Initiating Reform through Whole School Improvement Programme: Aga Khan University's Experiences from Pakistan

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Abstract

The AusAID-funded Educational Development and Improvement Programme (EDIP) is a comprehensive, consortium-based school improvement project being implemented (July 2010 to-date) in the rural and mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. The project builds on and maximizes Aga Khan University-Professional Development Centre North (AKU-PDCN)'s previous experiences of designing and implementing the whole school improvement program (WSIP) in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. The WSIP model considers the entire school as a unit of change and recommends working with different stakeholders including teachers, headteachers, students and communities to make a sustained improvement in the teaching and learning conditions in schools. What makes the EDIP-sponsored WSIP unique is its consortium-based nature where seven Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) specialist agencies collaborate providing their particular inputs to achieve the overall goal of the EDIP project. The mid-term evaluation of the project (December 2012) reflected the efficacy and innovative nature of EDIP Project. The multi input by different partners increased the scope and productivity of the project, however, networking among the partners also posed challenges at the stages of planning and execution of the EDIP project. There is adequate evidence to suggest that the EDIP-sponsored WSIP model is relevant and viable for the schools in the rural and often poverty stricken Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan; hence, replicable in similar contexts elsewhere.

Keywords: WSIP, Multi-input school improvement, evidence-based school reform, mountainous and rural schools, Gilgit-Baltistan

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1. Background to Educational Improvement in Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan

Gilgit-Baltistan(GB) spans an area of 72490 square kilometers of northeastern Pakistan and is characterized by a fragile, high mountain environment and extreme climatic conditions. The entire region has been divided into seven administrative units called districts of Hunza/Nagar, Gilgit, Ghizer, Skardu, Ghanche, Astore and Diamar. The presence of a difficult terrain comprising snow-clad mountains and rivers, coupled with unfriendly climatic conditions and an underdeveloped communications infrastructure confront local people with numerous challenges.

The recent estimates suggest that the population of Gilgit-Baltistan consists of 1.2 million people (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2011-12) holding a literacy rate of 44% which is lower than the 56% national literacy rate (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2007-8). The current status of female literacy in Gilgit-Baltistan generally and in some of the districts (e.g. Diamar, Astore, Skardu and Ghanche) particularly is a source of concern. Girls' education (or women empowerment, for that matter) is still considered a taboo in some segments of the local communities of these districts. Hence, the literacy rate in these districts is one of the lowest in the entire country.

Over the last several decades, there has been considerable effort made by the government of Pakistan, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)[2] agencies and other local and international NGOs to improve the living conditions of the people in general and to increase access and quality of education in Gilgit-Baltistan in particular. The Northern Pakistan Education Project (NPEP) (1999-2008) funded by the European Union, the Northern Areas Education Project (NAEP) funded by the World Bank, the Child-Friendly Schools Project (2005 to-date) funded by UNICEF, and the Canadian Debt for Education Conversion Project (2006 to-date) funded by CIDA, are some of the recent examples of international community's interest and generosity to improve educational landscape in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, despite their significant contributions to improving access, quality and infrastructure, these externally-driven donor-funded projects couldn't address the multifarious issues of education in GB.

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[2]The Aga Khan Development Network is a contemporary endeavor of IsmailiImamat to realize social conscious of Islam through institutional action. It brings together, under one coherent aegis, institutions and programmes whose combined mandate is to help relieve society of ignorance, disease and deprivation without regard to the faiths and national origins of people whom they serve.

Delineating the numerous challenges faced by the Department of Education (DoE), GB, the mid-term review (MTR) report (2012)[3]of the EDIP project painted the following picture:

> The education sector in GB is characterized by serious issues of governance and management. Some of the most obvious ones include: hiring, postings and transfers of teachers and education officials in violation of good practices; irrational distribution of teachers, leading to an excess of incompetent teachers in most accessible schools, and severe shortage of teachers in most remote schools; weak content knowledge and pedagogical and classroom management skills of staff, resulting in poor teaching and management; liberal use of corporal punishment, and high repetition and dropout; weak leadership and management skills of heads, resulting in high teacher absenteeism, and poor performance; lack of physical space, furniture and equipment, teaching materials, consumables; an almost non-existent school monitoring and support system, confined to occasional checks and reprimands; and non-functional PTSMCs(Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R. 2012:3).

It was against this backdrop that a need was felt to conceive and implement a more robust, integrated and comprehensive school improvement model to help address the multi-dimensional issues related to educational reform in GB. AKDN, a long-time and most trusted government partner with valuable experiences of leveraging sustained social development in the region, came up with the proposal of Educational Development and Improvement Program (EDIP) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) approved and provided the financial resources for this project.

2. The AusAID-Funded and AKF(P)-Implemented EDIP Project[4]

This EDIP Project aims at "enhancing access, equity and quality of education with increased gender parity, participation and sustainability of community participation in targeted districts of Gilfgit-Baltistan," so that the overall socioeconomic development in the region is supported.More specifically the Project aims to:

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[3]This quote as well as those referred to elsewhere in this paper have been used after seeking written consent from the MTR Report author.

[4]It is to recognize the generosity and invaluable support for the EDIP Project that gratitude is expressed to (i) AusAID for the approval and sponsorship, (ii) AKF (P) for the management and (III) AKU IED/PDCN and other partners for facilitating the execution of the Project.

- Increase enrolment and retention in schools, and improve participation of communities in the management and general life of the schools.
- Enhance professionalism of headteachers and teachers, and improve quality of the physical learning environment and resources in cluster schools.
- Upgrade the capacity including leadership and governance of Department of Education GB to sustain the reforms initiated by the Project.

EDIP is being implemented since July 2010 in 109 schools in GB of which 59 schools are AKU-PDCN-managed whereas the rest are AKESP-managed project schools. Almost all PDCN-managed project schools (i.e. 95%) are public sector schools, whereas the share of public sector schools amongst the total 50 AKESP-managed project schoolsis 30%. Hence, the share of government and AKESP schools in the EDIP Project is 76% and 24% respectively.

2.1. The EDIP Cluster Model

The practice of clustering schools and creating networks among them for school improvement purposes is gaining momentum in different parts of the world. AKU IED, Pakistan used the cluster-based mentoring approach to upgrade teachers' capacities in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan since 1990s which heralded the introduction of a new approach for school improvement in Pakistan. Later on, AKU IED synthesized and replicated its learning from the cluster-based mentoring model in designing and implementing WSIP through PDCN since 1999 in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The current EDIP model being implemented in GB is comprised of four schools expected to be operating in close proximity. One of these schools is a centrally-located secondary school functioning as the hub (or epicenter) of the school improvement and teacher development activities for the cluster. The centrally-located secondary school is also called the learning resource school (LRS) which is expected to emerge as a showcase of success for the other feeding schools—as well as for the other schools in the area—to emulate from. A teacher educator, i.e. a specialist in teacher education and school improvement and called a professional development teacher (PDT), is placed at the LRS to act as a source of professional support, facilitation and inspiration for the LRS teachers, staff, students and local level institutions (LLI) members as well as for those at the feeding schools.

The EDIP has emerged as the most comprehensive model ever implemented in the context of GB; it is designed on the principles of multi-input area development (MIAD) in that a consortium of seven AKDN specialist organizations work in tandem and bring in their particular input for the overall success of the Project. This is aligned with the insights emerging from the literature highlighting the importance of multi-level intervention to promote school improvement (Harris 2002). For example, building upon and maximizing their earlier experiences of using the whole school improvement (WSI) approach in GB, AKU-PDCN and AKESP attend to the various issues having a bearing on the change initiatives in schools. From considering an entire school as a unit of change and improvement, EDIP upgraded its focus to a cluster of four schools to initiate and sustain the reform process. AKPBSP introduced the most recent technologies in construction and strengthening of the existing infrastructures; they used thermal-efficient as well as inclusive approaches to curtail the harshness of the climatic conditions and to facilitate the moderately-disabled children attend schools. NOWPDP introduced teachers and parents to different inclusive approaches to take care of the children with mild-to-moderate disabilities.

Interestingly, parents and teachers got the knowledge for the first time that children with mild disabilities can be made part of the mainstream education. Their understanding improved on how the various issues related to children's disability can be taken care of. CSRC augmented school committees' leadership for community mobilization to narrow down the gap between schools and the wider school communities.AKU HDP contributed its expertise in strengthening the initiative of early years education and disability and, more importantly, conducted research in these areas to generate context-specific knowledge related to the EDIP Project. FOCUS brought in to the Project their expertise on the disaster risk reduction and management and introduced parents, teachers and students to various techniques on how to ensure safety and security of human life and property and minimize the risk related to various natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, landslidesand/or fires etc.

The EDIP cluster model seeks inspiration from the research insights that contend that there is little teacher development without school development (Hopkins 1996) and that the effectiveness is enhanced if schools and the newly trained individuals are able to move forward at the same pace (Hargreaves 1994; Stoll & Fink 1995). It particularly recommends looking at the processes of school improvement and the links between processes and outcomes (Gray et al. 1999; Reynolds et al. 1993).

The EDIP cluster model, therefore, recommends working with four schools simultaneously to rally the inside-school and outside-school stakeholders behind the well-defined and achievable school improvement goals.

The LRS-based professional development teacher (PDT), i.e. the teacher educator, plays different roles including that of a mentor, community mobilizer, resource developer and change facilitator. These various roles, understandably, make his/her job quite complex and extremely challenging to cope with. However, PDTs are trained and expected to give the school heads leading role in the school improvement process, i.e. the school heads should genuinely own and be intrinsically motivated to do their best to make the school improvement process a success. In addition, concerted efforts are made right from the inception of the project by the LRS-based PDT and the Project Office to develop a team of the key stakeholders including the school headteacher, school committee leaders, teachers supporting the school improvement processes, student leaders and the school parents (including mothers) to determine and drive the overall school improvement agenda. Rather than leading from the front, the PDT is expected to play a catalytic role in creating conditions for the team members to lead the process.

3. Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP)—The Overarching Theme of EDIP Project

Teachers trained away from their schools and having no professional support mechanisms put in place in their work places often get immersed in the conventional cultures forcing them to revert back to old ways of doing the business. Expecting a teacher who availed an out-of-school professional development opportunity to replace the existing deep-rooted school culture to bring improvement in schools is often a far-fetched and an unrealistic idea. Therefore, considering the school as the unit of change (Hopkins 2002), rather than working with individual teachers, gave birth to the idea of 'whole school improvement' (WSI) which encourages investment of time, resources and effortsto improve teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), governance and management related practices including accountability, team work, assessment of students learning, resource generation and community participation in schools.

Contrary to the traditional top-down approach in education delivery, the WSI philosophy advocates for increasing involvement of heads, teachers, students and school community in the school decisions.

"The assumption underpinning the policy is that a decentralised education system is more responsive to local needs and nurtures a culture of ownership, partnership and commitment" (Akyeampong, 2004).

The EDIP-sponsored WSIP in Gilgit-Baltistanis a 3-year, school-based training program, designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to develop the school as a learning organization. It aims to improve students' learning outcomes and build local capacity to address the school improvement issues on an on-going basis. In this program, WSIP is initiated with an intensive needs analysis and base-line followed by an orientation to the heads of the project schools. During orientation, heads are facilitated to develop school development plans (SDPs) for their schools, so that they have the ownership of school improvement right from the beginning of the project. Where possible, teachers from these schools are then brought to PDCN for an orientation; otherwise, orientations for teachers are held in their schools. This approach corroborates the recommendations made by the WSD Training Programme Handbook (1999) which says that school improvement must be a 'process of effecting positive change in the classroom to be owned by headteachers, teachers and community' (P. 4)

In the process of bringing change and improvement in schools, WSIP facilitates teachers to employ the holistic approach to help students develop their physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual dimensions of their personalities. The following structure reflects the six important elements for WSIP:

3.1. WSIP Framework

The six key elements of WSIP guiding and shaping the EDIP initiatives in the Project schools are as follows:

The Key Factors of WSIP	Specific Goals
Quality of Teaching and Learning	Teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement. Teachers have clear objectives, lesson plans and evaluation procedures. Teachers use appropriate textbooks, displays and resources for teaching and learning. Children are active learners and do sustained work. They are highly motivated, eager to learn and show initiative.They take risks and are not afraid to make mistakes.
Curriculum Enrichment and Staff Development	National Curriculum is enriched by the use of relevant resources and information. The curriculum is broad, balanced, relevant and matched to children's needs and experiences. It is challenging. HT and teachers organize regular in-service training. They constantly endeavor to improve their knowledge and skills.
Leadership, Management and Administration	Headteacher has a clear vision for the school and high expectations. HT communicates effectively, demonstrates instructional leadership, supports teachers and visits them in class, shares responsibility, provides for staff development, manages finance, plans ahead and keeps good records, works collaboratively with parents and community.
Building, Accommodation and Resources	School environment is well maintained, inviting and attractive. It is effectively used. Resources, including the library, are adequate and easily accessible. There are good displays of children's work and other materials.Children and teachers take pride in their environment and maintain high standards.
Community Involvement	Parents and community are involved in the work of the school. They co-operate and collaborate with headteacher and teaching staff. Parents are involved in their children's learning, and policymaking.Parents and community share their skills with teachers and children.School organizes regular meetings and classes for the community.
Students' Social and Moral Development and Health Education	Standards of students' behavior and discipline are exemplary. Students are well behaved, cooperative and keen to take responsibility. Students and teachers collaborate, and show respect towards each other and all members of the school community.

3.2. A Close Up on the WSIP Components to Gauge the Project Impact

Gray et al. (1999) proposed the following 4-prong framework to gauge school improvement:

- Loose descriptions of what has happened, particularly highlighting the pre-intervention and the post-intervention situations;

- More systematic descriptions providing estimates of how much change has occurred against different outcome measures;
- Judgments by people external to the school about how much change has taken place;
- Judgments about extent of improvement based on 'harder' evidence such as examination and test results (P. 36).

What follows is a blend of the four approaches proposed by the above framework to highlight the pre-intervention and 2-year post-intervention impact of the EDIP Project, both in narrative and statistical forms, where possible. It is noteworthy that the baseline included many more variables to collect data to capture the pre-intervention situation of WSIP, only a few have been chosen here because of the space issue.

3.2.1. Quality of Teaching and Learning

Baseline Findings

Analysis of data on quality of teaching and learning from the baseline study showed that:

1. 90% of the teachers reflected ambiguous understanding of the objectives of the lessons they taught.
2. The data showed that government schools had consistently less than 90% student attendance in all months.
3. 81% of government schools reported to have no libraries, one percent (1%) government schools had internet facility, whereas, only 4% government schools reported to have a sufficiently equipped laboratory.
4. 78% of the secondary schools had no science laboratories, this posed serious challenges to students to gain practical understanding of the concepts taught.
5. 90% of the classroom visited reflected a barren look of the classroom walls having no displays on them. Likewise, only 1% government schools had resource rooms.
6. The dominant reason for 30% children's drop out at primary level was corporal punishment by teachers in schools. It is worth noting that DoE GB had already banned corporal punishment but it was prevalent in various forms in schools.

Findings after 2-Year EDIP Implementation

1. The data showed that in 39% PDCN-managed schools teachers had a written lesson plan with clearly written objectives for the observed class after two year of the intervention.

2. The pre- and post-test results of the various capacity development programs conducted at PDCN and at LRSs, reflected a remarkable impact on course participants' knowledge and understanding. The following excerpt from the MTR Report will corroborate the above claims made on the impact of teaching and learning related initiatives on teachers and students: "About 75% teachers showed improved content knowledge of ECED and primary education and 80% teachers showed improved content knowledge in English, Science, Maths and Urdu. Some 70% (493 out of 648) teachers developed lesson plans with given objectives during the training. A survey showed that 60% teachers were carrying out additional school responsibilities, 65% teachers were providing out of classroom counseling to students and attendance of teachers and students improved"(Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R., 2012:14).

3. The data collected by the PDCN M&E clearly shows that 85% of teachers use various activity-based and child-centered teaching approaches in ECED classes while 45% teachers use these approaches in primary and secondary classes.

4. The data also reflects that in 10 project (i.e. 4 LRSs and 6 feeding) schools headteachers and teachers organized summer- and winter-camps (i.e. coaching classes) for grades 5th, 8th, 9th and 10th students to improve their examination scores. This is a significant impact of the project showing heads and teachers eagerness and sense of voluntarism to put in extra efforts to improve school results.

5. There is convincing evidence of improvement in examination results. For instance, on an average there is 82.9 % improvement in the pass % of the externally-conducted examinations of the 13 LRSs in 2012 and 2013. LRS Singal bagged the top three as well as the 9th position in the externally-conducted grade 8th examination in 2012.

6. Some of the EDIP Project schools emerged as "schools of choice" for the communities. The following excerpt from the MTR Report endorses the above discussion on increase in the student enrolment and decrease in drop-out: "Enrolment in the 48 PDCN project schools increased from 7,934 in 2010 to 9,317 in June 2012, including 239 children with disabilities...Drop-out of students in PDCN cluster schools decreased from 86 students in 2010 to 27 in 2011 and 17 in 2012, with a retention rate exceeding 99% "(Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R., 2012:8-9).

3.2.2. Curriculum Enrichment and Staff Development

Baseline Findings

1. The data showed that in all 48 project schools 90% teachers were not aware of the curriculum documents; they considered the textbook as curriculum.
2. Of the total 48 schools assessed, only 19% had libraries; however, the books available in the libraries were not highly relevant to teachers and students day-to-day needs and experiences; hence, they were not of much use even if teacher wanted to use them for curriculum enrichment.
3. Only 4 of the 48 project schools had computer labs. However, most of these computers were either out-of-order and dysfunctional or they were not connected with internet. Hence, resource availability for curriculum enrichment was a genuine issue in schools. It is also worth noting that in most cases teachers were not trained to use the computers.
4. In none of the 48 schools visited there was any mechanism of providing professional support to teachers. Nor, did this support come from the district offices to the teachers in schools.
5. Teachers in 48 schools felt constrained by acute shortage of the essential resources such as charts, paper, pens, markers, crayons and masking taps etc. to develop resources to enrich curriculum.

Findings after 2-Year Project EDIP Implementation

1. Teacher skills and knowledge has been upgraded for curriculum enrichment. 100 % of the project schools have been provided with curriculum copies and other relevant resources to make the task of curriculum enrichment easier for them. Now they easily differentiate between the curriculum and the textbook contents.
2. Libraries were either established or upgraded in schools with 600 and 500 books including dictionaries to LRSs and feeding schools respectively. The PDCN library officer visited 14 LRSs and provided training on establishing LRS-based LRCs. Teachers have started using these books to improve their knowledge-base and enrich the curriculum being taught in schools.

3. 201 Computers have been provided to the EDIP project schools (i.e. 123 to LRSs and 78 to feeding schools). Likewise, internet connectivity has been established at LRS-based LRCs. The teachers and students have started utilizing this facility to enrich their learning and curriculum contents.

4. Since the initiation of the project 502 professional development sessions were conducted on topics of teachers' interests and their needs. These professional development sessions at LRSs and feeding schools have promoted the culture of organizing school-based professional development for teachers' capacity building. The provision of resources has made the process of organizing and delivering professional development sessions much easier and doable.

5. The MTR Report, for instance, illustrates that the Focus Humanitarian Agency team trained 185 teachers as master trainers who formed school safety committees and conducted schools-based sessions on disaster risk reduction benefitting 1187 teachers and parents. The Report argues: "The school-based sessions enhanced knowledge and capacities of teachers and school safety committees in curriculum enrichment regarding DRR and coping strategies during emergencies" (Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R. 2012:13).

6. EDIP provided reasonably good quantity of resources (worth Rs: 30,151) to each of the 48 project schools and gave each teacher in all the project schools a stationery pack of worth Rs: 2000 to meet any exigencies.

3.2.3. Leadership, Management and Administration

Baseline Findings

1. The LRSs and feeding school heads, promoted as heads on the sheer basis of their seniority, lacked leadership qualities such as vision and influence to steer the schools towards change and improvement. Only 2 of the 12 LRSs had school development plans.

2. 60 % of the heads reported that they did not attend even a single capacity development opportunity since their appointment as heads. 80% of the school heads reported delegating various responsibilities to different committees, but there wasn't any evidence of these committees functioning effectively in schools. Nor, were there any capacity development opportunities provided to these committees in schools.

3. 100 % of the project schools had school management committees but 90% of these committees remained dysfunctional. No efforts were made by the schools to revitalize these committees and not a single capacity building opportunity was provided to help these SMCs

4. Teachers and students attendance in all 48 schools was recorded 60% and 70 %respectively, which reflected poor school management.

5. 50 % of the schools showed issues of teacher regularity and punctuality. Information collected from students showed that their classes remained at times unattended while the teachers were present in schools.

Findings after 2-Year EDIP Implementation

1. 60 heads of the EDIP project schools availed the opportunity of attending the yearlong AKU-IED-certified advanced diploma in educational leadership and management course during 2012-13. The impact of this leadership development course was that the heads developed and started implementing SDPs in their schools.

2. Headteachers are now better able to address the numerous day-to-day school improvement issues. School discipline has visibly improved, teachers' regularity and punctuality is no longer a serious problem and school governance, as a whole, has become much better than what it used to be before the project. The M&E data, for instance, showed that 50% teachers in the PDCN-managed EDIP schools don't take any leaves while the rest take leave for less than a week during the entire year. The data also showed that 60% of the teachers in these schools don't take any unpaid leave.

3. The leadership development and awareness raising sessions attended by some 2664 SMC members yielded results in terms of parents motivation to get their children (including the disabled) registered in schools. The impact of this initiative was that the parents (and specially mothers) are now more involved in issues related to their children's education and better linkages between schools and the communities established.

4. PDCN's mentoring training contributed to the leadership development of some 30 teachers. These mentoring training graduates now work as key contributors to school improvement initiatives.

The MTR Report, for instance, said: "We were highly impressed by the quality of mentoring training offered by PDCN, its internalization by participants, and, especially, the module design, which involved training, followed by application in schools, and then followed by a review session at PDCN" (Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R. 2012:15).

5. The MTR Report said; "One of the impressive achievements of the project is motivating the community to get volunteer teachers (working without any salary) and community teachers (salary paid by the community) to work in government schools" (Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R., 2012:12).

3.2.4. Building, Accommodation and Resources

Baseline Findings

1. LRS schools such as LRS Gupis, Kashrote, Oshikhandass and Khaplu and the feeding schools such as Kihong, Skardu, had developed cracks on walls and became dangerous for children to live in.

2. 90% of the project schools had infrastructure-related issues including fewer classrooms to accommodate students, no or fewer and dysfunctional toilet blocks and no separate classrooms for the early year education (ECE) children. Only 20% government schools reported to have dedicated ECD room, whereas only 60% of government schools had dedicated staff rooms. Furthermore, only80% of government schools, which enroll girls, had dedicated female toilets, 80% of schools had teacher toilets, only 57% of Government schools had electricity and 63% of government schools had drinking water available at the school premises.

3. In government schools, there was a desk for every one out of four children, while there is a chair for every 2 out of 3 children. That translates into every third child without a chair. Only 35% government schools have sufficient boards in classrooms.

4. 75% of the 48 school buildings presented an untidy look and required upkeep and maintenance. The school buildings were not painted and whitewashed for years and reflected serious issues of cleanliness.

5. The inside-class environment as well as the school premises presented a dull and boring look. In most cases there were no displays on classroom walls and in corridors. Nor, were there any school development plans displayed in schools.

Findings after 2-Year EDIP Implementation

1. All PDCN-managed project schools (59 including Diamer) were physically assessed for geo-hazard risk. 35 rooms were retrofitted making them accessible to disabled children and 35thermally-efficient ECD rooms (20 already completed) and 27 toilet blocks (18 already completed) are being constructed.
2. 100% project schools were trained for any emergency situation and safety kits were provided to all schools, and master trainers trained in each school to cope with any emergency situation.
3. 5015 Chairs, 258 white boards, 4,135 sets of uniforms and 8,552 sets of books and notebooks to needy children, and 3,910 health and hygiene kits have been provided to project schools. These resources have addressed the issue of the acute shortage of resources in these schools.
4. The resources provided to the LRCs at LRSs included 123 computers, 5 laptops, 12 printers, 6 multimedia projectors, 8 UPSs, 10 stabilizers, 7440 books and stationery worth Rs: 30151. It was to build schools capacity that 43 resource persons were trained to maintain and use these resources efficiently.

3.2.5. Community Involvement

Baseline Findings

1. SMCs didn't exist or were dysfunctional even if they existed in 90% of the PDCN-managed project schools. SMCs where existed remained unaware of their roles and responsibilities. 100% of the SMCs included men only as members and there was no way for mothers of school children to get involve in school-related decisions.
2. Parents had a very narrow view of education being children's ability to read, write and speak in Urdu (and English in some cases). They remained ignorant of their role in facilitating the learning processes and the holistic development of their children.
3. 100% parents considered addressing the various school-related issues the basic responsibility of the Department and never showed motivation to contribute their time, knowledge and money to the cause of schools.
4. In 10% of the so called "good" schools, parents would be invited to schools during annual examination result announcement; however, there were no practices of sharing students' academic achievements with parents.

5. Headteachers and teachers believed and saw the school as their domain and considered parents interest in school affairs as an encroachment in their jurisdiction.

Findings after 2-Year EDIP Implementation

1. As a result of the 86 awareness sessions conducted for 2664 community members, parents' motivation to register their out-of-school children in schools increased. Hence, there was a net increase of 3816 children, including 267 disabled children, in the project schools.
2. LLIs were made functional and sessions conducted for them to play their role in increasing community involvement in schools. As a result, LLIs became active partners in school improvement processes.
3. As a result of their increased motivation, school communities provided volunteer and/or community-sponsored teachers to support their children's education. This is a very convincing example of communities' active involvement in schools.
4. In 65% project schools mother support groups (MSGs) were established to increase mothers' involvement in school improvement processes. Today, MSGs network with other school mothers and resultantly there is tangible improvement in children's attendance and cleanliness.
5. Teachers, SMCs and parents discuss collectively the school improvement challenges and find viable solutions. For instance, SMC in government Girls Middle School, Gupis built a classroom utilizing their own resources to address the issue of lack of space in school. The SMC of Govt. Boys High School, Karimabad took an innovative initiative of upgrading the LRC with internet connectivity and provided electricity which clearly reflects community's participation in school improvement processes.

3.2.6. Students Social and Moral Development and Health Education

Baseline Findings

1. Students memorized information with no conceptual understanding of the contents taught. The culture of students using unfair means in examinations was very prevalent.

2. In 90% cases, students showed lack of motivation and confidence to get involved in discussion and even to respond to questions asked in classrooms. They had fewer or no opportunities to analyze, share and defend their viewpoints in classrooms.

3. There were opportunities for children to participate in games in schools but there were no health-related lectures or health screenings taking place in schools.

4. In all 48 schools, teachers and parents remained oblivious about children's all-round development.

Findings after 2-Year EDIP Implementation

1. Students' participation in the co-curriculum activities such as sports, quizzes and sharing their thoughts with students in school assemblies and getting involved in project work has improved.

2. EDIP provided frequent and enabling opportunities to students to get involved and enjoy their learning processes in schools: their interaction with their peers and teachers increased. Students now avail more frequent opportunities to lead their groups and represent them in presenting their work to whole class. Their confidence and level of rejoicing their presence in classrooms have visibly enhanced.

3. Students and their parents have become more conscious of the cleanliness—be it the personal and/or school premises cleanliness. For instance, there are more dustbins in school premises as well as in classrooms and students have started using them to collect junk.

4. The following excerpt from the MTR Report illustrates impact of the project initiatives taken to improve students' social, moral development and health education:

The project attempted to address various behavioral problems through a multipronged approach,including capacity building of teachers and heads in child psychology, pedagogy andschool/classroom management, giving PDTs the responsibilities to support teachers to deal withproblem children, training teachers in mentoring skills to assist mentees to deal with classroom problems, improving the physical environment of schools (building, furniture, charts), involving students in developing charts and other materials and displaying the same in classrooms and outside, and, most importantly, promoting the setting up and running of elected students councils, including class representatives. The latter was a new initiative in schools, and had a good impact both on the students and the school environment. The teachers, head, students and the PDTs all reported marked improvements in student behaviors as a result of the above activities, including increased student participation, attendance and punctuality. A number of PDTs have documented these important changes in their success stories (Jaffer, R., Gul, S., & Jaffer, R. 2012: 17).

4. WSIP – The Sticking Points

The data shared in the foregoing pages suggests that the EDIP Project schools did reasonably well on various predetermined school improvement indicators; however, the overall environment in which these schools operated was never problem-free. In addition to their particular characteristics which made these schools develop at their own pace, they were also affected by some overarching challenges making it difficult for them to achieve the EDIP programmatic goals in their entirety. What follows is a brief description of the key overarching challenges faced by the project schools:

4.1. The Governance and Management Issues of DoE GB.

DoE GB has gone through a very turbulent time over the last 2-3 years due largely to the violation of merit in teacher recruitments as well as to the weak governance structure of the Department. Consequently, the image and reputation of the institution plummeted resulting in the erosion of communities trust in the efficiency and productivity of the Department. Therefore, restoration of the image of the institution by addressing the severe governance issues emerged as the top priority for DoE GB. Nonetheless, the good news is that the current leadership has been working diligently to address the numerous governance related issues and these efforts have already started yielding tangible results.

Apparently, quality improvement and/or teacher development seem to have been put at the back-burner and the institution's energies are currently focused on restoring communities' trust and confidence in DoE GB. Poor governance and mismanagement repeatedly hindered the effective implementation of the EDIP project over the last 2-3 years.

4.2. Institutional Policies Hampering the Process of School Improvement.

Most of the current policies governing the institution seem to be outdated and no longer aligned with the contemporary trends and people's expectations from the Department. For instance, it is primarily an employee's number of years in service that determine his/her rank and status in the institution and not his/her worth or the ability to add value to the cause of the institution. This 'seniority-oriented' policy for staff promotion and compensation is an insurmountable challenge for the DoE GB to become a dynamic institution capable of coming up to the expectations of its clientele.

Likewise, there is a clear disconnect between employees performance and their compensation packages. Whether or not a teacher performs well, he/she gets the salary at the end of the month and increments at the end of the year. And, for receiving all perks automatically and uninterruptedly, teachers don't feel the need and motivation to improve their competence and productively.

4.3. DoE GB under Constant Political and Sectarian Pressures.

DoE GB has emerged, over the years, as one of the most affected institutions in terms of the constant pressure coming from the political and the sectarian arenas. Politicians exert pressure for appointments, promotions and posting/transfers of their voters so that the goodwill generated translates for them into increased vote bank in their constituencies. The political pressure seems to have exacerbated during the current political government confronting the DoE GB with numerous challenges. The religious pressure seems to be even more persuasive and domineering in that the religious leaders and/or sectarian groups influence institutions to protect their followers' interests. Resultantly, there has been increasing fragmentation with widening gaps amongst the people representing different denominations. This 'sect-conscious' environment has compelled the management to consider staff placement in schools and offices more based on their religious affiliation than on their capability for service delivery.

4.4. Financial Limitations Constraining DoE GB's Role in GB.

Primarily linked with Pakistan's overall increasing socioeconomic challenges that DoE GB has remained under constant pressure of scarcity of financial resources to meet its emerging development needs. The fragile economic situation at the national level has resulted in thinner and reduced resource provision to schools. DoE GB, as a whole, could not implement the Gilgit-Baltistan Education Strategy (2013-18) recommendations due largely to the scarcity of financial resources. Expecting teachers and heads to improve teaching and learning through using activity-based and participatory approaches, remains as a wishful thinking particularly when teachers don't have access to the basic needs in schools. Also, the fact that many children suffer for not getting an enabling and enjoyable learning environment in schools and thus opt for drop-out is also attributable to the financial constraints facing the Department.

5. Conclusion

The EDIP Project (2010-2015) has already proved its efficacy as a comprehensive, consortium-based school improvement model that is being implemented in the rural and mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan. Development, in its broader sense, is a complex phenomenon. However, the school improvement process aiming to improve the pubic sector schools operating in this backward part of the country is particularly more challenging, uncertainly-laden and resource-hungry. The fact that education has been a much lower national priority further aggravates the process of delivering quality education in Gilgit-Baltistan. Despite numerous odds, the EDIP impact in the project schools is highly encouraging particularly in view of the expectation to turn-around the public sector schools confronted with issues of poor governance, low quality, resource constraints and inadequate community motivation to get involved in the school improvement processes. The data shared above on the impact of the EDIP Project in the schools clearly delineates the success of the project.

The Project has taken the issue of sustainability into consideration; however, continuity of the EDIP project initiatives to help these schools meet, and in fact exceed, the community expectations beyond the Project life, is inextricably linked with the vision, mission and intrinsic motivation of the top-notch institutional leadership. The school improvement momentum will certainly dwindle and fade-out if the institutional leadership working at the head office and at the field level, stop exhibiting ownership, building on and maximizing support and input to these schools.

PDCN's outreach, through extension of EDIP, to the most underprivileged and backward areas including Diamer has particularly been remarkable. The Project has been instrumental in successfully reversing the resistant-to-change attitude of communities from the educationally-backward districts for education of their children. Today, there is increasing demand from these communities for access to and quality of education for their children. Girls' education, once seen as a social taboo in some districts, is increasingly becoming part of the mainstream education in schools. Furthermore, parents and communities have become better informed about the rationale for their children's education. Hence, a rare opportunity for the local, national and the global development partners to show their generosity and support to some of these hitherto unattended segments of populations in GB to bring them to the light of knowledge and socioeconomic development. A long-term investment in the education and overall wellbeing of these communities would certainly be a desirable and much-needed investment in safeguarding children's rights, peace and development.

It would be, therefore, pertinent and desirable to conclude this paper thanking the donor (i.e. AusAID) for sponsoring EDIP, AKF (P) for its meticulous management of the Project and AKU-IED/PDCN and other partners for their dedication and commitment to make this project a success!

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