

Dumalpur school: Offers a practical example of Bal Sansad

Dumalpur, a village under Kapalsadi Gram Panchayat (population as per 2011 Census: total 2,024, females 986, males 1,038) of Jhagadia Block is located in Bharuch district in the state of Gujarat, India. The village is located at about 18 KM from Bharuch (district headquarters), and 15 KM from Jhagadia, the nearest town and the block headquarters. Children's population below 6 years includes a total of 208 (female 108, male 100). The village is populated mainly by tribal people.

Bal Sansad: Bal Sansad (children's parliament) is the term used for formation of school children's parliament through democratic election process annually. The process is to be conducted by the Head Teacher along with other school teachers. Purpose of the Bal Sansad process is to introduce the democratic process to the children, promote leadership skills among them, and also promote discipline of carrying out the responsibilities assigned to them.

Similar to the national parliament, the student getting the most number of votes is declared as Prime Minister (or President), followed by announcements of other Ministers depending upon their vote counts. The ministers, according to their interests, may be allocated various departments such as health, education, sanitation, water etc. Sample guidelines for organising Bal Sansad have been attached in Hindi and Gujarati for ready reference and their web links, respectively, are as follows:

http://sujal-swachhsangraha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Unicef_Bal_sansad_book_0.pdf and

http://sujal-swachhsangraha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2015_WIS_Bal%20Sansad%20Guideline_Guidelines_Gujarati_Gujarat.pdf.



Bal Sansad in Dhumalpur (Gujarat) - Example of Democratic Process to Link With Gram Panchayat

Dumalpur is a tribal village in Jhagadiya block of Bharuch district in Gujarat. It has a primary school with Standards 1 to 8 in the village. Since 2016, when Mukeshbhai Kalidasbhai Vankar became the Head Teacher, he initiated the Bal Sansad concept. There is also a Government of Gujarat guideline (but not mandatory). In Dumalpur primary school, Bal Sansad election is held every year during the month of June or July (as the new academic year starts from June). The students are encouraged to participate in the election process by registering their names for candidacy. The students in Standard 8 are usually more interested in the election and positions.

Elections are organised in the same manner as for national/state elections. The candidates are allowed to choose their symbols and conduct campaigns for votes. On the day of voting, election booth is created with children playing the role of polling officers and guards. The students cast their votes through stamping the sign of their chosen candidate. Votes counting is done in transparent manner.

The candidate with the highest votes becomes the President, followed by Vice-President and Ministers for departments such as Sanitation, Health, Midday Meal and others. The President plays the leadership role. For example, Rakesh Mangabhai Vasava, Standard 8 student, had become President and he played excellent role of motivating other ministers to do their work effectively.

Thus the children are exposed to the democratic process of election. They get the opportunities to develop their democratic leadership and follower-ship skills right from the school age. The Dumalpur primary school links this Bal Sansad with the School Management Committee but not the GPDP yet, which is an opportunity in coming years. Other schools may also follow the suit, and Sarpanch can encourage the schools.

It is important to note that the Bal Sansad's role, as given in the above guidelines, has been envisaged as limited to the school management, and has no role in Gram Panchayat or local governance. Furthermore, Bal Sansad does not represent all the children of the village, especially those who are school drop out (especially adolescent girls), child labour, and children studying outside the GP if the GP has schools only up to Standard 8. Therefore, there is a need for Bal Panchayat to play the role in GP and GPDP, and if Bal Sansad exists in the GP, the Bal Sansad can be merged with Bal Panchayat.