IMPROVING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: EVALUATION OF THE SUGAM PROGRAMME
SUMMARY REPORT

November 2018

1. Introduction

Effective school governance is regarded as an important driver of improvements to the quality of secondary education in India. Under the Government of India's Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan framework (RMSA, 2009), School Management and Development Committees (SMDCs) are responsible for school planning and improvement. Community participation in school governance is seen as critical to strengthening the accountability of schools to the communities they serve (Government of India, 2014[1], World Bank, 2004[2])

Against this background, the SUGAM programme was developed by the Kusuma Foundation[3], in partnership with the State government of Uttar Pradesh, to promote effective school governance in all government secondary schools across the State. The programme involved the development of tailored training resources, the training of master trainers, and the delivery of training courses for SMDCs in all government secondary schools in Uttar Pradesh over a three-year period (2015-2018)[4].

This summary highlights key findings from a qualitative evaluation of the Kusuma Foundation's SUGAM programme[5]. Three independent researchers based in India[6] were commissioned by the Kusuma Trust UK to undertake the fieldwork and initial analysis of the findings[7]. The fieldwork for the evaluation was completed between March and April, 2018.

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[1] Government of India (2014) *Community mobilisation and SMDCs under RMSA* (rmsaindia.gov.in)
[2] World Bank (2004) *Making services work for poor people*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
[3] The Kusuma Foundation is an NGO based in India and funded by the Kusuma Trust, UK.
[4] A total of 1285 government secondary schools in 75 districts across Uttar Pradesh participated in the SUGAM programme over three years (2015-2018).
[5] 'SUGAM' means to ease or facilitate.
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[7] The final report was prepared by the Kusuma Trust's Head of Research.

2. SUGAM Evaluation

The main aims of the study are to assess the extent to which training on school governance improved school planning and management in practice, explore barriers and facilitators to effective school governance, and identify examples of good practice.

14 government secondary schools (8 in Hardoi and 6 in Lucknow districts respectively) took part in the investigation. Of the 8 schools in Hardoi district, 4 form part of the Kusuma Schools Partnership Initiative.[8] Schools were purposively selected for diversity in terms of i) level of participation in SUGAM training courses over the three year life of the programme, (ii) schools that received post-training from the Kusuma Foundation, and (iii) SMDCs that were rated by Master Trainers as functioning well or as experiencing difficulties, post-training.

In each case study school, interviews were conducted with SMDC members (Head teachers, teachers, community representatives) to explore the impact of SUGAM training on their understanding of SMDC roles and responsibilities to develop, implement and track school improvement and specifically to:

- develop, implement and monitor school annual plans;
- mobilise and manage financial and other resources for school improvement;
- provide academic leadership; and
- promote community participation in all aspects of school governance.

A total of 104 interviews were conducted (50 in Lucknow and 54 in Hardoi), of which 41 were teachers and 63 were community members of SMDCs. Documentary evidence was also reviewed (e.g. minutes of SMDC meetings, minutes of academic and buildings sub-committees, school annual plans, student enrolment and attendance registers). A tour of school premises was also conducted to record evidence for improvements to school toilets, availability and management of library and science laboratory facilities, water and electricity supply, safe classroom structures and adequate classroom furniture.

3. Key findings
3.1 Take-up and satisfaction with SUGAM training
The capacity of training programmes to achieve impact on practice is closely related, in part, to the take-up of, and participant satisfaction with, the training provided.

Take-up of SUGAM training
A majority (60.5% n=63) of SMDC members interviewed had attended SUGAM training and participation by teaching (32) and community SMDC members (31) is evenly balanced. Given the challenges of engaging community members in school governance, this level of participation in training indicates an active interest and willingness to learn, particularly at the community level.

Head teacher support for teacher and community participation had a key role to play in facilitating access to SUGAM training events their SMDC members – for example, by hiring a vehicle to transport all SMDC members to training venues:

'SMDC members were not educated but were still motivated to attend the trainings. It is important to compensate them for their conveyance'. Head teacher

A number of barriers to accessing SUGAM training were also identified:

- *Teachers* highlighted the timing of SUGAM training (delivered December to February) as conflicting with preparations for Board examinations. Single-teacher schools experienced difficulties in finding time to attend training.
- *Community members* highlighted the long distances required to travel to training venues particularly during winter months, a lack of reimbursement of travel costs, loss of income resulting from participation in training, and negative attitudes of Head teachers towards community participation in school governance
- Some district education officials had limited familiarity with the SUGAM programme due to frequent changes in personnel.
- *Kusuma Foundation staff and some Head teachers* felt that frequent changes in district education officials reduced opportunities for encouraging participation in SUGAM training at a strategic level and providing feedback to schools on school planning.

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[8] KSPI schools have received a package of interventions from Kusuma (improved school facilities, contract teachers to fill teacher vacancies, teacher professional development, remedial education) including support for improved school governance.

Satisfaction with SUGAM training

The majority of respondents were satisfied with the SUGAM training received (giving a positive score of 6 or above out of 10 points). In particular, teachers felt that training was an opportunity to network with other schools and share experiences on how to resolve common problems of low student enrolment, attendance and retention.

A number of steps were taken to make SUGAM training sessions as inclusive as possible. For example, training sessions were conducted in the local language, and audio-visual resources and group work activities were designed to meet different learning needs and literacy levels. Teachers generally described trainers as easy to understand and encouraging of participation. Community members particularly valued the use of examples to illustrate key points and group activities, such as the school mapping exercise, but said that they didn't always understand the content of training sessions. A minority of Head teachers felt that the training methods used were not sufficiently advanced for their needs.

3.2 Impact of SUGAM on understanding of SMDC roles and responsibilities

Overall, a majority of SMDC members interviewed said that their understanding about the roles and responsibilities of SMDCs improved after receiving SUGAM training. Teachers and community members were able to identify a wide range of SMDC roles and responsibilities, including making improvements to school facilities and the wider school environment, promoting good classroom practice, preparing school annual plans, monitoring teacher and student attendance, and fundraising.

Training sessions also provided an opportunity to prepare draft school annual plans and receive constructive feedback. For example, one Head teacher reported that *"preparing the school annual plan of the school and later getting it approved by the trainer was a useful exercise…. Many doubts were cleared"*. The written materials provided during training, especially the school action plan booklet, were also positively received.

Equally important, most teachers and community members agreed that SUGAM training had improved the confidence of community members and that this, in turn, had increased the level of contact between parents and schools.

"SMDC helps us to stay connected with school matters on a regular basis. Members act as a force to talk to any official and put collective pressure to bring change".
Community SMDC member

However, the teacher vacancy rate, turnover and deputation for other tasks contributed to difficulties in sustaining the skills and knowledge of teaching SMDC members over time.

3.3 Impact of SUGAM training on school governance in practice
Preparing, implementing and monitoring school annual plans

In Lucknow and Hardoi schools, SUGAM training was often reported as acting as a trigger to the preparation of school annual plans. School records demonstrated that only a minority of schools had prepared a school annual at the start of the SUGAM programme but that completion was near universal three years later, at the end of the programme.

However, the quality of school annual plans was uneven. Only KSPI schools were offered post-training support and their school annual plans were more comprehensive and detailed than those of other schools. Non-KSPI schools tended to adopt the RMSA format for the preparation of school annual plans and these often lacked implementation plans and financial information. Most non-KSPI schools reported a need for post-training guidance:

"After training, when I had to prepare the school annual plan, I needed help. Eventually, I asked a friend who is a teacher at a KSPI school who had skills because of the handholding support from the Kusuma Foundation in making school annual plans."
Head teacher

Although the evidence shows that school annual plans were prepared with limited community involvement, the attitudes of Head teachers had a key role to play in this respect. Some teaching SMDC members felt SUGAM training offered them new ways of improving communication with community SMDC members to enhance their participation in school planning.

> ### *Good Practice: Involving the community in preparing school annual plans*
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> The Head teacher involved all SMDC members in preparing school annual plans and parents were instrumental in highlighting the deficits associated with school building, infrastructure, and teaching and learning. She said, *"the parents feel the ownership of the school when they are consulted regularly. They feel part of the school when their suggestions are taken for small things"*.

However, the attitudes and economic circumstances of community members also functioned as a potential barrier to their participation in school governance. Some community SMDC members felt that school planning *should* be the responsibility of teachers, either because they felt they lacked the necessary skills or because they were time-poor and preparing a school annual plan was regarded as a time-intensive activity. Nevertheless, there were signs that these attitudes are starting to change. For example, a Head teacher reported an improvement to the quality of SMDC meetings over time: *"people have started coming out of the house, especially women. They have started to speak and participate. Things might improve further"*.

A key question concerns the extent to which school annual plans were actively used to guide school improvement or, alternatively, were regarded as a paper exercise to meet the demands of RMSA. High teacher vacancy rates and a lack of resources functioned as disincentives to active engagement in school planning as tasks could not be effectively delegated among SMDC members. Although most annual plans set a list of targets, schools tended to make progress as and when they could, according to the available human and financial resources.

3.4   Financial management
Sources of income
The main source of funding for schools comes from the government, under the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abiyhan (RMSA) initiative. Rs 50,000 is allocated annually to each SMDC, irrespective of the size of the school. Of this, Rs 10,000 is channeled back to RMSA to cover the cost of school books. Three schools in Lucknow district were successful in applying for additional funds from RMSA for securing electricity connections to school buildings. Some schools also received a grant for an educational tour for students. KSPI schools received a financial contribution from the Kusuma Foundation to cover the cost of improvements to school facilities e.g. provision of libraries and science laboratories.

Overall, a large portion of the Rs 50,000 annual RMSA fund was spent on building maintenance and facilities. The Rs10,000 routed back to government to cover the cost of books accounted for most of the funds allocated to teaching and learning. Where information on expenditure was available, the allocation of funds appeared to be largely ad-hoc and not according to school annual plan targets.

Parent Teacher Funds were collected by 5 schools and used to appoint new community teachers; one school raised an annual fund of 1.7 lakhs through the school PTA. In 6 schools, the local Panchayat funded the building of boundary walls, a permanent access road to the school to resolve the problem of waterlogged tracks during the monsoon season and repairs to school water supplies.

Good Practice: Building a boundary wall

One school campus lacked a boundary wall and this put school property at risk. The matter was discussed during SMDC meetings and the local Panchayat (village council) representative brought this matter to the Gram Pradhan (leader of the local elected body representing a number of villages or town), which marked out land allocated for the school grounds prior to the building of a boundary wall.

Community financial contributions were rarely sought and where some funds had been collected, they were not sustainable. For example, one school collected community contributions of Rs 50 per student per in order to hire a part-time teacher but after 6-7 months the community refused further contributions, citing economic hardship. Head teachers of 9 schools reported that they had paid student fees out of their own pocket so that students could appear for Board exams.

Obtaining non-financial support from community members proved to be more achievable. Some schools involved local educated people in teaching pupils and it was common for community members to donate their labour to improve school buildings. For example, one Head teacher said, *"we had to install blackboards and needed a carpenter. We requested the help of the SMDC. One parent helped and installed the blackboards. We gave his daughter a fee waiver."* Parents and former students also donated books and stationery to schools. However, both teaching and community SMDC members felt that the government should provide more funding for schools.

Transparency in utilisation of funds

There was limited evidence to support the claim made by several key stakeholders that financial management had improved as a result of SUGAM training, partly because school financial records were either incomplete or unavailable. A review of minutes of SMDC meetings showed that school finances were rarely discussed. A lack of transparency in the use of school budgets was also a concern among SMDC members (teachers and community members) who were aware that the school budget was mostly spent on basic utilities (e.g. electricity), cleaning materials, furniture, and stationery but they were unaware how much money was spent on these items.

3.5   Providing academic leadership

Head teacher professional development

Given the pivotal role of Head teachers in leading effective school planning and management, participation in leadership training for Head teachers could have a potentially important role to play in supporting effective school governance. However, participation in school leadership programmes was relatively low. In Hardoi, the Head teachers of three of the five KSPI schools' have received leadership training organised by the Kusuma Foundation and these were well-received. For example, one Head teacher said, *"these training teach school administration, leadership, staff management and maximising HR use, improving teaching and learning environment, and financial discipline"*.

Teacher attendance

In both Lucknow and Hardoi schools, Head teachers tended to express reluctance to monitor teacher attendance but some examples of good practice in community accountability and monitoring emerged in a few schools. For example, a community SMDC member said, *"If the Head teacher doesn't come to school for more than 2-3 days in a week. I come to school to see if the teaching is taking place"*.

Good Practice in Teacher Attendance Monitoring

The Head teacher maintains a leave register for teachers and expects teachers to make cover arrangements for their classes when they go on leave. Teachers are required to inform the Head Teacher about these arrangements in advance: "*this encourages responsibility and good employee relationships*". The Village Education Committee is also active in monitoring teacher attendance and encourages teachers to send a text message if they plan to go on leave.

Monitoring quality of teaching

Overall, SMDC's role in monitoring quality of teachers and teaching was limited. Community members lacked confidence and attributed this to their own education status. This undermined their power to question or suggest ways to improve the quality of teaching in schools. In a minority of schools, Head teachers observed classes or listened just outside the classroom, questioned children about how much they understood, checked student notebooks and tracked Board exam results.

Academic planning

Academic planning in schools was reported as largely driven by the RMSA prescribed annual academic calendar called the 'Shaikshak Panchang'. The main barriers to undertaking detailed academic planning (e.g. preparation of lesson plans, listing teaching methods, fixing timelines for syllabus completion etc.) were identified as:

- a high level of teacher vacancies and single teacher schools, particularly in Hardoi district;
- the burden of administrative work on Head teachers and teachers;
- absence of school buildings or insufficient number of classrooms in schools to enable teachers to have the appropriate teaching environment; and
- low learning levels of students on entry to secondary school resulting in the need to provide remedial education and reducing the likelihood of completing the school syllabus.

Despite these difficulties, some Head teachers and SMDC members took active steps to improve academic planning. In four schools, teachers maintained detailed diaries, showing the timeline and method for teaching specific chapters or topics. Two schools had established active academic sub-committees, which met monthly to monitor and discuss teachers' lesson plans.

3.6   Community participation in school governance

The issue of community involvement in school governance has been addressed throughout this summary report. In relation to the composition of SMDCs and their functioning, various sections of the community were represented on SMDCs in sample schools, including parents, minority groups, scheduled castes/scheduled tribes, Panchayat members, Village Education Committee members, subject-specific teachers and Head teachers, as per legal requirements.

However, in practice, some compromises were made in achieving representation from these different sections of the community. Female members were sometimes listed as Mahila Dal[9] representatives when, in fact, they were PTA teachers or women who prepared the mid-day meal in local primary schools.

Community SMDC members tended to be more involved in monitoring targets related to school buildings than other aspects of school planning, often taking responsibility for overseeing construction and repair work in schools. In some schools, community participation was erratic and not in keeping with the formalities of school life. For example, Head teachers and teachers reported that SMDC members do not come to meetings on time and that they tend to turn up at a time that is convenient for them. This made formal collective decision-making hard to achieve. For example, one Head teacher commented: *"some of them will come in the evening when they return from field, some also come after 2-3 days. We just tell them what happened in the meeting"*.

4. Key achievements

The take-up of SMDC training (by 60% of informants) indicates that the SUGAM programme was effective in reaching its target audience.
The inclusive approach adopted by SUGAM trainers assisted women and participants with low learning levels to actively engage in training sessions, and this resulted in an overall improvement in the awareness of SMDC members about their roles and responsibilities.
During the three-year implementation of the SUGAM programme, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of schools that successfully prepared school annual plans.
Examples of good practice were identified in relation to community involvement in school governance, improvements to school buildings, monitoring teacher attendance and the quality of teaching that could be widely replicated by other government secondary schools.
The SUGAM programme improved the confidence of some community members to engage in school governance and where Head teachers made positive efforts to build on this foundation, the quality of SMDC meetings improved and women were more likely to attend and speak up at SMDC meetings
A small number of schools were successful in raising funds from a range of sources and these could serve as models for other government secondary schools

5. Conclusions

Overall, SMDC members reported that SUGAM training on school governance had a positive Impact on their understanding of SMDC roles and responsibilities. Participants were mostly satisfied with the training provided, particularly the attempts made to include SMDC members with low literacy levels and the feedback received on draft school annual plans. Nevertheless, some community members had difficulties in understanding the content of SUGAM training sessions and striking a balance between the learning needs of teaching and community members requires further development. That said, emerging evidence indicated that SUGAM training had a positive impact on the confidence of some community members to engage in school governance and thereby strengthen the accountability of schools to the local community.

Head teachers had a key role to play in facilitating or inhibiting community access to SUGAM training and in supporting community involvement in school governance in practice. The pivotal role of Head teachers at the school level was set against a backdrop of low engagement in school improvement among district education officials. This systemic lacuna meant that SMDCs were not provided with effective feedback on school planning or encouragement to build on positive improvements.

Most SMDCs identified a need for structured support, post-training to assist in putting knowledge gained from SUGAM training into practice. There was a rapid increase in the number of school annual plans submitted to district education authorities over the three years the SUGAM programme was delivered but the quality of school plans varied. Two key components of effective school governance (clear implementation plans and information on school finances) were often missing. Some schools were successful in lobbying for additional resources but overall, the SUGAM programme had a limited impact on the management of school finances. Raising funds from parents was rarely attempted and difficult to sustain as a result of low income levels, but the non-financial contributions made by families (e,g. undertaking or monitoring repairs to school buildings) should not be underestimated.

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[9] An organisation representing local women

Attempts to strengthen the accountability of schools to local communities largely depended on the willingness of Head teachers and community members to take concerted action and to embed such activities in the routines of school management. Although many SMDCs were reluctant to monitor teacher attendance, some good examples were identified in this respect. These examples indicate that opportunities for improving school governance largely operate at the school and community level, and are underpinned by the motivation and willingness of Head Teachers to work with community members to improve the quality of education for young people.

6. Recommendations

To improve SUGAM training:

Informants suggested that the delivery of SUGAM training could be improved by:

- *Plan the delivery of training sessions* to avoid peak periods in the academic calendar (e.g. preparations for Board examinations)
- *Increasing the number of Master Trainers* (3-4) appointed by RMSA
- *Reducing the duration of training* sessions from two days to 3-4 hours
- *Using more visual and audio-visual aids* and practical activities to maximise community participation
- Introducing *more parent-specific activities* to stimulate their interest and engagement
- *Providing tangible take-aways from training* for community members for future reference, post-training
- *Covering transport costs* for schools to hire vehicles to enable all SMDC members to attend SUGAM training sessions or *reimbursing the travel costs* of community members
- *providing* structured post-training support to assist SMDCs to put new learning into practice

To support secondary schools

Improve access to school leadership training for Head teachers, with particular emphasis on training that addresses attitudes to, and strategies for, improving community engagement in school governance, monitoring teacher attendance and classroom practice, and mobilising resources from local organisations (e.g. the Panchayat, and PTA) as well as RMSA.

To support district and State-level education officers

Explore options and develop strategies for strengthening the link between schools and district and State education officials in order to provide better support for school planning and management.