

The Bombay Community Public Trust
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Municipal School Education in Mumbai — A meeting of VOs

REPORT

A meeting of Voluntary Organisations (VOs) working with the schools of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (BMC) was convened by BCPT. The meeting was held on Wednesday, August 25, 2004 from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. at the Smt Premila Thackersay Committee Room. SNDT Women's University, 1 Nathibai Thackersay Road, New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- Understand the different approaches used and activities conducted
- Avoid duplication of efforts
- Share best practices
- Liaison with MCGM

Twenty-eight organisations participated in the meeting. Also present were Mr. Bhimrao Gaikwad, Chief Community Development Officer, Education Department, BMC and Ms. Rukmini Srinivasan from Times of India.

After a welcome and a brief introduction to BCPT, three speakers addressed different facets of working with MCGM Schools. Initially, Mr Ramesh Joshi, General Secretary, Centre for Public Education (CPE), an organisation of municipal school teachers, talked about the initiatives taken by the Centre to improve the quality of teaching and the mindset of teachers. Mrs Bina Lashkari, Director of the Society for Door-step Schools (DSS) spoke about the work of DSS and its efforts at collaborating with the MCGM administration. Mrs Farida Lambay, a Founder Trustee of Pratham spoke about the survey undertaken by Pratham in Mumbai city under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (a scheme floated by the Govt of India to ensure free education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years).

The findings of the survey were:

- 97% of the children are in school today
- 54% of these children drop out between the 3rd and 7th standards, some reasons being:
 - a) no exams till 4th std.
 - b) Limited access to free education after 7th std.
 - c) Parents prefer to enrol their children into a private school in standard fifth so that completion of school education is ensured. Securing admission in 8th std is more difficult.
- 22% of children in std. five do not know how to read and write
- 89,000 children were out of school at the time when survey was completed, of which 10,000 were street children

She also outlined measures that could be initiated to make the VOs work more effective and to upgrade the schools.

In the post lunch sessions, small groups of participants were formed to have discussions on the following subjects:

1. Enhancing Learning Effectiveness
2. Retention of students and Preventing Drop outs
3. Enabling Environment
4. Igniting Minds
5. Ensuring Completion of School Education
6. Community Participation, Collaboration and Sustainability Issues

Some salient points that emerged during the discussions were as under:

1. Current status of education in municipal schools in Mumbai
 - The most marginalised sections of society populate BMC schools
 - Enrolment rate in BMC schools is dropping particularly in schools located in city proper.
 - Lack of adequate teachers; a large number of teaching posts have not been filled
 - Teachers faced problems of large classrooms (in some schools), administrative responsibilities and additional non-teaching assignments regularly
 - Physical infrastructure in many schools is in pitiable condition

The above situation exists despite the fact that BMC teachers are all qualified and well trained and the systems are in place. What is lacking, as perceived by the participants was:

- Interest of the administration in the education process
- Accountability on the part of the teachers and administration
- Proper mind-set of the teachers, principals and others directly connected with schools

2. The School Adoption Programme (SAP)

The SAP was formulated by the BMC in **1991**. A large number of VOs have partnered with the BMC on the SAP.

- Despite inflow of resources - monetary, human and material through VOs, the impact of SAP on improving the quality of education has not been visible.
- VOs and BMC administration and staff rarely work as equal partners in the SAP; due recognition has not been given to the work done by VOs,
- VOs are largely perceived as "money-bags" which are there to give donations for items required by the schools staff.

3. Issues need to be tackled at three levels:

Administrative Level

- a) streamlining the BMC's Education department. In terms of general attitude, decision making, accountability and communication with all stakeholders
- b) Delegation of authority and decentralisation of the BMC's decision making process was required and active involvement of citizens needs to be encouraged.

School Level

- c) improve the quality of education imparted; to impact actual learning to take place
- d) provide and maintain basic amenities and Infrastructure such as water, toilets, lights, fans, telephones in the school premises
- e) create and develop a clean and attractive environment which would encourage students
- f) develop links with local anganwadis and balwadis to ensure enrolment of students In standard 1.

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- g) demonstrate their work and show visible results to parents, school sponsors
- h) ensure the sustainability of their efforts
- i) come together to address issues with a single voice, share good practices and avoid duplication of efforts and services
- j) Revamp the SAP - VOs need to network,

Strategies

- i. A Forum of VOs under the aegis of BCPT should be initiated.
- II. Formulate a common goal and work towards this. It could be:
 - a) Making BMC Schools No. 1
 - b) Ensure all children read and write and are pax with their standard's syllabusEvery child in school, every school beautiful and every child learning
- iii The Forum will develop a partnership pact (or a BMC-VO Bond) which will identify the different roles and responsibilities,
- tv The Forum should liaison with the two Committees appointed by the Mumbai High Court to look into problems faced by BMC Schools. These are:
 - a) Academic Standards Committee
 - Infrastructure Committee

The meeting ended with participants agreeing to meet In smaller groups to continue the discussions and take the process further.