

How does the community participate in Kajoli?

Community participation has emerged as an indispensable element of the model. In fact the success of Kajoli depends largely on the involvement of the community, their sense of ownership of and belongingness to the Kajoli centers. In the successful execution of Kajoli Model, a community usually plays the role stated below:

Champion(s)

A key element for community participation in the establishment of Kajoli centers is the role of “**champion(s)**”

. The concept of a “champion” is of a more recent vintage in the social sciences. Champions are animators/facilitators of social change and social participation to promote an objective. In the context of the Kajoli model a champion takes the initiative to explore the possibility of setting up a Kajoli center in his/her village/ neighborhood/ community. The champion learns about the Kajoli model brings the idea to the people and serves as the chief animator to promote the idea. If there is enough interest in the community, the champion gets in touch with RIB for technical and other support for the establishment of a center as well as to arrange for teacher’s training. The role of the champion may diminish if the community as a whole takes up this responsibility. In any case, once a center has been set up and is fully functioning, the primary responsibility for the running of the center normally devolves upon the teacher and the mothers of the children.

Selection of the Children

The champion(s) or the management committee of a center normally assumes the responsibility of **selecting the children**. The focus is upon five year olds, plus or minus, and they are chosen from the most disadvantaged families, as a priority. While this may require some efforts in the initial stages of the establishment of a center, the task becomes easier when the efficacy of the centers become well-known to the local community over a period of time. In fact, though the

ideal number of children at a center has been fixed at 26 for reasons stated below, often there is more than that number vying for admission, including from well-to-do families. Parents often “book” their children in advance for admission in the following year. Many centers are forced to accept more than 26 children because of pressure from parents.

Providing Space for the Center

With the help of the local community, the champion(s) will identify a **space where a Kajoli center could be established**

. Centers are often established in a room or space made available by someone in the community, such as, unused room in a local institution, in a thatched or tin-roofed hut built with people’s support or even on the verandah/corridor of someone’s residence. The main requirement is that there should be enough space to hang a pocket board, put up blackboards and seat 26 children and the teacher.

Teacher(s)

A key to the success of a center is the selection of a **teacher**. The teacher belongs to the local community/village, known to the children and their parents. The model does not require a formally trained teacher (except for a short training provided by RIB), but someone, preferably a woman, who would enjoy spending time with children for about four hours a day, six days a week; would be able to show them motherly love, affection and care; who is able to read and write in the mother tongue of the children and has lots of patience. Even physically disable persons with the above qualities have proven to be successful teachers.

Participation of the Parents

The **participation of the parents** in the affairs of a center is an essential element for its success. An innovative feature in this respect is the development of a practice by which each **parent provides midday meals** to all the 26 children at a center once a month. Normally it is the mothers who do so. As there are normally 26 school days in a month, in practice each center accepts only 26 children so that it is easier to explain to the mothers that their turn to feed will come only once a month. It has been found that mothers do not consider this as a burden since they know that they have to provide only the amount of food their children would have consumed in 26 days if they had eaten at home. In return they are assured that their children are fed regularly throughout the month. In fact the practice of mothers providing food to all the children at a center once a month gives them a sense of pride and ownership about the centers. As each child becomes the class captain and host on the day his/her mother provides the food, it is a big day for him/her. He/she ensures that the mother does not forget her turn to feed.

Furthermore frequent visit of the parents (usually mothers) and concerned community members to the centers to view children's performance boost their confidence and enhances their interest in learning. At the same time parents' visits enable them to see the problems faced by the kids in the center that they later try to sort out collectively in Mothers' Association's monthly meetings. (See "*What is Mothers' Association?*" below)

Teachers' Salary

The salary of the teacher is the main cash requirement (which varies from TK 500 to 2000, depending upon financial capacity of local community/parents) for the center which is provided mostly by parents. Unlike most other NGOs, RIB does not provide teachers' salary given the fact that its aim is to revive the practice of voluntarism among people and make the community aware of its responsibility for education of their children. In recent days, guardian's appreciation of the quality of education being provided by Kajoli is being observed. Many parents are now willingly paying more towards teacher's salary having been convinced that their children not only learn to read and write and count well but also acquire other skills and social manners at the centers.

Mothers' Association

The idea of Mothers' Association (MA) originated from the need to ensure sustainability of the Kajoli centers given the fact that mothers in rural areas are more concerned about their kid's education than fathers generally. MA seeks to engage mothers in income generating work and encourage them to spend a part of their income to ensure the well-being and sustainability of the Kajoli centers. Usually a MA has its own elected Secretary and Cashier to keep the records on behalf of all the mothers. They sit once or twice a month, discuss in an engaging and participatory manner to find out their real life problems and try to solve them to the extent possible. Needless to say, the prime subject of their discussions is how to advance their kids' education at the center and any functional problems that the center might be facing. Such gathering of mothers also enhances solidarity among them. RIB's experience over the years has shown gradual shift in mothers' capacity for development, enhancement of their ability to make choices and changing their status in the community.