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ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) AND COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOs): IMPACT OF AN INNOVATIVE INITIATIVE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to unpack the notion and process of institutional capacity building of NGOs / CBOs in rural and semi-urban areas of the Sindh province. Several NGOs / CBOs and other organizations tend to take initiatives embedded in the 'first order' changes which are of incremental nature and have failed to contribute substantially towards enhancing their institutional capacity building. In 1999, the AKU-IED was engaged in enhancing institutional capacity building of selected NGOs and CBOs in Sindh through 'second order' changes for promoting education in general and female education in particular.

The process of the transformational development of these NGOs / CBOs began in October 1999 through the participation of their staff members in various contextualized Professional Development Programmes at AKU-IED directed at initiating 'second order' changes. The focus of these programmes was to develop and promote an academic leadership and collaborative culture among the participants so that they are able to demonstrate themselves as a 'community of learners' in their own contexts. These programmes eventually contributed towards enhancing the institutional capacity building of NGOs / CBOs for managing the 'second order' changes in their contexts.

Within three years, these NGOs / CBOs conceived and provided contextually viable and financially feasible professional platform in the shape of Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) for their teachers and others continuing professional development. Sixteen LRCs were established by the respective NGOs / CBOs. These are functioning effectively with the minimum resources.

Although, these LRCs are small in their nature and size, their impact for building institutional capacity has been found quite substantial. This innovation has led to develop

an indigenous model of professional development of teachers and others that can be easily replicated in the similar contexts of Pakistan. This paper further discusses the role and impact of LRCs in relation to institutional capacity building of NGOs / CBOs in Sindh. These LRCs have developed innovative and relevant Professional Development Programmes for their staff and others to provide access for professional development at grass-roots level which eventually improve the quality of education to a great extent.

Introduction

Successive Governments in Pakistan have grappled with the issue of qualitative and quantitative improvement of education in the country because of prevailing low enrolment and retention rates, high dropout rates, irrelevant curriculum and ineffective assessment fostering rote learning, ineffective teacher education, poorly managed schools and poor quality of primary education. The Mid-Term Evaluation Report of PNI-Phase -II (2001) mentions that “only 33% of Pakistani children attending fifth grade can read with comprehension, only 17% can write letter using simple grammar and vocabulary, and the average years of schooling is under two” (p. 4). Hence, the state of education in Pakistan is considered to be the poorest within South Asia (Aga Khan Foundation, 1998). Several reforms were launched by the Government of Pakistan to raise standards of education through a “top-down” approach (Fullan, 1999) without clarity on focus, purpose, framework, strategies and desired outcomes. Teachers were considered as problems rather than parts of solution.

As a result, this approach created disillusionment, demoralization, and disempowerment among teachers (Myers & MacBeath, 2002). Hence, there is a need for adopting a “bottom-up” approach embedded in human resources perspective for building institutional capacity. In the late 1990s, the Government of Pakistan recognized the role of community participation in the development of education. Thus, community participation became a major thrust of Government plans and programmes such as Social Action Programme (SAP) Phase I (1992-1996) and II (1997-2002) and the Education Sector Reform (2001-2004). As a result, several NGOs and CBOs emerged as driving forces to take on a leadership role in the implementation of governmental initiatives at the grassroots level. However, many NGOs / CBOs seem to have suffered from the lack of adequate institutional capacity to manage the governmental, or their own educational initiatives effectively, at the grassroots level.

The Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan (AKF,P) launched a project titled ‘Pakistan Non-Government Initiatives’ (PNI) with an aim to enhance the capacity of NGOs / CBOs for promoting the quality of preschool and primary education in general and girls’ education, with particular focus on the rural and semi-urban areas of the Sindh province. Realizing the need for strengthening the NGOs / CBOs’ capacity building in the area of primary education, the United States Agency for International Development (US-AID) provided some financial assistance to AKF,P for Phase II of the PNI initiatives in 1999. In this paper, the authors present an account of the impact of one of the initiatives: building NGOs / CBOs’ capacity for improving primary education managed by AKU-IED.

This initiative contained the following objectives:

- to build upon the successful NGOs / CBOs’ work in rural Sindh;
- to provide management training to head teachers, community management and NGO / CBO staff;
- to provide follow-up support for teachers and others; and,
- to develop capacity among NGO / CBO members to better monitor and document the progress of their educational initiatives.

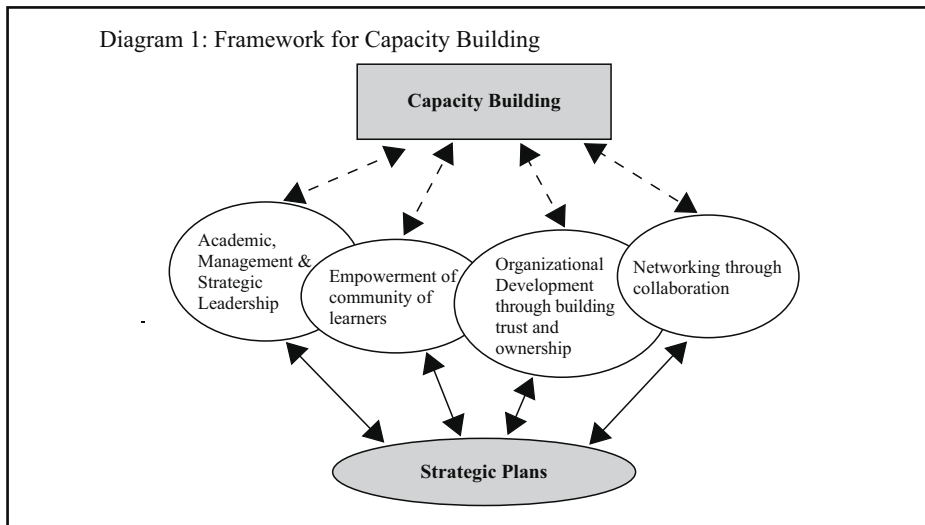
Through a rigorous and transparent selection process, AKU-IED short-listed several NGOs and CBOs of which a final fourteen were selected. A comprehensive needs assessment was carried out through a survey questionnaire combined with a one day needs assessment workshop, followed by a focus group meeting. A validation process of the needs assessment was also carried out with NGOs and CBOs through the one-day workshop. Thus, AKU-IED established collaboration with fourteen NGOs / CBOs in rural and semi-urban areas of Sindh province to build their institutional capacity for promoting primary education.

Notion of capacity building

Literature on school improvement (e.g. Hopkins, 1987; Fullan, 1992; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Mortimore, 2000; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Harris, 2002; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000) suggests varied approaches to school improvement for raising standards of Education. Harris (2002) argues that without capacity building there would be no real changes in schools. Varied notions of capacity building are described in the literature but there does not seem any agreement on its definition. However, capacity building has become pre-requisite for school improvement initiatives. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) describe three inert-related dimensions of capacity building: personal, interpersonal and organizational.

To them, personal capacity of individuals is built as a result of their reflection on classroom practices for improvement. Interpersonal capacity is developed through creation of collaborative learning environment to learn from each others experiences. Organizational capacity can be built through shared vision and leadership through empowerment of staff. According to Harris (2002), capacity building is “concerned with creating conditions, opportunities and experiences for development and mutual learning” (p. 2). She seems to agree with Mitchell and Sackney (2000) that capacity building requires fostering and development of collaborative processes through which individuals feel confident in their own capacity, in the capacity of their colleagues, and in the capacity of the school to promote professional development. She further adds that “schools generate the external capacity and build the internal capability for improvement” (p. 2). Sergiovanni (2000) considers capacity building as a crucial factor whereas Stoll (1999) considers internal capacity as power to change in and sustain continuous learning in schools. This suggests that there is no easy way of building capacity and a ‘one size fits all’ approach to capacity building will not work. Teachers and others in the ‘community of learners’ need to work together to build capacity for managing initiatives effectively.

A working definition of capacity building evolved as a result of the implementation of this initiative was to create and strengthen the internal conditions for the accomplishment of organizational vision and mission in effective ways (Memon & Mithani, 2003a and 2003b). Building upon this definition, a capacity building framework was developed based on strategic thinking and planning. They further identified a number of rubrics of capacity building which have been presented in the diagram below:



While building institutional capacity of these NGOs / CBOs, the following strategies were used:

- Strategic and operational planning
- Advocacy and community mobilization
- Effective management and leadership practices
- Pedagogical and curriculum enrichment
- Empowerment of female teachers and community leaders
- Social and reflective practices
- Enabling learning environment
- Programme and project development framework
- Collaboration and networking
- Human and finance resource development
- Programme monitoring and evaluation

These strategies did not only become critical towards programme implementation and follow-up but also served as indicators of measuring success of the initiative. One the most significant strategic outcomes of the initiative was the changing internal structure and processes for developing of Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) within the premises of centrally-located schools. Conventionally, this notion translates itself into a ‘brick and mortar’ structure but in this case, the centrally-located schools, based on a cluster approach, were transformed as LRCs making responsible for imparting education to children and providing professional development opportunities for teachers. Such models are labelled as ‘Professional Development Schools’ (Holmes Group, 1990), Professional Practice Schools (Levine cited in Byrd & McIntyre, 1999) and Teacher Resource Centres (Government of Pakistan, 2002).

Conceiving change for capacity building

Educational change cannot achieve its objectives through a linear process hence there is a need to explore alternatives for making change happen at the grass roots levels. The framework of the innovative initiative was guided by a set of principles enunciated by Fullan (1992) and Hoban (2002). To Fullan, change is a process rather than an event. To Hoban, educational change be viewed as a “complex system assuming that change is a non-linear process that needs to be supported by a framework for long term teacher learning” (p. XVIII). Fullan’s (1991) change model provided the basic operational strategy to implement the programmatic activities. He suggested a four-step cyclic process: initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome, which helps to conceptualize

change as an integrated process for building capacity at the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels. The focus was on the ‘second order’ changes rather than the ‘first order’ changes which aimed at bringing about holistic improvement at the system level. The ‘second order’ changes seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together including new goals, structures and roles. In contrast, the ‘first order’ changes, according to Cuban (1988), are “implemented without disturbing the basic organizational features, and without substantially altering the way that children and adults perform their roles” (p. 342). The distinction between the ‘first order’ and ‘second order’ changes is given below:

Table 1: Distinction between the first order and second order changes

First order change	Second order change
Focus is on present	Focus on past, present and future
Linear approach	Non-linear approach
Emphasis on product	Emphasis on process
Experts-driven change	Needs-driven change
Focus on “fix it”	“One size does not fit all”
Changes in basic organizational features are not required	Changes are required in organizational goals and structure
Single-loop learning approach	Double-loop learning approach
Emphasis on individual learning	Emphasis on collective learning

Literature on educational change and improvement suggests several strategies for change, however, multi-layered change strategies were used bearing in mind that ‘one size does not fit all’. This allowed managing the change more effectively. Hence, change strategies varied from the context to context of each NGO and CBO. Harris (2002) argues that in order to build capacity for school improvement, change needs to be carefully planned. Initiating Innovative Programmes for Capacity Building In line with diagnosed needs of fourteen NGOs / CBOs, a series of context-based Professional Development Programmes were developed. These included: a) Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management; b) Certificate in Education: Primary Education; c) Advanced Diploma in Education: Primary Education; and d) Short Course on Monitoring, Evaluation and Documentation. Some participants also enrolled in the Master in Education (MEd) Programme. These programmes were responsive to the stakeholders’ needs and demands

and therefore created lot of enthusiasm and interest among the NGOs / CBOs. These programmes mainly concentrated on creating capacity-building required for bringing about sustainable changes at three levels: individual, inter-personal and organizational. The following section describes the impact of an innovative initiative in terms of capacity building at three inert-related levels:

Individual Capacity Building Four programmes leading to an award of Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management were conducted in which one hundred and eight serving and aspiring primary school head teachers and community motivators were developed. Out of these, sixty-five (60%) serving and aspiring female head teachers and community motivators benefited from these programmes. These participants developed a wide range of skills such as effective communication, participatory decision-making, time management, reflective practice, community participation, monitoring and evaluation, managing change, curriculum enrichment, and supervision. The participants were also exposed to processes engaged in organizational development analysis.

Seven programmes leading to an award of Certificate in Education: Primary Education were conducted in which two hundred ten primary schoolteachers were professionally developed as reflective and skilful teachers. These teachers enhanced their subject content knowledge and improved pedagogical, assessment, reflective, and curriculum enrichment skills. Teachers were also exposed to various approaches to students and teachers' learning. Out of these teachers, one hundred and fifty six female teachers (74 %) benefited from the programmes.

Two programmes leading to an award of Advanced Diploma in Education: Primary Education were conducted and thirty-two primary schoolteachers participated who were developed as 'academic leaders' for taking on leadership role in their respective LRCs. Out of these, twenty-one (66%) were females who benefited from the programmes. Thus, these programmes developed female leadership enabling them to participate effectively in policy decisions.

One programme on monitoring, evaluation and documentation was conducted in which thirty-two candidates participated. Out of these, eighteen (56%) were females who benefited from the programme. Programme participants were from all management layers. The candidates developed their skills in preparing framework of monitoring and evaluation including performance indicators and monitoring tools. They also developed skills of how to analyze monitoring and evaluation data and write a report for purposes

of documentation.

Seven candidates participated in AKU-IED's two-year MEd Programme. Out of these, two (29%) were female. These teachers were developed for leadership positions in their respective NGOs / CBOs. The graduates of the MEd Programme serve as Professional Development Teachers (PDTs) in their respective LRCs.

Female empowerment was one of the foci of capacity building through enhanced female participation in the programmes. The NGOs / CBO's leadership found to be appreciative of AKU-IED's efforts in providing adequate support to all female course participants, especially those from the rural areas who came out of their homes first time and stayed in Karachi. One of the female graduates mentioned that:

Before coming to AKU-IED, I had in sufficient leadership and management knowledge and skills and I was somehow not confident about my roles and responsibilities as a head teacher. I was also unfamiliar with the issues related to classroom management, school development, community development, female education and team building. I was dependent on my management even for minor things. I [now] feel an incredible improvement in my leadership and management style. It has developed my confidence to make decisions and move ahead and find solutions to problems locally. As a result, I planned how to resolve this issue and came up with the idea to knock at the doors of the community and meet with parents, especially mothers, and encourage them to send their daughters to the school. I have decided that there will be a meeting with mothers to strength partnership with the parents on a monthly basis. I have learnt how to walk on the tight ropes of effective school management" (See Project Completion Report).

It appears that the graduates have developed a substantial understanding of their roles, which contribute towards building their own capacity required for sustainable improvement.

Interpersonal capacity building

One of the aims of these programmes was to develop skills in order to promote a collaborative culture and networking. The Course Participants (CPs) were exposed to the best practices of collaboration and networking. One of the graduates' impressions was cited in the project completion report that "the programmes encouraged us to work

together, and to reach out to the people around us for help.” Graduates found this experience quite insightful because they learnt how to work collaboratively with others. It is evident that the NGOs / CBOs were using each other’s ‘benchmarking’ for improving the quality of education in their own contexts. Hence, positive collaboration among the NGOs / CBOs provided CPs with opportunity to share their expertise and resources in order to accomplish the common goals. This allowed CPs to visit each other’s schools and provide support in conducting professional development activities. In addition, CPs, along with other team members, started contributing effectively in initiating innovations for their school staff and the community members as reported by the different NGOs/CBOs leadership. Another graduate’s impressions mentioned in the project completion report was that:

The AKU-IED created an opportunity for the course participants from different NGOs / CBOs to work collaboratively and shared their experiences. We were also able to develop and strengthen the professional relationship among different people and work cooperatively for sustainable changes in their community.

This reveals that the participants did not only become aware of collaborative and networking practices but they also employed them in their own contexts. It was also found that the graduates worked together to strengthen the capacity of LRCs by developing short courses for their fellow teachers.

Institutional capacity building

Developing a professional platform at the grass roots level for the professional development of teachers and others was envisioned from the very beginning of the project. The NGOs / CBOs accordingly developed a platform for developing their teachers and others. This platform was conceived as a Learning Resources Centre (LRC). The development of the LRC and its functions were considered as unique features of an indigenous model of professional development. Each NGO / CBO identified a central and accessible school for the utilization of the professional development of teachers and others. An initial LRC framework was developed in collaboration with NGOs / CBOs (Memon and Mithani, 2003b). Each LRC was also conceived as a networking mechanism for promoting primary education. The NGOs were provided with necessary technical, professional and material support by the AKU-IED team to launch their NGO Access Programme for the professional development of teachers and others. All collaborating NGOs / CBOs developed a Pilot Programme of ninety contact hours for teachers’ professional development. Each LRC

included 20 to 30 teachers in their Access Programme, which was conducted twice a month. The majority of NGOs will have concluded their first programme in December 2003.

The NGO Access Programme was conducted with teachers without disrupting their daily teaching and learning processes and contributed significantly towards enhancing each NGOs / CBOs' capacity to meet the growing professional needs of their teachers and school managers. The AKU-IED assisted in developing the capacity of LRCs through developing human and material resources. A female graduate said:

Before attending the programme at AKU-IED, I had very little understanding of teaching and learning and did not have any clue of the holistic development of children. After attending this programme, my perception has changed in this regard. I now realize that the course has helped me to understand the practical approach to teaching-learning. The programme has provided me with the opportunity to re-conceptualize my beliefs and practices.

Prior to joining the programme, I considered the students' mind like empty jars. However the experience at AKU-IED has enabled me to understand the practical approach that as a teacher we need to build on a child's previous knowledge. I felt a tremendous improvement in my teaching style and acquired a wide range and depth of concepts that have helped me to make connections among concepts, activities and strategies. I used to come to school without knowing my objectives.

In addition to my skills, my attitudes regarding education and community participation also changed. I now prefer to consider my students' mothers as an integral part of the educational system. I arrange meetings with mothers in order to share problems with them. This has given me a lot of confidence and the mothers have started appreciating my role as a teacher". (See Project Completion Report)

Those who participated in the programmes have been performing different roles at LRCs. For example the graduates of the Advanced Diploma in Education: Primary Education and MED provide academic leadership; the graduates of the Certificate in Education: Primary Education provide academic support; and graduates of the Certificate in Education: Educational Leadership and Management provide management support for conducting

Professional Development Programmes at their LRCs. These LRCs have provided a platform for teachers and others to be a ‘community of learners’ by generating a progressive discourse for promoting collaborative culture. The graduates provide opportunities for the professional growth and development of their fellow teachers through formal and informal discussion on the issues and challenges faced by teachers and others in their classroom situation. They have started working with teachers from other NGOs / CBOs to develop networking by learning from each other for building their own capacity. They collectively plan Professional Development Programmes at LRCs seeking solutions to their own problems for improving the quality of education.

Conclusion

It is evident from the narratives of the graduates that the innovative initiatives have made substantial impact at the personal, inter-personal and organizational level to build institutional capacity of NGOs / CBOs for improving the quality of primary education. The focus of the capacity building must be placed on creating the internal conditions for the development of collaboration, empowerment, ownership, networking and a sense of strategic leadership among the stakeholders to achieve the common goals. Schools can only improve their performance if there is adequate capacity for change at the above-mentioned three levels. Working with NGOs and CBOs reveals that institutional capacity building is a continuous process of creating internal conditions that can facilitate NGOs / CBOs to accomplish their objectives. Literature on professional development suggests that teachers and others learn on-the-job more effectively than off their workplaces. One of the strengths of this professional development model was that teachers and others were able to relate their new learning to their own context and apply and reflect on the implications. This allowed NGOs and CBOs to develop an indigenous model of professional development of teacher education and educational leadership. This model can also be replicated in other areas of Pakistan.

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