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Education Guarantee Scheme A Community-Government Partnership That Gets Millions into School in Madhya Pradesh

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Executive Summary

The goal of universal elementary education has eluded India for over 50 years. Notwithstanding a wide range of primary education programs, some with donor assistance, many regions of the country continue to report the presence of a large number of out-of-school children. All this changed in a dramatically short time in the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) in central India. Over the course of the last decade Madhya Pradesh's Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) dramatically improved access to primary education, especially for children from very poor households and in scattered settlements. The program is built on community demand and participation and guarantees a fast track approach to basic education by linking it with local self-government institutions.

In 1994, MP launched a primary and adult education mission and began shifting accountability for school education to local and district bodies. In 1996 a state-wide house-to-house survey revealed that non-enrolment in primary schools was more severe than had been popularly believed. Only 70 percent of habitations, (6.1 million households and 10 million children) had access to primary schooling. 24.4 percent of boys and 35.2 percent of girls were out of school, of these 19.7 percent and 29.3 percent, respectively, had never been enrolled. The data showed that the inability to access primary schools was serious, especially acute in tribal hamlets with highly dispersed population and in children from socially disadvantaged communities in non-tribal areas. In response, political leaders and administrators in Madhya Pradesh reworked the system to address the twin problem of non-enrolment and lack of access.

The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) was initially designed to specifically address the issue of access. After a tentative start, the program went to scale in a brief period. Between July 1997 and July 2000, a staggering 26,571 EGS Schools were created (42 percent of them in Tribal areas) catering to 12,33,052 children (47 percent girls and 44 percent being tribal children) – out of which 91 per cent of children were from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and other socially disadvantaged communities. As of June 2003 the program appointed a total of 31,815 *Gurujis* (teachers) who were identified by the community and trained by the education department of the government. The program guaranteed that on receiving a written request from the Panchayat, (local self-government unit) the EGS program will provide a school within 90 days.

This unique program is acknowledged as a breakthrough in social sector planning: one that was based on community demand and managed by local self-government institutions. EGS is indigenously designed with the government pledging its own resources, not linked to availability of grants from Government of India or foreign donor agencies. In an environment where frequent transfers of officials is often cited as a reason why programs fail to be sustainable, the Government of Madhya Pradesh ensured the continuation of a motivated team of officials for a decade starting from 1993-94. The universal primary education program was complemented through an adult literacy program initiated in 1999. A series of institutional reforms were initiated, culminating in the Madhya Pradesh People's Education Act (2001) and Jan Shikshan Adhinyam (Statutory Framework for Quality) in 2002.

The most significant impact of EGS is a sharp reduction in the absolute numbers of out-of-school children from 1,315,000 (boys) and 1,604,000 (girls) in 1996 to 346,000 (boys) and 428,000 (girls) in 2002-03. Female literacy increased by 20.93 percent over the decade. Gross enrolment ratios have also increased across the board and exhibit no substantial differences between social groups. The EGS has also been responsible for bringing hitherto deprived groups into the education fold. Institution reforms have created administrative and statutory instruments to devolve powers to local communities and local self-government institutions.

From its outset, EGS was positioned as a large-scale program and not a small innovation. While the approach was certainly experimental, it was evident from the start that the government was determined to cover the entire state. The MP Government allocated adequate financial resources and maintained a steady increase of actual expenditure on elementary education even though there was a noticeable decline in GOI Plan expenditures. Other innovative sources of funding have included the “Fund a School” program in 2000 – whereby anyone can log on to the website and adopt a school which is directly credited into the bank account of the school concerned. Most innovative was the management decision to evolve and fine-tune the program as it went to scale. While the basic blueprint was prepared in 1997, the program adapted and changed as it went to scale.

The Education Guarantee Scheme created institutional structures and statutory mechanisms for inclusion of the excluded (poor rural children who had no access to primary school within 1 kilometer walking distance) by providing a forum for articulation of demand for education through the Panchayat, a mechanism to forward that demand through local-self-government structures, public commitment by the government to establish EGS primary schools and finally mechanisms for continued participation of the community and the Panchayat in management and supervision. Contrary to popular beliefs about the value of education, social resistance to education of girls emerged as a relatively less important reason for non enrolment (only 8.2 percent respondent cited this as a reason in 2002, LSA) while issues of non-availability of schooling facilities, economic compulsions and school related factors got more prominence. Open discussions in the Panchayat as also within the official system not only created a climate for change, but gave the people a mechanism to demand a school for their children.

Another innovation was the government’s provision of a unilateral legally cognizable guarantee by pledging to meet its obligation of providing an EGS School within 90 days and provide training and academic support to the teacher identified by the community. Necessary statutory institutions and mechanisms were established to enable the government to respond as well as empower the Panchayats to make decisions and make demands on the administration. The forging of mutually supportive links between the state government, local self-government institutions and civil society was another breakthrough, ensuring convergence and synergy between the administrative/financial wing and the academic arm of education. Further, making the system responsive and accountable to the Gram Sabha (the entire village – as the basic unit of democratic decentralization) effectively flipped the accountability pyramid. The EGS School is today owned by and accountable to the Parents Teachers Association and the Village Education Committee – who in-turn are elected by the Gram Sabha. Funds allocated by the government for

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the EGS program are managed by the Panchayat and allocations/expenditures are supervised by the Parents Teachers Associations of each school. The government, the Panchayat and the school form three corners of the management pyramid. Other institutional reforms strengthen decentralized management and quality monitoring.

The key message to emerge from the EGS experience is that structural reform in one sector cannot be sustained unless reforms in governance follow. Empowering local self-government institutions (Panchayats) through effective decentralization of development planning and resource allocation are the logical next steps. Future issues that must be addressed include the establishment of forward linkages to make primary education a means to livelihood security, funding sustainability for the poorest communities, and ensuring equal quality of education for all. There is a discussion as to whether EGS can be replicated in other states and even as to its sustainability in MP given the change in government in December 2003.

The EGS program demonstrates that when poor people are confident that their voice will be heard and that they can exert a positive influence – their enthusiasm to participate in local governance goes up. Equally, that decentralization cannot be sustained without appropriate institutional mechanisms and legal instruments. The poor need no incentives when they are confident that universal education will lead to their own empowerment.

Implementation Process

The time line given in Exhibit 1 below captures the events from 1994 that led to the designing of Madhya Pradesh Education Guarantee Scheme and associated institutional reforms that facilitated its smooth implementation. Capturing the context in which EGS emerged the architects of the programme point out: “Historical experience reveals that centralised models of delivery delayed the spread of primary education even where resources were identified. The emergence of working Panchayati Raj system consequent on the 73rd Constitutional Amendment provides opportunities that need to be seized to share the task of universalisation of primary education with the community mediated through Panchayat Raj institutions. In Madhya Pradesh a ‘Lok Sampark Abhiyan’ or door-to-door survey was undertaken jointly by Panchayat leadership, teachers and literacy activists in 1996 for a detailed identification of children not going to school and to follow it up with an enrolment drive. This led to the development of decentralised Panchayat level plans for primary education. This survey also led to detailed mapping of gaps in access to schooling facilities. In addition to coalition building for primary education between Panchayats, teachers and literacy volunteers, the survey created leadership roles for Panchayats in the management of primary education and provoked policy-makers to quickly respond to the gaps in access. The EGS was created in response to this need with an understanding of the potential of collaboration and leadership at the village and Panchayat level... The EGS reinterpreted the definition of responsibility of the state to provide universal primary education by enlarging the understanding of state to mean not only government at the state level but local government or Panchayat and the community” (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 1999)

Tracing the path of this initiative the State Human Development Report (2002) explains: “Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, it could be said that institutional change in Madhya Pradesh began with clarity of objectives and instruments in the mid 1990s. The *objective* was to improve the components of human development—health, education and the like—in an equitable way in a specified period of time. And the *instrument* for achieving the goal was the combination of new initiatives and ideas in the capital and implementation through the new Panchayat and people’s collectives at the local level... The Rajiv Gandhi Mission brought in new ideas and insights; the Panchayat brought in the energies and experience of the people. The Panchayats and working with people’s collectives brought to the fore people’s demands—and the government responded to that demand, through programmes in Panchayats, through using people’s collectives more and more in managing people focussed programmes. The two developed into a valuable partnership that is institutional in nature. Both, not in themselves, but acting in concert, are crucial to Madhya Pradesh’s subsequent experience. This process is perhaps the key institutional change that was made.” (Third Human Development Report, Madhya Pradesh 2002.)

In a situation of debilitating resource crunch, the EGS scheme, fully funded through domestic resources in the early stages (before additional funds were mobilised through the multi-donor funded District primary Education Programme 1994 to 2004), tried to develop a cost

effective model without compromising quality¹. This scheme marked a significant departure in educational administration by creating an “organic link between the teacher and the community. The EGS *Guruji* being selected by the local community and appointed by the gram Panchayat strengthened local accountability thereby creating the necessary (bit not sufficient) condition for quality improvement. The EGS has by effectively responding to the specific habitation pattern in tribal areas of the state created parity for tribal areas in terms of access and thereby contributed to equity in the spread of primary education” (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 1999).

The pioneers who have steered the programme since its inception to December 2003 underscore the point that EGS holds “a real potential of becoming the first building block towards a genuinely alternative community centred learning” by forging partnerships at the local level and it is “less a matter of finding money and more a matter of forging alliances of the right kind”. (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 1999) Anchoring the EGS scheme on community demand and community participation has enabled the participation of the most deprived children in primary education—thereby creating access where there was none and in the quickest possible time.

¹ Gopalakrishnan and Sharma point out that the quality issue was in fact at the heart of model. Given the realisation that the quality of education available in formal schools is quite poor across the country, they argue, “formal schools are ‘superior’ only as local appendages of a large bureaucratic system and not in terms of their software of educational transaction or community processes”. Subsequent evaluations of learning outcomes have shown that children in EGS learn as well, if not better, than their counterparts in formal schools.

Exhibit 1: Madhya Pradesh Education Guarantee Scheme, 1994 to 2003	
1994	<p>Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (primary and adult education) created with the Chief Minister as the Chairman and the Chief Secretary as the head of an empowered Executive Committee.</p> <p>Key features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of adult and basic education structures from the village level right up to the state headquarters • District units empowered to prepare contextual / district specific plans • Panchayats and local bodies made accountable for school education • Recruitment of teachers done at district and block levels by Panchayats • Constitution of Village Education Committees, including construction committees <p>The Government of MP launched 6 other missions in 1994: Watershed, Health, Sanitation, Rural Livelihood and food security and Technology for development. However the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission received priority support from the Chief Minister—making it the flagship mission of the government.</p>
1995	<p>Madhya Pradesh District Planning Committee Act: The important functions related to planning were devolved to the district government (District Planning Committee). This act was amended in 1999 to read: “Besides the function of consolidation of plans prepared by Panchayats and municipalities in the district and preparing draft development plan for the districts as a whole as envisaged in the original act, the DPC would exercise all such powers which the state government would entrust to them from time to time.” The Chief Minister clarified that “The powers entrusted with this body are those that have not been entrusted to Panchayati Raj institutions or urban local bodies, but those that were exercised by the secretariat of the state government².”</p>
1996	<p>Participatory problem mapping: Lok Sampark Abhiyan I:</p> <p>Create an alternative data set through door to door campaign in rural areas to list the number of children going to school and not going to school—a people’s information system that presents a realistic picture;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an understanding of the causes for non-enrolment or irregular participation • Develop a Village Education Register as the basic record of educational statistics of each village—maintained by the gram Panchayat as the school • Use this mechanism for cohort monitoring for completion of primary schooling. • The campaign conducted by the Panchayat level campaign team. • First step in the preparation of village education plan based on the realisation that the problem of non-enrolment was far more severe than earlier estimates and thereby demanded a radically new strategy to get children into schools.
1997	<p>Education Guarantee Scheme launched by Government of Madhya Pradesh: a creative institutional response on a rights based framework for basic education. Taking community demand as the start-up point, the programme guaranteed a fast track approach to basic education by linking it with local self-government institutions (Panchayats) and creating the space for educational innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee by the government that if a Panchayat forwards a list of 40 children (25 to 30 in tribal areas) with no schooling facilities within walking distance, then the government will provide a school within 90 days.

² As of 1999 (before the bifurcation of MP) there were 30,992 village Panchayats spread over 45 districts (Zilla Parishad) and 459 Janpad (Block) Panchayats

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District EGS committee that scrutinises proposals is chaired by Zilla Parishad President (head of the district level elected body) • Community to identify teachers (Guruji) who would then be trained by the education department. The community to provide land / space for school, manage mid-day meal through the Panchayat, participate through VEC and Parents Teachers Association—known as Palak Shikshak Sangh (PSS). • The inputs guaranteed by the government include teacher training, teacher: pupil ratio of 1:40, curriculum on par with government primary schools, equivalence ensured in evaluation and supervision, funds for school building, monitoring and academic evaluation
1999 (a)	<p>Institutional reforms in education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional issues emerging from EGS addressed in a holistic manner—synergy between administrative and academic arms of educational administration • Gender inequality issues brought centre stage: State Women’s Policy addressed education issues, 30 percent reservation for women in teacher posts • Social mobilisation and special “school <i>chalo</i>” programmes introduced with focus on girls and children from disadvantaged social groups
1999 (b)	<p>Lok Sampark Abhiyan II: Participatory Planning for elementary education initiated to take stock of progress made since LSA I and identify issues / thrust areas for the future</p>
1999 (c)	<p>Padna Badna Andolan—a campaign for adult literacy and education initiated to not only give adults, especially women, an opportunity to learn to read and write but also to create a positive climate for basic education and contribute towards the emergence of schooling as a social norm for all children.</p>
2001	<p>Amendment of MP Panchayati Raj Adhiniyam (Act) 1993—Second Amendment 2001—where the words ‘<i>Panchayati Raj and Gram Swaraj</i>’ have been inserted in place of ‘<i>Panchayati Raj</i>’. This effectively attempts to transfer all powers previously exercised by gram Panchayats to periodic village mass meetings or gram sabhas—a major departure from relying on user committees like the VEC etc to facilitate participation in primary schooling. The act also stipulates that a minimum quorum of 1/3rd of the members of the gram sabha, with no less than 1/3rd should be women and the proportion of SC and ST members should be commensurate with their proportion in the general population of the village. This effort in direct democracy implies that the VEC will be elected by the gram sabha instead of it being nominated by the teacher. “This experiment is a leap into the unknown. It may work well or prove disappointing—but there is not doubting its audacity and its broader significance.” James Manor (2001)</p>
2001	<p>Institutionalisation of EGS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EGS no longer a stopgap or temporary strategy but as an integral part of the primary education system of the state. • All Alternative Schools merged with EGS. • Merging of the curriculum and textbooks for EGS and the government primary school—thereby ensuring equivalence in all respects. • Introduction of grades in EGS—in the early stages children were grouped together according to ability. However, by the year 2000 it became apparent that children would have to be seated grade wise—thereby bridging the gap between formal schools and EGS.
2002	<p>Padna Badna Andolan (Literacy and continuing education campaign), Padna Badna Samity (Literacy and continuing education committees) and Padna Badna Sangh (Village level women’s group for literacy and continuing education)—formalised in 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make all people literate • Consolidate fragile neo-literacy through committees and organisations functioning as units for literacy for empowerment—where the literacy and continuing education committees runs

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	<p>a rural library and organised social and cultural functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watchdog for the universal elementary education programme • Promote water conservation, community health and sanitation, gender empowerment, removal of social discriminatory practices (untouchability), promote physical development and sports and a unit for community entertainment and infotainment <p>Mahila Padna Badna Andolan (Women’s literacy campaign) launched 8 March 2002</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create women’s literacy committees • Facilitate and support adult literacy among women • Convert PBS into self help groups
2002	<p>Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam—a legal framework for education reform.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthens institutional partnership between the government, local bodies and community for universal elementary education and adult education • Recognises the fundamental right of every child to basic education • Parental responsibility for compulsory education up to the age of 14—this is enforceable by the Gram Sabha • Roles and responsibilities of key agencies—parents, teachers, local bodies and government • Crucial role of Parents Teacher Association (See Exhibit 8) • Teachers cannot be deployed for non-teaching tasks • Education fund created at the school (Shala Shiksha Kosh), District and State levels to mobilise additional resources for education • Public Education Report (Jan Shiksha Prativedan) to be presented every quarter at the PTA and District level and annually at the state level to the Legislative Assembly reporting on progress on all educational programmes in the state. Create a public space for reinforcing people’s right and the state’s responsibility for better quality education.
2003 (a)	<p>Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to education of every child—a fundamental right that will be safeguarded by the Gram Sabha in rural areas and Administrative Officer in urban areas • Mandatory record maintenance in every school—in particular Village Education register / Ward Education Register where the status of every child in the 6 to 14 age group is recorded • Mandatory audit of school accounts every year—especially the village education fund • Order preventing the utilisation of school premises for non-academic activities • Mandatory constitution of Parent Teacher Association in every school—a committee vested with management responsibilities • Mandatory constitution of education committee in the Panchayat • Creation of a Jan Shiksha Kendra in every block (Janpad Shiksha Kendra) district (Zilla Shiksha Kendra) for academic support of elementary schools / EGS • Codifying the responsibilities of local bodies with respect to UEE • Formalising the education fund introduced in Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam (2002) • Mandatory preparation of Annual Academic Report to keep track of progress on the quality front.
2003 (b)	<p>Institutional reforms to promote quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential records of teachers that were written by seniors / supervisors replaced with recording of learning outcomes of children—transition / completion and outcomes. This made the basis for academic / career advancement of teachers.

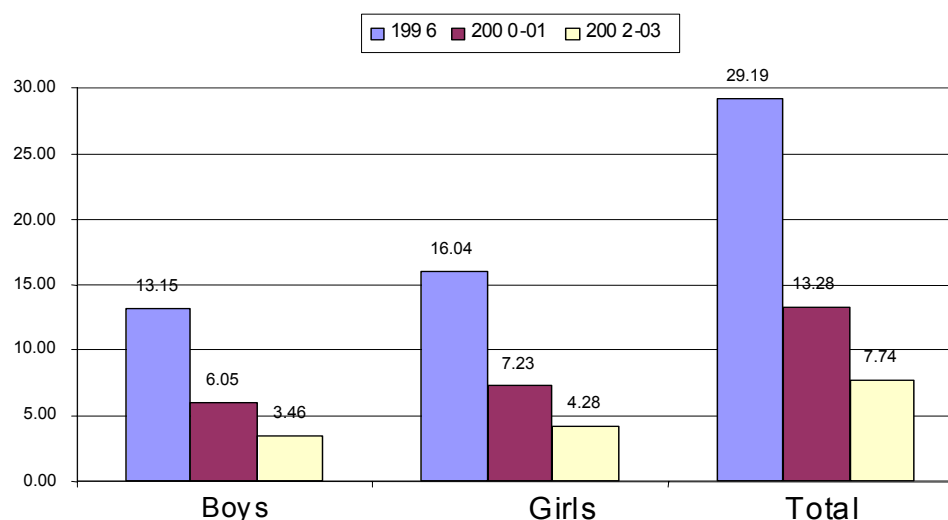
CASE STUDIES IN SCALING UP POVERTY REDUCTION

- Monthly progress report of children to be presented in the Parents Teachers Association

Impact Analysis

The most significant impact of EGS is a sharp reduction in the absolute numbers of out-of-school children from 13,15,000 (boys) and 16,04,000 (girls) in 1996 to 3,46,000 (boys) and 4,28,000 (girls) in 2002-03—as shown in Exhibit 2 below.

Exhibit 2: Out of School Children 6 -14 years age (In Lakhs)



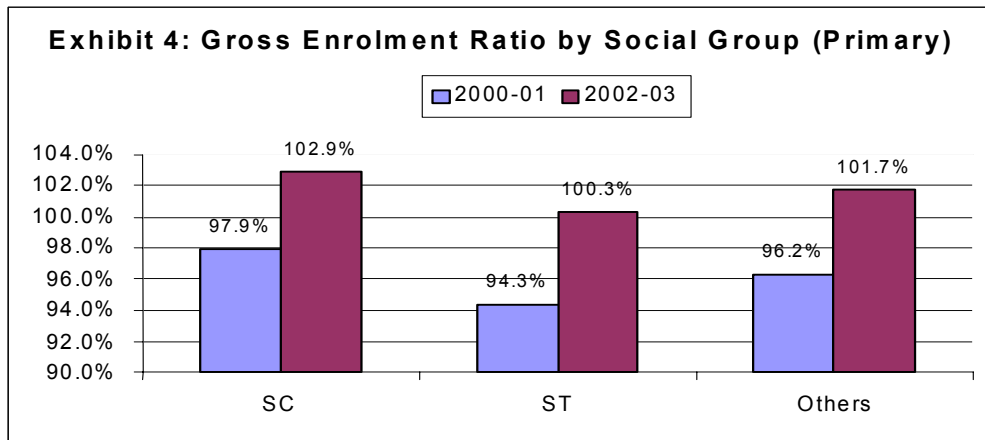
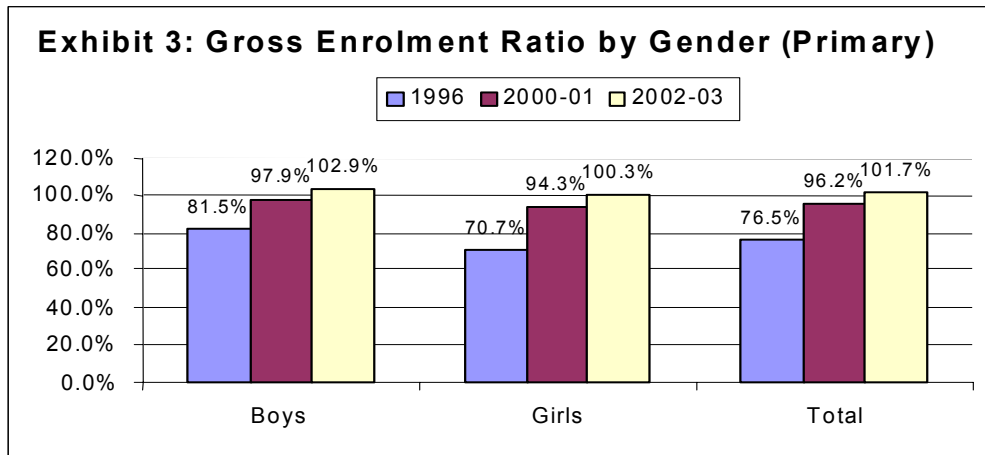
Important achievements with respect to universal access to schooling are:

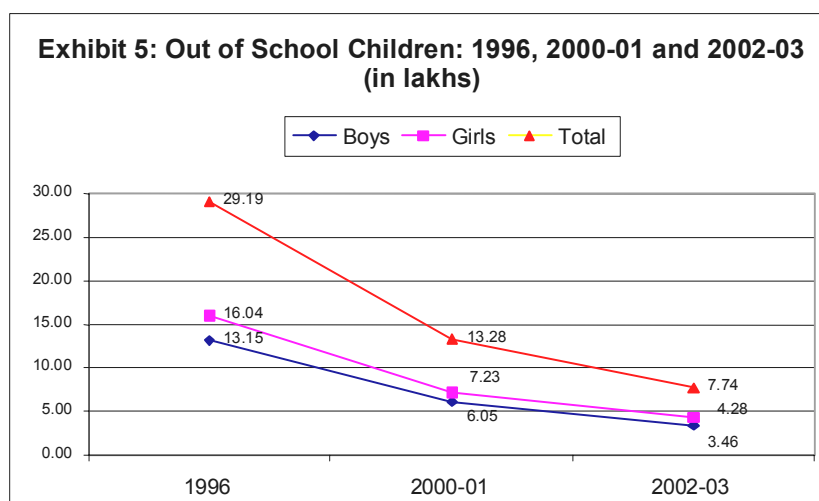
- MP recorded an impressive decadal increase of 20.93 per cent in female literacy between 1991 and 2001, ranking three on an all-India scale of decadal increase. This impressive achievement is an outcome of the EGS programme for children and Padna Badna Andolan for adults (primarily women)³.
- An independent data source, National Family Health Survey (Sample Survey) reveals that the percentage of 6-11 year olds attending school has gone up from 61 percent (boys) and 47.3 percent (girls) in 1992-93 to 80.1 percent (boys) and 73.9 percent (girls) in 1998-99.
- The percentage of out of school children has come down from 29.3 percent (24.4 percent boys and 35.2 percent girls) in 1996 to 6.2 (5.2 percent boys and 7.5 percent girls)—as seen in Exhibit 5 below. However absolute numbers tell a different story: 3,46,000 (boys) and 4,28,000 (girls) reported they never enrolled! Exploring the factors affecting children's participation in schools, the survey (LSA, 2002-03) revealed that 20.7 percent reported they were busy with sibling care, 20 percent with agricultural and other farm / home based work,

³ As of June 2003 there were 31,815 Gurujis teaching in EGS schools and 2,17,000 volunteers working with Padna Badna Samity.

17.9 percent grazing cattle and 14.1 percent because of weak financial condition. Notwithstanding the impressive progress, the LSA information confirms that the poorest of the poor are still outside the ambit of primary schooling. (Source: Lok Sampark Abhiyan 1996 and 2002-03)

- The Gross Enrolment Ratio at the primary level stands at 102.9 per cent for boys and 100.3 per cent for girls (Lok Sampark Abhiyan, 2002-03, GoMP) while at the upper primary level it is 77.7 per cent for boys and 69.2 per cent for girls. The survey also reveals a GER at primary level of went up from 97.9 to 102.2 per cent Scheduled Caste, from 94.3 to 100.3 per cent for scheduled tribes and from 90.2 to 101.7 per cent for other social groups—exhibiting no substantial differences between social groups. (Exhibit 4 and 5)





Source: RGSM, Bhopal. 2003

As of 30 June 2003 there were 26,571 EGS schools, catering to 12,33,052 children—of which 45 percent are from Scheduled Tribes and 15 percent are from Scheduled Castes. 47 percent of all enrolled children are girls (Exhibit 6). 91 percent of children in EGS schools are from socially disadvantaged groups living in rural areas.

Exhibit 6: Overview of Progress

Type of schools and year / period	EGS and GPS schools
Government Primary schools (GPS) before 1995	51,813
Government primary schools opened between 1995—2002	4,209
EGS schools opened between 1997—2002	26,571
Total primary schools opened between 1995—2002	30,780
Total primary schools to date	82,593

Source: RGSM, Bhopal, June 2003.

- Recent evaluation of DPEP (covering the formal primary schools) reveal an 8.17 per cent increase in the enrolment of girls in high female literacy district (Betul) and a 13.13 per cent increase in low female literacy district (Sidhi). In case of Scheduled Tribe girls the increase in Betul is 9.18 per cent for girls while there is a decrease in the proportion of boys in school. Interestingly there seems to be a drop in the proportion of boys in both districts. More girls are entering primary schools. (Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow 2002). However, the data gathered does not capture the shift of children from formal primary schools to EGS schools or enrolment of children (mostly boys) in private schools. During field visits we noted that there were many more girls in government schools (GPS and EGS).

- Recent field visits (Vimala Ramachandran, September 2003) and qualitative micro studies (Aarti Saihjee, 2002) reveal dramatic improvement in access to primary education—especially for children from very poor households and in scattered settlements. All EGS schools were found to be functioning regularly with one or two teachers. Community leaders admitted that several children moved from government primary schools to EGS schools—partly because of convenient location and partly because of regular functioning and empathetic teachers.
- Community groups do not play a significant role in monitoring the learning outcomes of children. Quality monitoring and academic support is provided by Block resource Centres (BRC) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRC). This situation may change with the introduction of District Annual Academic Report under the aegis of the People’s Education Act of 2002.

Important achievements with respect to community involvement, teachers, classroom processes and learning outcomes:

- All EGS schools are housed on land made available by the community.
- Village Education Committees and Parents Teachers Association take full responsibility for regular functioning of the EGS schools. They supervise the conduct and attendance of *Gurujis*, monitor student attendance and, most importantly, ensure uninterrupted provision of the midday meal. Almost all the teachers are recruited from the village or from the neighbouring villages. While we do not have reliable data on the social composition of EGS *Gurujis*, efforts were made to give preference to local candidates.
- Corporal punishment was almost non-existent in all the EGS schools visited during the course of fieldwork for this study and micro-studies done in 2002. This could be attributed to closer interaction between the *Guruji* and the community—through the Parents Teachers Association.
- Given that the community selects the teacher the relationship between the PTA and the school is supposed to be much better than formal GPS. While we did come across a few proactive PTAs, the sample is too small to make any conclusive statement. We were informed that there is considerable variation from district to district and even within districts. It depends a lot on the texture of the Panchayat as well as the personality of the teacher herself/himself.
- Limited evidence available indicates that there is no significant difference in the learning outcomes of children in EGS schools and the formal Government primary Schools (Brij Kothari et al 2000, Malcolm Mercer et al 2002). The data compiled by the government does not include transition from one grade to the next and learning outcomes of children in EGS schools as compared to formal schools.
- Equally important is that there is no difference in the curriculum and textbooks used in the EGS; as a result children can easily migrate from EGS to formal schools.

- The actual teaching time in EGS schools is significantly higher than formal primary schools. EGS *Guruji* are not allocated additional work like Census, Elections and other data collection and surveillance activities of the government.

Driving Factors

A combination of inter-related institutional reforms spearheaded by determined political leadership was the driving factor that made EGS a reality.

Commitment and Political Economy for Change

Right from the start, the EGS stood out in the country because of the strong backing it received from the Chief Minister who publicly committed to make local resources available. This programme was not contingent on availability of foreign funds or grants from the Government of India. However, funds made available through the District Primary Education Programme (1994 to 2002) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2002 onwards) were used by the government to augment its resources.

EGS was positioned as a large-scale programme and not a small innovation. While the approach was certainly experimental, it was evident from the start that the government was determined to cover the entire state. Most innovative was the management decision to evolve and fine-tune the programme as it went to scale. While the basic blueprint was prepared in 1997, the programme adapted and changed as it went to scale.

The Government allocated adequate financial resources and maintained a steady increase of actual expenditure on elementary education from Indian Rupees 2,844.1 million in 1990/01 to 3,492.0 million in 1998/99 even though there was a noticeable decline in Plan expenditure, most of which comes from GOI (Bashir and Ayyar, 2001). Government of India grants under the District Primary Education Project and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan augment state resources in elementary education. The RGSM also launched other innovative mechanisms to garner financial support for EGS. The “Fund a School” programme was launched in 2000—whereby anyone can log on to the RGSM website and adopt a school and pay Rs 16,000 (sixteen thousand), which is directly credited into the bank account of the school concerned. So far close to 1000 individuals and corporate institutions have adopted EGS schools.

The People’s Education Act passed in 2002 attempts to formalise institutional mechanisms to foster transparency and strengthen accountability of the educational administration to the Panchayat and the community, rather than upwards to the bureaucracy. Equally, the government introduced District Annual Academic Report to make public information on enrolment, attendance, grade-wise transition and teacher deployment and training, learning achievement of children, distribution of textbooks so on. It is too early to say whether this act would be implemented in letter and spirit—especially after a change of government in December 2003. Analysing the election of where Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won with a thumping

majority, political commentators observed that government employees—especially block and village level functionaries, actively campaigned for the BJP. Apparently, many government functionaries were unhappy with devolution of powers to local bodies and in particular GPS teachers were unhappy with the announcement that all future appointments will be on a contract basis and that the confidential records of teachers will include performance outcomes of children in GPS. Equally, EGS teachers are also demanding parity in tenure and pay with GPS teachers.

One of the issues that emerge in most discussions on decentralisation is whether Panchayats are truly representative? Did it create space for effective participation of the poorest of the poor—Dalits, Tribal groups (especially the more disadvantaged)? This is indeed a fiercely contested issue in Madhya Pradesh. While there is no doubt that devolution of funds to the Panchayat has made a difference on the ground, there is bound to be considerable variations across districts and even within districts. The formal representation of socially disadvantaged groups or women does not guarantee participation. Like other states in the country MP also has its share of dummy representatives. It would therefore be difficult to say whether decentralisation has been effective in giving Dalits and poor women a voice in local governance.

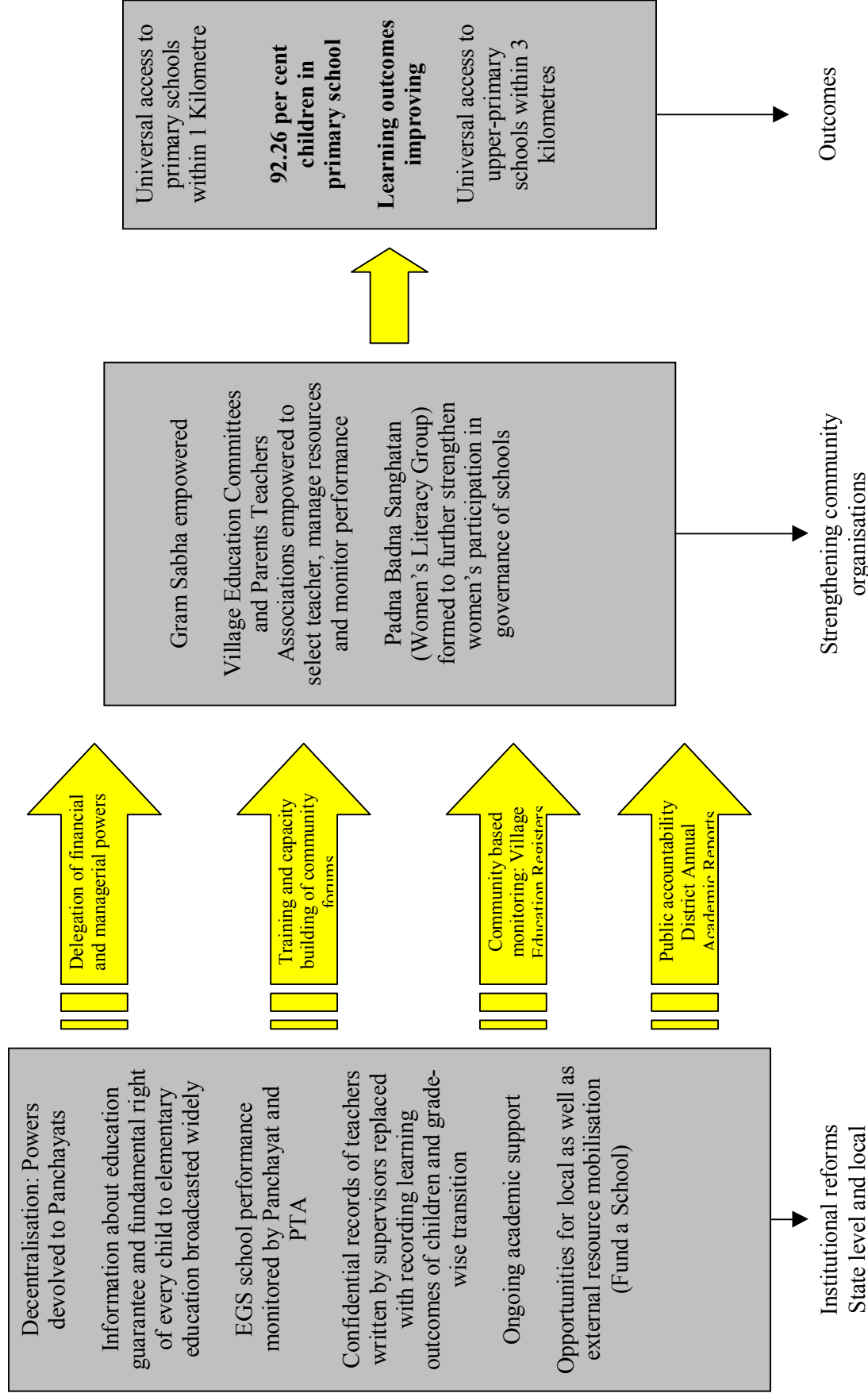
Institutional Innovation

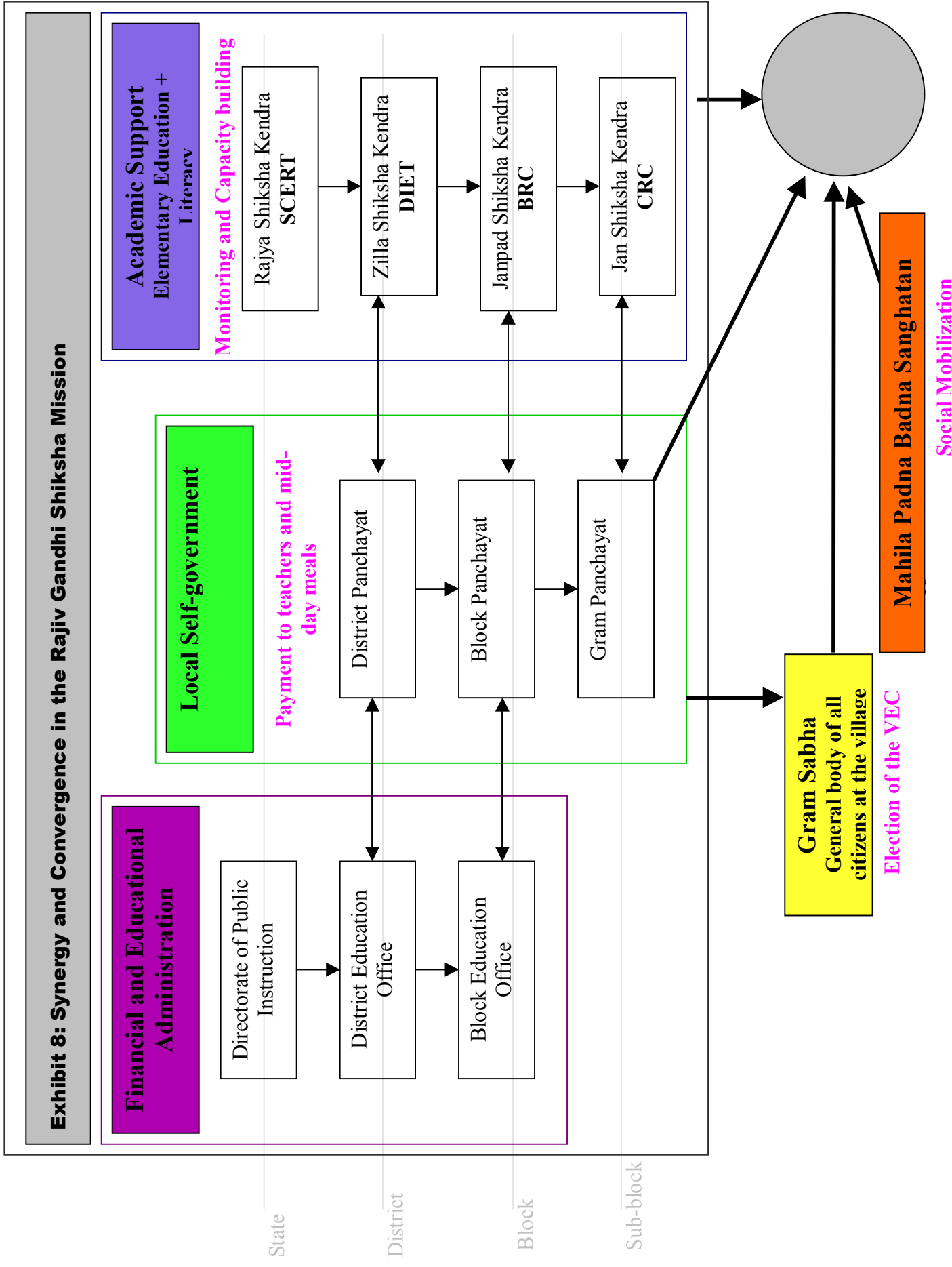
The Education Guarantee Scheme is hailed as a major breakthrough in the education sector because of three important institutional innovations:

First, it created institutional structures and statutory mechanisms for inclusion of the excluded (poor rural children who had no access to primary school within 1 kilometre walking distance) by providing a forum for articulation of demand for education through the Panchayat, a mechanism to forward that demand through local-self-government structures, public commitment by the government to establish EGS primary schools and finally mechanisms for continued participation of the community and the Panchayat in management and supervision. Contrary to popular beliefs about the value of education, social resistance to education of girls emerged as a relatively less important reason for non enrolment (only 8.2 percent respondent cited this as a reason in 2002, LSA) while issues of non-availability of schooling facilities, economic compulsions and school related factors got more prominence. Open discussions in the Panchayat as also within the official system not only created a climate for change, but gave the people a mechanism to demand a school for their children.

Second, the government provided a unilateral legally cognisable guarantee by pledging to meet its obligation of providing an EGS School within 90 days and provide training and academic support to the *Guruji* (teacher) identified by the community. The government opened itself to meeting the demand for primary education through the EGS scheme and the People's Education Act. The bureaucracy had to respond—failing which the Panchayat could appeal to a higher authority. Necessary statutory institutions and mechanisms were established to enable to government to respond as well as empower the Panchayats to make decisions and make demands on the administration.

Exhibit 7: Mechanisms and Structures That Facilitated Empowerment





Third, forging mutually supportive links between the state government, local self-government institutions and civil society: Lack of coordination and synergy between administrative / financial wing and the academic arm of education has often been cited as a major reason for poor performance on both the access and quality aspects of education. This problem is further exacerbated when local self-government institutions are left out of the loop of educational management. The coming together of the administrative, financial and academic arms of educational management under one umbrella—Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission—ensured convergence and synergy. Further, making the system responsive and accountable to the Gram Sabha (the entire village—as the basic unit of democratic decentralisation) effectively flipped the accountability pyramid. The EGS School is today owned by and accountable to the Parents Teachers Association and the Village Education Committee—who in-turn are elected by the Gram Sabha. Funds allocated by the government for the EGS programme are managed by the Panchayat and allocation / expenditure supervised by Parents Teachers Association of each school. The government, elected body (Panchayat) and the school forms three corners of the management pyramid.

Two administrators who conceptualised and steered to programme in the formative years led educational reform in MP from 1993 to 2003⁴. This was a significant departure from the convention of frequent transfers. After the December 2003 state elections and the change in government, the newspapers reports that the two officials who were quite central to the EGS experimentation have been moved. It is too early to make any statement on the impact of leadership change on the educational reform process in Madhya Pradesh.

Learning and Experimentation

EGS did not burst on the educational scenario as a fully formed model; it evolved and matured with experience. The learning and experimentation process (Exhibit 1: Time Line) involved the following stages:

- As a first step the government initiated and fine-tuned LSA method for accurate assessment of demand for education, cross-checking statistics generated by the system with household survey data.
- This was followed by statutory mechanisms for channelling and responding to community demand for schools.
- In a situation where the government was facing financial crisis, also in a situation where the primary school system was not functioning properly, EGS evolved as a cost effective strategy for universalisation of primary education. .

⁴ Malcolm Mercer et al (2002): “Management of DPEP in Madhya Pradesh has been characterised by sustained, dynamic and committed leadership by the RGSM Director, who has been in charge of the programme since its inception in 1994. To a large extent this continuity has been crucial to the programme’s success. Similarly, the ability to adapt to changes in circumstances and to seize opportunities afforded by the advance funding to embark upon beneficial innovations has been strengthened by the RGSM’s mission mode of operation...”

- The government acknowledged that local teachers—albeit with lower qualifications—are critical in tribal hamlets and in remote areas because they can communicate with the children and their parents in the same language.
- In the early stages, the Gurujis were seen as para-professional teachers (also known as parateachers) but as the programme matured the teachers identified and supported by the community were recognised as full-fledged teachers.
- This was made possible by according priority attention to training and supervision, thereby bringing them on par with teachers in Government Primary Schools. When coupled with the District Academic Report and quarterly reports on academic progress to Parents Teachers Association, ensuring equivalence in quality became more credible. This was an important lesson, when training and supervision is streamlined and made rigorous—no matter what the qualification / remuneration of teachers—it is possible to enhance the skills and capabilities of teachers
- The EGS programme was initially visualised by Government of India and the larger education community as an alternative stream. That the Government of Madhya Pradesh took a decision not to establish any more Government Primary Schools, soon dispelled this notion. While EGS continues to be viewed as an “alternative stream” in the rest of the country, the MP Government treats it as an integral part of their strategy for universal elementary education.
- Institutionalising community ownership was a key area of learning and experimentation—starting off as local committees specific to the EGS programme the Parents Teachers Association (also known as Palak Shikshak Sangh) were made an integral part of education management.

Exhibit 9: Parent-Teacher Associations: Institutionalising Local Ownership

A critical determinant to the quality of schooling is the extent of local ownership and accountability and the challenge here is to create institutional arrangements that help to establish the school as a unit responsive to the learning needs of the children and the educational aspirations of the community.

The idea of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) offers an option in this direction. The Madhya Pradesh *Jan Shikshan Adhiniyam* (M P People’s Education Act of 2002) stipulates setting up PTA, giving it a legal status. The PTA as the term implies consists of all parents of the children studying in the school along with all the teachers. The PTA elects a President and Vice President from itself. The Head Teacher of the school is the Secretary of the PTA, which meets once a month.

Recognising the need to strengthen the school as units the PTA has been given powers to facilitate effective functioning and make the school management responsive to the needs of children. *Responsibilities* of the PTA include:

- Ensuring 100 percent enrolment of children in the 5-14 age group.
- Ensuring regular attendance of students and teachers.
- Assist in the development of the school and school assets.
- Present the needs of learners to *Gram Sabha* for availing of the benefits/grants from it.
- Assist the teachers in the discharge of their duties to impart quality education.
- Raise funds for the development of school.
- Motivate illiterates and neo-literates towards sustainable continuing education.
- The *Rights* of the PTA include the following:
- Preparing the *Jan Shikshan Yojana* (People’s Education Plan).
- Maintain, operate and strengthen *Shala Shiksha Kosh* (school education fund).
- Decide and recommend a school uniform for the students of the school.
- Monitor the children’s growth in the achievement in various competencies of different subjects.
- Supervise and review all development, academic, administrative and financial activities of the school.
- Recommend withholding salaries of teachers in case of wilful default.
- Examining and advising on the Public Evaluation Report (*Jan Shiksha Pradivedan*).

PTAs are at the initial formative stage. The current paradox is that good schools with motivated teachers tend to have stronger, more involved PTAs; and relatively less functional schools have weaker PTAs; whereas the need for strong PTAs really exists for these weaker schools. Currently the character of the school tends to determine the character of PTA. Till date, 1,03,546 PTAs have been formed.

A PTA that evolves a reciprocal balance of rights and responsibilities in the interest of the children’s learning would offer an instance of participatory school management where local ownership and accountability cohere and the dichotomy between demand and supply, between provider and receiver dissolves.

Source: Third Human Development Report, Madhya Pradesh 2002.

External Catalysts

Right from the start EGS was designed to forge mutually enriching partnership between the Panchayat, the larger community and the administration. Given that the programme was steered by the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, all academic and administrative linkages were ensured. The programme also built on mutually supportive external linkages—the Government of India allocated the European Commission DPEP funds to Madhya Pradesh. As a result the programme was included in joint review missions of DPEP and specific appraisal missions jointly fielded by the World Bank, European Commission, DFID India, Royal Netherlands Embassy and UNICEF. This facilitated national and international exchange on a range of pedagogy, management and mobilisation issues. As the programme matured, initial apprehension with what was described as a low cost programme soon led to a realisation of the potential of the EGS model in educationally backward regions. As a result the EGS programme received considerable national and international attention.

Lessons Learned

Education is one of the key pillars of social empowerment as it enables people to not only acquire knowledge, skills and the confidence to secure a livelihood but is the key to accessing information. Education enhances the social status and boosts the self-esteem and self-confidence, *thereby enabling disadvantaged social groups to negotiate an unequal world from a position of strength*. Education is also the key to development of human capabilities thereby creating valuable social capital. Nevertheless, given the centrality of ‘tangible’ gains of education, especially for the socially disadvantaged groups and for women, the MDGs recognises it ‘as an important *end* in its own right’.

The development discourse in India invariably leads to comparisons between the more forward states with high literacy, better social sector services, greater employment opportunities and informed participation in democratic processes and the less developed states marked by a downward spiral of low literacy, poor social services, precarious economic situation and low participation in democratic processes. For several decades Madhya Pradesh was counted alongside the less developed states and sometime given the pejorative label BIMARU (Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh)—a local word also meaning ‘sick’.

In the last decade Madhya Pradesh has made significant progress on several fronts—most notably democratic decentralisation, universal primary education and literacy. The political leaders publicly committed to getting out of the downward spiral of poverty, illiteracy and poor health. The Education Guarantee Scheme and democratic decentralisation were the two important vehicles for catalysing social change. Today Madhya Pradesh is cited as a model, recoding significant improvement in elementary education. Unfortunately, the achievement over the last ten years is often projected as the achievement of one political party or even worse one dynamic

leader. Discussions with senior political and administrative leaders were very revealing. Reducing the fiscal burden of the state, democratic decentralisation and the EGS scheme were all part of the same continuum. Given the fiscal situation of state governments in India, universal access to elementary education would not have been possible without a more cost effective alternative. EGS therefore emerged as a response to both the need for educational access as well as balancing the precarious fiscal situation of the state. Equally, decentralisation emerged as a vehicle for delivery of a people-centred educational programme. Discussing the sustainability of the programme the former Chief Minister said that such issues have to be depoliticised—i.e., democratic decentralisation, EGS and even strategies to reduce the fiscal burden of the state need to be seen as issues that are important for the state of MP rather than that of any one political party. These are common public goods and should, ideally, not be tied up to any individual or social group or political party⁵. In other words it is a non-partisan political issue—one that cuts across the specific ideological and political USP of the two main political parties in Madhya Pradesh, The Congress Party and Bharatiya Janata Party. The issues discussed in this section needs to be read in this context.

First: the key message to emerge from the EGS experience is that structural reform in one sector cannot be sustained unless reforms in governance follow. The government acknowledged that EGS as a bottom-up and Panchayat centred innovation cannot be institutionalised unless the process of decentralisation and devolution of powers is carried to its logical conclusion. Empowering local self-government institutions (Panchayats) through effective decentralisation of development planning and resource allocation were identified as the logical next steps⁶. In the last eight years the Madhya Pradesh government has attempted to institutionalise democratic decentralisation through the MP Panchayati Raj Adhiniyan (Dwitiya) in 2001 and Lok Shiksha Adhiniyan (People's Education Act) of 2002 (Exhibit 1: Time Line above). Equally important is that democratic decentralisation by itself had little value unless the people who get elected to various committees and forum acquire the confidence to participate and know how to access and use information. Building the capacities of people is critical for meaningful and sustained participation. One of the criticisms of the MP decentralisation strategy is that ordinances and laws devolving more powers to local bodies and institutions were not matched with training and capacity building, especially of the disadvantaged social groups—thereby making it a top-down process of decentralisation, participation by dictate.

Second: Is EGS really all about supply of educational facilities and not so much about sustaining the demand beyond the primary education level and moving on to issues of quality and

⁵ Unscheduled meeting with the author in the office of Seminar Magazine, New Delhi, 9 January 2004

⁶ Discussions with Panchayat leaders revealed that primary schooling (including the issue of mid-day meal) provokes heated debates not only at the village level but also at the district level (Zilla Parishad). Women leaders admit that this was not the case even five years ago when Panchayats rarely discussed education. Interestingly, women leaders did not distinguish between an EGS school and a formal GPS, but made a distinction between those schools that function regularly, where teachers come and teach and those that are irregular or dysfunctional. Discussion with EGS teachers often led to parity issues—culminating in a comment on why equal work is not rewarded with equal pay. It must however be noted that with effect from July 2003 the monthly honorarium for EGS Guruji and contract teacher grade-III recruited for Government Primary Schools have been brought on par—Indian Rupees 2500 per month.

relevance of education, access to higher levels of education in both the formal as well as the vocational stream? Enhanced participation at the primary stage needs to be followed up at higher levels. Addressing the question of relevance of education in the lives of people and enabling them to access farm and non-farm work, creating capacities for self employment and linking up with the rapidly changing economy remains a big challenge. “Experience has shown that the presence of a group of demoralised/disillusioned youngsters, who may have either completed primary schooling or dropped out, who have no employment or productive work, act as a disincentive for education of other children in the family/community. Younger children and their families see the writing on the wall -- primary education does not always improve the situation of the poor unless what they learn is perceived as being relevant to their life situation. This is particularly true when education does not lead to any material gain (employment/self-employment), or for that matter even unquantifiable value addition (nowadays called social capital). Increasing adolescent crime, violence and general social unrest among educated youth further reinforces negative attitudes towards the youth and towards education (especially if the cohort has completed primary schooling)...” (Vimala Ramachandran, 1999) Conversations with parents and children (during recent micro studies / qualitative studies) reveal that unless the government is willing to invest in quality, children are not likely to be equipped to compete with the better-off sections of society. The academic rigour, time and environment necessary for children to move from primary to secondary to professional education are still beyond the reach of poor children. At best, most programmes for the poor go up to the secondary level. Even vocational education and training in livelihood skills are beyond their reach. The forward linkages necessary to make primary education a means to livelihood security are yet to be created. Creating exit points at different stages—especially between Classes VIII and XII, would enable children to move on to livelihood and life skills oriented programmes. Unfortunately, most elementary educational programmes do not take a long term view and plan ahead. Grappling with issues of quality and relevance is perhaps a first step towards any long-term educational planning. EGS is still negotiating the early stages and forward educational linkages have emerged as a big challenge.

Third: The EGS programme is cost-efficient when compared to government primary schools. The EGS *Guruji* is paid Indian Rupees 2500 per month (as compared to Rupees 6000 per month paid to regular school teachers and Rupees 2500 paid to Samvida Shikshak or the Contract Teacher). However, available data on performance indicate no appreciable difference between children in GPS and EGS schools (Brij Kothari et al 2000, Malcolm Mercer et al 2002). These comparisons take place in a context where learning levels in both systems are still fairly low. EGS model *per se* may not, as yet, be the answer to ensuring acceptable levels of learning in schools. Recent debates in the media and among educational planners have highlighted ethical and equity issues with respect to providing teachers at one-third the cost of regular teachers and with substantially less training. The Government of MP has responded by giving *Gurujis* access to D.Ed correspondence programme on a priority basis. Equally, the government has ensured equivalence in ongoing academic support, infrastructure development and most importantly, in minimum learning levels expected from GPS and EGS schools. Notwithstanding the resolve of the government to ensure equal education to all, the fact remains that the EGS primarily caters to the most marginalized. These issues acquire a sense of urgency in the context of quality of

education and the ability of the poor to compete with their counterparts from better-endowed schools in both the public and private sectors⁷.

Fourth: A major issue flagged by the Government of Madhya Pradesh relates to sustainability. The government has tried to optimally allocate its own resources and balance it with those that are made available by Government of India as a part of Central Sector Schemes. Given that it is the poorest of the poor who depend on government schools and among them socially disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes—the government is aware that it cannot mobilise funds from the community for education and instead has to make resources available. Leveraging donor funds and funds mobilised from corporate / civil society / philanthropic institutions have been identified as potential sources for additional resources. ‘The Fund a School Initiative’ was conceived as a first step in this direction. As the government tried to respond to the educational needs of the very poor beyond basic education, the resource issue will acquire a totally new dimension. Therefore, exploring partnerships with local business and philanthropic institutions would become essential to take the EGS programme to its logical conclusion—ensuring good quality education for all.

Critics of the EGS scheme argue that existing financial ceiling for construction of school may only exacerbate existing inequalities. Relatively well off communities may be able to match the contribution of the government with their own inputs while the poor tribal hamlets may have to make do with what they have received from the government. The government could have evolved differential norms for more backward and remote areas. While this is indeed the case, state government officials argue that additional aid through fund-a-school initiative is channelled to remote / poor areas.

Fifth, discussions on innovations invariably bring up the question of ownership. Travelling around the state one cannot miss the fact that community forums (VEC, PTA and the Panchayat) believe that the EGS programme is theirs. Community leaders refer to EGS as “our school” and refer to the government primary schools as “*sarkari schools*” (government schools). They refer to *Guruji*s as “our teachers”. Critics of the programme argue that when the participation or people refer to the EGS “their school” and the teachers as “our teachers”—they are essentially making a relative statement, comparing it with the formal government primary schools. The important issue here is whether the participation is as empowered equal partners or it is a formality. The hard reality is that, given the prevalent social situation, the economically better off groups and the higher castes have a bigger say in local government. While EGS may cater to the very poor and the marginalized, its continuation or strengthening is contingent on the support of panchayat leaders and local power elite. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the change in government in December 2003 will influence the sense of ownership.

While the larger education community, the donors and the Government of India hail EGS as a innovation that has changed the face of education in Madhya Pradesh, taking this model to

⁷ “There is also an equity question of whether it was intended that marginalized groups (i.e. SC, ST and OBC) would receive a cheaper form of primary education than more privileged groups. The issues of the cost effectiveness and the ethics of education provision to different social groups needs to be examined in more detail...”(Malcolm Mercer et al, 2002).

other states / regions invariably attracts the comment that this unique programme was made possible by exceptional people and the coming together of administrators, political leaders and practitioners. Therefore, many commentators observe that this model is not replicable. For example when Rajasthan tried to introduce a variation of the EGS scheme called Rajiv Gandhi Pathashala; the administration organised a survey and local MLA and other political leaders took decisions on location of new schools. The very foundation of the MP EGS—community demand channelled through the Panchayat to an administration that was obligated to provide a school within 90 days—was not followed in Rajasthan. Maybe the government there was not ready to “trust” the people and willingly accept community pressure on the government. The fundamental principle of “guarantee provision on demand” that was the driving force of MP EGS was missed out in Rajasthan—both governed (till December 2002) by the same political party, one that introduced the 73rd Constitutional Amendment devolving greater powers to local self-government institutions.

The big question is whether EGS will sustain if there is a change in government or a change in administrators. Will a change in leadership result in reversing the bottom-up system of this unique programme? Six years are hardly sufficient to institutionalise new systems and processes in an administration, especially when it has worked in a top down fashion for over hundred years. After all decentralisation processes initiated by Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan were reversed with a change in government and change in leadership. The question that is often debated is whether EGS will be sustained now that the state has a new Chief Minister and a new ruling party. Discussions with administrators and community leaders indicate that they firmly believe that democratic decentralisation will be difficult to reverse in Madhya Pradesh, and that local self-government institutions (Panchayats) are here to stay. Given the scale of the programme no government can afford to lose the goodwill of people who now have real access to schooling facilities for their children.

Notwithstanding the sense of ownership among local stakeholders and momentum of the programme, what is obvious is that the EGS programme of Madhya Pradesh needs more time for it to be institutionalised and become an integral part of the administrative culture of the state. It needs careful nurturing and support for at least another ten years before one can be assured of long-term sustainability. Not a long time to turn the system upside down and ensure its continuation.

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Glossary

73 rd Constitutional Amendment	Amendment (73rd (Panchayati Raj) and 74th (Nagarpalikas) Act, 1992) made to the Constitution of India introducing a third tier of government
Chief Minister	Head of the State Government
D Ed	Diploma in Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Project—a multi-donor initiative led by the World Bank that was initiated in 1994 under the Social Safety Net programme of Structural Adjustment Loan
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
GOI	Government of India
GoMP	Government of Madhya Pradesh
GPS	Government Primary School
Gram Sabha	A village assembly
Gram Swaraj	Village self-rule
Guruji	Teacher
Jan Shiksha Kendra	Cluster Resource Centre—also referred to as CRC
Jan Shiksha Prativedan	Public education report—a quarterly report that is presented at the gram Sabha
Jan Shikshan Adhiniyam	Statutory Framework for Quality
Jan Shikshan Yojana	People’s Education Plan
Janpad Shiksha Kendra	Block Resource Centre—also referred to as BRC
LSA (Lok Sampark Abhiyan)	Participatory problem mapping, a house-to-house survey to gather information on educational participation of children (6 to 14 age group)
Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam	An act passed in 2003 formalising the institutional mechanisms for realization of the constitutional right to education of children up to the age of 14.
Mahila Padna Badna Andolan	A campaign for adult women’s literacy
Padna Badna Andolan	A campaign for adult literacy
Padna Badna Samiti	Literacy and continuing education committees
Padna Badna Sangh	Village level women’s group for literacy and continuing education
Palak Shikshak Sangh (PSS).	Parents Teachers Association
Panchayati Raj	Local self government institutions introduced under the 73 rd Constitutional Amendment
RGSM	Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (Rajiv Gandhi Education Mission)
Sarkari School	Government School
SC	Schedules Caste
Shala Shiksha Kosh	School level education fund
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Campaign for Education for All)
ST	Scheduled Tribe
Zilla Shiksha Kendra	District Institute of Education and Training—also referred to as DIET