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Through support of mothers

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Through support of mothers

By Khush Funer Murtaza

School improvement initiatives taken from the outside do not have an effective impact on change processes without the involvement of communities and parents in the school teaching and learning process.

In order to increase maximum capacity building of the communities and their participation in the school improvement activities, the Aga Khan University-Professional Development Centre's (AKU-PDCN) Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP), apart from other stakeholders of the communities, involves parents, particularly mothers in the teaching and learning processes by celebrating Mothers' Day and sometimes mothers' meetings in each of the project schools during various terms of the academic year.

The school management committee (SMC), the village education committee (VEC) and in some schools the parent teacher association (PTA) play a vital role in collaborating with the PDCN faculty to ensure maximum participation on such occasions.

Initially the mothers show a little reluctance to come to schools because of the cultural sensitivities. Conducive environment in the project schools and the friendly interaction of the faculty have now encouraged them to visit the schools frequently in order to share their feelings and ideas about how mothers can contribute to the school and student's performance.

The mothers had never visited the schools before WSIP. Some shared that they had never thought about how they could help the schools and their children in their learning process. It is through the frequent meetings of the PDCN faculty with school management committees (SMCs) and some mothers already working in different schools as teachers that the attendance and participation of mothers in meetings has increased gradually.

The PDCN faculty encourages mothers to serve as members of the school management committees and village education committees in order to become more informed about what happens in schools to contribute knowledge about their children and also sharing an equal voice with the teachers.

The significant features of mothers meetings are to

- Discuss with them about creating a home environment that encourages the children`s learning.
- Become more involved in their children`s education at home.
- Communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their children`s achievement and future guidance.
- Develop procedures that enable mothers to monitor and help homework.
- Provide frequent, timely communication on student progress so mothers can respond to the student`s individual interests and difficulties.
- Discuss issues related to students leaving the school premises during school hours.
- Discuss cleanliness and basic health problems.
- Use mothers as resource persons in teaching and learning process, i.e., some mother`s are very good in sewing and cooking, while some are working as health workers. The programme tries to invite and arrange sessions where these mothers share their skills and experiences.
- Share mobile library resources that literate mothers might read aloud to their children at home as illiterate mothers could tell indigenous stories to their children.
- Identify how mothers can manage and prepare low-cost cushions/seats to their children who are expected to sit on the ground in the few schools where building/space is not available for some classes.

There are clear benefits from having the mothers` effective involvement in the school process. It helps in minimizing students` absenteeism from the classes. It is observed that in schools where mothers have participated, the students no longer leave the premises during school hours and the attendance, too, has increased. The habit of cleanliness in students and the quality of their uniform has also improved. Students bring basic resources, i.e., pen, pencil, sharpener and writing and reading resources in their bags. Mothers have prepared low-cost cushions for their children who have to sit on the floor due to lack of building and space in few project schools. Some mothers and their educated daughters, too, teach in the school as substitute and volunteer teachers.

The mothers have started visiting the schools where they can discuss their children`s performances as well as ask the teachers how they can assist their children more meaningfully at home. Health visitors and health workers, too, are being used as resource persons in mothers meetings, where they share, conduct sessions on basic health education and suggest activities to mothers about prevention of diseases caused by germs.

All the above results indicate that mothers can be involved in forming an effective partnership with the home and community in order to improve the schools.

Michael Fullan (1997) says it best “Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/communities working together in partnership. These forms of [mothers`] involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention.”

The writer works at the Aga Khan Universitys Professional Development Centre North in Gilgit.