	40	8	40	5	50	83	17

When asked who generally attended these trainings, most respondents (6 out of 8 BRCCs and 15 out of 20 CRCCs) said that some members of all Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis attend. Very few respondents claimed that all members of a VSS attended.

In terms of the agency that generally conducted training, the majority of all responses of VSS members indicated that it was block (49%) and district level (29%) functionaries who conducted training.

#### Content of training

Of the VSS members who had received training hardly any knew what the training was called. A few responses recalled that the training was on '*lok bhagidari*' or community participation. Although the manual content is extensive and exhaustive, many respondents were unable to describe what was covered in the training.

Of those VSS members who were able to describe their training, responses included the following topics: enrolment, attendance and retention of students, academic and learning related issues, administration, finances, civil works, monitoring teacher attendance and work,

general roles and responsibilities of VSS members and the mid day meal. The issues most frequently referred to were: monitoring teacher attendance and work, and monitoring and arranging the mid day meal. Training on civil works was least referred to and policy and legal training was not referred to at all.

**Table 6.2** Content of training of VSS members

District	Enrolment, attendance and retention		Academic		Admin		Financial		Civil works		Policy / Legal		Monitoring teacher attendance and work		MDM		Roles and responsibilities	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
East Champaran	8	13	12	19	4	36	1	20	0	0	0	0	13	15	12	16	4	24
Darbhanga	21	34	11	18	1	9	1	20	4	50	0	0	18	21	10	13	5	29
Purnea	17	28	19	31	4	36	0	0	1	13	0	0	31	36	27	36	5	29
Nalanda	8	13	11	18	2	18	2	40	3	38	0	0	22	26	22	29	1	6
Vaishali	0	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	6
Patna	7	11	6	10	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	4	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Effectiveness of training**

#### The view from trainers

8 of the 9 trainers interviewed said that they had received training on VSS policy and guidelines as well as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan norms before they themselves started conducting VSS training. Responses for the duration of this training ranged from 1- 4 days. All said that they were satisfied with the training.

The district VSS in charges in Darbhanga, East Champaran and Purnea explained the 'training of trainers' better. There are 4 master trainers per district who are trained in Patna for 4 days. These trainers then train 65-100 trainers in the district who are selected at the block level and then go through a 4 day residential workshop. District officials said they would also attend these training and sometimes train themselves as well. These trainers are then distributed to administer training across clusters.

Both the content and the methods of training appear to vary across workshops. When trainers were asked what topics they had covered in their last training, responses were varied. One said they trained participants on the roles and responsibilities of the VSS, provisions of the SSA, what the Bihar Education Project is about etc. The meaning of community participation, ways to increase enrolment, how to make an annual plan was also discussed. One trainer in Nalanda even said that language and arithmetic pedagogical methods were discussed in the training. Some used conventional training methods such as lecturing and using the blackboard while others said they engage participants in interactive activities like role plays and skits.

The biggest problems trainers said they face are low attendance and participants getting restless after a few hours into the training. Trainers also made several suggestions to improve trainings. First, training should also be held at the cluster level. Second, training should be residential. Third, that all VSS members should be graduates. Fourth, training should be compulsory and membership in the VSS should be contingent on attendance.

#### VSS members' views

VSS members who had received training were asked in what way they found the training useful. One member said, 'we understood what the roles and responsibilities of the VSS is and how we can improve school management.' Another said 'we found out how to increase school enrolment', a comment which was echoed by several others. 'The training helped in managing accounts', said one member. One insightful response was that the training helped in 'understanding how to bring VSS members and other community members together for school improvement'. However, there were several who were critical and said the training was not helpful at all, one saying 'sirf do dino ka picnic maana gaya' (It was like a two day picnic).

'Sirf do dino ka picnic maana gaya'  
(It was like a two day picnic).  
VSS member,  
Darbhanga district

6 out of the 9 trainers interviewed for this study said that they received oral and written feedback from the trainees. This included increasing the duration of training from 2 to 3 days as well as increasing the frequency of meetings held in a year. The district VSS in charge showed us a file with all the written feedback received from the trainings. These feedback forms reiterated what the trainers had pointed out. A primary school teacher present during our discussion with the district administration officials in East Champaran suggested that CRCCs should also get involved in training.

In summary, based on the data collected for this study, it seems fair to conclude that the training of VSS members in Bihar has been well thought out and designed; but that the implementation on the ground needs more attention.

## **2. Convergence and coordination**

### ***VSS and PRIs***

In light of the discussion of the earlier discussion on decentralization of governance in general and education administration in specific, the structural and functional linkages between Panchayats and the VSS needs to be studied carefully. Under the head 'Relationship with Panchayats', the Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000, specifies that the VSS is a sub-committee of the sukh-savidha committee of the Gram Panchayat and functions under it, in accordance with

'We understood what the roles and responsibilities of the VSS is and how we can improve school' management.'

-VSS member, East Champaran

Section 25 (i)(iii) of the Bihar Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam, 1993.

The Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance 2006 (which replaces the 1993 Adhiniyam) also makes specific references to primary education and the VSS. Point 22 (xiii) lists 'promotion of public awareness and participation in primary and secondary education' and 'ensuring full enrollment and attendance in primary schools' as one of the functions of the gram panchayat. Point 25 (iv) states that a standing committee on education will be constituted through an election among its members 'for performing functions relating to education, including primary, secondary and mass education, libraries and cultural activities'. In addition to these linkages there are also other points of convergence such as payment of teacher salaries. This is because the VSS is responsible for monitoring teacher attendance and is empowered to recommend deductions in teachers' salaries.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000 states that 2 Mukhiya nominees will be a part of the VSS. However for this nomination itself to be meaningful, it is important to know whether the Mukhiya himself/herself has also received some kind of orientation on education. Of all the Mukhiyas interviewed, only 30% had received some kind of education related training. Of those who said they had received training, most could not name the training. While only 21 of the 490 VSS members interviewed were nominated members, of these only 5 had received training. Also, these members do not receive any special training on promoting coordination and synergies between PRIs and the VSS.

Nevertheless the Mukhiya provided information on the different education facilities and programmes in the surveyed village/s in their panchayat as well as several details about the VSS. When they were specifically asked whether they knew what the functions of the VSS are, responses indicated that Mukhiyas were fairly well informed and responses were evenly spread out. These included, getting children enrolled in school, creating a list of tasks to be completed in the school, encouraging parents to participate in school activities, improving school management, motivating teachers, resolving enrolment and attendance issues, organizing resources for school development. In terms of how they felt the VSS had been most helpful to the school. The three most frequently referred to activities included organizing and monitoring the mid day meal, monitoring teacher attendance and monitoring school activities in general. Helping children with special needs (CWSN) and organizing cultural programmes was least referred to.

A study of policy documents indicates that there is no institutionalized relationship between the Mukhiya and the VSS but it is important to know to what extent the Mukhiya is directly involved in school functioning in his Panchayat. The majority of Mukhiyas interviewed said that they inspected schools in their Panchayat. Most Mukhiyas also said that they had last visited the sample school less than 4 months ago. Even when district officials were asked for their view on the relationship between PRIs and the VSS, they acknowledged that there was no 'formal' relationship although sometimes Mukhiyas take an active part by attending VSS meetings, trainings etc.

### **VSS, CRCs and BRCs**

To be able to understand the structural and functional linkages between the VSS and cluster and block officials, 20 Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators and 10 Block Resource Centre Coordinators were interviewed across all districts. In addition to this focus group discussions were held with district, block and cluster level officials at the district SSA offices. All VSS members were also asked specific questions about the interaction of the VSS with these officials.

#### Meetings with BRCCs and CRCCs

Responses of BRCCs when they were asked how many times that met with each VSS in the past year responses varied from 1 to 24 times. However, some were more vague and said 'often' or 'when the need arises' or 'frequently'. The responses of CRCCs were as inconclusive with their answers varying from 1 to 42 meetings held with every VSS in the past year. The ambiguity of these figures was echoed by the views of administrative officials in the focus group discussions. A CRCC from East Champaran for example said 'There is no established system of monitoring. When we make visits to the field we speak to the school principal and look into the activities of the VSS where necessary such as at times of a dispute'. He added that 'there is a monitoring register that lies at the school. We sign on this after our visit. There is no established procedure for doing the same for VSS registers.' From these discussions it appeared that while block and cluster officials visit schools on a fixed date with pre determined supervision agenda, monitoring of the VSS is not prioritized.

According to the Nalanda VSS in charge 'there is no established channel for grievance redressal either at the cluster or block level. Complaints from the VSS are directed towards block or district officials but there is no real norm'. The absence of a system of communication, supervision and support was reiterated by figures which indicate that more than 80% of interviewed block and cluster level officials do not receive reports from VSSs.

The issues discussed in these meetings differed for each group. 6 out of 9 BRCCs said school, grants, schemes and general school development issues were discussed. CRCCs responses were more varied. 7 said learning was discussed, 7 said school grants and schemes was discussed, 6 said the mid day meal was discussed and 5 said enrolment and retention was discussed.

**Table 6.3** Issues discussed by BRCCs in meetings

District	School grants, schemes, development		Other		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
E Champaran	1	100	0	0	1	100
Darbhanga	1	50	1	50	2	100
Purnea	1	50	1	50	2	100
Nalanda	1	50	1	50	2	100
Vaishali	1	100	0	0	1	100
Patna	1	100	0	0	1	100

<b>Total</b>	6	67	3	33	9	100
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**Table 6.4** Issues discussed by CRCCs in meetings

District	Learning		School grants, schemes, development		MDM		Enrolment, retention		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>East Champaran</b>	2	29	2	29	2	29	1	14	7	100
<b>Darbhanga</b>	2	29	2	29	2	29	1	14	7	100
<b>Purnea</b>	0	0	0	0	1	33	2	67	3	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100
<b>Vaishali</b>	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	1	100
<b>Patna</b>	1	20	2	40	1	20	1	20	5	100
<b>Total</b>	7	28	7	28	6	24	5	20	25	100

## CHAPTER VII REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE OF THE VSS

Is the institutionalization of a school management committee adequate to ensure wider community participation and collective action towards improving school functioning? Are intermediaries in the form of VSS members able to ensure people's participation in decision making? Are these formal bodies of community participation truly representative? To try to answer these questions, in this chapter we summarize the responses of stakeholders who are not themselves VSS members when they were asked for their views on the VSS functioning in their village. Respondents who were asked these questions included parents, teachers, and functionaries of Cluster and Block Resource Centres.

### Parents' opinions of the VSS

Of the 100 parents interviewed, 67% had studied upto Std VIII or less. This includes a significant 33% of all parents who had never attended school. 46% worked as casual labourers and 26% were farmers. In every district, parents from the OBC social category formed the majority, followed by SC parents. Parents from the general or ST categories were very few.

**Table 7.1** Parents by social category

District	GEN	SC	ST	OBC	Total
East Champaran	2	5	0	13	20
Darbhangha	2	6	2	10	20
Purnea	3	5	2	10	20
Nalanda	4	6	0	9	19
Vaishali	1	2	3	4	10
Patna	1	2	0	7	10
<b>Total</b>	13	26	7	53	99

**Table 7.2** Parents' occupation

District	Agriculture	Business	Service	Labourer	Others	Total
East Champaran	8	6	2	4	0	20
Darbhangha	6	1	1	11	1	20
Purnea	8	3	1	6	2	20
Nalanda	4	0	1	14	0	19
Vaishali	0	0	0	8	2	10
Patna	0	1	1	3	5	10
<b>Total</b>	26	11	6	46	10	99

The majority of parents interviewed seemed to have a positive view of the sampled school. 80% of all parents said that teachers attend school regularly and 60% felt that these teachers taught well.



The majority of parents interviewed lived less than 1 km from the school. The proximity of these parents to the school is important because it makes it relatively easy for them to monitor school activities. When they were asked about what kind of development work had taken place in the school in the last 5 years, 22% said that no work had taken place, 29% said new toilets had been constructed, 55% said that new classrooms had been built, 24% said more teachers were hired and 24% said TLM had been bought. Although these responses were not compared with actual development work in each school, it appears that parents were in general aware of what was happening in the school.

When asked about the VSS specifically, close to 40% parents said that there is a VSS currently functioning in their village, 23% said that there was a VSS in the past but was not functioning currently. However, more than a fifth of all parents interviewed (21%) did not know anything about the VSS. In other words, although a significant percentage of parents appear to be aware of the VSS, a large number didn't have any information.

Parents were then asked what kind of help the VSS had given to the school. Monitoring teacher attendance seemed to be the most commonly referred to activity (47%) followed by organizing and monitoring of the mid day meal (43%) and increasing student enrolment (38%). Other responses included improving school management (27%), monitoring civil works (21%), preparing the school plan (21%), organizing additional resources for school development (19%) and encouraging parents to participate in school activities (17%). However, only 13% of parents felt that the VSS had helped in organizing cultural programmes, re-enrolling children who had dropped out and made special arrangements in the school for the education of CWSN. It is interesting to note that of the 100 parents interviewed, 40% felt that the VSS had helped in improving school functioning to a large extent while 43% did not know. These figures suggest that a large proportion of parents are not sufficiently informed about the roles and functions of the VSS. The response was rather discouraging in the urban districts. 80% parents answered 'don't know' which might be indicative of low levels of awareness among parents but can also be a proxy for poor functioning of the VSS.

**Table 7.3** Parents' perceptions regarding VSS assistance to the school

District	Large extent		Some extent		Very little		Not at all		Don't know		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
E Champaran	8	40	3	15	1	5	0	0	8	40	20	100
Darbhanga	6	30	2	10	3	15	2	10	7	35	20	100
Purnea	12	60	1	5	0	0	0	0	7	35	20	100
Nalanda	11	55	0	0	2	10	2	10	5	25	20	100
Urban 1	3	30	1	10	0	0	0	0	6	60	10	100
Urban 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	100	10	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Parents were also asked to list the three biggest problems with the school and also suggest solutions to resolve them. Our findings reveal that 57% of all parents pointed out various infrastructural problems such as lack of toilet and water facilities, adequate classrooms, furniture etc. The most predominant problem was that the school did not have its own building. Some parents even pointed out that the school did not have any sanctioned land on which a permanent school building could be built. 28% of all parents identified the lack of teachers and low punctuality as one of the major problems afflicting the school. Only 10% referred specifically to the quality of teaching.

In Piprakothi block of East Champaran district, a school had been functioning out of a shed with a leaky thatched roof precariously held up by some bamboo poles for over 2 years. We learnt that the enrolment in the school was well above 180 and on a day with reasonably good attendance most children would spill out of the shed and be made to sit in the surrounding fields. It was raining heavily on the day of the visit and only one of the two teachers arrived, more than an hour after our surveyors did. There were about 15-20 children milling about well before the teacher arrived. We were told that the rest of the children did not attend regularly during the monsoon months because there was no place to sit. The fields around the school were muddy and dotted with puddles. From a discussion with VSS members and other members of the village community we found out that the land on which the school shed stood had been contributed by a village elder for temporary use. Despite sending repeated applications to the block office for sanctioning land, the issue had not been resolved because of some legal formalities over the name of the school which had the word 'harijan' which is not permissible under the law. This issue was not resolved even when the donor decided to hand over the land permanently to build a school building. Money for undertaking this construction still had not been approved.

When parents were asked about their views on the quality of education in private schools versus government schools, strong opinions were voiced. Those in favour of private schools said ‘our children will learn more in a private school because there teachers are not involved in non teaching activities’. Several parents said that ‘in private schools, parents pay fees and are therefore able to hold the teachers accountable’. One more specifically referred to better teaching methods, ‘in private schools teachers regularly revise what was taught the previous day. They teach with more interest and commitment’.

Several expressed their dissatisfaction with government schools. One parent said, ‘there is shortage of teachers in government schools. Children don’t receive any special attention or care’ while another said ‘teachers don’t come on time and the quality of education is very poor. The quality of education in government schools in very poor. We have only enrolled our children for the certificate they receive after taking the school exam. Otherwise our children attend classes in a private school’. On the other hand there were some parents who stated clear reasons for their preference for government schools, ‘we prefer government schools because of all the benefits and facilities such as mid day meal, scholarship, books etc which are available to our children for free’ and ‘the government school certificate has a recognition which is very important for my child’s future’. Other recognized their own role in ensuring the quality of education and said that ‘the quality of education in government schools is also dependent on the level of involvement of the parents.’

### **Teachers’ opinions of the VSS**

For the decentralization of school management to succeed the link between community participation and school processes needs to be well defined. This is one of issues at the core of a multi-country study on local educational governance (Dunne et al 2007) undertaken by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE). The report points out ‘in relationships between local education authorities and schools, there is some ambiguity over who is responsible to whom and for what’ (ibid p 18).

For the present study, a total of 200 teaching staff were interviewed, consisting of the head teacher and another teacher in each of the 100 schools visited. Their responses are analysed and presented separately because of their differing levels of engagement with and knowledge about the VSS. It is important to note than in the absence of a VSS some of these teachers were a part of the ad hoc committee constituted in its place. The ad hoc committees comprise of the head teacher and another senior teacher.

**Table 7.4** Teachers interviewed for the study

District	Regular teacher	Assistant teacher	Other	Total
E Champaran	1	7	12	20
Darbhanga	0	17	3	20
Purnea	3	6	11	20

<b>Nalanda</b>	0	12	8	20
<b>Vaishali</b>	0	8	2	10
<b>Patna</b>	0	6	4	10
<b>Total</b>	4	56	40	100

One way of instituting a clear framework for how responsibilities between the VSS and teachers will be shared is to involve teachers in training on community participation. Given that teachers are expected to spearhead localized decision making to improve schools and assist the VSS in several ways such as calling for elections, informing parents about VSS meetings, ensuring meeting registers are completed etc, capacity needs to be built accordingly. However this factor seems to have been largely overlooked. 78% of the teachers interviewed said that they had not received any such training. Nevertheless when asked how often they had met the VSS in 2008-2009, responses varied from 0-30.

Although teachers found it difficult to state an exact number, most said that they were in regular contact with the VSS secretary and president if not the other members as meetings often took place in the school campus.

**Table 7.5** Frequency of teachers' contact with the VSS

<b>District</b>	<b>Frequently</b>		<b>Sometimes</b>		<b>Rarely</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>E Champaran</b>	9	45	6	30	5	25	20	100
<b>Darbhangha</b>	8	40	6	30	6	30	20	100
<b>Purnea</b>	11	55	8	40	1	5	20	100
<b>Nalanda</b>	7	35	5	25	8	40	20	100
<b>Urban 1</b>	3	30	2	20	5	50	10	100
<b>Urban 2</b>	6	60	3	30	1	10	10	100
<b>Total</b>	44	44	30	30	26	26	100	100

When teachers were asked if they knew the role and functions of the VSS, 59% said it helped with student enrolment, 51% said the committee monitored teacher attendance and 49% said it helped with monitoring student enrolment. When asked more concretely about how the VSS had helped in school improvement broadly the impression was that VSS had contributed most in community mobilization and least in resource generation.

**Table 7.6** Parents' perception of VSS activities

District	East Champaran		Darbhanga		Purnea		Nalanda		Vaishali		Patna		Total	
N=	20		20		20		20		10		10		100	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Resource generation</b>	2	10	5	25	7	35	2	10	2	20	0	0	19	19
<b>Community mobilization</b>	4	20	4	20	11	55	11	55	3	30	2	20	35	35
<b>Infrastructure</b>	2	10	5	25	9	45	9	45	3	30	4	40	32	32
<b>Maintenance</b>	5	25	5	25	10	50	8	40	3	30	1	10	32	32

45% of head teachers felt that they had received some kind of help from the VSS. When specifically asked what kind of help; enrolment of children, arranging and monitoring the mid day meal and construction and maintenance of the school building were the three areas head teachers felt the VSS had contributed the most towards.

We also asked the head teachers what suggestions they would make for the new VSSs that would be constituted. Analysing these responses is another way of determining their view on the performance of the functioning or past VSS. These suggestions are as follows.

First, In terms of the link between teachers and the VSS some felt that responsibilities of the VSS should either be carried out by the VSS or by teacher. Coordination between the two becomes difficult. On the other hand there were some head teachers who were clear that they should only be given teaching related duties and not those related to the VSS.

Second, many head teachers emphasised the need for a minimum educational qualification should be prescribed as criteria for becoming a VSS member. Many listed other qualities that VSS members should possess such as honesty, selflessness, commitment to education etc. Some said that VSS members need to be aware of education related issues, understand their responsibilities properly and also give enough time to the committee. However only one teacher said that to ensure this training must be more rigorous.

Third, some head teachers said that only parents whose children are enrolled in the school should be allowed to become members of the VSS as this is not always the case. And fourth, a small number of teachers felt that VSS members should be elected through secret ballot. This they believed will ensure that deserving and capable people will become members.

### **BRC and CRC**

Focus group discussions with district, block and cluster officials in East Champaran, Darbhanga, Purnea and Nalanda provided much insight on how administration officials viewed the usefulness and performance of the VSS.

In East Champaran, one of the CRCCs felt that the VSS is an important element of administrative decentralisation. He explained that earlier, teachers would have to handle all school related activities which distracted them from their teaching activities. With the constitution of the VSS, teacher can focus on their job better.

In terms of the specific activities carried out by the VSS, the district VSS in charge said that the committee is quite active in supervising construction activities in the school. He added that the VSS had also played a significant role in getting children enrolled in school. This he explained had been done as part of a 'namankan abhiyan' (enrolment drive). The VSS also monitored the working of the mid day meal by employing the cook, making arrangements for appropriating the grain etc.

*'Yeh log kartavya ki baat na karke, adhikar ki baat karte hai. Haavi ban jaate hai'*

*-Block Resource Person,  
Darbhanga district*

The district VSS in charge in Darbhanga positioned the role of the VSS in a larger move towards decentralization. He said, 'There is a larger decentralization trend that is unfolding and is very important for effective monitoring. Monitoring cannot take place at the micro level without decentralized structures in place. If the VSS becomes more active it can make a big impact on the ground. 'However he felt that this process of democratic decentralization had some weaknesses.

*'Principles are all very good but democracy functions very differently. People need to be literate to be active. Where there is no literacy, people are unable to understand their roles and responsibilities. Another reason is that meetings haven't been monitored properly.'*

*-VSS in charge,  
Darbhanga district*

When specifically asked how active the VSS in Darbhanga district was, he said, 'This is a voluntary post and people in the village are busy with their work. These posts have no monetary compensation. Therefore we find that the Sachiv and Adhyaksh who have more concrete duties and are responsible for money matters are more active.'

In addition to these FGDs, 10 BRCCs and 18 CRCCs were interviewed individually. Their role and coordination with the VSS has already been discussed

in chapter III. Both groups were asked what they felt were the biggest problems faced by the VSS.

Half of all BRCCs interviewed felt that it was low participation in terms of number of members who attend VSS meeting as well as involvement of the parent community in the village that was a major hindrance to the functioning of the VSS. Most CRCCs on the other hand identified lack of coordination and internal bickering among members of the VSS as the biggest constraint to the functioning of the VSS. The other reason cited by CRCCs was lack of cooperation from teachers, which they attributed to teachers' perception of VSS members as being illiterate and unaware of

the policy provisions governing the VSS. One BRP felt that this tenuous relationship between VSS members and government teachers was a result of the confrontational attitude of VSS members: *'Yeh log kartavya ki baat na karke, adhikar ki baat karte hai. Haavi ban jaate hai'*. Vasavi et al (1997) also refers to 'the reluctance of teachers to be subjected to the scrutiny of the VEC'.

'Some teachers in a taluka where educational levels are low referred to the problem of having leaders who are themselves illiterate and disdainful of education. In such areas even many politically active and economically well-off persons continue to be "thumb impression people who carry their stamp pads with them". The teachers question not only the capacity of such leaders to perform functions related to educational matters but also the desirability of making teachers accountable to them.

Insufficient finances and poor economic situation of members was another constraint which was highlighted. The CREATE report also acknowledges that in contexts of poverty, decentralization can produce undesirable outcomes such as capture of local decision making by powerful elite groups. This in way reverses the assumption that decentralisation increases access of the marginalised. The report also quotes a UNESCO study which argues that 'the poor may not be in the position to actively engage in decisions about service delivery due to their lack of political bargaining power.'

## CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this concluding chapter we compare the key features of the current VSS Act (the Bihar Elementary School Education Committee Act, 2007) with the previous Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act, 2000. A brief discussion of the differences between them was included in Chapter 2 of this report. Second, the views of various stakeholders on the future of the new VSS will be presented. Finally we lay out some recommendations for the VSS in Bihar that emerged from the present study, especially in light of the important role accorded to School Management Committees under the Right to Education Act.

By studying the changes introduced through the new VSS Act of 2007 (Table 8.1), it is evident that Bihar had preempted some of the provisions of the Right to Education Act with its renewed stress on ensuring accountability in primary education through local participation. With School Management Committees empowered to make school development plans and monitor school level expenditures, the VSS has emerged as a potentially powerful institution for increasing transparency and accountability in school management.

The Bihar VSS however are somewhat differently poised because of the electoral exercise involved. Holding elections for VSS membership through secret ballot makes the committee more politically significant and therefore may change how the committee is perceived by the local village community, school faculty and administration officials. With this there is a hope that engaging with an electoral process for VSS membership will increase political consciousness and greater awareness among the village community around shared education concerns. However, instituting a democratic institution of this kind is not without its problems. In Bihar where caste has been a defining characteristic of the social, economic and political landscape, caste and community identities will undoubtedly have implications for the VSS as well.

With elaborate norms governing the constitution of the VSS such as defining an electorate that exclusively comprises parents belonging to the school's catchment area, as well as specific reservations for women and backward castes, this trend may be countered to some extent. However, for the new VSS to be effective in catalyzing collective action towards improving school outcomes, links between the VSS and the larger community need to be strengthened; in addition, thought needs to be given to ways of preventing and/or resolving conflicts between VSS members and teachers.

**Table 8.1.** Key features of the Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act (2000) and the Bihar Elementary School Education Committee Act (2007)

Feature	Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act, 2000	Bihar Elementary School Education Committee Act, 2007
Composition	Total 15 members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 9 parents and 3 non parents will be elected</li> <li>▪ 2 mukhya nominees</li> </ul>	Total 15 members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 9 parents</li> <li>▪ 3 non parents of which one must be a retired</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ school principal</li> </ul>	<p>government teacher/ officer/employee, one will be a donor (if available) and one will be a resident of the school catchment area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 ex officio member from the gram panchayat/panchayat samiti/urban body</li> <li>▪ 1 mukhiya nominee</li> <li>▪ school principal</li> </ul>
<b>Election procedure</b>	Election of members will take place through an Aam Sabha	Members will be elected as per the norms prescribed by the state Election Commission and on the basis of the specified electoral roll. Procedural details have been set out in the Bihar Primary School Education Committee Guidelines 2009.
<b>Composition conditions</b>	<p>Of the elected members,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 male and 1 female member must belong to the SC community,</li> <li>▪ 1 male/female member must belong to the ST community, and</li> <li>▪ 1 male/female member must belong to the OBC community.</li> </ul> <p>Since this Act came into force before the creation of Jharkhand it specifies that the VSS which fall under scheduled areas will be subjected to the same norms as the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act. In these areas, more than half the members and the Secretary will belong to the ST community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At least 50% of elected members will be women.</li> <li>▪ Among elected members, at least 1 member must belong to the SC community, 1 to the ST community, 1 from Extremely Backward Castes and 1 from the Backward Caste Category.</li> </ul>
<b>Posts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Secretary and President will be elected by simple consensus among all members.</li> <li>▪ Either the Secretary or the President must be a woman.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Secretary and President will be elected by simple consensus among all members.</li> <li>▪ Either the Secretary or the President must be a woman.</li> </ul>
<b>Term</b>	Three years	Three years
<b>Functions</b>	<p>Ensuring teacher attendance Organizing extra-curricular activities Utilisation and monitoring of the school development fund. Creating work plans for school development Increasing student enrolment Monitoring student attendance Arranging and monitoring the mid day meal</p>	<p>Broadly the same functions as in the earlier Act.</p> <p>In addition, functions specific to the relationship between PRIs and the VSS have been included. The VSS is expected to submit reports to the Panchayat twice a year. PRIs will discuss these reports and make necessary enquiries.</p>

## Perceptions about the future of the VSS

### a. VSS members

Despite extensive policy level deliberations on the constitution of the new VSS, village communities remain largely unaware of the changes taking place. While the new guidelines have received some media attention,<sup>15</sup> dissemination needs to be much more widespread in order to generate awareness and debate around the new structure and functions envisaged for

<sup>15</sup> An example of this is an article in the Rashtriya Sahara (19<sup>th</sup> July 2009) 'Mat Se Banegi Shiksha Samiti', which discusses the changes to the VSS act and emphasizes the increased importance given to women.

the VSS. This lack of information extends even to individuals currently or previously serving as members of the VSS: of the 490 such individuals interviewed for the present study, as many as 60% did not know about the introduction of the new VSS norms. Among the rural districts, the lowest levels of awareness were found in Darbhanga district; however even the urban districts showed poor levels of awareness.

**Table 8.2.** Awareness of VSS members regarding the new VSS Act

District	Know	Don't know	No response	Total
East Champaran	29	66	2	97
Darbhangha	16	79	5	100
Purnea	33	30	33	96
Nalanda	31	63	3	97
Vaishali	8	37	5	50
Patna	12	26	12	50
<b>Total</b>	129	301	60	490

The question of what should be different in the new VSS obtained a wide variety of responses. Close to 10% of members interviewed felt that nothing should change, but a large percentage (30%) felt that VSS members should be better educated, while 7% listed qualities such as integrity, honesty etc which they felt VSS members must possess. Some members had strong views that teachers must not be included in the VSS. Some advocated for more equal representation of women and the lower castes. Some felt that the Secretary and President should have fewer powers; that the powers of the VSS overall should be increased; and that all members should have equal powers. In addition to this, a few felt that VSS members should give more time to the work of the committee and should receive some benefits.

#### **b. Head teachers**

Among the 100 school principals interviewed for this study, one third (34%) felt that the decision to dissolve the earlier VSS was a good one. But the majority (62%) gave no opinion. When asked for specific suggestions on what the new VSS should incorporate, the majority felt that VSS members should be selected based on educational qualifications should be committed to the cause of education and should possess qualities such as integrity, honesty and selflessness. Another common response was that teachers should be excluded from the VSS and that they should also be freed of responsibilities such as financial accountability and arranging the mid day meal. Some felt that powerful members of the village community should not be allowed to become VSS members as they tended to dominate and politicize the proceedings of the committee. A few principals felt that VSS members should be elected through secret ballot.

#### **c. Teachers**

When teachers were asked how the functioning of the VSS could be improved in the future some emphasized the importance of qualities such as selflessness, honesty, objectivity and awareness. Others stressed that there should be regular monitoring with daily school visits by at least one member. A few said that the VSS should increase awareness around education in the village and consult other members of the parent community on important decisions, encourage parents to participate in their child's education, increase enrolment and ensure regular attendance. One teacher felt that the VSS should treat all school tasks as theirs while some teachers mentioned specific infrastructural improvements in the school which the VSS could help with. Several teachers felt that the members of the VSS needed unanimity and better coordination among themselves to function more effectively.

### **Recommendations**

The summary of stakeholders' observations presented above demonstrates some degree of unanimity regarding how the VSS as an institution could function better in the future. First is the stress on honesty and integrity, perhaps reflecting the extensive problems of corruption faced in the past due to influential community members utilizing the institution for personal benefit. Second is the importance of defining clear roles for VSS members vis a vis teaching staff, which has also been a major source of conflict in the state in the past. And finally, a number of stakeholders refer to the potential of the VSS in shouldering more of the non teaching burden of the school beyond supervision of the midday meal, thus leaving teachers with more time to concentrate on classroom instruction.

The recommendations presented below are grounded in the present study and centre on ways of increasing community ownership and making the VSS a more sustainable body for local educational governance. Ensuring equitable participation of members within the committee, active engagement of members in the decision making process within the VSS, regular communication with the wider parent community, clear definitions of roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms, and responsiveness of teachers and the administration to action recommended by the committee are some ways of promoting this outcome. The following discussion is divided into three sections. First, policy recommendations are discussed, which focus on aspects of the structure and functioning of the VSS. Second, ways of improving relationships and linkages with other local bodies are presented. And finally, issues with regard to the implementation of existing structures and mechanisms are discussed.

#### **a. Policy recommendations**

- *Incentivize participation.* This has been reiterated by several VSS members and other groups of respondents concerned with the VSS. Since monetary benefits are not feasible, adult literacy classes, training in managing accounts etc could be provided to VSS members as incentives as well as to improve their capacity to contribute more effectively towards the activities of the VSS.

- *Utilize feedback.* While policy norms suggest that information collected from the VSS such as school plans, feedback on training etc should be used for decision making, budget allocations etc., fieldwork for the current study suggests that there are no systematic channels for collecting or analysing information generated by VSS across the state, nor procedures to utilize this information for purposes of improved planning or administration. Similarly, fieldwork for the present study suggests that state and district level officials responsible for the VSS in Bihar have a sound understanding of community mobilization programmes and are strong advocates for efforts to involve local participation. Mechanisms for collecting and utilizing feedback from these officials may be key to ensuring effective implementation on the ground.
- *Build capacity.* Training modules intended for VSS members in Bihar are well designed and comprehensive. However, their implementation appears to lag behind, and large numbers of VSS members have not received any training. In order for the new VSS to function as envisaged, capacity building must be given priority and should go beyond a one-time training. The feedback mechanisms discussed above should be a central part of all training modules.
- *Ensure that VSS members are in the loop.* The VSS should be kept informed of new education initiatives being implemented in the school, and be invited to participate in trainings whenever possible. This will facilitate a transition in the role of the VSS from just monitoring infrastructure and finances to monitoring educational performance of children as well. VSS can also provide organizational support and undertake awareness building activities in the community around educational schemes being implemented in the village and/or issues that need to be resolved.

#### **b. Relationship with other local bodies and the state**

- As mentioned earlier, there is a danger of the committee being manipulated by local elites. While the new Act provides safeguards through its norms for constitution, an external accountability mechanism also needs to be put in place. For example, CRCCs, BRCCs should try and attend VSS meetings, regularly review VSS documents, and obtain feedback from VSS members.
- The relationship between PRIs and VSS is only nominal. While the new policies outline the structural relationship, it does not do the same for the functional link, how responsibilities will be shared etc. The VSS needs to be more embedded in the local governance structure so that there is more coordinated action and shared understanding of the state of education in the village.

- There is currently poor coordination between the various tiers of the education administration and the VSS. While a loose structure of communication exists, the flow of information is downward only rather than in both directions. There is no system of grievance redressal in place, and it is unclear who the VSS should approach in case of complaints.

### **c. Implementation**

- In addition to playing a monitoring role, VSS members should be encouraged to provide more support to the school as they have done with the arrangement of the MDM. For example, although their mandate includes organizing various extra-curricular activities in the school, fieldwork for this study suggests that these additional activities are rarely implemented. Improved mechanisms for information, training, and feedback will be critical to enabling VSS to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities and defining additional ways in which they can support education, both in the school and in the larger community.
- The impact and reach of the VSS in the larger village community needs to increase. There appears to be a serious communication gap between VSS members and non VSS parents who are rarely aware of the activities of the VSS. To tackle this, VSS meetings need to be better publicized and mandatorily held in a public space. Specific initiatives that will increase wider community participation and parental involvement can be carried out by the VSS such as regular public meetings around different educational issues, involving parents in encouraging regular attendance of students, organizing human and material resources for school improvement etc.
- The problematic relationship between teachers and VSS needs to be addressed. Teachers feel accountable 'upwards' towards district and state education authorities, but not to the community. There is a need to transform this relationship from one of conflict to collaboration by clearly spelling out the nature and extent of power and responsibility on shared school management issues. An important point of convergence where this can be attempted is VSS member training which teachers could be invited to attend.

Finally, during the course of writing this report several policy/legislative changes have taken place at the national level, most significantly, the introduction of the Right to Education Act (RTE). This has altered the course of the introduction of the new VSS Act in Bihar which is now undergoing further modifications in order to streamline it with the RTE. While this effort must be commended as Bihar is one of the first states align the norms governing its school based committees to the RTE, this process must be concluded without further delay. The current number of schools without a VSS has increased manifold, with the terms of the previous VSS ending. This would only mean a drastically reduced level of transparency,

accountability and community participation which must be addressed urgently in keeping with the spirit of the RTE.

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