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Chronicles of change : Strengthening teacher education in Pakistan

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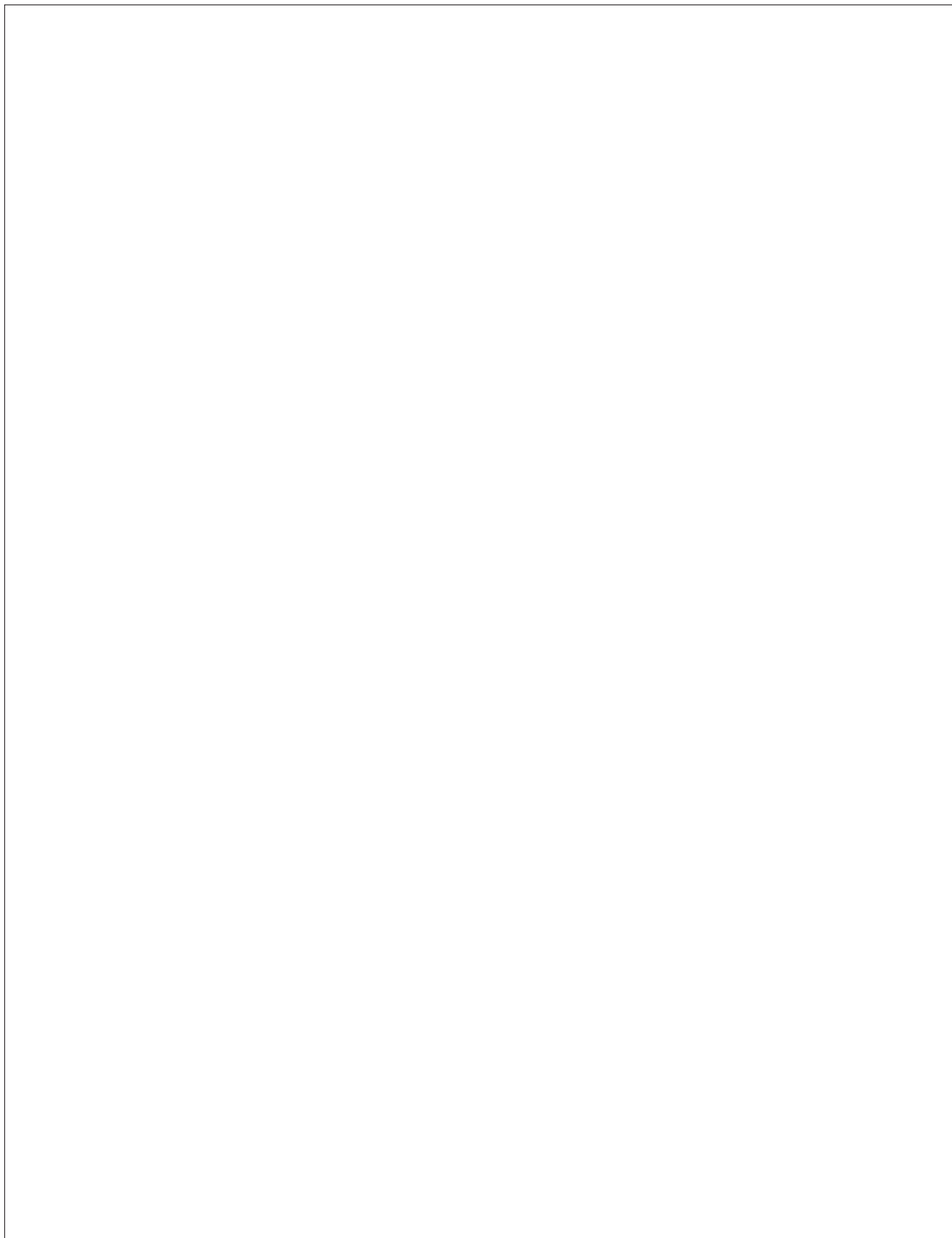
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CHRONICLES OF CHANGE

STRENGTHENING TEACHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank all the STEP district coordinators in Sindh and Balochistan and the STEP project staff based at Aga Khan University - Institute for Educational Development for their support in gathering these stories. We would also like to acknowledge Ms. Nida Dossa, Associate (Documentation), STEP project at AKU-IED Pakistan for putting these stories together in the form of this booklet.

This collection of stories would not have been possible without the hard work, commitment and resilience of all our mentors, mentees, headteachers and lead teachers who made the STEP project a success.

A STEP

Towards Improving Education in Pakistan

Being able to sit in a classroom, feel safe, learn about how the world works; being able to read a book, make up stories and discover new ideas – these are the basic rights of every child. However, millions of children in Pakistan have never seen a classroom or attended a lesson. Here, educational challenges are innumerable and oftentimes seem insurmountable. STEP – Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan works to improve the quality and delivery of elementary education services appropriate to the poor in the country, particularly women and children in Pakistan.



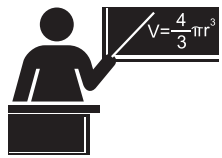
Since its inception in

2009

STEP has engaged

14,816

beneficiaries including



5,689

teachers



688

teacher educators
and trainers



369

education
managers

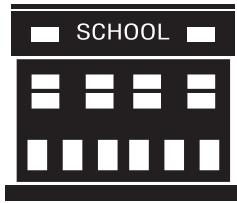


8070

community
members

IN **SINDH** GILGIT-BALTISTAN
AND **BALOCHISTAN**

Altogether,
STEP
is working with
1,650
government schools



across the three **PROVINCES**
and has reached over

300,000
STUDENTS

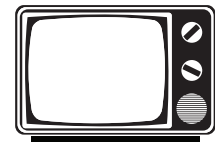


Established

165

RESOURCE CENTRES
in project schools

EQUIPPED



with a variety of



EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

to enhance
and enrich
the learning

EXPERIENCE

The STEP project introduced three major models in schools:

- Cluster Based Mentoring Programme (CBMP)
- Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP)
- Professional Network for Teacher Development (PNTD)

The CBMP programme developed capacity of teachers through an Advanced Diploma in Education specializing in four key subject areas including Math, Science, Social Studies and English. These teachers serve as mentors to other mentee teachers and provide training and peer coaching support to improve teaching and learning practices.

The WSIP model focused on holistic development of schools through six pillars which include improved school leadership and management, continuous monitoring and evaluation, effective curriculum implementation, development and effective utilization of teaching learning resources, enhanced community participation and school based professional development of teachers.

Professional Network for Teacher Development (PNTD) is a forum created for teachers, headteachers and educators for their continuous professional development. It's a cluster of nine voluntary associations aiming to promote sustainable enabling environment for the professional growth of teachers and educators. It also works for establishing linkages with National and International associations on curriculum, material, resources and research development.

Some of the changes produced as a result of the project intervention include:

- Shifts in teachers' attitudes
- Re-conceptualisation of their roles as professional educators
- Integration of gender sensitivity in educational practices
- Initiatives to stimulate creativity, imagination and intellectual curiosity in children
- Increased student enrolment in project schools, particularly girls' enrolment & retention
- Significant improvement in students' analytical skills, conceptual understanding of subject matter & an overall increase in test scores/examination results

Here we present some examples of most significant change created by STEP. These are stories of resilience, of determination and of ownership that have transformed the teaching and learning experience in these schools.

BUILDING CAPACITY

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION



Situated in the midst of mountains, the Government Boys High School Urgas in Muslim Bagh District Killa Saifullah echoes the resilience of the landscape it is located in. The students who come to this school belong to a rural marginalized community without many privileges.



Regardless of the rural context of the school, it is doing remarkably well in terms of quality teaching and learning as well as the facilities provided to students. Teachers have been trained to teach in an interactive, student-centric method where critical and analytical thinking is encouraged. Students benefit, not only from improved teaching techniques, but also the latest technology using computers as well as multimedia visual aid in the STEP established Learning Resource Centre (LRC).

“ We learnt about the human cell through multimedia. It was clearer when we could actually see it on a big screen” said Isbullah, a student at the school. Another student commented, “When I see something on the screen, I remember it. Just books can be boring sometimes.”

The success of this school can be attributed largely to the community and their support but particularly to the leadership of its Head Master, Mohammed Ishaq. Ishaq joined as Headteacher in 2006. Back then the school wasn't in the shape it is in now. It didn't even have water so the children came with buckets. Under his leadership, infrastructure was improved and after the STEP project intervention, many changes were made to improve academic performance as well. Assessment strategies were reviewed and revised and measures introduced to focus on understanding concepts and retention.

The headteacher wanted to ensure that the students not only have access to good quality education but are better equipped to handle further education. Thus, in 2011, it was proposed that the medium of instruction be changed from Urdu to English. This was met with much opposition but the school leadership was able to convince not just the community but higher officials in the government. Because of the headteacher's identification of a need, his initiative and persistence and the consistent community support, he was able to get books in English from the Balochistan Textbook Board and make the transition from Urdu to English medium. Other schools in the city have now started following the trend set by Ishaq and his teachers.



When asked why this was such an important issue, Ishaq responded,



“ Our kids suffer when they don’t learn the English language. I want poor kids to also have an opportunity for an equitable and bright future and not be left out because they don’t speak the language they need to succeed at higher levels.”

The trickle-down effect of his leadership is evident in other facets of the school: students take ownership of their classrooms, decorate walls, keep the classrooms clean, take the initiative to go to the LRCs themselves and use the available resources for self-learning.

Community engagement is a pillar of the STEP introduced Whole School Improvement Plan. The school has developed a health committee involving parents and the wider community. The group uses the school’s platform to do advocacy work around health for students as well as the surrounding neighbourhood. A community hall is also being built on the school premises which will be used by the school as well as the whole community. The community insisted that it be built on school premises. This reflects the community’s investment, trust and ownership in the school as well as the central position that the school has gained within the community.



GBHS Urgas and many more schools in Balochistan, part of the STEP project, are using their exposure and learning to gather support from the community, raise awareness and transform the way education and its role is perceived. This will ensure the holistic development of these communities and create a lasting legacy.

IMPOSSIBLE

IS TEMPORARY



Saleh Put is a very poor area in the Sukkur district of Sindh, where a large number of people live in huts made out of straw and bamboo. It is also the location of a Learning Resource Centre, established by AKU-IED under the STEP programme. The centre serves as the hub for many professional development workshops for local teachers.

Lack of funding and resources does not allow teachers here to procure relevant teaching aids. One of the training areas that the STEP programme focused on was to build capacity so that teachers can use available resources in the most effective way. Shahid Hussain, a primary school teacher in the area and a mentee in the STEP programme, attended several such trainings and learned to make effective teaching aids from locally available resources like straw and bamboo.

Using that knowledge, Shahid made sign boards, wall clocks, geometrical shapes, mathematical symbols and charts using recycled material and other objects. Not only has this made teaching easier and effective but has also made it engaging for the students. He gets excited every time a student makes a teaching aid with him.



“The materials can often be reused so if a student makes a mistake, I just tell them, it’s ok. That’s how you’ll learn.”

Shahid has organized workshops for other teachers and helped them to make useable teaching aids from available resources as well. “STEP trainings have not only taught me the use of low-cost no-cost materials, but they have also motivated me to share my skills with my colleagues, especially those who are unable to come to the workshops,” Shahid said.

The teachers that he has cascaded his learning to have shown tremendous enthusiasm and creativity in designing and making new teaching aids so that they can all provide inexpensive but quality educational materials to the children of their hometowns.

INSPIRING CHANGE

THE ANATOMY OF CHANGE



“ If the sun does not move then where does it go at night? ”

a curious student asked Kamila in the middle of a lesson on the solar system. Kamila paused for a second, then picked up the colourful balls in one of the corners she had set up in class. She went on to explain how the earth rotates in its own axis, how it also revolves around the sun and what happens when night falls.

This is an ordinary day for Kamila at Government Girls High School, Town Killa Saifullah where she voluntarily teaches Science to primary students.

Kamila is a former student of the school who graduated just last year.

She was in Grade 8 when the STEP programme was initiated at her school.

A UCTRC (Union Council – Teachers Resource Centre) was built, teacher mentors were trained at AKU-IED who would then conduct workshops for professional development at their UCTRCs in the school. When Kamila found out about the first workshop at her school’s UCTRC, she pleaded with the mentor to let her attend.



“ I will only sit in the back, not say a word ”

she told her teacher; who let her sit in. Kamila never stopped coming to these workshops. She kept attending these sessions until Grade 10 and became an active participant. She is now enrolled in college and attends classes in the afternoon. In the morning she comes to her alma mater and teaches voluntarily.

She hopes to get a degree in education some day and become a professional teacher educator and an inspiration for little girls in her community.

Using the interactive teaching methodologies, she learnt at the CBMP workshops and integrating the use of low/no cost material, as well as other resources from the Teachers Resource Centre, she makes her classroom a vibrant space for questions, discussion and exploration.

“ I love using the TRC resources; the flash cards and especially the book on the parts of body where kids can see the bones and major veins and arteries and touch them. I use flash cards to show them different vehicles. These are not city children. Many of these kids haven’t seen a plane or a jeep or fancy cars. ”



she commented on the integration of learning material in her lesson plans.

Kamila appreciates the value of creating an environment where students ask questions and voice their opinions without being afraid, especially girls in rural areas for whom opportunities are limited. A change has been observed at the school.

Students are more vocal, ask more questions, think outside the box and retain more concepts than they used to.

“It is a complete transformation. I feel it is my responsibility as a teacher to ensure that the students I teach have better chances and opportunities and turn out better than me. That is what they deserve and that is how society evolves.”

In rural Balochistan, where dropout rates for girls are significantly high and where cultural sensitivities make it difficult for women to pursue education, Kamila is an exemplary role model of commitment, dedication and the strength of women transformed by education.

WHERE THERE IS A WILL



Village Habib Soomro of Union Council Sonda, District Thatta is an old and underdeveloped area which lacks basic facilities of education and health.



A primary school called the Girls Primary School Habib Soomro was opened in 1948 in a small hut to give primary education to children. A building was constructed in 1976 but time was not kind to the school.

It fell into disrepair and became unsafe for the students. In 2007, the roof of the school collapsed while school was in session. When multiple requests for repairs by the villagers went unheard, the school had to be shut down.

In 2012, having been inspired by his learning from the STEP trainings and his interaction with other teachers Shamsuddin Soomro (a mentor in the STEP programme’s Cluster Based Mentoring Programme) decided to gather support and reopen the school. He wanted children from his village to get access to basic education and benefit from the innovative teaching methods that he had learnt.

He, along with his mentees, Muhammad Hanif, Ali Abbas and some other teachers and villagers campaigned hard and finally got the approval to repair and reopen the school. The easy part was done but their journey had just begun.

After the reopening, Soomro enrolled many out of school kids in the village and the school began its academic year again with 115 little boys and girls.

Soomro got transferred to this school and started implementing the innovative teaching practices he had learnt through the STEP’s CBMP professional development activities because just putting kids in classrooms was not enough.

They deserved quality education and their minds to be nurtured creatively and intellectually. “We experienced a lot of change due to new teaching methods applied by teachers who are getting STEP trainings.

“We experienced a lot of change due to new teaching methods applied by teachers who are getting STEP trainings. Students are coming with happy faces, teachers are using real life things related to content and activity based teaching methods” he mentioned.

Fundraising initiatives by teachers and community have led to building expansion, proper furniture and clean drinking water facilities.

The school also strives to provide equal opportunities to girls at primary level and has secured approval to run a middle school for girls so they are not deprived of their right to education because of lack of opportunity.



Though the school and its teachers have seen a lot of change and adversity but the resilience, the will to use available resources and opportunities to ensure a brighter future for the children has remained constant.

TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

I HAVE A DREAM



“ What’s your dream?
What do you want to be? ”

These were questions directed to Tooba, an eager looking eight year old at Government Girls Primary School, Shamsabad, Sukkur. She said that she dreamed of becoming a famous doctor when she grows up, one that everyone wants to come to.

Government Girls Primary School, Shamsabad is a public school in urban Sukkur and unfortunately, like many other government schools in the country, does not have all the support it needs.



If you walk into the school you may find yourself surprised to be greeted by colourful educational displays depicting vowels and numbers, learning resources adorning all the walls and a school that looks like it was built to develop and sustain young, creative and intellectual minds.

However, it wasn't always like this. Just five years ago, this school was literally in ruins. The chairman of the School Management Committee (SMC) commented,

“ The school was a khandar (in ruins) both physically and teaching wise. During the floods in 2010, displaced families were placed in schools. There was no support for them. Each classroom sheltered six or seven families. They burnt down the furniture, windows and doors for fuel. The school was left as if it had survived a war. ”

But the broken floor has been fixed, washrooms built, water tanks installed, walls painted and adorned with art work which is used in the classroom teaching and learning. All of this was done by the community and by teachers because of a sense of ownership fostered by STEP's intervention.

“ This is our space where we teach our kids. We can't wait around for someone to come and make things better so we do it ourselves; teachers, students, parents and the community, each taking responsibility and making things better. ”

said Najma, a teacher at the school.

It is not just the building that has been transformed but the learning environment as well. Rote memorization and reading from a text are standard teaching strategies in many schools in Pakistan.

But these teachers have now started to implement activity based and interactive teaching and learning methodologies that they learnt as part of the STEP project's capacity building initiative.



“It’s a cultural change. Fridays are our days to consult.”

said Farzana, a teacher who leads discussions on how teaching can be improved, what challenges are present and how they can work together to overcome them. The teachers also sit together and create lesson plans, evaluation strategies and organise learning resources. When one of the members of the SMC was asked why the teachers bother, the response was inspiring.

“The school was in dismal shape, the teachers could have given up but they didn’t. Walls were cleaned and washed; furniture was replaced out of their own pockets, enrollment increased by going door to door. Teachers taught diligently and with commitment. With a little help from the community and the motivation from their own development at IED, they brought back the school from being an empty khandar (ruins) to a learning environment for 275 children. Children come from a very poor community and from families for whom this is not just a school, it’s hope, hope of a better future and to be able to be a part of that is reward enough.”

Parents and the community are also part of this transformation. They have developed a learning resource centre in the school. Members of the community donate books, uniforms, sweaters in the winter, maps and globes; whatever they can to make this school a place conducive to learning for their kids. Why does the community invest in a state school where trust is a major issue? It’s because they see results.



Their children come home and tell them about finding continents on the map and stories of cultures that their parents have never seen but wish that their kids do some day.

“Teachers are accountable, they respond to us. And my daughter, for the first time, enjoys school”

a parent exclaimed with a big smile. She went on to say,

“I saw my daughter doing a role play in the classroom. Now I use that at home too to teach her or help with revision.”

In a country where the state of public schools is tragic, examples like these bring hope and inspiration. Hope that with a little initiative, support and commitment, even the worst of conditions can be turned around. That is how transformation can happen, one classroom, one teacher & one community at a time.

ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

A SCHOOL FOR THE COMMUNITY



Government Boys Primary School Main Sindhi Chamber is a public school in Chamber Taluka in district Tando Allayar. Before the intervention of STEP Project under AKU-IED, the community was reluctant to send their children to this school.



This was largely due to the lack of trust in the school management and the quality of education being provided to students.

STEP developed the capacity of the headteacher, Muhammad Bachal Kumber, by offering him an Advanced Diploma in teaching with a focus on educational management and many other workshops and training opportunities to provide him with the right set of tools and ideas for school improvement. Gradually, the teachers started focusing on content knowledge, pedagogical skills and teaching strategies and methods which were innovative and interesting to ensure that students not only come to school but learn and retain concepts.

What really sparked transformation in this school was the community's involvement. As soon as a Learning Resource Centre was established, the headteacher engaged mentee and non-mentee teachers and members of the community to collectively take ownership of this facility and ensure that it is used for maximum benefit of the children in and out of school in the village.

Soon, people from the community started coming to school on visits, observing the computers and multimedia equipment and teaching resources, maps, globes, models and books, all available for the children as well as the community at large. This resulted in increased enrolment and a high level of engagement not only with students and parents but also with education managers from the government.



This multimedia based instruction has become very popular among students and community of this village. Parents and community members requested the chairman of the school management committee to make the facility more accessible. Now this centre not only serves as a resource for teachers who use it for planning and delivering lessons in class but also as a teaching facility for girls from within the community and neighbouring areas. Every Sunday, English language and ICT classes are held by volunteer teachers for sixty girls from a range of academic backgrounds.

The ownership demonstrated by the headteacher and his teaching staff, parents and community members has played a vital role in transforming this school from traditional and ineffective to innovative and exciting as well as serving as a hub of learning for the wider community.

STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

TEACHER

NETWORKS
SUSTAIN CHANGE



Bringing about change in challenging contexts is hard but sustaining that change is even harder. Sustainability relies on continuous support and commitment.

The STEP project's support to Professional Networks of Teacher Development (PNTD) does just that.

These networks provide an opportunity to teachers from various backgrounds and schools to come together and identify needs, gain technical skills through professional development workshops and benefit from peer support that the networks provide.



These professional development activities are driven by the needs of its members and focus on a variety of themes, from gender integration in lessons to using low and no cost materials for teaching aids to child psychology and classroom management practices. Significant change has been observed as a result of this continuous interaction.

“ Six years ago, when I started taking the PNTD workshops, I used to struggle with classroom management. I would scream and shout at the students and get frustrated when they wouldn't listen. Gradually, I learnt strategies of classroom management, establishing ground rules and being calm and patient ”

said Siddiqa, a member of the Karachi chapter of the network.

Continuous and meticulous planning has become part of everyday teaching for these teachers who seek support from each other while making these plans. Another teacher recalls a PNTD workshop where she learnt how to teach the concept of matter to children by getting all the students to get up and act as molecules of solid, liquid and gases. “The trainer who was a fellow science teacher taught us how to engage kids.

We were running about acting as molecules in the training. When it was so much fun for me I thought, why wouldn't the kids enjoy and retain this concept. It was one of those aha moments”, she noted.

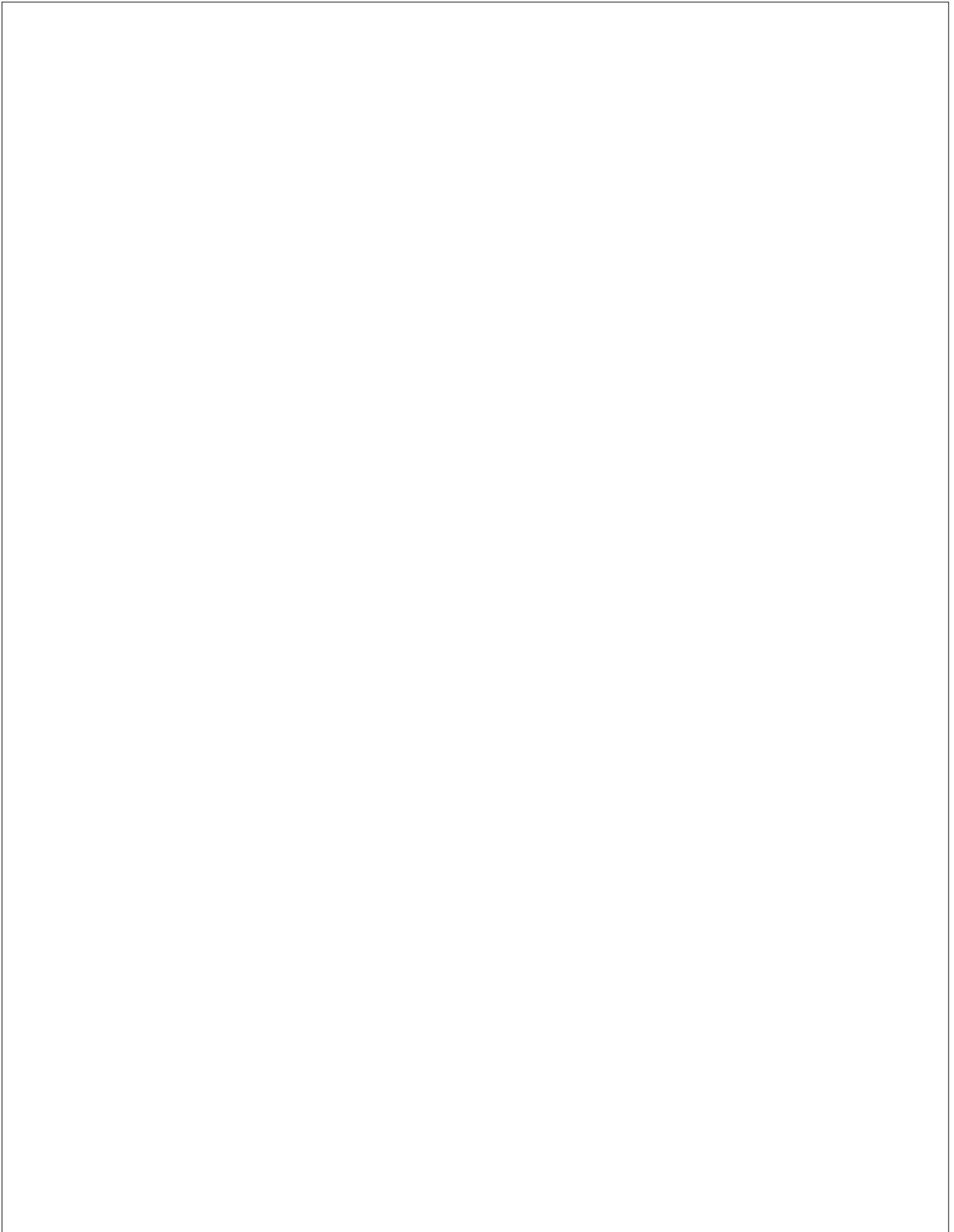
Whatever these teachers learn, they cascade to other teachers in their school, not just limiting the knowledge to themselves but mentoring and providing peer support. Teachers appreciate this platform where they get to share and learn from other teachers.

This ideological diversity and intellectual freedom that the PNTD platform provides is essential to teacher development. They find learning from teachers who come from different settings and with their own struggles and stories of success refreshing.

“ The give and take of knowledge is very empowering. It is also inclusive in terms of ethnicities, capacities and background. We have teachers from elite private schools as well as small NGO-run home schools in the network. Each teacher comes with a wealth of experience and ideas. ”

noted Neelum Suleman who runs a small home school.

Networking and professional development complement each other. It enables the sharing of ideas in a free and creative environment. Above all, it provides a self-sustaining platform run for and by teachers who strive to improve themselves continually and as a result enrich the learning environment for the kids they teach.





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