

RURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES NETWORK

A Synopsis of the *"Mobilising Communities to Demand Education (Article 25-A) and Local Accountability"* Project



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Introduction

One of the foremost reasons for a country being developed is the level of education of its people. Education has shown to play an important role in the reduction of poverty as well as in boosting a country's economic growth. In addition to this, education is known to be linked closely with a wide range of development goals such as improving child and maternal health, gender empowerment and building peace through greater civic responsibility¹.

In an underdeveloped country such as Pakistan which suffers from a slow economy, volatile security environment and inability to achieve its development goals, it is not surprising that it lacks immensely in education. With a literacy rate for ages 10 and above of 58% (69% for boys and 46% for girls), Pakistan finds itself right at the bottom within the region (excluding Afghanistan) in the educational sector². Specifically in terms of primary education, despite having a constitutional decree in the form of Article 25-A which states education as a fundamental right for children of 5-16 years of age, Pakistan has still been unable to achieve many of its primary education targets; with some targets becoming even worse such as net primary enrolment (5-9 years) which fell from 57% in 2008 to 56% in 2010/11. In 2011, 32.3% of 5 year olds in Pakistan were found to be



A typical primary school found in rural areas of Pakistan

not enrolled in any school facility while 57% of children between the ages of 3-5 were found to be un-enrolled. In terms of completion rates of primary school, only half of students enrolled will be able to complete their education³.

There are numerous reasons for the sad state of education in Pakistan such as the socio economic condition of the country, lack of educational facilities and a dearth of qualified teachers. However the root of all these problems lies within the lack of interest in education by political leaders and policymakers. An example of this disinterest is the scarcity of public resources that are dedicated towards education. In 2010, Pakistan spent 18.5% of its public funds on the military compared to 9.9% on education⁴. Added to this is the fact that large

¹ The Center for Global Development (CGD) 2006, *Education and the Developing World*, p1-2

² UNESCO Institute for Statistics data found at <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/regions.aspx>

³ Pakistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2010

⁴ World Bank data found at www.data.worldbank.org

parts of the population are unaware of their rights to education as well as all the commitments that their country has pledged towards educating children. This lack of awareness has resulted in little or no accountability being directed towards the government; in terms of demanding more resources for education or even to just ensure that whatever resources are provided should be utilised effectively and efficiently.

Mobilising Communities to Demand Education and Local Accountability

In order to work towards ensuring more children are enrolled in *quality* primary educational institutions (in terms of complete facilities), the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) implemented an 11 month project in seven districts of south Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The project was funded by Alif Ailaan and was implemented in partnership with two of RSPN's partners; namely the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and the Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP).

To achieve its overall objective, the project worked through the social mobilisation approach of the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) which focuses on the innate potential of grassroots communities. By providing them with awareness, capacity building and resources, rural communities have been organised into their own community organisations at the neighbourhood, village and union council levels. With over 850 union council level grassroots organisations (or Local Support Organisations) present throughout the country, the project worked in partnership with those LSOs present within its seven project districts. By engaging with local organised communities, the project ensured that communities were made aware of their right to education (specifically to the existence of Article 25-A) and to develop a system of local accountability in order to make their local elected leaders accountable for the state of education in their constituencies. This was done through a series of systematic initiatives, such as:

Project Profile

Objective: Awareness raising within communities to demand education and local accountability

Location: Seven districts in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces:-

- Bahawalnagar
- Bahawalpur
- Dera Ghazi Khan
- Rajanpur
- Haripur
- Mansehra
- Swabi

Implementation Period:

Apr 2013 – Feb 2014

Donor: Alif Ailaan

Research into the condition of education in the project districts

Having been oriented and obtained their pledges, one of the first assignments given to the organised communities, i.e. LSOs was the collection of baseline data of their villages, union councils and districts. Baseline data pertained specifically to educational facilities, their condition, and enrolment of primary school-going

boys and girls. In terms of enrolment, the data found that 51,518 children (of which 27,389 were girls) were out of school, i.e. 32% of children between the ages of 5-10 were out of school. This data not only provided an accurate and updated picture of education in their own areas but also provided the LSOs with actual information with which to face their local politicians, influential leaders and parents within the community.

Sensitisation sessions with parents using Community Resource Persons

To create awareness regarding the importance of education, activists from within the communities were selected to ensure that there was a higher level of acceptance. Each LSO was asked to select five men and women Community Resource Persons (CRPs) from within their union councils who would be assigned the task of meeting parents and community members to raise awareness. A total of 296 men and 258 women were selected and trained over a duration of two days, in order to become CRPs.

Each CRP was then assigned a specific area (usually their own union council) and a time-frame in which to carry out sensitisation sessions with parents and community members.



CRP delivering a mock session in Swabi

These sensitisation sessions took place with Community Organisation (CO) and Village Organisation (VO) members. However non-members of the local community organisations were also targeted and were encouraged to participate in the general awareness sessions. The sessions

themselves focused on three key areas;

namely highlighting the importance of education, discussing the key barriers which prevent children from going to school or dropping out from school and to make the participants aware of Article 25-A, i.e. their rights as citizens of Pakistan to ensure that their children receive quality primary-level education. The sensitisation sessions also allowed the participants to understand that it was their responsibility to hold their local political leaders accountable regarding the state of education and that change would only come about with initiation of a

dialogue between leaders and the people who elect them. Over the project's duration, a total of 185,514 people were reached through sensitisation sessions; of which over 95,000 were women.

Communities holding political leaders accountable

Seeing as one of the prime reasons for the lack of quality education and low primary enrolment figures in Pakistan is the indifference of political leaders and the government, one of the main components of the "Mobilising Communities to Demand Education (Article 25-A) and Local Accountability" project was to help communities to hold their leaders accountable. By developing a mechanism for community-based accountability, the quest for high quality education will carry on regardless of the life of the project.

In order to bridge the gap between communities and their political leaders, a



LSO members and local politicians meeting in Dera Ghazi Khan

series of meetings were organised in which community members (specifically LSO leaders as well as local parents) met with political leaders from all the major political parties of the country. These meetings allowed the community members to present the enrolment data of their respective areas in addition to the dilapidating condition of schools. These meetings took place over the course of the project including prior to the 2013 general elections in

which political leaders were asked to make pledges to improve the state of education should they be elected. A series of follow-up meetings were also carried out post elections in order to remind the political leaders of their written pledges. In all, a total of 679 political workers were met with over 79 follow-up meetings taking place.

Primary school enrolment initiatives by communities

Having obtained commitments and built capacities of organised communities such as LSOs, one of their prime responsibilities was to ensure that primary school-age children were enrolled and remained enrolled in schools. To this end, LSOs along with activists carried out a series of initiatives to encourage the

enrolment of children. In addition to the sensitisation sessions carried out by CRPs, the LSOs also organised union council-level walks in which the goal was to raise awareness for Article 25-A and other education-related issues. Men, women and children were all encouraged to participate in the walk (of which 56 took place) resulting in 3,317 men, 3,678 women and 4,908 children participating. Residents



District walk in Bahawalpur

of adjacent union councils also took part in these walks in order to show their enthusiasm for the initiative. Seven district walks also took place in which members from various LSOs jointly participated by walking around their district and concluding with meetings with their local District Officer – Education's (EDO). Over 2,400 community members (including 825 women and 785 children) participated in these seven meetings in which the EDO's commitment was sought to improve the problems facing parents in educating their children. Common barriers which were discussed were missing school facilities (such as drinking water, latrines,



EDO Education meeting LSO members after a UC-level awareness walk

classrooms, fans and boundary walls, etc), the unavailability of schools in some localities and the absenteeism of school teachers. As a result of these public issues being faced by

communities, government

representatives became more open and receptive to working with communities to improve the state of education in their districts.

Other initiatives carried out included door-to-door awareness raising of those households which had not enrolled their child(ren) in school, highlighting the importance of education

Resolving Teacher Absenteeism through Power of the People

Chinarkot is a village in Union council Ichriyan, District Mansehra. The children of the village were found to be missing out on their education because of the continuous and blatant absenteeism of the sole teacher of the village. This however changed as a result of the sensitisation and organisation provided to the community of Chinarkot (through the project). Parents, members of the local LSO and CRPs (through their Education Committee) met with officials from the Education Department and pressurised them to change the teacher in their local government school. Upon seeing the valid case of the community members, the Education Department immediately transferred the absent teacher and replaced him with a teacher who now is dedicated to the education of the local children.

in religious sermons and on-the-spot enrolment of children.

As a result of these enrolment initiatives, a total of 18,522 children (of which 8,550 were girls) were enrolled into primary school. According to the baseline carried out at the start of the project, these initiatives were able to successfully enrol 36% of out of school children.

Union council and District-level Education committees

As a part of ensuring that the responsibility for children's education lies in the hands of the community as well as holding those in charge accountable for the quality of education, various educational committees were set up. These committees consisted of community members themselves such as LSO members and parents as well as teachers and Education Department representatives. In addition to this, to resolve issues being faced by parents, committees were made at both the union council level (to settle education-related issues of a local nature) and the district level (to bring about a broader change in the quality of education and to advocate for the right to education for all).



Parents in Bahawalnagar taking part in a Parent Ittehad meeting

As a result of these committees, several issues have been resolved such as:

- Ensuring a regular dialogue with school management committees to improve the operation of schools
- Installing missing or improving existing facilities such as:
 - Provision of drinking water in 80 schools
 - Building boundary walls in 31 schools
 - Repairing toilets and roofs in 51 schools
 - Providing electricity in 17 schools
- Ensuring that teacher absenteeism was resolved either through strict warnings or appointing teachers who were dedicated to their work. As a result, teacher attendance improved in 1,406 schools and 13 new teachers were appointed
- Initiation of construction of new schools in areas where there were none – due to communities donating land

Conclusion

In order to ensure sustainable and continued efforts to increase the level and quality of education, the participation of grassroots communities is of the ultimate importance. The “Mobilising Communities to Demand Education (Article 25-A) and Local Accountability” project has demonstrated this fact by reducing the gap between communities and the people that provide them with important facilities such as education.

As a result of these various initiatives, 36% or 18,522 of the children who were out of school prior to the start of the project, are now enrolled in primary school.