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# A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF ADULT LITERACY AND COACHING CENTERS

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the impact of the educational interventions (the Adult Literacy Centers (ALCs) established by The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and Coaching Centers (CCs) run by the Aga Khan Education Service (AKES,P) in the Northern Areas of Pakistan in the regions of Baltistan and Nagar. The communities of both these regions have been reluctant to mobilize women for education. The centers were opened in order to change this perception, as well as to create an environment in which females could contribute to the overall development of these communities. More than 200 ALCs and 39 coaching centers are functioning in the above-mentioned two regions.

Two studies (Baig, S., 2001, & Baig, F., 2001) have been carried out which explore the need for non-formal education in those areas, set out the practical results of the interventions to date, and make recommendations for the future. This paper is written against the backdrop of those studies and in the light of a recent study conducted in February 2003.

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## **Methodology**

Individual interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and document analysis was used to explore the realities, and the findings were triangulated. The study participants were the teachers of both the Adult Literacy and Coaching Centers, graduates of the centers, members of village education committees, and community leaders. Three kinds of questions such as open-ended, probing and close-ended were asked to obtain maximum data. (See Annexure). Field notes, including a reflective journal and a tape recorder were used as tools for data collection.

Data analysis is indeed a complex process which needs a lot of struggle and hard work.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 95) “data analysis is a messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative and fascinating process”. However, we applied the inductive method to draw appropriate conclusions by playing with the data purely collected from the individual informants, focus group and observants. For this, we sought guidance from Patton (1990) who elaborates “inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis come from the data. They emerge out of data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis”.

The analysis process was developed by reading all the responses of individuals, focus group participants and notes taken during observations. These were coded, and a search was made for the repeated and common points. Thus, common themes and sub-themes emerged progressively with the analysis and review of the whole data.

### **Theoretical background**

According to the culture of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, community leaders make most of the decisions regarding any planned project but the decisions, particularly those related to women, do not work well without close consultation with the village population at large, especially the family members of the intended participants. Wolfendale (1991 p. 7) recognizes the imperative of obtaining the consent of communities before establishing any project:

The involvement provides for parents themselves to learn, to grow, to explore possibilities, to become familiar with organizations such as schools and local educational authorities...consultation with and involvement of parents in discussions and planning of school policies and discipline and behaviors management constitute preventive measures of a positive nature (p. 45).

She further suggests that involvement of parents should include decision-making, and not simply information-giving: all parents have a right to be involved, and to contribute to projects of the school (pp. 7-8). Likewise, Anne Sharrock (1997) says that home and school are probably the two social institutions which have the most far-reaching influence on our lives if we think in terms of their joint effect. It is educationally and philosophically desirable for the child’s home and school environment not to operate in isolation (pp. 9-10).

From our experience, we have learnt that active involvement not only of parents but of

all the stakeholders such as head teachers, teachers, students and other members of a community can certainly make a school and centers improve holistically. In this respect, Pamela Munn (1993) argues that without doubt, teachers, parents and pupils should work together in a spirit of practical partnership; then, not only do pupils gain in obvious ways, but there are also benefits of achievements and relationships that are both lasting and developmental (p. 104).

In many regions of the Northern Areas women's literacy is not considered important as women are largely confined to their homes. In this connection Taylor, quoted by Weiler (2001, p. 77) says, "women's literacy is devalued because it belongs to the home, to the care of children and to the maintenance of private life". Likewise, Mghadam argues, "for men, education must ensure continuity with progress without disrupting the status quo... because the political and social status of women is secondary to that of men in most societies. Proposing an improvement in their status could similarly be viewed as a threat to the status quo" (1992, p. 244)

Regarding the importance of female education, Robinson-Pant (2002, p. 359), referred to by Safiullah Baig, writes that education provides girls with an opportunity and skill to maintain communication with their parents, particularly in times of crisis<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, it seems that reading and writing might provide a private space for women to reflect on their experience. In support of this, Chambers (1992) maintains that perhaps for uneducated women, education provides an alternative, a reversal of the traditional women's role away from normal practice and towards its opposite. All these ideas and insights broadened our thinking and guided us to consider various factors while carrying out the study.

## **Findings**

The study revealed two major themes: the quantitative and qualitative impact of the interventions. It also explored some future implications, some potential challenges and some measures to take in future for sustainability of the centers.

### ***Quantitative impact***

The document analysis revealed that ALCs have provided 3723 females between 10 and 45 years old with an opportunity for study, and 126 teachers obtained employment. 116 teachers (the total number trained in Baltistan) provide literacy classes in the ALCs in

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<sup>1</sup> In Pakistan, it is the custom for married women to live in the homes of their husbands' families.

the mornings, and in the afternoons they provide after-school coaching at home to an average of 23 students of formal schools. Additionally, each teacher conducts meetings with the women of three villages every month in order to share the learning and discussions carried out in the centers, and to discuss social and cultural issues related to their particular area.

In some villages there is no access to education beyond primary schools, especially for girls. In such villages coaching centers have been set up to provide tuition to those girls wanting to continue their education.

Through the coaching centers, access to education has been provided to more than 80 large and small villages. There are 2002 female and 18 male students studying middle and secondary level education in the coaching centers and 54 female and 99 males are teaching in these centers as paid tutors. Up till now 492 girl students have passed the public matriculation exam, of which 40 are working in NGO schools, 35 are teaching in the coaching centers, 70 are teaching in community primary and social action programme schools, 67 are working for health education, 2 are working in AKRS, P. Furthermore, 55 graduates of the centers are studying towards higher education.

### ***Qualitative impact***

It is understood that quantitative impact works as a motive or vehicle for making qualitative differences. The overall goal of the programmes mentioned above was to bring about change in the commonly-held discouraging attitude towards the education of females and their participation in the holistic development of their communities. The study resulted in the following very encouraging findings, which can indeed contribute to the overall goal of the interventions.

### ***Promotion of awareness of the need for children's education***

It was clearly and confidently mentioned by the study participants that not only the teachers of the centers, but also the graduates of the centers have started to give due importance to the education of their children. They send their children dressed in neat and clean uniforms, provide books and other material, give time for studies at home, and develop a schedule for their studies. Amina, a graduate of ALC, says “before attending this centre, I used to force my children not to go to school and go to the pasture to graze the sheep. But now I keep a check on my children's time schedule for study”. Before, such women sent their children for games at a suitable time but they did not care about

their children's activities after school. A tutor of coaching centre Minapin in Nagar, while discussing the outcomes of the ALCs, said:

Two of my sisters in-law are going to the ALC. One of them, although not having attended any school or centre, is very sharp. I was astonished when I saw her making my son (who studies in the infants' class) hold the pen correctly and helping him to write the Urdu alphabet. The boy was writing the letter 'bay' in Urdu (which gives the 'b' sound); he was writing it from left to right. She gripped his hand with her hand and helped him to hold the pencil appropriately, and to write from right to left, saying that we write Urdu from right to left.

### ***Promotion of health and hygiene awareness***

In the group discussion the teachers maintained that there was a clear change in attitudes towards health and hygiene.. Now the graduates, as well as other women of the villages where the centers are working, wear clean dresses, take showers and keep their children and houses as clean as possible. Fatima, a graduate of ALC, said that the women of her village observe Cleanliness Day each Friday. On that day, in addition to cleaning their houses, clean all the dirt from the streets. They also have increased the frequency of bathing. Amina, a lady from Shigar valley, happily stated that she did not even take a bath once in a month before, but now she as well as her children take a bath weekly.

### ***Change in attitude of both men and women***

There has been a considerable change in the attitude of both men and women. Husbands have changed their rude attitude into a more polite and encouraging one, as Bano from Bara village said:

I feel very different now. My husband behaved very rudely and disgracefully towards me in the past. Now when he sees me gaining knowledge and helping my children with their schoolwork, he has no more negative attitude. Instead he respects me and lends a hand in the household chores.

The women also have begun to reflect on their attitude and given up their unacceptable habits. A student in this respect told her story:

I used to have a lot of arguments with my mother and siblings. I quarreled

with my mother and disgraced her on many occasions, but after participating in the activities of this centre, I see a complete change in me. I cannot believe I am the same Kulsoom. Now I have realized the mother's worth and respect her and take care of my siblings.

These statements explicitly tell us that educational activities such as various discussions on diverse issues and the environment has broadened the thinking of people and has encouraged them to be more open-minded.

### ***Development of self-confidence and decision-making***

It is said that confidence creates a 'can-do' approach. In this study it was repeatedly mentioned that the women have built considerable confidence, and this has developed their decision-making power. Many young girls go and teach in the madrasa (religious schools). They also go together with the males to mosques during the religious days and take part in speeches and other related activities. A cohort of coaching centre students mentioned this with pride. They said that:

In the absence of our teachers in the centre in 1999, we decided to go in a group to the religious leader and tell him to ask our parents to allow us to come to the mosque, and we succeeded in doing so. If we had not taken that decision, we would not have been able to avail ourselves of any opportunity, and we would have remained confined to our houses.

### ***Development of literacy skills in Urdu***

A very encouraging impact of the centers is that those women who had never been to a school or a learning centre have also learnt to read, write and speak in Urdu (which is not their mother tongue). Fozia, in her study (ibid) has found that out of the 29 women interviewed, about 19 participants could read and write simple sentences and letters in Urdu, and 11 participants could speak Urdu. She further says that most of the respondents could easily understand her questions, and only five could not respond fluently. But they also seemed very confident as they interacted with her by using some vocabulary of both Urdu and Balti (the local language). A 36 year-old woman in Nagar seemed, throughout her discussion, as though she had completed her education up to secondary level, but at the end of interview it was learnt that she had not attended any formal school. She had gained confidence, knowledge and language skills from the three-year course in the ALC. She added, "I am now teaching Urdu to my daughter who is in Class 7".

It is hoped that if classes could be arranged for groups of females according to their academic ability, and if there were tests after each year of study, there would be many women like her who would easily pass the middle and matriculation level public exams.

### ***Enhanced personal status and empowerment***

Another potential contribution that these centers have made is that they have given an awareness of empowerment to women at the household level and even outside. They have realized their potentialities and capabilities through the lectures and discussions in the centers. Fozia (ibid) has written that Mehra Bano, a teacher from Khaplu centre, calls all the women from her village to her home once in a month and delivers lectures on different topics such as environmental, social, gender and health issues, and the importance of savings. The women share their experiences and problems and look for solutions. She further said that they eagerly participate in these gatherings and develop a sense of solidarity with each other.

This was very strongly noticed in Nagar region as well. On a visit to to that region in connection with this study, Hurmat Khan noted:

When I entered the house that had been decided as the venue for the focus group discussion, I was surprised to see that there was nobody there. I thought that the women would not come for the discussion since the men of Nagar might not appreciate an outsider like me coming to discuss things with women. But after a few minutes I heard a lot of voices outside the room, and saw a woman opening the door. She paid regards and asked the others to come in. They were 14 of them, and they came into the room as if they were my students, and I had known them for many years. Moreover, the discussion was amazing. They responded to my questions and raised many social issues, which I could never have imagined or expected from such women. They said that they had been discussing such issues regularly in the centers and had come up with solutions for many of them. They added that they had started a campaign to bring all the school-age girls to school, and had succeeded, as all the girls except from one household had joined different schools.

It seems that women of that region have developed their understanding about social issues and the need of education for females. Another hidden factor could be that since women have been deprived of mobility for education and making decisions, they have

seized the opportunity and taken bold steps because of the open discussions they had in the centers.

### ***Awareness and understanding of development projects***

The learning in the centers has encouraged women to look for various small projects, which generate income for the community. Many participants have made money by utilizing local fruit and vegetables. They have established small projects such as making pickle and jam, and drying fruits. Thus they earn money and deposit it in the bank and use it for their children's education as they contributed their share for the matching grant scheme. (This scheme has been introduced by AKES,P to sustain schools and coaching centers by creating an endowment fund in which community savings are matched on a 1:5 basis.)

All these efforts indicate that women can make rapid progress in the overall development of any community if they are provided with opportunities for learning and with some amount of money to establish small projects and enterprises.

### **Challenges**

The challenges are few as compared to the benefits of the centers. Almost all the samples of the study mentioned that the workload on women is much greater than that of men. They work to grow crops, look after livestock and do household chores. Secondly, the conservative attitude of some religious and political leaders does not fully encourage females to go to the centers. The third challenge is that very young women can neither go the coaching centers nor can they sit with the older women. Fourth, is the paucity of resources for salaries of teachers and for buying materials. Finally, the demand for a centre in each village is difficult to meet, as there are more than 1000 villages in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Other challenges included shortage of time for satisfactory coverage of the syllabus, lack of coverage for certain subjects, especially English and Maths, lack of properly-conducted examinations and suitably qualified teachers. Some centers even had to close: it had originally been envisaged that in some areas where funding was short, communities would themselves take over the running of the centers after one year. In the event however, this did not prove practically possible. Additionally, some community/religious leaders do not appreciate female education, as Safullah (2002 p.12) found in his study. He writes, "Men seem to think that women need the kind of project which can increase production within the existing subsistence agriculture rather

than providing alternative activities which might offer women more economic and personal autonomy”. All these factors have contributed to closure of some of the centers.

### **Future implications**

The study revealed that the continuity of the centers in the future will have many advantages, such as the increase of the female literacy and employment rate. Constant efforts of women will change the conservative attitude of the religious and political leaders. Due to the importance to children’s education given by the mothers, the quality of teaching and learning will improve in the schools. Women will be able to take appropriate decisions on their own. Local resources will be utilized for education and for generating funds for various projects of the government and NGOs run in partnership with the communities.

### **Measures for improvement and sustainability**

The participants of the study came up with the following suggestion for the improvement of the function of the centers:

- Linkages should be created with government and other NGOs to create funds and to provide technical support to the centers and to increase their numbers.
- Opening centers at cluster level where one center will cater to all the adjoining villages and charging a fee to the students, will help to create more resources and minimize the demand for more centers.
- The AKRSP and AKES,P will have to frame active Village Education Committees and enhance the capacity of communities by providing them with training on planning and managing the centers and schools, as well as on mobilizing of local resources.
- The duration of the course might be increased and changed into a certificated course so that the graduates can get admissions in formal schools if they choose to.
- An increase in the number of experienced teachers will attract more women, particularly older ones, to the centers.
- It was also suggested that some of the content is difficult for older women, so reviewing it to bring it to their level would help all students to work at their own pace.
- Frequent monitoring of the activities in the centers will encourage both teachers and students to take corrective measures in good time.

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## **Annexure**

### **Questionnaire for the impact study of ALCs and CCs**

#### ***Adult Literacy Centers (ALCs)***

1. How many ALCs were opened?
2. How many centers are closed and why?
3. How many centers are functioning now?
4. How many participants have completed courses from these centers?
5. How many teachers are teaching in the centers?
6. Are they doing any follow-up work?
7. In your opinion, what is the impact of these ALCs (qualitative and quantitative)?
8. What challenges do the students and teachers face while studying in the centers?  
Should more centers be opened?
9. In your opinion, what will be the actual impact of the centers on the society in the future?
10. What are the general concerns of the community activists and parents about the continuation of the centers?

#### **Coaching Centers (CCs)**

1. What is the number of CCCs, students and teachers?
2. What is the impact of the centers (qualitative and quantitative)?
3. Which fields are the graduates working in?
4. How many are enrolled in higher education studies?
5. In your opinion, what will be the impact of the centers on the society in the future?
6. What challenges do the centers face?
7. What challenges do the parents face?
8. How can we improve the function of the centers in the future?
9. Why do parents not avail the centers?