

Story of community participation in Ajepur

Ajepur, a tribal village in Nandurbar district with majority population of Konkani Adivasi community, has Zilla Parishad Primary School with 72 students. The school has developed itself in past few year with the initiative of its school teacher Mr. Gavit and active members of SMC. Even the village community raised almost Rs 2,75,000 from their meagre earning for the local school.



Being able to speak student's mother tongue Konkani, the school teacher could communicate closely with his students. After engaging them in learning, he also worked towards improving the school infrastructure.

There were, for instance, no benches for the students. Mr. Gavit contributed Rs 10,000 for the project, and the villagers reciprocated by

donating another Rs 30,000. Soon the school had good quality, sturdy benches for its students.

The villagers responded in a similar way when the school needed plates and bowls to serve the midday meals. Given that most parents and guardians worked as farm labourers, and since the school provided midday meals, most students did not bring any food from home. Neither did they carry empty lunch boxes or plates. Some students would go home in the recess period, to get a plate off which to eat. But for many, their homes would be locked, as the adults would be out working. This often meant that not every student was able to eat, as the school did not possess enough utensils either. When this situation was explained to parents, some came forward to gift 50 utensil sets, each with a plate, a bowl, and a glass, to the school.

In 2015, the school became digital. To facilitate this, Mr. Gavit and Head Teacher Mr. Desale adopted a new approach while seeking help from the community. They downloaded interactive software related to the school curriculum and held demonstrations for the school management committee and at parents' meetings. In this way, they convinced parents and guardians that this method of learning was more effective than learning by rote, or only through textbooks. And they explained how, in the changing, digital world, students stood to benefit from an acquaintance with this new technology. The students' families and the

management committee together worked to raise some Rs 1,50,000 for a computer and a projector for the school.



Digital classroom in the school

Although these funds were enough to digitalise one classroom, it left out students in the other class. Turning to parents and guardians once again, the teachers pointed out this problem. The village council stepped forward and promised to get funds under the PESA (Panchayat Raj

Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act. Soon, they were able to procure Rs 2,00,000 for the school. With this sum, the school not only managed to digitalise the other classroom, but also purchased six tabs for the students.

To overcome the problem of power outage, the school has installed solar panels and has also purchased an inverter. This ensures that the school can continue to function even during a power outage. Just as the village community has helped by giving plates and bowls, both teachers have, between them, personally spent some Rs 15,000 to repair and paint the school building.



The kitchen garden of Ajepur school

A special feature of this school is its kitchen garden, growing local seasonal vegetables. Many vegetable varieties that grow in the Nandurbar region are considered to be nutritious and to have medicinal value. Teachers and students plant vegetables such as “chitrak”

and “Thang” in the garden. The students bring the seedlings from their own backyards. During the rainy season, these plants are included in the meals cooked for the students. At other times of the year, vegetables like tomatoes, spinach, coriander, carrots, and so on, are grown in the school’s kitchen garden.

Over the years, both the school teachers have built and maintained channels of communication with the villagers. They have sought to understand local problems, and lent a helping hand wherever possible. In the process, they have shown by example what mutual support leads to school development.
