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# THE STATUS OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN RURAL BALOCHISTAN

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## **Abstract**

Balochistan is the largest province in Pakistan, occupying almost 43% of the country's land area and is approximately the size of France. It is also the least populated province with only about 5% of the population residing there, 80% of whom are scattered in small villages. These villages have remained largely untouched by the advances of the modern age, and largely ignored by the central authorities. Very few resources have been made available to these rural areas with the unfortunate result that education for all is extremely under-funded, and the most seriously affected by this neglect are the women and the girls.

The status of female education in rural Balochistan presents a depressing picture. Although illiteracy in Pakistan as a whole stands at 80% and growing, the literacy rate among rural women in Balochistan is bleaker. It is estimated that less than 2% of rural female in Balochistan are literate. Literate and illiterate traditions assign the women certain responsibilities such as cooking food, cleaning the house, child-bearing and rearing, and all other domestic support needed by her husband and other family members. The benefits of education for girls in rural Balochistan have only recently being recognized.

The Mobile Female Teacher Training Unit (MFTTU) is a project that was developed out of the realization that girls and women in rural areas deserve an education and that their role in rural development depends on their larger participation in the process. Cooperation between the Government of Balochistan, from the provincial to the district level and international organizations such as UNICEF, USAID, PED, TVO, World Bank and the Society for Community Support for Primary Education Balochistan and Village education Committee, which is made up of parents, has enabled the MFTTU and the society to bring together available community resources for girls education in the rural areas and to train female teacher for the villages. Although it is an excellent programme and has a significant impact on the female education in Balochistan, it was losing its desired benefits because of issues related to time and the handling of the programme by traditional people. When I came back from AKU-IED, I was given charge of this programme. On

the basis of my experience at IED, I introduced some new professional interventions in the program. They worked very well.

The main objective of this program was to increase the sustainable enrolment of girls in Primary schools in the rural areas by identifying qualified females from the villages who will become primary teachers in the villages. The main task is to train these teachers in their own environment and close to their communities.

This paper describes the efforts made by the Education Department Government of Balochistan with the assistance of donors and effective support of communities to make a significant break through in female education in the rural areas of Balochistan. This paper will also explain the main features of the research studies carried out on the effectiveness of this program by different organizations.

On the basis of these studies and the emerging trends of Education sector reforms I was given a task to revise the model of this program. With the help of discussions and consultation with teachers and field staff officers the revised version of MFTTP was developed. It is a beautiful blend of theory and practice spread over three years. Although it is an excellent model in theory, a huge number of female teachers have dropped out from the course in subsequent years and are finding out alternate easy ways for getting the certificate through Allama Iqbal Open University Courses or from some other private institutions.

This paper also looks into the realities of the introduction of any change and its sustainability. One must be very careful while bringing about change based only on a theoretical basis without taking into consideration field realities. It also reflects the alternate mechanism (shortcuts) present in the society and their attractiveness for teachers in getting annual increments or running salaries by proving them qualifications through such pirated certificates.

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## **Background and rationale**

Balochistan is the largest province in Pakistan, occupying almost 43% of the country's land area and is approximately the size of France. It is also the least populated province with only about 5% of the population residing there, 80% of whom are scattered in small villages. These villages have remained largely untouched by the advances of the modern

age, and largely ignored by the central authorities. Very few resources have been made available to these rural areas with the unfortunate result that education for all is extremely under-funded, and the most seriously affected by this neglect are the women and the girls.

The status of female education in rural Balochistan presents a depressing picture. Although illiteracy in Pakistan as a whole stands at 80% and growing, the literacy rate among rural women in Balochistan is bleaker. It is estimated that less than 2% of rural female in Balochistan are literate. Literate and illiterate traditions assign the women certain responsibilities such as cooking food, cleaning the house, child-bearing and rearing, and all other domestic support needed by her husband and other family members.

The benefits of education for girls in rural Balochistan have only recently being recognized. The Mobile Female Teacher Training Program was developed out of the realizations that girls and women of rural areas deserve an education and that their role in rural development depends on their larger participation in the process. The main features of this program were to train more female teachers in rural areas within the cultural context of rural areas by conducting training in the field to teach in their own villages

### **Purpose of intervention**

Besides this programme some other non-conventional approaches for rural female education were utilized in Balochistan. For the sake of consolidation and reviewing these programs in the light of new emerging trends in Education, the Government of Balochistan sent 12 senior teachers to Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) to complete the Master of Education (MEd) programme. Their main responsibility was to undertake the task of reviewing and refining these programs after completion of their MEd. Luckily I was also a member of that professional team.

After my MEd I was assigned the task of reviewing the Mobile Female Teacher Training program and to update it according to the emerging trends in education.

### **Intervention strategies**

I started working on this task along with my three other MEd colleagues. We studied the program in detail and met female teachers in their schools and communities. We also review the scheme of study of the three months' condensed version of Primary Teachers Certificate (PTC), which was used to train the primary teachers in this program.

The first thing we felt was that just three months of condensed training for a primary school teacher is not sufficient. So, in spite of resistance from teachers and parents, we tried to convince the provincial government to increase the duration of this training from three months to nine months but spread out over three years, with three months of training per year.

The enhanced training period was utilized for more practical activities rather than just theoretical training. Teachers are given more exposure to classroom teaching practice by developing teaching lessons and presenting them in classrooms.

Based on this teaching practice they are, for the first time, being encouraged to start thinking critically on their own activities through reflective practice. Student-centred activities were introduced and teachers were asked to develop these types of activities by keeping in their mind the actual situation and resources present in their own schools. They were tooled with the new joyful learning activities such as developing listening and speaking skills of students through story-telling, and singing poems and rhymes with their friends. In line with the needs of teacher, some new ideas of health, hygiene, multi-grade teaching and environmental education were introduced.

### **Assessing the impact of intervention**

This intervention started just two years ago and none of the teachers have completed the three years required mandatory period for the course. It is very difficult to see any significant impacts in this short time; however, sometimes the effectiveness of the process itself becomes the desired product. The female teachers trained through this revised version of the programme were continuously monitored through the existing system, that is, through a learning coordinator and district education field staff during all nine months after receiving three months of training.

According to the feedback from learning coordinators, head teachers and other education field staff, these teachers are now more confident and are trying to use some new strategies in their classrooms. Our introduction of the new module of health and hygiene in the revised version, according to the district field staff teacher, also produced very good impact on student environment and on other teachers working in these schools.

Another great achievement of this program is the attitude of teacher towards integrated textbooks. In Balochistan, the Education Department had introduced integrated books for classes 1 to 3, but due to a lack of training they have been splitting the books again

into subjects and are maintaining different notebooks for every subject. However, after training, they have started using these books in an integrated manner.

Another impact of this intervention has been seen in multi-grade teaching. Approximately 50% of the schools in Balochistan are single-teacher schools. Based on this need we introduced a module of multi-grade teaching in the new version of the programme. It worked very well and now field staff officers are demanding this multi-grade training for other teachers also.

A module of continuous assessment was also introduced in this training. It was also well received by the teachers and students in the schools. It has provided teachers with a better assessment technique and allows them to take relevant remedial measures well in time.

Above all, due to the spreading of the training over three years teachers feel more attachment and affiliation with their education system and also give more value to three years training than just one, short three-month training. It provides them more opportunity to apply theory to practice after equal intervals of time. They have more chances to share their achievements and problems with colleagues and teachers and to update their knowledge continuously from different inputs.

Due to the three years continuous professional attachment teachers are given some on-the-job assignments such as introduction of easy action research in their school and trying out some new interventions in classroom management, teaching methodologies and interaction with community. They are asked to write reflective journals of these new interventions regularly and to share these with their head teachers and learning coordinators. Some of them are so fascinated with the outcomes of these processes that they write letters continuously to us. They are very happy with liveliness of teaching learning processes in their classrooms and with the significant positive change in the behaviour and achievements of their students.

It is human nature that when some one does some good work she/he needs some appreciation and encouragement; hence, these teachers too want to show their good work and innovations to their master trainers and resource persons. They are strongly demanding that we (their Master Trainers) be sent to visit their classrooms to see the positive changes they have produced with their new interventions. They also share these achievements with our team through their letters and phone calls.

Shortcut seekers, and those who were previously taking wrong benefits of just three months training to board on education salary, are now discouraged from their incorrect practices due to this in-service mode of training.

One important impact of this intervention directly affects us, the PDTs of AKU-IED. Due to the positive and comprehensive intervention, the Government of Balochistan Education Department has started recognizing our abilities and we, the PDTs, have been assigned many important professional tasks. We are given preference in all sorts of professional discussions and input as compared to the other traditional subject specialists and teachers.

## **Discussion**

In the beginning of this program there was a myth that “parents in the rural areas don’t want their girls to go to school”; however, this myth was proven wrong. The fact was disclosed by a survey that showed that 28,000 girls in rural areas were attending schools with boys, and many were being counted in the school register as boys.

A large number of female candidates turning up every year for training in MFTTP shows that the programme is popular in Balochistan. Although in this way a large number of vacant posts were filled with trained female teachers in rural areas and fulfilled the objective of providing access to females in the rural areas to education, there were a few concerns about the quality of education in these schools. The main reasons were that the shorter duration of training did not change the attitudes of these teachers themselves. All necessary skills required for a primary school teacher were not always developed in the teachers in the brief time available.

Another drawback was the relaxation of qualification in some cases. Some teachers who had only been educated till Class 5 or Class 8 were also appointed in this process. It meant that besides the need for development of pedagogical skills, there was also an acute need for the enrichment of content knowledge of the trainees. Hence, in the new version of Mobile Female Teacher Training Program all curricula from classes 1 to 5 are included, along with different methodologies.

In this process the role of the master trainer is just provide participants with awareness and guidance for planning, preparation and presentation of model lessons and in the use of different teaching methodologies according to the needs of the environment, resources available, and the mental level of students. Then, the teachers are supposed to plan,

develop and present daily lessons of different subjects and levels in actual classrooms and necessary feedback is given on the spot by their master trainers. This arrangement not only enriches their content knowledge but also polishes their pedagogical skills.

One very dangerous and threatening situation to the existing Government Colleges of Elementary Teachers was that this program, in its previous mode, was providing a shortcut to females for joining the education profession as a teacher after just getting a three-month training. The females in the province, instead of going to elementary colleges for a year-long PTC training, were managing to get admission in the three-month PTAC through different means.

This intervention in the form of a revised version of this training has tried to overcome some of these problems. The prolonged training period (nine months) discouraged the shortcut seekers. Its mode of conduction and frame work, that is, three months each spread out over three years, provided a beautiful mechanism of turning theory into practice. In the nine months of teaching, participants try to apply all the skills they have learned in three month of training and, the following year, they come back with lots of experiences to share and questions to seek suitable answers to.

### **Lessons learnt**

In education no intervention should be considered perfect for all times and in every situation. The same thing has happened with this program. It was a very successful program at one time and several impact studies showed its effectiveness towards the achievement of the goal of providing access to females of rural areas to school. But, there was a need to review this program after regular intervals because people always misuse and exploit the simplicity of these interventions. All sort of interventions have some boundary conditions and limitation that need to be kept in view.

In the process of teacher change the increased collegiality among the teachers improved the likelihood of risk-taking and of trying to adopt new approaches in the classroom. In this way things started moving towards a positive direction.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the above discussion about the program and the role of the PDTs in modernization of this program, teacher change is clearly seen as a very complex phenomenon. It requires very careful planning and comprehensive implementation with

consistency and sustainability.

In the Government sector there are quite a few people who can produce a significant change in the system, provided that they are allowed to do so and their work is appreciated. In this particular program, the Government provided full support to PDTs for reviewing and planning the new version of MFPPP. They accept this task as a challenge and worked on it day and night and, with the help of different stake holders, they made this program a success.

In order to develop a critical mass in the Government system there is a need to revise a few very rigid rules for sending the teachers to the AKU-IED MEd programme so that all benefits and service protection are provided. In addition, there is also a need to place teachers appropriately once they've completed their degree programme.