From the Editor

That it is absolutely critical for a school to strike roots in its neighbourhood is stating the obvious. Of course it is. It needs the roads and lanes, the water supply and sewage network, the community dumpster and every other service and facility available locally, to function. Then naturally it must involve itself in all that concerns its neighbourhood.

We knew this already. What we might have missed are the changing traits of this partnership.

Yes, there has been a very significant shift on this front. Or at least in the manner in which the education pundits have now begun to perceive this relationship between a school and its locality. The neighbourhood is no longer considered a passive backdrop, a provider of basic infrastructure. Rather, it represents a community of people which provides that vital support that the school requires to turn out successive ranks of able, aware and competent citizens. So the country's premier curriculum setter, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), insists that a 'healthy' alliance between the two is an absolute prerequisite for students to develop the 'right attitude' towards society. And the Ministry of Human Resources Development's (MHRD) flagship programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, clearly states that the Right to Education Act can be translated from a legal framework on paper to a vibrant movement on the ground 'only with the local people's support and ownership'.

So when we decided that the time has come for us to encourage our school partners to share their Green Schools Programme (GSP) experiences with the world outside, we really did not have to look too far. But before we could ask them to venture out, we had to do some homework.

We had to find out if the neighbourhood outside the school compound was at all ready for such overtures. So we conducted an online survey, asking the people in general if they perceived local schools to be viable partners in neighbourhood affairs. Would they join hands to push for relevant policy changes? Would they take part in a joint campaign to make the locality more habitable? The response was overwhelmingly in the affirmative. Have they ever taken part in any such initiative till date? This time the tone was more subdued.

Now it was the turn of the other camp – the schools and the educators. We invited a panel of experts and practitioners, ranging from schools principals to government heavyweights, and held a brainstorming session. Here again, the votes were largely in favour of a school--community alliance. But some interesting road blocks came up when we presented the survey results. The people might claim what they want but they respond to a student team's proposal only if it suits them, said an experienced school head. A school can make itself heard only if it is prepared to lead by example, declared another.

At the end of it all the real picture had begun to emerge. The two partners are willing, even enthusiastic. But no one has yet been able figure out how this partnership can operate to make a credible impact.

This manual attempts to plug this gap. It suggests a viable, doable "HOW". Of course, it just offers a broad framework, that the real players must improvise on. The manual signals a beginning. The end, we hope, will be fashioned and refashioned by its users.

Sumita Dasgupta
Editor