

G LIMPSES from the **g** rassroots

a synthesis

based on

Case Studies of Successful Practices at Local Resource Centres
in Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh



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FOREWORD

Universalisation of primary education involves, along with universal access to schools, an improved and constantly improving quality of the teaching learning process. Among the many interventions undertaken in DPEP for quality enhancement, such as competency and activity based textbooks, extensive teacher training and many others, is the establishment of sub-district resource centres at the cluster and block level. These centres have played a critical role in disseminating new ideas in pedagogy and also in developing them further.

The establishment and development of sub-district or local resource centres has in itself been a challenging task. The centres need to be vibrantly functional and reach out to the schools with interventions of high quality. These centres have to evolve activities and processes that are need based and induce quality. Some states in DPEP have succeeded in evolving resource centres that have become the hub of academic activity in the area and have contributed significantly to the improvement of the quality of the classroom transactions. This success is worth sharing, particularly for emulation and learning. We have, consequently, conducted case studies of some of such centres in five states i.e. Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.

This document is a synthesis of these case studies. It attempts to illustrate some of the processes undertaken by these centres and also to analyse how these processes have come about i.e. what has enabled these centres to become as productive as they are.

We hope that this document will throw light on the potential of the resource centres as well as what makes it possible for these centres to function effectively. We also hope that it will subsequently inform policy formulation in phase-I states which are planning for sustainability and in phase-II states which are still developing these centres.



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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS DOCUMENT?

Block and cluster resource centres have been established in DPEP for extending *academic support* to teachers through school visits, teacher training, material preparation, discussion of specific problems at monthly meetings etc. Though the idea of resource centres for teachers in the form of school complexes has existed for some time in government as well as the NGO sector and found place in the POA 1992, *the actual large scale operationalisation of grassroot academic resource centres has been an exciting development in DPEP*. These structures have supported the overall pedagogical reform that the programme has triggered and have played a central role in helping the teachers in bringing about necessary changes in the classrooms processes. Regular school visits by CRC coordinators and monthly meetings of teachers have indeed made a very special contribution. Though these resource centres have been established in all DPEP districts, they are at different stages of development and there are significant variations in their activities. In some states steps have been taken for effective school visits, academic discussions in monthly meetings, documentation of folklore and its use in classrooms, establishment of maths lab, developing libraries etc. In some others, these structures have taken up roles that are more administrative and supervisory in nature. Similarly, the degree of community involvement in functioning of these institutions varies, as does the level of their autonomy. These emerging institutions vary considerably in their focus, structure, activities and their role in the school system across states. Some practices appear to be more rewarding than others.

The experiences in national and state workshops has shown that sharing of ideas, activities and experiences among different groups of people enriches all. Consequently it was felt that states would benefit a great deal from a sharing of the varying practices and experiences at local resource centres all over the country, specially the experiences, where the resource centres have met with some success. Many practices that have emerged are worthy of emulation, and can indeed be replicated. The creation of a "good" resource centre is not a matter of accident to be left to chance, but a practice that can be fostered systematically.

We decided, therefore, to document the relatively more successful activities at the block and cluster resource centres in five states namely *Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala* and *Madhya Pradesh*. Except *Bihar* all others are phase I states where the programme has been underway for over 3 years. In *Bihar*, the Bihar Education Project (BEP) has been active for a fairly long time. Thus in the resource centres studied, the duration of their functioning has been long enough to allow for experimentation and learning. Moreover, we have concentrated only on some of those areas where such experimentation and learning appears to have taken place, and our preliminary interaction provided sufficient evidence of grassroot level constructive activities.

Based on carefully collected observations from the above five states, this synthesis document aims to provide glimpses of the activities that have been initiated by the resource centres and to identify the necessary conditions for their replication. Specifically it intends to:

- compile a resource pool of various processes that have been initiated through these structures;
- highlight the potential of the block and cluster resource centres in providing academic support to teachers;
- facilitate cross state sharing i.e. learning and transfer of positive experiences;
- identify key indicators which contribute towards making the resource centres functional and effective;
- bring out the factors that limit the effectiveness of the processes identified in providing academic support to teachers and
- suggest a possible way forward.

DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

In each of the five states mentioned above at least two block resource centres and four cluster resource centres were studied in depth (See Annexure 1). Resource Centres known to be active and functional were selected with the help of the state project office. Wherever possible a visit to a not so successful BRC was also made for comparison and to understand what made a resource centre special.

Through a *detailed case study* of each resource centre selected an attempt was made to understand and document the genesis, structure, processes initiated till date and factors affecting the functioning of the centre. At each centre the focus was to understand the following aspects:

- human resource at the centre, the recruitment policy, capacity building and individual motivation of coordinators
- infrastructure, facilities, nature of books, reading material available at the centre
- nature of school visits, and monthly meetings and other processes initiated by the centre

These case studies did not explore teacher training activities in detail, as these have already been the subject of much study and discussion. They concentrated instead, on academic support activities other than teacher training. All the investigators were called for a briefing meeting before field visits.

During the field visit the investigator visited:

SPO, SCERT and SRG
DPOs, DRGs and DIETs
BRCs and block resource groups
CRCs
Schools (to interact with teachers and children)
Concerned NGOs

Efforts were made to attend the monthly meetings of the teachers at the CRC and the meeting of CRC coordinators at the BRC. Informal discussions at SPO, DPO, DIET and visits to schools with the coordinators, attending monthly meetings at cluster and block level helped to document in detail the nature of onsite support extended to teachers. Review of available literature and records of last four to five months at the resource centres was also undertaken. Debriefing meetings after field visits were organised and a detailed report was submitted by each investigator.

Some of these reports were shared with all the DPEP states in a national workshop to *identify strategies for strengthening block and cluster resource centres*. Sharing experiences of these states by state representatives as well as the researchers and resource persons helped in understanding the emerging issues. We intend to continue this process of sharing and learning in the future through state level workshops and by circulating this document to all the states. Hopefully, these efforts will lead to the development of resource centres

- which can become the hub of academic activity in primary schools;
- which can be used by the teachers to refer to different types of materials, books, journals on education;
- where regular seminars, debates can be organised on need based issues, where teachers can learn from resource persons and each other;
- where teachers in groups can sit and develop new materials and activities whenever they feel the need even beyond the prescribed meetings.

EVOLUTION OF LOCAL RESOURCE CENTRES

The visualisation and establishment of resource centres at the block and cluster level in DPEP has meant that

- a forum is created where teachers come together to discuss classroom related issues usually in monthly meetings;
- arrangements are made for a resource person to make school visits to discuss academic issues and advise the teacher;
- an academic resource centre, ideally with relevant books, teaching learning materials, facilities for training etc. is created close to the school, readily accessible to the teachers; and
- efforts are directed to bridge the gap between the community and the school.

Within the above framework of academic support for the teacher, cluster and block resource centres have evolved differently in each state depending upon the specific need and the existing pedagogical vision. A scrutiny of the evolution of these structures in the five states, *Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala*, where this case study was based, provides rich insights.

THE EMERGING ROLES

The structure, roles and functions of the block and cluster resource centres in the five states seem to have emerged mainly in response to *the vision of the overall pedagogical renewal process in each state*. Though each state engaged itself in all the aspects of pedagogical renewal, including teacher training, textbook renewal, evaluation, TLM development etc., *each state had a different focus determined by its context and vision which in turn influenced the evolution of its sub district institutions*.

Bihar and Karnataka for example gave special importance to teacher training. Not surprisingly, the block and cluster resource centres are largely engaged in training teachers through training packages, developed by the state resource groups.

In *Assam* it seems that the interaction between the school and community became the most important aspect of the pedagogical renewal process. Consequently, the block and cluster resource centres, in addition to doing a variety of other things like developing materials and activities became sites for dynamic interaction among the teachers, resource persons and the community.

In *Madhya Pradesh* cluster resource centres were established as a part of the "Seekhna-Sikhana

package" a classroom transaction methodology that embraced textbooks, teacher training and academic resource support at the cluster. Over time however, the cluster resource centres evolved as supportive to the new pedagogy, organising training, conducting school visits and cluster meetings, and also aided DPEP implementation in major ways, undertaking diverse tasks. The block resource centres in Madhya Pradesh remained as programme implementation units.

In Kerala the focus of the pedagogic renewal process was from the very beginning on a participatory and interactive dialogue among teachers, resource persons and the community *on all pedagogical aspects*. All innovative initiatives in the different aspects of the pedagogical renewal process including textbook writing, teachers training, evaluation were subsumed and fed by this constant dialogue, feedback from classroom practices and needs of children and teachers. Even *when the first set of materials and training were planned centrally their implementation and subsequent modification was a local dialogical process*. The resource centres played a key role in this dialogue and in facilitating the process of change in the field. They have consequently become sites for this discourse, as we shall see.

EVOLVING INSTITUTIONS

Though the role of resource centres is closely linked to the pedagogical vision of the state, once established, these structures have at times gone beyond that vision and have acquired roles and functions that were not hitherto visualized. For example in Kerala,

the original concept of a resource centre did not include a resource reference library for the teachers at the block level. But over a period of time the teachers and trainers began to feel the need to consult books. The state office in response to this emerging need supplied books worth Rs. 10,000 to each BRC.

Similarly in Karnataka, the resource persons at the BRC say

"So far we have spent a lot of time in implementing the programme of the state. Now we need to chalk out our own strategies"

"The BRC should become a resource centre that can cater to the needs of the teachers and the children. The training should be based on local needs. The centre should be a place where teachers can access relevant materials and magazines"

"We need to spend more time on school visits".

The vision of these institutions in different states may need to be reviewed and renewed on the basis of the felt needs and the feedback received. It is important that policy decisions match these emerging needs to facilitate a functional and meaningful institution.

THE STRUCTURE TODAY

As the roles and functions of these centres evolved in tune with the pedagogical vision and local needs, the structural patterns in each state emerged in response to the varied roles to be performed. Let us take a closer look at the structural variation i.e. in terms of personnel in these five states.

| Comparative Picture of the Resource Personnel at the Centres in the Five States | | |
|---|---|---|
| States | Block Resource Centre | Cluster Resource Centre |
| Assam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Block resource centre coordinator ● Assistant block resource centre coordinator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cluster resource centre coordinator |
| Bihar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3 resource persons (RPs) identified through the training programme for a period of 1 year. 3 other RPs are also identified as back up arrangement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School Samanvayak ● Sankul prabhari (These are the CRC coordinator and academic coordinator) (not full time staff-additional charge) |
| Karnataka | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 block resource centre coordinator and five resource persons (subject experts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CRC coordinator |
| Kerala | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 block resource centre coordinator ● 1 academic coordinator (DIET member) ● 15-17 trainers (depending upon the number of clusters) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CRC coordinator (not full time) |
| M.P. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 BRC coordinator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cluster resource centre head (not full time) ● Cluster academic coordinator |

In both *Bihar* and *Karnataka* where teacher training is a major activity, a strong team of trainers is located at the block resource centre. However, it is interesting to see the variation in these teams in the two states.

In *Bihar* a team of resource persons for the block and the centre school are identified through training programmes. These BRC and CRC teams function only for limited periods (usually 1 year) and are later repatriated to their schools. The idea underlying this practise is to provide opportunities to more and more teachers to become trainers, thereby enhancing their understanding, confidence and teaching competence. After the block level training programme the teachers come together every month at the cluster school for the cluster level enrichment session. The monthly meetings in *Bihar* are thus an extension of the training programme.

In contrast to *Bihar*, in *Karnataka* a team of five resource persons and the BRC coordinator is identified by the DPO and trained to conduct teacher training. The cluster resource centre has been converted into a maths lab* where a kit of materials and activities developed by an NGO called Suvidya is kept. All coordinators have been trained to use this kit. Though the mandate of the block resource centres is mainly teacher training, sometimes on their own initiative resource persons organise other programmes for the block also.

In *Madhya Pradesh* the centres function as programme implementation structures, performing academic as well as administrative roles. At the moment in *Madhya Pradesh* there is one coordinator at the BRC and two coordinators at the CRC (a full time academic coordinator and a part time cluster resource centre head who is the head master of the centre school).

The BRC has not been developed as an academic structure and does not have a team of resource persons. However in the NGO supported block there is a field centre equipped with library books, journals, discussion papers etc. Also at the centre there are 6-7 field workers fully involved in follow-up activities like monthly meetings, school visits, material development, training etc. This centre gives academic assistance to the BRC.

In *Assam* there are two coordinators at the block and one at the cluster level. However compared to *Madhya Pradesh*, *Assam* has an added advantage of having block and cluster resource teams** which assist the centres in performing the academic and non-academic functions. In *Assam* these centres have emerged as resource institutions which play a critical role in eliciting community support for academic and non academic activities. These community linked activities may range from documenting folklore and flora & fauna, to mobilising funds to build a road (to reach the school) and to developing a learning corner at the centre with their help. These institutions seem to participate in the overall development of the cluster / block. These centres have also organised TLM workshops, mela's, excursion tours for children as and when required. Some BRCs also bring out a newsletter.

In comparison to other states, resource centres in *Kerala* are structurally very different. Instead of one or two coordinators and subject experts, the BRC coordinator is supported by 15-17 trainers (depending upon the number of clusters) and an academic coordinator who is a DIET faculty member but is stationed at the BRC. Other than providing regular support through school visits, the trainers in *Kerala* frequently refer to reading material for developing activities for transaction of curriculum and for answering some mind boggling

* Materials provided by Suvidya are kept in the Maths lab. These are shared as a part of the ongoing training programme (6 days) for teachers at BRC. Specifically multiple uses of material and their production are discussed in detail during training.

**Cluster Level Resource Group (CLRG) is constituted of village volunteers (2 per VEC). The members of this resource group make school visits and help the teacher in TLM preparation. Each volunteer get Rs. 30/- per school visit.

**Block resource group in Assam is mainly constituted of retired teachers and experienced resource persons from NGOs. Members of this group make regular school visits (at least 10 every month) and attend monthly meetings at the cluster, block and district level. They not only extend support to the teachers but also help the BRC in organising seminars and workshops as per the need. Each BRG member is paid Rs. 50/- per visit.

questions raised by children. Though the community linkages with centres in *Kerala* are not as strong as in the case of *Assam* efforts have been to made in this direction. In *Kerala*, the BRC trainers often attend PTA / MTA meetings and share the teaching strategies adopted in the classrooms. Parents have also started participating in teacher training programmes. Recently a booklet has been developed to create awareness about the new approaches to teaching. Some BRCs have also assisted in the planning of the Block Education Project.

*I*t needs to be emphasised that these block and cluster resource centres have not emerged as isolated entities. Their structures and functions have evolved in a certain context of pedagogic renewal. They have borrowed heavily from the larger process, often reflecting the state specific vision of primary school pedagogy. These are link structures in the whole pedagogical intervention strategy. How they develop will influence very strongly how well and deeply the pedagogical interventions will take root. Further, they have the potential to become sites where the pedagogical processes initiated can evolve further.

SUPPORT TO TEACHERS

Though each state has conceptualised support to the teacher differently based on its overall pedagogic vision and local needs, teacher training followed by extension of support through school visits and monthly meetings seem to have emerged as critical grassroots academic support mechanisms in all the five states. In this section we will take a closer look at these support processes. While school visits and meetings have been scrutinised in greater detail, the documentation of teacher training is more limited in scope since teacher training as a process has already been extensively examined in other studies. Here we will discuss only the contribution of resource centres to teacher training.

TEACHER TRAINING

In all the five states block and cluster resource centres are playing a critical role in the conceptualisation, conduct and organisation of the teacher training programmes. In *Assam*, *Kerala* and *Madhya Pradesh* these centres undertake teacher training at regular intervals throughout the year. Efforts are made to organise these training programmes during holidays, so that school functioning is not disrupted. However during the teaching period *feedback* is collected through regular school visits and monthly meetings and it is this feedback which forms the basis of the next training programme. On the other hand, in *Bihar* and *Karnataka*, the BRC functions mainly as a training centre throughout the year, organising training programmes 20 days a month.

In Bihar the block resource centre is essentially seen as a teacher training centre, organising training programmes for teachers 20 days a month throughout the year. Once a month training at the CRC is seen as an extension of this 10 days' block level training programme. This 10 days' motivational training programme called Ujala at BRC aims to help the teacher analyse his role in the society and to equip him to take up improved teaching methods centred around active learning processes and a child-centred pedagogy. The basic approach at all levels seems to be to demonstrate how specific areas/hard-spots from the contents of the textbooks are effectively handled in mock-classrooms, involving plenty of role-play.

Though this study did not tackle teacher training as an activity in detail, the case studies revealed some positive and critical changes that took place in the teacher training programmes with the coming up of resource centres. Let us briefly examine these changes

CREATING A SPACE

In the past teacher training was mainly the responsibility of DIETs. The training packages or modules developed at the national or state level were conducted at the district level. In the

case of mass teacher training programmes like SOPT and PMOST, block level training venues came into the picture. However these remained sporadic and temporary. It was only when the block and cluster resource centres were established in DPEP, that a systematic effort was made to conduct teacher training programmes at the block level. *Infrastructure and facilities* were provided at these centres to facilitate this process.

In Karnataka, the block resource centre has an office room for the BRC coordinator and a training hall for conducting teacher training. Separate dormitories are provided for ladies and gents which makes it possible to conduct residential training programmes. Toilet and drinking water facilities are also provided. Books, photocopier, OHP, TV/VCR etc are readily available for use.

Such infrastructure, available close to the teachers has made possible frequent residential and well conducted training programmes.

RESOURCE TEAMS OF TEACHERS

Never before were teachers involved on such a large scale in the conceptualisation and conduct of teacher training programmes. But now BRC-CRC coordinators and other identified resource teachers are trained as master trainers to conduct training programmes. In all the five states identified teachers have been consistently involved in the conceptualisation and implementation of teacher training programmes.

In Bihar all teachers from a cluster come together for the training programme. It is from these teachers that the resource persons for the block are selected for a period of one year, after which they go back to their schools. Because of this practice more and more teachers get the opportunity to function as teacher-trainers which is likely to enhance their own understanding, confidence and teaching competence.

QUALITATIVE CHANGES IN TEACHER TRAINING

The shift in teacher training from the district to the block has not only brought the trainers closer to the teachers but has also led to a *qualitative* change in the training programmes. A space has been created for experimentation in the field followed by reflection and revision in strategies. Kerala's *Kinginkkoottom* training programme is a case in point.

A hands on teacher training programme call Kinginkkoottom was organised in May 98. The 16 day children's camp was closely linked to the ongoing five-day in-service training programme for teachers organised at the BRC. The teachers during this five day training programme identified common classroom difficulties and collectively formulated classroom strategies for team teaching, facilitating group activities with peer learning, designing

classroom activities to address the multi-grade/multi level situations, developing small projects for children, organising field trips and so on. Immediately after this five day interaction at the block, these strategies were tried out in the classrooms by teachers and trainers together.

The traditional teacher training packages were highly structured and rigid in terms of both content and form. In the absence of a dialogue between expert and teachers the possibility of modifying these teacher training packages was extremely limited. The local resource centres have made possible for the form and content of teacher training programmes to be highly flexible. For example, if the block or cluster level teachers feel that they need to focus on mathematics in a particular grade or on special disability children they can always design the teacher training programme in such a way that it addresses the specific issue that they have to handle. Such *need based training programmes* have been organised especially in Assam and Kerala. Let us see what a trainee teacher from Kerala has to say:

"...I was skeptical as I approached the training centre. I was quite sure that this was going to be just another one of those in-service programmes. But what DPEP gave us was certainly a very different experience from what we had gone through earlier. As I got inside the training centre, the first thing that caught my attention was the arrangement of the chairs in a circle. It was clear that this was going to be something different. The very first grouping itself was quite interesting. The haste with which we quickly introduced ourselves to the other members in the group- believing that this group was going to be constant - was proved fruitless when we went through several grouping activities which were effective and quite interesting. Through this we could get to know every one of the participating teachers in the programme. The various wake-up activities that we participated in certainly succeeded in working up the sleeping minds in every one of us...

We understood a very important thing right on the first day: that the most effective learning takes place through experiences. The fact that the child looks at the world holistically and with a lot of imagination was presented to us using the object which every child dreads: the cane! The infinite possibilities of imagination was slowly unraveled to us as the cane took on various shapes ... ranging from a sleeping baby to a fishing rod! The activity that we participated in - to understand that anything in the environment could be used for creating learning experiences - was really good. As we started framing questions in the object identification activity we realised how difficult it is to frame questions. The basic elements of a good learning activity gradually emerged..."

E.P. Sairabanu, school teacher, Palakkad district, Kerala.

AN ONGOING PROCESS

Before local centres emerged teacher training had been either a once in a life time activity or available, in more recent times, every 3 to 4 years to a particular teacher. In DPEP however, the establishment of the local resource centres has created a potential for need based recurrent training programmes. For instance, in *Karnataka* teachers have been exposed to a series of training programmes on different issues ranging from MLL, activity based pedagogy, film based training on thematic issues to Gender, IED and VEC training. One sees similar experiences in the other four states also.

Moreover, these training programmes are not an isolated input but are part of a continuous process. The BRC/CRC coordinators as trainers conceptualise new ideas, and share them with teachers in the training programme. Then through school visits they help teachers in trying out these new ideas in the classrooms. These experiences are then shared by teachers in the monthly meetings. It is this dialogue, generated through school visits and monthly meetings, which forms the basis of the next training programme.

In Kerala after the introduction of the new textbooks with activity based pedagogy, field visit by trainers revealed the problems being faced by teachers in implementing the integrated new language approach. This feed back was shared by the trainers in the state resource group. Based on the feedback the next training programme focussed on this emerging issue of integration. Further interaction with teachers during school visits and monthly meetings revealed that, "with changes in the teaching learning process the evaluation system needs to correspondingly change". The whole issue of evaluation was then addressed in a series of state level workshops in which identified teachers and BRC trainers also participated. A new technique of evaluation and grading was then developed after trialling a series of activities in the field. Teachers were trained and evaluation tools were developed by them in the CRC meetings.

The creation of grassroot resource centres has inevitably given a new dimension to the content and form of teacher training. The centralised and top to bottom modules are no longer relevant and the teacher training programmes are driven by the experiences and needs of local teachers. Now they cannot but address the immediate problems of classroom transaction and be participatory in nature. This process generally involves rewriting and reinterpreting several texts and devising either completely new activities or considerably modifying old ones. The teacher herself is actively involved in the process of teacher training. The centres have also helped to make teacher training a continuous process rather than a one time event. The fact that the centres provide a space for discussion, libraries, consultation, feedback, sharing etc has created a new potential for training.

SCHOOL VISITS

School visits by the resource persons at the block and cluster level have indeed emerged as important means of extending support to the teacher and implementing the pedagogical vision. However the nature and frequency of visits by the two functionaries differ and have therefore been discussed separately.

VISIT BY THE CRC COORDINATORS

In both *Assam* and *Madhya Pradesh* the CRC coordinators (*academic coordinator in case of *Madhya Pradesh*) visit 10-12 schools in a month. During the visit they spend the entire day in the school. However there are subtle differences in the nature of visits made by the coordinators in these two states. In *Assam* the focus is on demonstration classes and discussing need based issues identified during the visit or in the monthly meeting. In *Madhya Pradesh* in addition to academic discussion with teachers, some of the major tasks of the cluster academic coordinators include checking of classwise targets fixed in the monthly meeting, engaging a teacherless class, holding joint meetings with teachers and head masters, collection of data and dissemination of information (mid day meal, enrollment etc).

In *Bihar* and *Karnataka* the frequency of school visits by CRC co-ordinators is very low. In *Bihar*, the CRC coordinator being a full time teacher (responsibility of CRC is an additional charge) is unable to undertake school visits. In *Karnataka* though the CRC coordinator is a full time appointee he finds it difficult to provide sustained inputs through school visits, mainly due to a large number of schools(25-45) in the cluster.

The CRC coordinator expressed his concern about the number of schools in a cluster:

"The geographical division is not proper. The number of schools on an average is high. The lowest in our block is 17, and it goes up to 40 per cluster. In the neighboring Srirangapatna Taluk, I have heard that one cluster has 45 schools! In such situation, how can we be expected to visit all the schools regularly and provide continuous support to the teachers?"

Nagaraj, CRC Coordinator, Malavalli, Mandya Dist., Karnataka


Initially in *Karnataka* school visits by the CRC coordinator were supervisory in nature, but with increased interaction with the BRC team of trainers a greater clarity on the academic support needed emerged. Consequently, there has been a shift from supervision to observation and interaction.


In both *Karnataka* and *Bihar* regular academic support through school visits is emerging as a perceived need. In *Bihar*, in response to this emerging need for onsite support, schools were graded and those requiring more attention were attached to the block resource persons (details in the next section). Some cluster level efforts were also made to overcome the problem of erratic school visits.

During the meeting at CRC the issue under discussion was the inability of the coordinator to make regular school visits. As a solution it was then proposed that every month 4-5 teachers will form a group and visit schools to provide support. Women too decided to participate in this activity. After discussion with the block education officer it was decided that teachers from schools with a staff of more than 1-2 will be included in the group. The field visits undertaken by these motivated teachers were a great success.

Cluster Resource Centre - Ghaghra, Khunti, Ranchi, Bihar

School visits in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Karnataka have elements of supervision, and data collection along with extension of academic support. However, in Kerala school visits by the cluster coordinators (called trainers) are purely academic in nature and do not generally involve discussion on administrative issues. Each trainer, responsible for one cluster (7-8 schools) is able to make 13-14 days' visits per month. In some districts, each trainer looks after one cluster for a month or two and then moves on to another cluster. *The reason for continuous redistribution of clusters among the trainers located at the block is to ensure that each school benefits from the skills of all the trainers.* During the school visit the trainer usually spends the whole day (10-4 PM) in the school. Depending upon need he distributes his time among the classes. On one of his visits during the month a school resource group meeting is organised where he meets all the teachers together. Let us look at an extract from the Kerala report:

 **I**n Cherypullassery and Pattambi blocks of Palakkad district in Kerala teachers and trainers usually enter the school together in the morning. As the teachers begin the school activities, the trainers review the previous records of the visit and the reports maintained by teachers. The trainer may sometimes discuss with the teachers the lesson plan for that particular day and then decide which classes to visit. Classroom observation by the trainer involves active participation in the teaching learning process. Most of the time the trainer and the teacher together handle the class to try out new methods of teaching; sometimes the trainer provides an academic input and sometimes he simply helps the teacher in organising the classroom, field trips etc. At the end of the day the teacher and the trainer share and discuss their observations and problems. The trainer records his observation in the school visit book and his own diary. In Kerala school visits by the trainers have played a critical role in implementing the new pedagogy. Feedback of the problems identified through school visits helped the SRG in planning need based training programmes (on integration, whole language approach, evaluation, EVS projects etc). Here are some glimpses of the interactions between the trainers and teachers in Kerala:



Teacher shares with the trainer (cluster coordinator), "each child writes on something different and I keep correcting note books." The trainer and the teacher then develop a series of self correction, peer correction activities. In one such activity children were asked to name all eatable things. These were then classified into vegetable and rice items, followed by sentence making exercises done by children. Each child then read out his sentence and the teacher simultaneously wrote it on the board. The children, without being instructed, started making corrections in their notebooks. The exercise was a great success and was shared in the school resource group meeting.

Trainer, "It was a pleasure to see children correcting themselves without going through the humiliating experience of being told by the teacher"

BRC trainer, Cherrypulssery, Palakkad Dist., Kerala

During a school visit the trainer observed that the teacher was giving a project on construction to the children. He was instructing the children to go home and find out from the parents the materials required to construct a house. The trainer intervened and suggested an alternative to make the whole exercise interesting for children. This involved a visit to the construction site in groups of 4-5 and collecting information through discussions with the men working there. After the visit each group would present the observations while others would add to the information being presented

BRC trainer, Pattambi, Palakkad Dist., Kerala

SCHOOL VISITS BY BRC PERSONNEL

In all states, the school visits are also made by the BRC personnel, though less frequently compared to that of the CRC coordinator. In *Madhya Pradesh* the BRC coordinator's occasional visit to the school is usually to check the CAC's visits and supervise the school functioning. In *Kerala* though the BRC coordinator makes at least 5-7 school visits in a month, his interaction is mainly supervisory in nature. In *Assam* the BRC coordinator visits at least 10 schools in a month to monitor pedagogical interventions, assess the needs of the school, teachers and CRC coordinators. He also organises joint supervision visits of schools with the BEOs, school inspectors and CRC coordinators. *Assam* has an added advantage of a *block resource group* which regularly interacts with the teachers on *academic issues* and provides feedback to the BRC.

In *Bihar* and *Karnataka* the resource persons are too preoccupied with training programmes to make regular school visits. In both these states the resource persons at the BRC spend about 3 weeks of the month training, and much of the remaining days are spent in monthly meetings with the CRCs. Possibility of sustained support through school visits is thus very remote. However in both these states a perceived need for continuous interaction with the teachers in schools is emerging and efforts have been directed to overcome these problems.

In Bihar

On the basis of the Gross Enrolment Ratio + Retention + Achievement-levels there is a system of grading the schools in order to identify those schools which need closer attention. Apart from the 'worst' school, which is 'adopted' by the resource centre, 2-3 schools are 'visited' by the BRC-RPs every month. An 'observation tool', developed at the DLO, is used by the BRC trainers during the school visits and the contents are discussed later at the BRC and at the CRC meetings.

In Karnataka

Even though school visits by resource persons at BRC have been few and far between, these have helped in clarifying doubts of teachers regarding the new teaching methods and approaches. A BRC resource person reports from a school visit: "a teacher found it difficult to believe that the sun was much, much bigger than the earth. I used an analogy related to the apparent reduction in the size of objects that are far away from us. For example, you can use your fore finger to block from your sight an entire building that is at a distance. This does not mean that the building is smaller than your finger! The same idea applies to the sun".

Malavalli BRC, Mandya Dist., Karnataka

In Kerala the BRC coordinator visits 5-7 schools in a month. Unlike the visit of the trainer, it is more supervisory than academic in nature. A format is used to report observations which are shared with the BRC team. These visits help the BRC coordinators to stay in touch with the issues emerging in the field.

In Assam, Kerala and M.P the cluster coordinators (trainers in the case of Kerala) provide more academic support to the teachers through school visits compared to the BRC coordinators. Assam also has resource groups at block and cluster level who make school visits and give feedback to the BRC.

In Bihar and Karnataka the resource persons at the BRC provide more academic input whenever they can visit schools. In both the states some efforts have been made at the field level to respond to the emerging need of regular school visits. However these states need to take cognizance of this growing need and take steps to ensure that regular school visits are made to extend support to the teacher.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

An important feature of the resource centres are the monthly meetings which are held at different levels. Teachers come together every month at the cluster. In some states the CRC coordinators have monthly or bimonthly meetings at the block. Also, in many states the BRC coordinators regularly interact with DIET, DPO or DRG. Each meeting whether at the cluster, block or district level in its own way contributes towards extension of support to the teacher. In this section we will focus on block and cluster centre meetings which are directly relevant to the teacher.

CLUSTER MEETING OF TEACHERS

In *Assam*, all teachers of a cluster gather at the CRC once a month for the whole day to discuss academic issues. The schools remain closed on this day. Though the CRC coordinator is the key facilitator, the meeting is also attended by block resource group members, with the BRC coordinator joining in occasionally. Sometimes CRC coordinators of other clusters are invited as resource persons for the meeting. This is made possible by slotting the meetings of CRCs of one block on different dates.

After a brief review of the last meeting each school presented a report on lesson wise progress in each primary class. Two issues, the concept of addition for class I and the concept of multiplication for class III, identified after presentations were then discussed in groups. Later in day teachers developed an action plan for the next month and also prepared the necessary teaching learning materials.

*CRC meeting at Sri Sri Ramkrishna Vidyamandir,
Mayang BRC, Morigaon Dist., Assam*

Initially, when the resource centres were set up, monthly meetings in *Assam* were an immediate follow-up of the training programme on activity based pedagogy. Efforts were made during these meetings to further clarify concepts introduced during teacher training. Approach papers presented at the meeting, usually by the CRC coordinator, focussed on issues like 'concept of activity', 'how to deal with tables', 'recognition of alphabets' etc. These papers were prepared by the academic resource group at the district and adapted at the block and cluster level. Over a period of time after teachers had gained clarity on some basic principles of activity based pedagogy, the focus of the CRC meetings shifted to lesson planning and TLM preparation.

In *Madhya Pradesh*, separate meetings are held for teachers of classes 1,2,3 and of classes 4 and 5 for 4-5 hours in alternate months. The meeting involves interaction on both academic and non-academic issues. Usually lessons of language, maths or EVS are discussed through demonstration, sharing of alternative teaching methods, TLM preparation etc. Non-academic

but critical issues like mid day meal schemes, school contingency, government circulars, EGS scheme are also discussed.

In the Eklavya (NGO) supported block of *Madhya Pradesh* cluster meetings are comparatively more academic in nature than in the rest of the state. Classwise and school wise detailed feedback is given by each teacher on the classroom transaction in the previous month and on specific problems encountered by them. Discussion on one issue/teaching concept is then taken up. This is followed by planning activities for the next month. Resource persons from Eklavya provide the academic input.

As in *Madhya Pradesh*, in *Kerala* too separate meetings are held for teachers of classes 1 and 2 and of classes 3 and 4, so that schools can remain open on the day of the monthly meeting. However, in *Kerala* the meetings go on for the whole day, usually beginning at 10 am and ending around 4 pm. The first half of the day is spent in discussing problems faced by the teachers in the classroom and in developing activities to address them. The second half is spent in planning for the next month. Participants usually divide into groups and identify activities for different curricular statements to be transacted during the coming month. Evaluation tools are also developed in the monthly meetings, and are later adapted to the school specific situations. The meetings are facilitated by one or more trainers from the BRC. The organisational aspects are handled by the CRC coordinator (not full time) who is the headmaster of the school, where the CRC is located.

In one CRC meeting the teachers were discussing the nature of errors or spelling mistakes made by the children. They deliberated upon the strategies that could be adopted to overcome this problem and came up with an activity bank. Some of these activities outlined by the teachers were:

- *Making children develop a dictionary*
- *Using interesting card games. For example, developing word cards. On one side of the card the correct word could be written. On its back side will be the incorrect form. Children will be asked to identify the correct form.*
- *Repeatedly using words spelled incorrectly in a story to be told to children.*
- *Introducing word formation and sentence building exercises.*
- *Using word games like, "think of all the words connected with coconut" or "make a word with the last letter of the word spoken by the previous child".*

*Experience shared by a school teacher in Cherpullassery Block,
Palakkad Dist., Kerala*

*Some of the questions raised by children which came up to the CRC meeting included:
Which part of the plant is used for reproduction?
Does the giraffe have a horn?
Where is the ear of the crow?*

Is squirrel a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian?

Sometimes discussion, sometimes observation, sometimes the encyclopaedia came to the rescue of the trainers and the teachers.

CRC Cherpullassery Block Palakkad, Kerala

In *Bihar*, all teachers of a cluster come together once a month at the CRC. The schools remain closed on this day. The meeting takes place for the whole day and the discussion mainly focusses on the ways to tackle already identified problematic issues in different content areas. The discussion involves group work followed by presentation and sharing of different strategies. Sometimes a demonstration lesson in the lab school precedes the discussion in the meeting. A resource person from the block usually comes to facilitate the discussion. Issues raised in the VEC meeting are also deliberated upon in the cluster meeting.

Teachers were divided into groups. Each group was working on a "hard spot". Group I was developing activities on addition and subtraction using marbles. Group II & III was working on place value. Group IV was identifying different approaches for teaching a lesson "Aasman Gira" of grade II. Group V was working on the Hindi lesson "Kabootar aur Jaal". Since this lesson is also taught in grade II and grade III, group V was also trying to work out how it could be transacted in a multigrade situation. The group work was followed by presentation and discussion, which helped in creating a larger pool of activities for each area. The transaction of one story on "Kabootar aur Jaal" was also taken up in the nearby lab school. One teacher took the class, while others watched from outside. The teacher presented the story with a lot of action, mimicry and role play, and invited children to act out specific events of the story, following it up with a series of other related activities.

Cluster Resource Centre, Birahima Bazar, Motipur block, Bihar

In Karnataka, the role of cluster level meetings is still evolving. Initially, the CRC meeting was mainly a means for collecting and disseminating information for the BEO's office. Lately however, the focus has shifted to discussion on academic issues. Now in the meeting a list of topics and competencies to be transacted in the forthcoming month is prepared and discussed in groups by teachers, followed by an outlining of activities, methods and materials for the transaction of these competencies. Our case study revealed that teachers in Karnataka are not comfortable with the idea of joint planning in groups. According to the teachers of one CRC "each teacher is in a different situation and each situation demands a different approach. This cannot be decided at a CRC meeting." Based on this feedback the next monthly meeting in that block deviated from the usual practice and focussed instead on discussion among teachers on academic issues identified by them.

The CRC coordinator, Aswathappa, had seen an interesting game on place value in one of the schools. In the monthly meeting he invited the concerned teacher (Govindappa) to share this with the teachers. Govindappa actually prepared the model and made the teachers play the game. It consisted of a pack of cards, and each card had on it a single digit from 0 to 9. Four players could play this game. All you had to do was to pick up the topmost card on the pile, and note the digit on a grid. Once a particular digit was written, its place on the grid could not be changed. After four chances (if you were writing a 4-digit number), the player who could make the highest number with the chosen four digits won the game.

This was an interesting activity for reinforcement of the place value concept, and the teachers enjoyed it.

CRC Hampasandra, Gudibande, Kolar Dist., Karnataka

BRC MEETING

In Assam, the meeting of CRC coordinators at the BRC is critical for the cluster level meeting and school activities. Initially the meeting of CRC coordinators was held twice a month at the BRC to discuss the issues emerging out of the school visits, cluster level monthly meeting of teachers and VEC meetings. The approach paper to be discussed eventually with teachers was deliberated upon in this meeting. Block resource group members and sometimes, academic resource group members provided the academic inputs to CRC coordinators. Lately this meeting has been converted to a two day residential fortnightly meet in which the BRC and CRC coordinators develop activity based lesson plans and teaching aids for the curricular areas of the forthcoming month.

BRC meetings in Kerala also centre around academic issues. However, instead of a fortnightly meet the BRC team in Kerala meets every week on Saturday. In the meeting issues emerging out of school visits are discussed and plans are made for the next week and for the monthly meeting at the cluster. Here are some glimpses of the discussions that took place at the BRC.

The Evaluation Issue

Heated debate on the grading system in the new evaluation strategy took place in Pattambi BRC. It began with a small argument on the inclusion of the grading indicator for two digit addition in first term of class I. The trainer presenting the case felt that the grading indicators given by the state did not match the curricular statements. Taking one example he said that "children master two digit addition only by end of the session, but one is expected to

* District resource group/academic resource group in Assam is mainly constituted of DIET/faculty members, BEO, SIs, BRC, BRC coordinators, CRC coordinator (on rotation), Assistant BRC coordinator (on rotation) BRG members, district programme officers etc. This ARG plans all academic activities in the district after taking detailed feedback from field functionaries.

evaluate it in first term. Why evaluate when one knows that the child will not be able to accomplish the task?" After discussion the entire group decided not to give it as a grading indicator for first term. This discussion led them to address questions like, do we evaluate the child's experience or the curricular statement? Is a learning activity different from an evaluation activity? and so on. After discussions this group of trainers came to some conclusions which were:

- A learning activity is not different from an evaluation activity
- Present grading indicators do not always help in assessing the experience of the children
- Term exams are needed to satisfy the parents.
- Evaluation is a part of every learning activity

BRC Pattambi, Palakkad Dist., Kerala

The New Approach

Field visits of the trainers after introduction of the new book revealed that teachers were finding it difficult to implement the new language approach introduced through training and textbooks. There was also a feeling among the teachers that through this method children would not learn letters. Trainers felt that while the teachers were somewhat convinced about the new approach during the training programme, they were facing difficulty in implementing this new approach in the classrooms. Also observations had revealed that teachers were always in a hurry to make the child read and write specific words and letters which did not allow the child to move at his own pace. Another disturbing trend that was observed was that most teachers did not plan the classroom transaction before coming to school. The trainers decided that each of them would spend two consecutive days in the same school interacting with teachers and children of classes I & II.

During these two days trainers planned with the teacher the activities to be undertaken throughout the day. Most of the trainers found that pre reading activities were missed out by the teacher and they were also unable to exploit the potential of the text and rhymes given in the textbook. The trainers, with help from the teachers conducted these activities with the children. This gave a lot of hope and confidence to the teachers.

BRC Pattambi, Palakkad Dist., Kerala

Unlike Assam and Kerala, our case study found that BRC meetings in Bihar focus on administrative as well as academic issues. While in Madhya Pradesh the BRC meeting usually focuses more on administrative and programme implementation issues, such as collection of reports from various clusters and planning for the next month's targets. However in the Eklavya supported block of Madhya Pradesh, academic issues are also discussed.

In Karnataka BRC level meetings are beginning to play a critical role in supporting the

activities at the cluster and school level. The BEO and the Inspector of Schools also attend the meeting, and this has proved to be a useful practice. The CRC coordinators share experiences with the BRC team and then plan the future course of action. It is these discussions which lead to the desired changes in the activities of the centre based on feedback. Let us look at one example:

In the meeting the CRC coordinator shared with the BRC team the perceptions of teachers. The feedback from the teachers was that a lot of time was being wasted in taking feedback from all teachers about their activities in the previous month. This was not necessary, felt many teachers, as they could get away by mentioning things that they were not doing! In addition, they felt that the afternoon sessions at the CRC meetings were a complete waste of time. During these sessions, they would draw up a plan for the next month, only to forget all about it as they left the venue of the meeting. It was strongly felt by the teachers that there was no point in planning for the next month during the meeting, as each teacher was in a different situation. And each situation demanded a different approach. The next month's plan was not something to be decided at a CRC meeting, but had to be decided at the school level, with support from the concerned CRC and BRC resource person.

The CRC coordinator expressed concern about the perceptions of the teachers and felt that necessary changes needed to be made. The BRC team then proposed a series of ideas that could help to provide better support to the teachers and address their needs. These included forming cluster resource groups to support the schools, bringing out newsletters, adopting schools, experimenting in the lab school etc.

Regarding the CRC meeting, the decision was to do away with the feedback and planning session. Instead, the teachers would work in different groups and list out the various activities they undertook in their schools during the previous month. These would then be listed in a plenary session and prioritized. For example, the teachers would be asked to identify the five most important things they wanted to discuss in the CRC meeting, and these points would be discussed in detail.

In addition, for the next CRC meeting, it was decided that there would be a quiz for the teachers. It had been observed that the teachers were not regularly using the handbook, though it had many useful activities and hints for the teachers. The quiz would focus on the handbook, and would have many questions taken from it. The idea was to convince the teachers that if they had not been using the handbook so far, they were missing something important.

This discussion had immediate effect in the field. In the next CRC meeting the discussion deviated from the norms and focussed on issues prioritised by the teachers.

*Meeting between the BRC team and CRC coordinator in
Gudibande block, Kolar Dist., Karnataka*

The monthly meeting of the teachers at the CRC is actually the creation of a forum where teachers can come together to share their views on academic and other school related issues. A teacher can present and discuss a teaching strategy adopted by him to 15-20 other teachers. These experiences not only encourage others to do activities but instil a lot of confidence in that innovative teacher. However, one notes a tendency in some states to focus more on administrative issues in these meetings, which are also important, but there is a need to ensure that a balance is maintained between academic and non-academic issues. Also, there is a close linkage between the BRC and CRC meeting. The issues emerging in the CRC meetings are discussed at the block, based on which the next meeting is planned. In Assam especially, the CRC coordinators in a fortnightly meet develop lesson plans and materials at the BRC before initiating a similar exercise at cluster level. In fact, in Assam the activities at the block and cluster level have a close linkage with the activities of district academic resource group also.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

The resource centres of this study were found to be different, not only in what they did i.e. the activities they undertook, but also in terms of how well they performed. The case studies in the five states made an effort to identify and understand the factors which help the centres to be effective i.e. translate the pedagogic vision into reality. These case studies have revealed that firstly there are some basic minimum conditions (essential conditions) that need to be provided to make a functional resource centre. Secondly, there are another set of factors which contribute towards the growth of the centre.

ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS

WELL DEFINED CAREFULLY THOUGHT OUT PEDAGOGIC VISION

We have discussed in the first chapter the evolution of the resource centres in response to the pedagogical vision of the state. It is this vision which is perhaps the most important enabling factor for an alive and thriving resource centre. The more holistic the pedagogical intervention strategy, the more meaningful will be the activities of the resource centre.

For example in Kerala the pedagogical renewal process involved interventions in textbooks, teacher training, evaluation etc. The resource centres played a key role in

- *supporting the teacher through school visits and monthly meetings;*
- *implementing activity based pedagogy in classrooms;*
- *providing feedback to the state on the emerging issues in the field;*
- *planning need based training programmes; and*
- *developing evaluation strategies.*

The centres in Kerala thus had a major task of implementing the renewal process in the field. We argue that if the basic teaching learning processes have not been gone into in detail, debated, tried out, internalised, the resource centres will remain lifeless. In other words, a resource centre can only be as good as the pedagogy it fosters. The soundness of basic pedagogy therefore remains the cornerstone of a vibrant centre. Once formed, the resource centre also becomes a valuable tool for further development and growth of the pedagogic vision. But a basic clarity in the original processes needs to be ensured.

SELECTION PROCEDURE

A major contributor to the performance of the resource centre is the quality of human resources, i.e. the coordinators and their perceptions about education. Experiences of the five states showed clearly that coordinators who have primary school teaching experience, well developed interaction skills, ability to coordinate activities and listen to others and a desire or

motivation to try out and experiment with new methods were highly effective. This need to have coordinators with specific abilities and a high degree of motivation sometimes led the states of our case study to make drastic changes in their selection procedures for coordinators. This is especially true for *Kerala*, where in the first year of the programme, the selection was based on an interview by the DPO of applicants from among teachers who had experience in secondary schools. However, the lack of understanding of the learning process and absence of experience in teaching and handling primary classrooms entailed heavy costs. These trainers were unable to relate to the problems of the teachers either in the training programmes or during school visits. Consequently, the selection procedure of trainers was changed. The teachers with primary school experience were selected as trainers through a workshop mode. In the workshop, activities, group discussions and written tests were organised to assess the skills of the teachers. Let us look at the experience of a teacher who attended one such workshop:

In March 1997 Ramankutty went to Ottapalam for the selection test, a one day workshop. The workshop began with an introduction from the district project coordinator focusing on the changes needed in the education system, after which an inhibition breaking activity was conducted. All participants stood in a circle and one person was in the centre asking in Malayalam "what is green?" Each participant had to name a different thing. After more such activities, participants were divided into groups and each group was asked to make an activity for a specific area. Ramankutty's group was then asked to make an activity to introduce "Ta" to children. His group made an action song. After presentation and discussion on the activity all participants took a written test. Each individual was administered a questionnaire which had two parts - objective and descriptive. The question asked was, "Do you think any change is needed in Primary Education? If yes, what changes do you suggest?" At the end of the day the DPC addressed the participants again informing them about the role of the trainer. After a week, Ramankutty was invited for DRG training (around April 97).

Ramankutty, BRC trainer, Cherypullassery, Palakkad, Kerala

As in the case of *Kerala*, in *Assam* also the CRC coordinators were selected through an open workshop. In both these states, the presence of the right kind of people at the centres has contributed a great deal towards extending support to the teachers in the field.

In *Bihar*, the selection procedure is an interesting variation from the procedure adopted in *Kerala* and *Assam*. Here the BRC resource persons and CRC coordinators are selected through training programmes (on the last day) for a limited time period. This kind of procedure ensures acceptability of the coordinator among teachers of that cluster as they themselves are involved in the selection. Also, since appointments are temporary, only for year or so, more and more teachers get the opportunity to become trainers and coordinators. In *Karnataka*, in phase I districts the resource persons at the block are higher secondary

teachers identified by the DPO and the CRC coordinators are primary school teachers selected through interviews at the district level. However, after the experience of phase I, the selection procedure was changed for phase II districts. In the phase II BRCs, three resource persons are from primary schools and two from higher secondary schools.

In the NGO supported block of *Madhya Pradesh*, motivated teachers who had been resource persons during training and workshops were identified as cluster academic coordinators. The field observations reveal that the cluster academic coordinators in this block are in a good position to provide academic support to teachers.

Open selection procedures have, where conducted ensured that motivated individuals wanting to bring about a change in the education system are recruited as coordinators or resource persons at the BRC or CRC. For example, in Kerala, because of the selection procedure, the trainers at the block are actually motivated energetic teachers who have been a part of educational movements such as the National Literacy Movement in their district.

STAFFING (STRUCTURE)

Though selecting the right person as coordinator is important, this one individual cannot possibly meet all the demands of a resource centre. Observations in the five states reveal that wherever teams of resource persons have come together at the block and cluster, better academic support has been provided. Let us look at the number of resource persons available at the block and cluster in some of the states.

AT THE BLOCK

In *Kerala* at the BRC there is a team of 18-20 resource persons and the BRC coordinator handles all administrative matters. The remaining team is thus entrusted with the academic activities of the block. The BRC academic coordinator (DIET representative located at BRC) and the team of 15-17 trainers extend support to teachers through regular school visits and monthly meetings. Once a week the trainers of a block meet together to share their observations and plan for the next week. The presence of 18-20 resource persons with different abilities and ideas generates a healthy discussion in these weekly meetings as well as the germination of new ideas and plans. Also, the presence of a team ensures that if one trainer cannot meet the specific needs of a school, another can help out. Moreover, in *Kerala*, the trainers redistribute the clusters on a monthly or bimonthly basis among themselves so that each school benefits from the skills of all the trainers.

As in the case of *Kerala*, in *Assam* too efforts have been made to develop a team of resource persons at the block. But, unlike *Kerala*, only two coordinators are located at the BRC and a block resource group is constituted to support the activities of the BRC. Members of the block resource group make school visits, give feedback in block meetings, help the BRC in planning and implementing various activities in the block.

In *Bihar and Karnataka* too, a team of resource persons is located at the block. As mentioned earlier, in these states the focus is on imparting training. Notably, the importance of coordinated team work has emerged even with respect to training. The BRC coordinator in Malavalli block of *Karnataka* says

"Our strength lies in team work. We understand each others' problems and strengths. Other BRCs have problems because there is a lot of internal friction in their teams."

AT THE CLUSTER LEVEL

A full time academic coordinator at the cluster looking after 8-10 schools can extend better onsite support through school visits and monthly meetings than a part time functionary. We find that in *Assam* and *Madhya Pradesh* there are full time coordinators. *Assam* has an added advantage of having a cluster level resource group to support the activities of CRC in schools. In *Kerala* each trainer located at the BRC is actually responsible for one cluster and the head master of the centre school has the responsibility of organising monthly meeting.

From the experiences of the states it is clear that teams at block or cluster level are in a better position to extend academic support instead of individual coordinators.

INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES AND FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

AT THE BRC

Infrastructure available at the BRC affects the activities organised by the centre. For example, having a training hall and dormitories for participants helps in conducting residential teacher training programmes. In all the five states these facilities have been provided. Equipments like photocopiers, duplicating machines, typewriters, TVs, VCRs, public address systems, megaphones, OHPs etc. have facilitated the functioning of resource centres especially in *Assam, Karnataka* and *Madhya Pradesh*. Availability of books, activity banks, directories of teachers and CRCs (specialising in different subjects and activities), learning corners, supplementary teaching learning materials especially in the block resource centres of *Assam* has facilitated extension of onsite support to the teachers.

AT THE CRC

In all the states, rooms have been provided for or constructed within the school premises. In states like *Assam* and *Karnataka* two rooms have been provided to the CRC. Books have been made available at the CRC especially in *Assam, Bihar, Karnataka* and *Madhya Pradesh*. In the case of *Assam*, model lesson plans, activity banks, school and VEC data bases, teachers' directory, supplementary TLMs and learning corners are some of the additional facilities available at the cluster resource centres.

Adequate infrastructure and facilities are necessary conditions for a functional resource centre. Equally important is the financial provision for organising different activities, conducting school visits and monthly meetings. Depending upon state specific needs funds are provided at the resource centre. However there is an emerging need to give more financial autonomy to resource centers in all the states.

CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS THE GROWTH OF THE CENTRE

CAPACITY BUILDING

Getting the right number and the right kind of coordinators or teams at the BRC and CRC is indeed crucial for a functional resource centre. However, these coordinators are actually (primary) school teachers, now expected to perform a new role. How equipped are they to extend support to about 8-10 schools of the cluster? What is their capacity to extend support? These are important questions that needed to be addressed by the states. In all the five states, the coordinators have undergone an orientation for their role and have been involved in teacher training programmes. But specific training programmes and efforts aimed at building the capacity of the resource persons are not always adequate. Let us look at some of these capacity building initiatives which have really enabled the resource persons to extend support to teachers through school visits or monthly meetings.

SCHOOL PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

A school placement programme was organised for the BRC teams both in *Karnataka* and *Kerala*. In *Karnataka*, the idea was to orient the secondary school resource person/teacher to the needs of the primary school. In *Kerala*, experiences in training programmes had revealed that many suggestions of the trainers/block RPs were not practically oriented and their skills needed to be upgraded. This led to a 15/21 days' school placement programme for trainers called 'Kalari'. During this programme the trainers were teachers in classrooms trying out new ideas and teaching methods. Teachers were the observers. Everyday in the school resource group meeting, these observations were shared with the trainers followed by planning for the next day. The trainers not only realised the problems faced by teachers in organising, planning and implementing activity based pedagogy but also tested the practical implications of suggestions made during training programmes.

Ramankutty - a trainer at BRC Cherypullassery said about the school placement programme "the experience humbled me. Today my suggestions are more practical". He spent six days in a school. During these six days he interacted with 38 children of class IV.

On the first day he observed the class while the teacher was teaching. The second day onwards he took over the teaching and the teacher played the role of observer for the next five days.

On the first day the teacher had asked the children to write about 'cow'. After the class Ramankutty, acting as a teacher, collected the children's copies and analysed the nature of mistakes. Based on his analysis he categorised the children in different groups and listed out the activities for each group.

On the second day Ramankutty conducted the following activities with children:

| Group | Level of Childern | Activity |
|-------|--|--|
| I | Children who were scribbling | List of nouns and verbs were given and children had to make as many simple sentences as possible. |
| II | Children who could write well | A story book was given and children had to write a review of the book. |
| III | Children who were able to write but were not connecting meaningful sentences | He told a story and then gave it to them in a written but jumbled form. The children had to arrange the sentences in a sequence. |
| IV | Children who altered letters while writing | He gave a story without matras (sound symbols) and they had to correct it. |

Group II and III finished their tasks without Ramankutty's help. Group I & IV demanded some help in between. He found that the confidence of group I rose as they enjoyed making different combinations of sentences.

However, Ramankutty, while doing this came across a lot of problems. First, the instructions he had given to group II were not clear and he had to explain the task again. He also realised that it was not easy to manage multilevel activities in the classroom. Group II finished their assignment quickly and were sitting idle after that. He tried to improve his management skills on his second day of teaching. The moment the group would finish a task he had another activity ready for them.

Over the next few days Ramankutty organised a series of other activities. The teacher initially reacted by saying that it was too tedious to conduct such activities or to develop them. However, after continued observation, his interest grew over a period of 2-3 days. He soon became an active helper for Ramankutty and also his critic.

This programme also brought the trainers and teachers closer. The teacher actually saw the trainer struggling like him in the classrooms. It motivated the teacher to undertake similar activities.

SPECIFIC TRAINING PROGRAMMES

In *Karnataka* a ten days' training programme on motivational leadership aspects was organised for the BRC faculty by a Mangalore based organisation called AIM-INSIGHT. The BRC faculty feels that this training programme helped them in understanding their role.

"It helped us to understand our roles as BRCCs; we realised that we had to become facilitators, and not use our authority as administrators. Had it not been for this training, we would all have ended up mainly as administrators, next to the BEO. That would have been disastrous!"

BRC Coordinator, Malavalli, Mandya Distt, Karnataka

Also in *Karnataka* all CRC coordinators have undergone training on the maths kit supplied to them by an NGO called Suvidya. Each CRC is supposed to function as a maths lab. In *Assam* all CRC coordinators have been trained to undertake activities in model schools.

PARTICIPATION IN WORKSHOPS AND EXPOSURE VISITS

The participation of block and cluster resource persons (especially in the case of *Assam* and *Kerala*) in state resource group meetings and workshops has helped them in gaining more confidence, a broader perspective on education, and learning from experiences of other districts.

Similarly, exposure visits within the state or outside can lead to sharing and learning from each others' experiences. Such exposure visits in *Assam* and *Karnataka* have indeed enhanced the functioning of resource centres. An example:

Chandrashekar, the CRC coordinator during an exposure visit to Rishi Valley Centre in A.P. heard about the Metric Mela and got inspired by the idea. On his return he organised a 'measurement fair' or Metric Mela on January 13, 1999 with the active

involvement of children, teachers and the community in his cluster. There were 50-60 stalls in all and each one of these stalls was looked after by 2-3 children. The children sold milk, flowers, peanuts, bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumber, sweet sooji balls, tea, vegetable bondas, vade, Mysore pak (a sweet originally from Mysore), fried items etc. Most of the vegetables sold were grown on their own lands. Each shop sold a different commodity.

The main difference, of course was that children were supposed to manage the entire show and make a profit in the bargain. For once, children were the Resource Persons, managing the stalls, maintaining the records, handling the change. They were learning the practical uses of arithmetic which was far away from the boring chalk-and-talk methods that children are often tortured with. Profit, wherever it was made, went back to the respective families.

The measuring wheel used to measure the distance between any two points from the maths lab provided by Suvidya, was a great hit. At another stall, you could measure your weight and your chest. The BRC team, the Assistant Project Coordinators, Bellashetty, the Block Education Officer (BEO), Malavalli Taluk were some of the people who updated themselves on their body statistics, as did many villagers. The Metric Mela continued well into the evening, as anxious parents wandered around to see how their children were managing.

Poorigali CRC, Malavalli, Mandya Dist., Karnataka

LINKAGES

The linkages that the BRCs and CRCs establish with the community, children, block education office and DIET have an impact on the success of the activities/processes initiated by these centres. In the five states where the case studies were based, serious efforts have been made to establish these linkages.

LINKAGES WITH THE COMMUNITY

In all the five states community involvement is visible especially with respect to school development initiatives i.e. constructing rooms, providing funds for different activities etc. However, in Assam the role of the community has gone beyond school development activities. Here the community has been involved in the documentation and compilation of folklore, riddles, proverbs, rituals etc. which are kept at the BRC for further use by the teachers. The parents are also invited to take classes (once or twice a month) on topics such as agriculture, bamboo craft, storytelling etc. Contributions of the community towards learning corners is a common feature in Assam. In many schools agricultural and fishing implements, contributed by local craftsmen, can be seen in the learning corner. In another effort to involve the community, the cluster level resource group in Assam is constituted of

village volunteers. These volunteers help the teachers in preparing teaching learning materials.

A series of integrated development activities have also been initiated by the resource centres such as regular public meetings at the village, cluster and block level to discuss school related activities. The resource centres have facilitated the formation of mothers groups, special focus groups, self help groups etc. to undertake various developmental activities. All these efforts to develop a relationship with parents have gone a long way in eliciting community support.

In fact, this strong relationship with the community has helped in building an information network in some of the blocks. With this system, any information can be conveyed to all the CRCCs in a sub block within three hours. Maintaining relationships with neighbours who have telephone connections and two wheelers goes a long way in passing the message from one place to another.

In Amsoi Tea Estate is situated the Baragog Lower primary School. The approach road to the school was in a very bad shape as it was cut across by a stream. It was very difficult for the children to walk especially during rains. To tackle the problem, the CRCC went to that area and apprised the people about the problem being faced by their own children. He also contacted the trade union leaders and formed a committee under the chairmanship of the General Secretary. The people, mostly tea-garden labourers, got convinced and agreed to construct an approach road for the school.

*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Bidyamandir CRC,
Mayang, Morigaon Dist., Assam*

In Kerala too efforts have been initiated to involve the community in classroom processes. In Kerala, because of a well developed pedagogic process as well as highly evolved panchayats, this process has been far more structured than in Assam. An example is:

Involvement of BRC Cherrypulassery with the Panchayati Raj System

BRC Cherrypulassery guided the development of Block Education Project for the year 1999-2000. The process consisted firstly of School Plan development, then VEC plan development and finally Block Education Project plan development. School development plans were developed in 36 schools and participants included PTA/MTA members, school teachers and SWC members. The plans were developed in workshops conducted at each school and on an average of 20-25 persons attended these workshops. Subsequently, all six VECs also conducted similar workshops to develop VEC Education Projects. Participants included PTA/MTA members, educationists in the area, teachers, people's representatives and other interested persons. Finally, the Block Education Project was developed in the BRC Cherrypulassery. It was discussed in a meeting on 6th March, 1999 attended by all BRC coordinators and trainers, AEO Cherrypulassery, secretaries of various VECs and

clusters, selected teachers, Block Panchayat members etc. Some of the planned activities included organising camps for children, study tours for teachers and students etc.

BRC Cherrypulssery, Palakkad Dist, Kerala

In Kerala, parents have also been involved in the hands on teacher training programme called "Kingnikkoottam". Some other activities initiated to create awareness in the community include participation of BRC trainers in developing block educational projects, PTA meetings and bringing out of a booklet to create awareness among parents. However, there is a growing realisation that more efforts need to be made to elicit the support of the community.

LINKAGES WITH THE BLOCK EDUCATION OFFICE

Support of the BEO seems to be critical for the sustained impact of any activity initiated by the BRC. It is interesting to see that in the five states wherever the BEO has played a supporting role, a series of academic support activities have been initiated in the block. Let us see the nature of linkages that have been established in different states.

In Assam joint supervisions are organised 3-4 times in a month. In the joint supervision the BRC coordinator visits the school with the BEO and school inspectors. These joint visits not only elicit support of the BEOs for DPEP activities but also help in orienting them to the processes that have been initiated through these centres. In Karnataka, the BEO attends the monthly meeting of the CRC coordinators at the block. His presence helps in clarifying/solving various administrative problems being faced by the teachers and coordinators in the field.

A CRC coordinator in Karnataka told the researcher: "The presence of the BEO throughout the meeting is an important factor. It helps to sort out administrative issues regarding which we cannot take decisions on our own. For instance, there was a complaint from a teacher in one of the schools in my cluster that the headmaster was not allowing this teacher to utilise the Rs. 500/- grant, and he kept delaying the matter by stating that a voucher must be produced for the expenditures, otherwise, he would not authorize the teacher to spend the given amount. When this problem was brought to the attention of the BEO, he issued an order to the effect that the Rs. 500/- grant could be transferred to the accounts of individual teachers, thereby sorting out the matter."

CRC Ragi Bommanahalli, Malavalli, Mandya Dist., Karnataka

In Kerala the BRC coordinator has formally been given the powers of AEO. We find this development important since it confers legitimacy to the BRC. Also, efforts are directed to involve the regular AEO in various activities. The AEO is invited to attend the weekly block level meeting of trainers.

LINKAGES WITH DIET

In *Assam*, the District Resource Group (DRG) consists of DIET faculty members. The BRC regularly (monthly) interacts with the DRG for all academic activities.

In *Kerala* one DIET faculty member is permanently located at each BRC as an academic coordinator. He coordinates all the academic activities of the block and provides regular feedback to the DIET through bi-monthly meetings.

In *Madhya Pradesh* each DIET faculty member has been given the academic responsibility of looking after one or two BRCs. Monthly reports of BRCs are submitted to the DIET. However, due to other engagements the faculty members rarely attend BRC meetings.



Though resource centres have made efforts to establish linkages with the community and existing structures like BEOs and DIETs, there is a need to further strengthen these bonds. Processes need to be initiated to build the capacity of the DIET to provide academic support to subdistrict structures and to organise need based programmes for them. Similarly the BEO needs to be continuously oriented to the processes initiated by the centres. Steps need to be taken further to involve them in programme activities.

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION

Along with the presence of all other enabling factors the motivation of the resource person, coordinator or the block education officer remain critical. Even in adverse conditions, motivated coordinators have initiated innovative activities in the limited space they were provided. This became evident from the experience of the case study undertaken in *Karnataka*. Here is an extract from the report:

It must be mentioned that, had it not been for the dynamism of the BEO, and the capacity and willingness of the BRC team, Malavalli Taluk may not have been considered for either the Nali Kali project, or for the field-testing of the class 5 MLL based books. Nor would the Metric Mela have occurred. This has been acknowledged by the SPO, and speaks volumes about the faith that has been reposed on the BEO and the team at the BRC. It also very clearly underlines that the working relationship between the Block Education Office and the BRC is healthy; in the absence of conflicts, the administrative and academic resources are able to converge, leading to many useful activities for the primary schools. The pro-active BEO, Bellashetty, has also ensured that his office does not perceive DPEP as a parallel structure that has given rise to a conflict of interest with his own department. He has not imposed any administrative responsibilities on the BRC team. In addition, his interest in academic matters has greatly contributed to a synergy between the administration and the academic structure established at the block level".

Similarly in the case of *Assam*, motivated CRC and BRC coordinators have organised workshops, meetings even by paying out of their pockets. The *Kerala* case study also reports: "The training, facilities, policy level discussions have indeed made a difference but individual motivation of some of the trainers in *Kerala* to bring about a change in education seems to be a moving force. Many of these trainers and coordinators were also a part of the literacy movement in the district. A majority of the trainers were involved with the Total Literacy Campaign in the district and also with other education projects like "Aksharam", Aksharapulari, Vidyarambham, etc. Trainers had close association with various organisations like Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), Teacher Associations etc. In their words " we were not secluded to the four walls of the schools and were actively involved with educational projects, which offered us immediate acceptability among the fellow teachers. An extract from the *Kerala report*:

 **R**amankutty was involved in a series of activities after TLC and was known as an aggressive person. He and some teachers in his school got together and took over the library. Around 9000 books were lying in locked almirahs never used simply because of fear of wear and tear and the ensuing disciplinary action. He opened the doors of these almirahs to the children. They could borrow whenever they wanted. This was followed by other activities like bringing out children's magazines, discussion seminars etc. The process created a new breed of readers in the school. He became a member of Rakshakarthus Sangha (Upper body of Bal Sanghas constituted of parents) of Bal Sanghas (Children's Organisation). One of his duties was to convene classes on educational issues like - drawbacks of traditional education, new methods of teaching etc. This process brought him in touch with books like 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' by Paulo Freire, 'De Schooling Society' by Ivan Illich etc. 

A LAST COMMENT

As mentioned in the first chapter, three of these case studies were presented to representatives from all states. In the keen and sometimes contested deliberations that followed, several issues emerged. Firstly, the varying vision that these states had evolved of a "resource centre" was a point of much debate. While Kerala appeared to focus intensely on the pedagogical processes, the main activity of its resource centres located in detailed and exhaustive discussion about classroom transaction, resource centres of Assam seemed to have moved out to the villages, with academic activity (largely teaching learning material preparation) only one of a myriad of others, such as convincing the VEC to build an approach road to the school, developing local youths to fulfill teacher shortages and participation in local cultural activities. In Madhya Pradesh the resource centres, rather than developing institutionalised activities, adapt swiftly to changing programme priorities, shifting from teacher training to data collection even to adult literacy and so on. In Karnataka and Bihar, the resource centres mainly train teachers, while attempting, as far as possible, a wider spectrum of activities. Given this picture, the question that we encountered was:

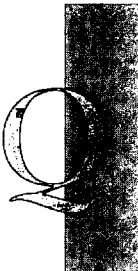
Is a cluster or block resource centre a centre for academic activities only or should it perform administrative functions also?

Should it mainly be a teacher training center?

What kind of interaction should it have with the community? Should it become a kind of cultural centre participating in many community activities or should its interaction with the community remain limited to primary school pedagogy?

While we could not arrive at a final answer, with the purists sticking to the all important "classroom processes" and others pointing to the interrelationship of administrative and academic issues, there was a broad consensus that though block and cluster resource centres may expand their functions to take care of some administrative issues, *their academic orientation should remain central*. In other words, these centres need to concentrate on the quality of the teaching learning process in schools and its improvement, and wandering too far away from this main goal could be counterproductive. Even activities oriented to the community may be focussed on children's learning in the form of discussion of report cards, drama festivals, drawing exhibitions, meetings with the parents etc. rather than mere general cultural and social contact. Under this umbrella of agreement, it was clear that each state may need to articulate clearly its **vision** of block and cluster resource centres and the functions they are expected to fulfill. *A fresh look at the roles of these centres at this point of time is important for directed growth.*

If these centres are to be academic resource centres, committed to improving the teaching learning process in schools, the question arises as to what is the nature of activities that they ought to undertake and how should they enrich the academic environment in the schools. We have seen in our case studies that teacher training, cluster meetings and on site support to the teacher have emerged as the three major supportive and capacity building modalities in the resource centres. These too have evolved as for example in the form of "school attachment programmes" in the case of Kerala and Karnataka. Some resource centres are developing their own specific activities like organising events for children. However, in many states the balance is skewed in favour of one particular activity only, specially teacher training in Bihar and Karnataka. If these centres are indeed to be *effective* academic support and resource centres there is an urgent requirement to assess the relative benefits of each of these activities and focus on that particular blend that gives maximum results. *The time of the resource centre may be devoted to activities that are needed the most by schools and teachers.* The above **ideal mix of activities**, i.e. teacher training, cluster meetings, school visits and others as they evolve, cannot be static over time. Depending on the needs experienced by the teachers, a centre may devote more or less time to one particular activity at a particular juncture. Which particular activity is most needed at what time is an issue for the resource centre to deliberate and decide upon, in consultation with the teachers and perhaps other institutions such as DIETs and project personnel. Obviously, a certain degree of *flexibility* in the choice of activities would help the centre develop into a need based institution. Linked to the issue of a flexible schedule of activities is the question of **autonomy** i.e. whether these resource centres are actually free to conduct activities that appear the most beneficial or are simply agencies for carrying out orders. In other words:



How should the resource centre decide its priorities, on the basis of the demands voiced by the schools and teachers or goals set by the state?

In order to be responsive to schools, what degree of autonomy should they have?

A pointer to the answer to this question is the example of Kerala, where resource persons respond to the schools, while collaborating closely at the state level. In fact, the trainers at the *block level are part of the state resource group*. However, each state would need to decide its own modalities.

It would be naive and simplistic at this point to suggest that "decentralization" or devolution of certain "powers" to block and cluster resource centres would automatically make them responsive to the schools and that they would evolve an effective mix of activities. It needs to be recalled that these practices of academic resource support are after all emerging practices conducted with more or less success by these nascent institutions : the block and cluster

resource centres. Indeed, *we do not know how well equipped the resource persons are to understand emerging needs, and how well they can respond to them.* The capacity of these institutions to analyse needs, plan, formulate strategies and move forward needs to be considered carefully while deciding on issues of autonomy.

However, while the capacities of many of these centres to respond to the needs of the school may be limited, it does appear from our case studies that some are now capable of, and clamouring for, more autonomous action than they are allowed. Such autonomy, to the right center, at the right time, in the right degree could strengthen school support, as well as the resource centre, and also reduce the work load at state and district level. *A continuous watch and assessment at the state level of the existing capacities of these centres would need to guide the slow devolution of responsibilities and independent functioning.*

Our case studies have brought out that a resource centre is not static but grows. It may begin as a teacher training centre but over time moves on to make cluster meetings its focal activity. As resource persons learn, they may become more curious and look around more keenly for resource material. These processes of changing and developing have to be fostered in any institution which is to become dynamic. A degree of autonomy is absolutely necessary for such growth to take place.

Depending on the role envisaged for the center, the personnel appointed as coordinators and resource persons and the processes of their selection may need to be reconsidered. Since human resources form the core of the centres, **selecting the right team** would be critical. In this case study states have exhibited novel and extremely effective ways of selecting the personnel. The best selection procedures are the ones in which an attempt is made through seminars, training programmes or other semi formal situations to judge the personal qualities of individuals : their motivation, intellectual caliber, willingness to learn etc. An invigorating fact that has come to light in this study is that a considerable number of highly motivated individuals do seem to exist in the system and some states have succeeded in placing them as resource persons. Recruiting these persons and evolving transparent methodologies for such recruitment is an issue that needs careful consideration. On no account can routine selection procedures based on formal qualifications and number of years of experience or seniority lead us to the right resource person. There is need to consider the following questions in state specific contexts:

Q

What are the qualities of an ideal resource person, intellectually and in terms of personality ?

What are the most suitable mechanisms for selecting such resource persons?

Another point that needs careful consideration is the number of persons needed at these resource centres to provide effective academic support. Our case studies suggest that states with successful resource centres have tended to develop *teams* of resource persons as against a single individual, who stimulate as well as support each other. Academic resource support is an activity that requires discussion, problem solving and various kinds of human interaction. It needs to be considered carefully in this context whether a single coordinator at the cluster level can indeed be effective. It also needs to be considered whether the coordinators should be supported by resource groups or encouraged in some way to form teams with other cluster coordinators to discuss and solve problems.

This documentation has brought out an amazing willingness to learn and experiment among resource teachers. More successful states have fostered this potential through training programmes, exposure visits and involvement of resource persons in designing textbooks, training modules etc. If a resource person is really to act as guide and mentor to the teacher, the understanding and knowledge of the resource person himself or herself needs to be deep as well as wide. A question that needs careful consideration is:

Q

What kinds of capacities do we need to develop in our resource persons?

If sound knowledge of pedagogy is one of these, how is this to be fostered?

A **systematic capacity building** effort over time, possibly 2-3 years, which includes all the varying skills that resource persons need is obviously indicated. The nature of this capacity building could be quite complex. Resource persons need to understand not just their roles and functions but also basic pedagogic issues i.e. how children learn, what motivates them, learning of language, mathematics, management of the classroom and several other issues in great depth. A resource person who does not have a view on these basic pedagogic issues, who has not thought about them, experimented with them, is not a real resource person. The school visits and cluster meetings of such a resource person may yield little. Consequently, careful attention to the capacity building of these resource persons and their systematic development would form the bedrock of any policy to develop resource centres.

It needs to be pointed out that the development of a resource person in terms of knowledge and skills depends partly on **exposure** to new ideas and programmes as the example of metric mela in Karnataka showed, and partly on his or her experience with teachers and children, as the experience with Kerala illustrates. The **rootedness** of the resource centre in the processes of the school, the intensity of interaction with teachers, regular participation in the classroom is as important a source of strength as is learning from others. In fact, developing a resource person is a question of simultaneously allowing and encouraging him or her to work intensively with teachers and providing opportunities for learning from other sources.

Our study revealed that the best resource centres function by establishing strong links with teachers, the community and other institutions. Particularly, the sorting out of administrative problems that often arise in various meetings needs to be ensured. While in this case study there was some evidence of these **links**, they had often been forged at a personal level but institutionally they were tenuous and incomplete. Unfortunately, in these resource centres we did not find the DIETs playing a strong supportive role and cannot therefore, comment on its impact. The possibility however, needs to be explored. Certainly a network which will help the resource centres come across new ideas and practices needs to be promoted.

Q

What are the kinds of linkages that resource centres need to establish with other institutions?

It needs to be ensured that the issue of linkages is not dealt with in a simplistic manner in terms of supervision. If in the name of linkages cluster and block resource centres begin merely to supervise schools and DIETs in turn to supervise the resource centres, no great benefit may emerge in terms of academic inputs. These linkages have to be formed in terms of working together and sharing of ideas as in the case of trainers in Kerala who *work with* a teacher in developing or doing a particular activity with children. Some of these linkages may be in the form of joint projects with the teacher too.

Taking a long look at what this study has brought out, cluster resource centres and block resource centres are emerging as important new institutions. Observations of some of these centres which have functioned well show clearly that a resource centre cannot be created by simply recruiting a suitably qualified person and providing building and infrastructure. **The core of a resource centre lies in its practices, and these need to be visualised and developed.** How "good" a resource centre is or how "well" it functions is a function of what it does; the nature of support it provides to the school through visits, meetings, training programmes, libraries, seminars and its own special processes. With clear vision and goals at the state level for these resource centres, it is possible to get the right people and provide the right kind of infrastructure. However, a resource centre needs not merely to be established but needs also to grow continuously if it is to be a resource centre. Orientation in basic pedagogy and new opportunities for learning are absolutely necessary. Linkages with other institutions of a kind that foster academic strength and rootedness in the schools can ultimately provide meaning to such resource centres.

All this said, it needs to be pointed out that this study is poised at a time when DPEP is nearing completion in phase I states, where the positive practices documented in these studies have taken place. Such states are in the process of taking their own decisions about **sustaining** these resource centres and all of them seem to be unanimous about the

usefulness of these centres. At the same time, these centres are being set up as part of the project in states where DPEP extended subsequently. The purpose of this study would be served if plans for the future resource centres are influenced by the learning from this study and if it can contribute towards the creation of vibrant and meaningful resource centres.

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It would be naive and simplistic at this point to suggest that "decentralization" or devolution of certain "powers" to block and cluster resource centres would automatically make them responsive to the schools and that they would evolve an effective mix of activities. It needs to be recalled that these practices of academic resource support are after all emerging practices conducted with more or less success by these nascent institutions : the block and cluster

resource centres. Indeed, *we do not know how well equipped the resource persons are to understand emerging needs, and how well they can respond to them.* The capacity of these institutions to analyse needs, plan, formulate strategies and move forward needs to be considered carefully while deciding on issues of autonomy.

However, while the capacities of many of these centres to respond to the needs of the school may be limited, it does appear from our case studies that some are now capable of, and clamouring for, more autonomous action than they are allowed. Such autonomy, to the right center, at the right time, in the right degree could strengthen school support, as well as the resource centre, and also reduce the work load at state and district level. *A continuous watch and assessment at the state level of the existing capacities of these centres would need to guide the slow devolution of responsibilities and independent functioning.*

Our case studies have brought out that a resource centre is not static but grows. It may begin as a teacher training centre but over time moves on to make cluster meetings its focal activity. As resource persons learn, they may become more curious and look around more keenly for resource material. These processes of changing and developing have to be fostered in any institution which is to become dynamic. A degree of autonomy is absolutely necessary for such growth to take place.

Depending on the role envisaged for the center, the personnel appointed as coordinators and resource persons and the processes of their selection may need to be reconsidered. Since human resources form the core of the centres, **selecting the right team** would be critical. In this case study states have exhibited novel and extremely effective ways of selecting the personnel. The best selection procedures are the ones in which an attempt is made through seminars, training programmes or other semi formal situations to judge the personal qualities of individuals : their motivation, intellectual caliber, willingness to learn etc. An invigorating fact that has come to light in this study is that a considerable number of highly motivated individuals do seem to exist in the system and some states have succeeded in placing them as resource persons. Recruiting these persons and evolving transparent methodologies for such recruitment is an issue that needs careful consideration. On no account can routine selection procedures based on formal qualifications and number of years of experience or seniority lead us to the right resource person. There is need to consider the following questions in state specific contexts:

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What are the qualities of an ideal resource person, intellectually and in terms of personality ?

What are the most suitable mechanisms for selecting such resource persons?

Another point that needs careful consideration is the number of persons needed at these resource centres to provide effective academic support. Our case studies suggest that states with successful resource centres have tended to develop *teams* of resource persons as against a single individual, who stimulate as well as support each other. Academic resource support is an activity that requires discussion, problem solving and various kinds of human interaction. It needs to be considered carefully in this context whether a single coordinator at the cluster level can indeed be effective. It also needs to be considered whether the coordinators should be supported by resource groups or encouraged in some way to form teams with other cluster coordinators to discuss and solve problems.

This documentation has brought out an amazing willingness to learn and experiment among resource teachers. More successful states have fostered this potential through training programmes, exposure visits and involvement of resource persons in designing textbooks, training modules etc. If a resource person is really to act as guide and mentor to the teacher, the understanding and knowledge of the resource person himself or herself needs to be deep as well as wide. A question that needs careful consideration is:

What kinds of capacities do we need to develop in our resource persons?

If sound knowledge of pedagogy is one of these, how is this to be fostered?

A **systematic capacity building** effort over time, possibly 2-3 years, which includes all the varying skills that resource persons need is obviously indicated. The nature of this capacity building could be quite complex. Resource persons need to understand not just their roles and functions but also basic pedagogic issues i.e. how children learn, what motivates them, learning of language, mathematics, management of the classroom and several other issues in great depth. A resource person who does not have a view on these basic pedagogic issues, who has not thought about them, experimented with them, is not a real resource person. The school visits and cluster meetings of such a resource person may yield little. Consequently, careful attention to the capacity building of these resource persons and their systematic development would form the bedrock of any policy to develop resource centres.

It needs to be pointed out that the development of a resource person in terms of knowledge and skills depends partly on **exposure** to new ideas and programmes as the example of metric mela in Karnataka showed, and partly on his or her experience with teachers and children, as the experience with Kerala illustrates. The **rootedness** of the resource centre in the processes of the school, the intensity of interaction with teachers, regular participation in the classroom is as important a source of strength as is learning from others. In fact, developing a resource person is a question of simultaneously allowing and encouraging him or her to work intensively with teachers and providing opportunities for learning from other sources.

Our study revealed that the best resource centres function by establishing strong links with teachers, the community and other institutions. Particularly, the sorting out of administrative problems that often arise in various meetings needs to be ensured. While in this case study there was some evidence of these **links**, they had often been forged at a personal level but institutionally they were tenuous and incomplete. Unfortunately, in these resource centres we did not find the DIETs playing a strong supportive role and cannot therefore, comment on its impact. The possibility however, needs to be explored. Certainly a network which will help the resource centres come across new ideas and practices needs to be promoted.

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What are the kinds of linkages that resource centres need to establish with other institutions?

It needs to be ensured that the issue of linkages is not dealt with in a simplistic manner in terms of supervision. If in the name of linkages cluster and block resource centres begin merely to supervise schools and DIETs in turn to supervise the resource centres, no great benefit may emerge in terms of academic inputs. These linkages have to be formed in terms of working together and sharing of ideas as in the case of trainers in Kerala who *work with* a teacher in developing or doing a particular activity with children. Some of these linkages may be in the form of joint projects with the teacher too.

Taking a long look at what this study has brought out, cluster resource centres and block resource centres are emerging as important new institutions. Observations of some of these centres which have functioned well show clearly that a resource centre cannot be created by simply recruiting a suitably qualified person and providing building and infrastructure. **The core of a resource centre lies in its practices, and these need to be visualised and developed.** How "good" a resource centre is or how "well" it functions is a function of what it does; the nature of support it provides to the school through visits, meetings, training programmes, libraries, seminars and its own special processes. With clear vision and goals at the state level for these resource centres, it is possible to get the right people and provide the right kind of infrastructure. However, a resource centre needs not merely to be established but needs also to grow continuously if it is to be a resource centre. Orientation in basic pedagogy and new opportunities for learning are absolutely necessary. Linkages with other institutions of a kind that foster academic strength and rootedness in the schools can ultimately provide meaning to such resource centres.

All this said, it needs to be pointed out that this study is poised at a time when DPEP is nearing completion in phase I states, where the positive practices documented in these studies have taken place. Such states are in the process of taking their own decisions about **sustaining** these resource centres and all of them seem to be unanimous about the

usefulness of these centres. At the same time, these centres are being set up as part of the project in states where DPEP extended subsequently. The purpose of this study would be served if plans for the future resource centres are influenced by the learning from this study and if it can contribute towards the creation of vibrant and meaningful resource centres.

ANNEXURE

| State | District | BRC | CRC |
|----------------|-------------|----------------|---|
| Assam | Morigaon | Mayang | Sri Sri Ramakrishna Bidya Mandir Makaria |
| | | Bhurbandha | Sidabari Hanimaraghat |
| | Dhubri | Golokgunj | Golokgunj Bisondo |
| Bihar | Muzaffarpur | Bonchaha | Garhan |
| | | Motipur | CRC Birahima Bagar |
| | | Muraul | CRC Dholi Bagar |
| Karnataka | Mandya | Malavalli | Poorigali |
| | Kolar | Gudibande | Hamasandra Pulisanioddu Garudarcharahalli Iragreddihalli |
| Kerala | Palakkad | Cherpullassery | Detailed Interaction with 3 CRC coordinators |
| | | Pattambi | Detailed Interaction with 2 CRC coordinators |
| Madhya Pradesh | Betul | Shahpur | Bhayawai Bhaura |
| | | Ghodadongri | Ghodadongri Sarni |

ABBREVIATIONS AND WORD MEANINGS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| AEO | Assistant Education Officer |
| BEO | Block Education Officer |
| BRC | Block Resource Centre |
| BRG | Block Resource Group |
| CAC | Cluster Academic Coordinator |
| CLRG | Cluster Level Resource Group |
| CRC | Cluster Resource Centre |
| DIET | District Institute of Education & Training |
| DPC | District Project Coordinator |
| DPEP | District Primary Education Programme |
| DPO | District Project Office |
| DRG | District Resource Group |
| Kalari | School placement programme for trainers in Kerala <small>Literal Meaning: Training centre for martial arts, gymnasium, ancient village school (with a single teacher) family shrine.</small> |
| Kinginikkootam | Hand-on Training Programme for Teachers in Kerala |
| MTA | Mother Teacher Association |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| PTA | Parent Teacher Association |
| RP's | Resource Persons |
| SCERT | State Council for Educational reserach and Training |
| SI | Sub Inspector/School Inspector |
| SPO | State Project Office |
| SRG | State Resource Group |
| SWC | School Working Committee |
| TLM | Teaching Learning Material |
| VEC | Village Education Committee |
| POA 1992 | Plan of Action 1992 |
| SOPT | Special Orientation for Primary Teachers |
| PMOST | Programme of Mass Orientation for School Teachers |
| MLL | Minimum Levels of Learning |
| IED | Integrated Education of the Disabled |



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