

AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE, PAKISTAN: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

***Muhammad Iqbal & *Maqsood Ahmad**

*Professor, Department of Education, Abasyn University, Peshawar

ABSTRACT

The study made an analysis of the community schools established under the Ammal project in the North-West Frontier Province during the period from 1998 through 2001. The analysis was made in terms of enrollment, quality, teachers, employment opportunities, public-private partnership as well as sustainability. The study examined 90 community schools established in Districts Dir, Dera Ismail Khan and Mardan.

The following questions were examined:

1. What prompted the sponsors to establish community schools under the Ammal Project?
2. What different roles were assigned to different partners of the Project e.g. the FEF, DPE, DFID and NGOs for funding, coordinating, monitoring and implementing the project?
3. What was the mechanism for sustainability and replication of community schools?
4. What benefits the project brought to the population of the three districts in terms of access, quality and employment opportunities?
5. What recommendations the study made to address future problems of sustainability for launching similar types of projects in collaboration with other partners?

The purpose of education, at the primary level, is the acquisition of basic literacy and numeric skills, appreciation of surroundings, and socialization of learners to understand and appreciate the dignity and identity of national values, culture and community. The Primary Education Development Program of the North-West Frontier Province involved private sector and communities in promotion of access and quality of primary education. Different donors including USAID, DFID, GTZ, NEDA, UNICEF, JICA, PEP-TAC, IDA, and WFP financed the different components of the program.

The universalization of primary education remained the corner stone of the National Education Policies of the Government of Pakistan. The first priority was to increase the learning of the children by retaining them in schools so that those enrolled completed the primary education cycle. The second priority was to provide access to all school age children. For retention of children in schools, efforts were needed to facilitate them to complete the cycle by such measures as checking of absenteeism of teachers particularly in remote areas; tightening supervision and monitoring of the delivery of services and making the curriculum relevant to local environment.

The study was significant because public-private partnership was receiving high importance in education sector and issues of replication and sustainable development emerged, which were not timely addressed in the strategic plans of the government. This created administrative problems for the government, the NGOs and the donors whose stake was also involved in these development initiatives. The study took timely cognizance to help the stakeholders in education to be more careful and responsive to the solution of issues of sustainability arising from the joint initiatives of the public-private partnership

The study found that the Ammal Project of community schools provided best model of public-private partnership in the form of civil society versus community versus FEF versus DPE through DEOs and the donors, who provided financial and technical support. The interrelationship was also demonstrated in the form of interaction among the partners as well as among NGOs and communities, teachers, Village Education Committees and School Management Committees.

Sustainability of community schools remained burning issue till last and efforts were continued by sponsors of the project to resolve this issue at the belated stage. A number of problems emerged during implementation of the project including the certification of the academic achievements of students of community schools; the sectarian differences between two sects in district of Dera Ismail Khan; the opposition of the NGO culture in District Dir and lack of support from employers in Mardan city. The non-availability of local qualified teachers for community schools also remained a problem.

In all the community schools the quality aspect was taken care of by providing a number of the needed inputs of teachers, teaching material, evaluation of students etc and timely delivery of support services.

Key Words: Primary education, NGO's, Community, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

The public sector's responsibility in education begins with primary schools. The medium of instruction at this stage is the mother tongue, which is Urdu in Urdu-speaking areas and Pashto in Pashto speaking areas of the North-West Frontier Province. The curriculum places great emphasis on the ideologies of Islam and Pakistan. In addition to the government schools, there are privately managed primary schools mostly in the thickly populated urban areas and some in rural areas of the country. In a country like Pakistan where population growth rate is about 3% annually and only about 50% of the existing primary group children are in schools, the private sector is most needed to share this huge burden. Government alone cannot build and run all the schools required for this purpose.

There is genuine need for establishment of quality schools for the poor in selected urban and rural areas. This requires the involvement of the NGOs through donors' driven programs of technical assistance. The sustainability of these initiatives largely depends on their good performance acceptable to the local communities as well as support and political will of the government.

There are financial and social constraints to access and quality of primary education such as low allocation of resources for education; which remained up to 2.4% and is far less as compared to 6.6% in Malaysia, 4.9% in Korea, 4.4% in Singapore, 3.7% in India and 3.9% in Thailand.; population explosion at the rate of 2.9%, which has increased almost two-fold in Pakistan since 1947. Poverty and cultural taboos do hamper government's efforts for expanding coverage. Poverty produces a sub-culture of ignorance, crime, drug abuse and early marriages. All these issues drastically affect the quality of life indicators. Due to cultural taboos illiteracy is endemic among rural girls. The overall literacy rate is approximately 39% in the North-West Frontier Province, which is a manifestation of the social factors hampering accessibility.

The quality of primary education plays a great role in determining the quality of secondary, tertiary and higher education. Poor quality in primary education is a serious matter because it is only the formal education that most of the Pakistani children have an access to acquire. The current public policy lays emphasis on quantitative expansion and uses primary education as a vehicle for universalization and promotion of literacy. In a country, where education standards have deteriorated the most, there is no longer an either-or choice between expansions and quality. Without some minimum package of basic inputs of adequately qualified and trained teachers; textbooks and other instructional materials, virtually no learning occurs. Thus, ensuring the availability of essential inputs is a prerequisite both for quality improvement and expansions.

The past efforts of the government and different agencies involved in financing and supporting the primary education did not achieve the desired outcomes and both access and quality issues remained unresolved in successive educational policies and plans of the government. There was no doubt some expansion in primary education but the efforts of the public sector did not meet total success because of the population growth and bad governance in the past. The quality of primary education did not improve due to disregard of merit in appointments of teachers; induction of undeserving persons in training programs without merit and poor delivery of educational services.

Keeping in view all that was described, the National Education Policy, 1998 recommended decentralization of primary education and community mobilization and suggested that the provision of education is a public responsibility and this role to be assigned to every one including private sector, NGOs, CBOs and other allied organizations to ensure the basic human rights. The policy also considered that there was need for great alliance between and among the government, private sector and donors.

This policy shift recognized the need for the intervention of DFID and other donors as well as NGOs for financial and technical support and subsequent social mobilization of communities to address the issues of motivation; community support and better delivery of service for improving access and quality of education particularly in the rural sector of the North-West Frontier Province. The community support was also needed in order to make projects a success and to escape defeat at the stage of implementation. The social linkages in educational planning and policy-making have recently given birth to the concept of community participation in the whole process. This was done through the DFID supported Ammal Project, which was virtually implemented by the NGOs in collaboration with the district officers of the primary education and the Frontier Education Foundation.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study examined two different experimental models of community schools: one implemented in Dir and Dera Ismail Khan Districts, where 80 community schools were established in all, and the other in Mardan City, where 10 community schools were established for the basic education of employed indigent children in the urban-based localities of the city.

Interviews with stakeholders and study of relevant documents provided the data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The elements of establishing rapport, validity of data and pilot study type of things were also made part of the study. A vast literature was reviewed in global perspective, which included almost all the reports and national education policies and the five-year plans of the government. The review also

included past and ongoing activities for improving access and quality of primary education.

THE FOCUS AREAS

The absence of adequate supervision of primary schools located in far-flung areas; lack of commitment of teachers to the profession; their improper training; lack of motivation; mismanagement and the shortfalls in the delivery of services; absence of involvement of parents in school management activities due to lack of awareness of communities about the importance of education in rural areas were some of the deficient areas, which came under focus of the Ammal Community Project, and addressed in this study.

The NWFP- Primary Education Program (1955-2000) recognized the need for making the community-based approaches as a part of the program and considered it necessary to improve enrolment in and quality of primary education with emphasis on increasing access for girls. The DFID was one of the eight international agencies that contributed to this goal through financial assistance of the Primary Education Program.

The Ammal Project was initially considered as a joint initiative of the Frontier Education Foundation and DFID within the Community Participation Component of the Primary Education Development Program. Its main focus was to develop 90 community-based schools, targeting girls in two rural areas of Dir and Dera Ismail Khan as well as the urban working indigent children of Mardan city. The implementing partners (NGOs) in the rural areas were Khwendo Kor (KK) and Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO). They established 40 community-based primary schools each in Dir and D.I. Khan districts. The Swabi Women Welfare Society (SWWS) established 10 CBS for urban working children in Mardan district.

The study revealed that the Department for International Development (DFID) provided support of staff and maintenance of an office of NGO at the district level. The salaries of teachers and expenditures on equipment and scholarship for the PTC/CT training of the project teachers were also met out of the grant assistance.

The role of Frontier Education Foundation (FEF) was restricted to the chairmanship of the Steering Committee, which was mandated to accord approval to the selected community schools on the basis of prescribed criteria and clear the project proposals. The FEF provided space for office and administrative support to DFID Advisor and her staff. The FEF was also made responsible for in-service training of teachers after completion of the project.

The NGOs were responsible for implementation of the field activities and operationalization of the community schools,

SUCCESSSES

The project provided a model to educate the working indigent children who were otherwise deprived from the basic right of education and to make them capable of learning various life skills of their choice and to subsequently bring them into the mainstream of education. This approach also served the purpose of public sector policy of 'Education for All' and universalization of primary education.

The Ammal Community Project provided best model of public-private partnership. The activities of the project were coordinated in such a manner that provided a model for healthy and durable relationship.

The Village Education Committees (both male and female) also facilitated the project to provide suitable places for the schools; identify local females for selection and training as teachers; enroll out of school girls into the community-based schools; manage and support these schools and release as well as maintain school funds.

The community schools provided access to basic education to the deprived population of rural areas with a total enrolment of 3469 girls and 204 boys in the two districts of Dir and D.I. Khan. These schools provided employment to 1102 local female teachers. Similarly in Mardan city the ten established community schools provided access to basic education to 464 working children including 208 females and provided employment to ten teachers including 03 females.

Quality improvement of schools is based on offering a coherent package of all inputs. The study revealed that in these schools all the necessary inputs of teachers, effective teaching methods, and proper evaluation of students, environment and management as well as timely delivery of support services were provided, which improved the quality of education in these schools.

FAILURES

The Steering Committee headed by the Managing Director, FEF, a joint partner, did not know about the details of expenditures made on different items although this grant assistant was provided to provincial government and both the MD and DEP as well other members of the community were to be kept informed about the details of the expenditures on different items.

The project was faced with a number of problems including lack of cooperation from the employees of indigent local employed children in Mardan city; unhealthy environment in which the children were working and non-availability of suitable places for locating the schools.

A number of issues remained unresolved, which included certification of students and their future prospects with regard to their integration into the main stream of education

The issue of sustainability of the community schools in two rural based districts of Dir and D.I. Khan remained unresolved till late, which caused embarrassment to all the stakeholders.

The activities of the project were also affected by the sectarian differences between two sects in district D.I. Khan.

In Dir district, the NGO culture received opposition from the religious persons and the project also received a set back due to non-availability of local teachers in far-flung area, lack of support from the local administration, local Maliks and the adversarial behaviour of the uneducated people, who did not value the services of the NGO for the cause of education.

LESSONS LEARNT FOR FUTURE PLANNING

1. In order to solve the problem of sustainability, the government may prefer a community partnership model, which suits the environment and culture of local rural areas and that can be feasibly replicated with minimum charge on public exchequer and that could be easily acceptable to community for subsequent management.
2. The advocacy and publicity of innovative activities are also needed to further support such projects and repose confidence of the public in this type of initiatives. This would also help negate

the baseless propoganda against the NGO culture, which caused problems to the project.

3. The public policy should bring about attitudinal change in society for support and encouragement of girls' education by curbing the negative propoganda against the NGO culture.
4. The issue of sustainability of community schools should also be linked to income generating skills to be introduced in these schools.
5. The Foundation (s) should be encouraged to initiate and implement community-based schools.

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