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Fostering Inclusive Education in Pakistan: Access and Quality in Primary Education through Community School Networks

Khadim Hussain

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Khadim Hussain is a guest scholar of the Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution.

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Fostering Inclusive Education in Pakistan: Access and Quality in Primary Education through Community School Networks

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important factor in any country's social and economic development. It builds human capital by producing informed and productive citizens. Education creates opportunities for marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities to escape poverty. A well-educated community promotes peace and leads towards prosperity. It is critical that countries establish, and work toward, national and international educational goals to educate their youth with the knowledge, attitudes, skills and competencies they need — free of discrimination based on gender or ability — to contribute socially and economically to the nation's well-being.

Women and people with disabilities are still at a severe disadvantage in many parts of the world, especially in Pakistan. Therefore, gender disparities and sociocultural

differences must be incorporated into the national education goals through inclusive education. No country can reach economic success and prosperity when excluding over half its population.

It has become increasingly evident that schools and communities must work in collaboration to achieve their mutual objective of a high-quality education for all. This paper shares the success story of the grassroots community organization GRACE Association, which works to educate girls and children with disabilities in northern Pakistan. GRACE Association makes the case that in order to foster inclusive education in low-income developing countries like Pakistan, there is a need for community school networks (CSNs) in order to improve school quality and accessibility for all children.

Research shows that the CSN model is a catalyst to address factors that prevent girls

and children with disabilities from accessing their fundamental right to public education. This paper outlines how CSNs create a collaborative structure that decentralizes power and increases community participation by distributing resources and enhancing schools' capacity to enroll all children and improve learning outcomes.

THE ISSUE

Educating Girls and Children with Disabilities in Gilgit-Baltistan: The State of Inclusive Education

Pakistan — the world's sixth largest country, with a population of more than 180 million — has 7.3 million primary school-age children out of school, more than any other country in the region. A 2011 UNICEF reports states that "if progress is not accelerated, even more children will be out of school by 2015." Due to widespread illiteracy — just 56 percent of the population can read — Pakistan is not able to fully leverage its human capital.¹ Pakistan's government expenditure on education, 2 percent of its gross domestic product, is among the lowest in the world.² Corruption, a lack of political will, a centralized governance system, poverty and civic unrest have resulted in a Pakistani community that does not participate in, nor feel any sense of ownership over, programs and projects related to their children's education.

A survey report launched by South Asia Forum for Education Development found that the majority of primary school children assessed in Gilgit-Baltistan could not even

read letters words and sentences of their text books.³ The 2011 study in found that half of grade 5 students were not able to read a story and only 37 percent of grade 3 students were able to read a sentence.⁴

Girls' opportunities for education are grim in Gilgit-Baltistan. Girls account for 57 percent of children excluded from primary education.⁵ Girls from remote rural villages in the mountainous region face significant barriers due to patriarchal beliefs, poverty, inadequate government policies, poor-quality education in both public and private primary schools, bureaucratic attitudes, widespread hierarchy in education systems and a lack of facilities.

In many rural villages of Pakistan, girls are often not allowed to attend schools due to male-dominant environments and cultural sensitivities that support the misconception that education is not beneficial for women. In remote villages, where subsistence farming is usually the only means of survival, families often can only afford to send one child to school, and thus typically send the boy because he is considered the future breadwinner. Girls' contribution to the household is seen as "running the stove." Furthermore, families commonly believe that daughters are others' property since they will marry out of the family and end up contributing their future husband's household. Thus, girls' education is seen as an investment in someone else's family.

Misinterpretation of Islam, which actually places equal importance on education of

both males and females, also hinders girls' access to education. In some villages, communities oppose education for their girls based on the belief that it is "sinful." Extremists bombed a girls' school in Chilas, Gilgit-Baltistan Province, in 2011 because the school was seen as "haram" (sinful). It had no boundary wall to protect it from the eyes of male passers-by.⁶ Even in communities where families are willing to enroll their girls in school, attendance and retention rates suffer if schools are located far from girls' homes because commuting time could be otherwise dedicated to domestic duties.⁷ Most villages have no schools for girls, while they often have one or more schools for boys.

Government funds are not allocated to address girls' issues, such as the need for separate toilets, boundary walls and female teachers. The recent Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey revealed that 40 percent of schools in Pakistan are without boundary walls, 36 percent without drinking water facilities, 61 percent without electricity, 39 percent without sanitary facilities and 6 percent without any buildings. There is generally a shortage of desks and chairs, and some schools do not even have mats where students may sit. Furthermore, the condition of most coeducational primary level schools is poor and most rural school buildings consist of a mixture of mud and wood.⁸ Schools focusing specifically on special education are found only in major cities. Inclusive education is a new concept to public and private schools in rural areas.

Inclusive education is based on the notion that all children — regardless of their gender, ability, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, social origin or economic condition — should have access to "quality education that meets basic learning needs and enriches lives."⁹ This goes beyond simply ensuring that children who are already able to access schools can do so. It is also about governments, organizations, and communities working to identify the barriers that prevent would-be students from accessing opportunities for quality education and removing obstacles that lead to exclusion. Girls and children with disabilities are at a particular disadvantage. In rural areas girls are responsible for household chores and caring for siblings. Early marriage is common, which also prohibits a girl's education.

The situation is particularly dire for the most marginalized — girls and children with disabilities — in the Gilgit Baltistan Province. Pakistan ratified the UN Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities and has included the right to free basic education for all children in Article 25a of the country's constitution.¹⁰ However, without the political will, a comprehensive action plan, effective implementation and community awareness of the right to — and importance of — education for all children, these documents fail to have any real impact on the lives of those they were designed to benefit.

Children with disabilities are the most seriously disadvantaged in terms of accessing

education. Parents and communities writ large often consider children with disabilities to be incapable or unworthy of any education in the first place. Discriminatory social attitudes attribute shame, humiliation or disgrace to children with disabilities and their families. A child's disability is perceived to be God's punishment for a parent's sin. Children with disabilities are seen as better off at home than at school. These opinions are reinforced by the poor quality of education offered at most schools for girls and children with disabilities. Furthermore, children with disabilities have needs which are not addressed in schools or elsewhere because of the shortage of skilled teachers and specialists and because of poor pediatric health services.¹¹

The lack of available data on prevalence of disability in Pakistan is a serious problem. No scientific study or survey has been done at the national or provincial level to comprehensively assess the problem. The available data shows that people with disabilities comprise at least 15 percent of Pakistan's population,¹² but they are mostly unseen, unheard, and fail to be considered in the country's development and planning projects.¹³ According to the director-general for special education in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education, there are 43,122 disabled children in special education schools in the country, constituting only 4 percent of the total population of children with disabilities, as estimated in the 1998 national census.¹⁴ Research shows that girls

with disabilities were less likely to enroll in school than boys.

The Government of Pakistan is making initial efforts to promote inclusion, such as a fifty per cent discount for public transportation for people with disabilities. The governments at federal and provincial level are also encouraging international organizations to develop inclusive model schools in the capital cities, but these efforts need to be scaled up throughout the country.

Some of the main challenges to inclusive education programs in Pakistan are the following:

1. Negative attitudes of parents, teachers, politicians, services providers and community members towards children with disabilities;
2. Lack of parental awareness about children with disabilities and their potential;
3. Accessibility of school buildings, classrooms toilets, playground and transport;
4. Biases in the curriculum, assessment, and examination system;
5. Limited financial resources;
6. Inadequate support system including insufficient trained and qualified professionals, medical and paramedical staff;
7. The need for continuous follow-up and monitoring of activities; and
8. The need for all stakeholders to share experiences and provide support for implementation of inclusive education in letter and spirit.

CASE STUDY:

A Success Story from Gilgit-Baltistan

Geographically remote Gilgit-Baltistan is situated in the shadows of three of the world's mightiest mountain ranges — the Karakoram, the Hindukush and the Himalayas. The entire region is known as “heaven on the earth” by climbers, trekkers, hikers and anglers,¹⁵ however, its political status is still shrouded in uncertainty due to the dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan. The Pakistani government granted some “controlled” autonomy to the region as a semiprovince in 2009.¹⁶ Gilgit-Baltistan's population is currently estimated at about 2 million people,¹⁷ scattered over an area of 72,496 square kilometers.¹⁸ Access to most communities is difficult due to the region's terrain, which is comprised of towering snow-capped mountains, rivers and streams, coupled with harsh climatic conditions and an underdeveloped communications infrastructure. This region is considered to be one of the least developed in Pakistan.

Villagers in Skardu, a district in Gilgit-Baltistan, have lived in isolation from the rest of the world, dedicating their individual and collective efforts to immediate survival, without the means to achieve socioeconomic improvement or development. Subsistence agriculture accounts for the livelihoods of most in the village. Crop production is limited by water shortages, disease and inefficient farming practices for harvesting and processing. Meanwhile,

conflict over the use of scarce natural resources is routine.

Citizens in the region face extreme inaccessibility to education, health and other social services. The social status of women is extremely low; they are treated as servants, bearing the full burden of productive and reproductive responsibilities. Education is not a priority, especially for girls, and the few elite families — those with exposure to other communities — mostly choose to educate their sons. On the whole, communities are not aware of the concept of “rights,” let alone the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, including girls. As recently as 1992, it was considered sinful to educate girls in my 10,000-resident village of Muntazarabad Kwardu.

Growing up, six classmates and I attended school by traversing six kilometers every day. Due to my post-polio paralysis, my friends carried me in a pushcart to school. My classmates and I were aggrieved by the limited number of children enrolled in the school and devised a plan to motivate parents to place greater value on education and literacy and to send their children to school. We embarked upon an educational campaign, going door-to-door to talk with parents about the importance of educating their children. We faced criticism and humiliation from several influential citizens, notably the clergy who opposed the campaign.

The results of our campaign did not appear promising at first, but our determined efforts worked over time and the number of

school-going children rose from seven to 40 in one year alone. This achievement encouraged more parents to enroll their children, especially their boys. With more students enrolled, I helped establish a student organization to inculcate the importance and need for education among the community and youth. We undertook actions to enhance access to education, with girls' rights to education as the primary focus. In 1993, we established a girls' school, Al-Zehra Girls School Kwardu, in a small room of a community member's house. It was the first public action by any group in the history of the town to make basic education accessible to girls. In the first year, only two girls enrolled. The entire community, particularly the community elders, resisted the change. In spite of their hostility, we continued our mission, and in the third year 22 girls enrolled.

We established a book bank and collected textbooks from students as they graduated to higher classes, then redistributed the books to needy students. We also introduced a model of cooperative learning, in which the students of higher grades were responsible for teaching the students in lower grades. In 1995, our efforts were transformed into a community welfare and development initiative.

With the number of students enrolled increasing at Al-Zehra Girls School, the space became insufficient. My team contacted the MARAFI Foundation Baltistan, a trust sponsored by a wealthy family from Kuwait. Our application was considered on the condition that the community donates the land.

We entered into a dialogue with community members, youth, elders and other influential citizens. The community's eager involvement in the initiative created a need to establish a community-based organization to formalize decisionmaking and community ownership over the initiative. The student organization morphed into a large community organization, Waliul Asr Falahi Anjuman (WAFI), which means "a community organization under the supervision of our spiritual imam (leader) for welfare and development." Under the umbrella of WAFI, the community donated land for the construction of a school building. This was the first milestone in mobilizing the community to undertake a development initiative. MARAFI provided PKR 350,000 (approximately U.S. \$7,000) for the construction of the school. The cost saving from the voluntary labor provided by the community was invested in the construction of an irrigation channel to transport natural spring water to the community to address water shortage problems. This was recognized as a major achievement for children by the elders and all other community members.

In subsequent years, WAFI succeeded in motivating the community to participate in village welfare activities such as the construction of a mother and child health care center and a community development center, the establishment of the Al-Muntazar Academy building (a coeducation English medium primary school), a water supply and sanitation project in Muntazarabad, the construction of pipe irrigation water channel, the establishment of fruit and forest nurseries and a

women's literacy center. The organization also started seeking outside support for new educational initiatives to fulfill the increasing demands of the community. For the first time, this community had a local forum continuously working to improve its welfare. Community mobilization has been the cornerstone for all achievements and guaranteed the sustainability of the initiatives.

Apart from working for the welfare of the villagers, WAFA started developing linkages and partnerships with various development organizations, including the Aga Khan Education Services Program and Aga Khan Rural Support Program, and the Water and Sanitation Extension Program. WAFA networked with public sector departments at the regional level, advocating for the socioeconomic rights of marginalized community members.

In 2000, I was named chief organizer of the Kwardu Development Union (KDU), an advocacy and lobbying forum for the valley, working to mobilize additional public sector resources for grassroots community development. WAFA's approach to community mobilization became a key approach that was also adopted by the KDU to complement and support enhanced development. To date, this has been the organization's principal method for working in partnership with other development agencies. In 2001, WAFA played a key role in collaboration with a few other community based organizations and formed the Baltistan NGOs Network (BNN), a collective advocacy initiative with the shared objectives of networking, capacity building and

promoting gender equality and development. BNN played a vital role in activating CBOs in the region by launching capacity-building training workshops, networking conferences, advocacy campaigns and a gender equality resource center in Skardu, Baltistan.

In 2006, I organized a meeting of like-minded community development volunteers to reflect on our successes and failures. The meeting focused on identifying pragmatic approaches to addressing the root causes and effects of poverty, environmental degradation, conflict, socioeconomic discrimination and social exclusion. The outcome of the meeting was the formation of a nonprofit organization, GRACE Association Pakistan, dedicated to making a significant contribution to alleviating the social conditions of vulnerable communities living in the least developed parts of the country. GRACE Association's first initiative was the establishment of GRACE Public School Skardu, the first inclusive school in Skardu city. Fourteen percent of its students are children with physical, hearing and speech impairments, 60 percent are female and 26 percent are male.¹⁹ The main beneficiaries of GRACE Public School are populations displaced from the Pakistan-India border area by conflict. GRACE also supports rural communities in Layyah by promoting inclusive education through the GRACE-INDUS Public School Bhagal Layyah in the Southern Punjab Province of Pakistan.

GRACE Association has launched a micro-scholarship program for 14 to 18 year-old adolescents from socioeconomically disad-

vantaged families in the Baltistan region. This program offers after-school English-language learning opportunities for boys and girls, with priority given to children from the poorest families. This program has created change in the parents' and community's attitudes toward gender equality. Today, the villagers and communities served by GRACE Association are operating and supporting their own schools successfully. There are more than 700 children enrolled — 70 percent of whom are girls and 5 percent of whom are children with disabilities. GRACE educational and community development initiatives in Baltistan have demonstrated that comprehensive community-school partnerships can be successful interventions to address barriers to accessing education for all children.²⁰

WHAT IS NEEDED

Community School Networks: A Democratic Solution and Effective Approach to Promoting Inclusive Quality Primary Education

School networks were established in the United Kingdom and India as early as the 1940s to enable rural schools to pool together resources for education. This model involves grouping several schools together to form a cluster or network.²¹ School clusters have been particularly popular in Latin America (including Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru), and increasingly prominent on other continents. In Asia and Africa, the system has been popular in countries like

Burma, India, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, South Africa and Zimbabwe and the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka.²² However, literature review shows no evidence of school networks system in Pakistan.

In the context of this study, a Community School Network (CSN) is a group of member schools initiated and driven by local communities to achieve common objectives. Schools participating in CSNs can include government, semi-government, private and community primary schools. A standard CSN is made up of 20 to 30 primary schools within a geographic area. CSNs establish a resource center as a meeting space, ideally located at a community development center run by a civil society organization where other social and commercial services are also available. When there is more than one CSN in a geographic area, there should be a central district resource center to facilitate collaboration. CSN members agree to share human, financial and material resources to ensure access to education for all children and promote quality, equity and efficiency in all member schools.

Why Community School Networks?

Pakistan's Ministry of Education stated in the 2009 National Education Policy that government education systems have failed in delivering meaningful education. The national policy document states that Pakistan has made progress on a number of education indicators in recent years, but admits that education in Pakistan suffers from two key deficiencies: (1) at all levels, access to edu-

cational opportunities remains low; and (2) the quality of education is weak, not only in relation to Pakistan's goals but also in international comparisons. On the Education Development Index, Pakistan ranks at the bottom, along with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.²³

The 2009 National Education Policy argues that the two fundamental causes of a weak education sector are (1) a lack of commitment to education, and (2) an implementation gap that has thwarted the application of policies. The commitment gap is a result of two factors, a lack of belief in education's value for socioeconomic and human development, and a lack of belief in the fundamental goals of education. The policy implementation gap is believed to be more pervasive because it is affected by multiple aspects of government, such as the allocation and use of resources that often remain unspent. Often, the educational allocations are diverted for personal reasons. Political influence and favoritism interfere with the allocation of resources for schools, recruitment, training and posting of teachers and the results of examinations and assessments. The Pakistani government realizes that a fundamental change in the thinking that informs education policy at all levels is needed so that the objectives of education policy serve the interests of students and learners rather than of those who develop policy or implement programs.²⁴

Pakistan's likelihood of achieving universal primary education by 2015 is poor. In support of its "Vision 2030," the Planning Commission of Pakistan argues for a change in

mindset to address the lack of commitment in policy implementation to achieve universal primary education. Pakistan requires community involvement in the school system and CSNs may be one of the best solutions. The fundamental goals of CSNs are to improve the quality of teaching and learning. By embracing a participatory approach to educational development, CSNs play an active role in raising awareness of the importance of education, especially for girls and children with disabilities. Improving the physical accessibility of schools is high on the agenda of CSNs, which they address by raising funds to modify existing government and private primary school buildings to include ramps and handicap accessible restrooms and building school boundary walls to ensure security for female students.

Greater participation from parents and other community members can support inclusive schools' capacity to enroll all children and deliver a high-quality education addressing the needs of children with special needs. Compounding the barriers to education for girls and children with disabilities is the lack of community participation in Pakistan. Schools perform better when they are an integral and positive part of a community and benefit from community resources including involvement by parents, local education leaders, community activists, businesses, philanthropists, religious institutions, public and private agencies, community-based organizations, civil society groups, local governments, volunteers, and parks and recreation staff members. While the government of

Pakistan recognizes that education is a public function, is also welcomes public-private partnerships, and there is a role for this type of partnership within CSNs.

CSNs contribute to government efforts to raise awareness and funds, advocate for the rights of marginalized groups, identify school level issues, build educational leadership capacity, train primary school teachers through networking, put appropriate pressure on teachers for better performance and improve learning outcomes for all students. CSNs are a strong approach to enhancing schools effectiveness by providing a comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated continuum of interventions to support girls, and children with disabilities, and their families.

CSNs work toward four goals:

1. Community Participation: The specific difference between CSNs and other school clusters or networks is community participation. Research shows that donor-driven school clusters or networks are mainly run by the Ministry of Education. However, the CSN model is not only conceived by the community but also driven by the community with minimal funding needs. This model can be replicated in any school community with modifications to local needs. Sustainability and scalability through local resource mobilization are crosscutting themes of this model. CSNs not only encourage parents, students and other community members in the society to participate in school improvement but

also open opportunities for other actors, including local government, philanthropists, religious figures, academics, civil society organizations, and local, national and international volunteers.

2. Access: CSNs promote access to the fundamental rights of education for all children by addressing both the attitudinal and the physical barriers that prevent girls and children with disabilities from going to school. CSNs can play a vital role in ensuring access to education for all children in primary schools in remote mountainous villages by undertaking campaigns for sensitization, awareness and rights-based advocacy. At the same time, CSNs may sensitize and raise awareness among parents and community members regarding the rights of children and women. This is critical, given that the majority of people with disabilities do not know about their rights.

3. Equity: One of the principal goals of CSNs is to ensure transparent and equal allocation of educational resources to all schools, whether located in rural or urban areas. CSNs contribute to greater equity by investing in schools to provide access, accommodation and special training for teachers to address children's special learning needs. CSNs would also ensure fair and optimal use of resources to improve educational quality in schools.

4. Quality: The major barrier to the enrollment and retention of children in schools in Pakistan are low learning outcomes in primary schools. Parents do not want to waste time by sending their children to low-quality

ty schools. The most important determinant of school quality is that teachers are skilled and well prepared. CSNs address this issue by providing an opportunity for teachers from different schools to meet in subject groups and share best practices for lesson plans, assessment and low-cost teaching material. CSNs provide professional development opportunities through networking with national and international training organizations. CSNs give teachers a chance to work cooperatively and develop their professional skills to promote inclusive, high-quality education.

Networking Models

Three models of networking exist that can be applied to CSNs. The first is the extreme model in which school network committees or councils have very wide powers enshrined in the national law. In the second option, the intermediate model, schools are grouped together by higher authorities, but committees have less extensive powers. For example, the government might establish a set of education resource centers in different parts of the country and indicate which school is served by each center. The director of the center would organize workshops and distribute materials around the schools, but could not transfer staff members among the schools or make recommendations for promotion. This type of model exists in Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua Guinea. The third model is the least extreme model: In the least extreme, far-reaching model, membership in a cluster is voluntary. Schools group themselves together and can abandon the association if they wish.²⁵

Given that this kind of the institutional arrangement of the extreme model is not provided for under Pakistani law, this model is not currently feasible. The most appropriate CSN model for Pakistan to start with is the least extreme model, since the CSNs will not be governed by any national policies. The model for Gilgit-Baltistan is a robust version of the least extreme model, whereby the CSN creates a structure and purpose so that in the future it could be transitioned to the intermediate model enshrined in policy. Research on different school networks shows that the most effective models meet the needs of the community and leverage national and regional policies. The types of schools involved, and the conditions under which they participate, are then dependent upon local conditions. The executive secretary of the CSN may implement the decisions made by the CSN governing and general councils and committees, with support from CSN resource center staff.

The CSN can be made up of primary or secondary schools. If primary and secondary schools are grouped in the same network, the secondary schools are likely to dominate, which could result in the staff of the secondary schools not sympathizing with the needs of the primary schools.²⁶ At the same time, a large private school may have different needs from a government-run primary school. The number of students and teachers varies considerably across primary schools. If large schools participate in CSNs, they may cause severe imbalances in the organization. Therefore, the target schools from CSN should be average-sized and low-perform-

ing primary schools. With experience, school coverage can be expanded.

The CSN may cover a specific geographical area, for example, a village, a union council or a subdivision. Initially, the geographical area covered by a CSN should be relatively small in order to ensure ease and equality of access for the schools, given the mountainous topography of the region. While physical access might be difficult, communication through mobile technology may facilitate contact among CSN members.

CSN Formation Process

The overall formation process of a CSN takes six steps:

- 1. Initiators:** Any civil society group can lead the initiative in their respective communities and geographic areas. In some cases a few interested people such as parents, principals, teachers, volunteers or education officers from the government may initiate a CSN through conversations with the school's community. The initiators must know about local community dynamics and have an action plan.²⁷
- 2. Dialogue and Membership:** This includes developing connections and meetings with all relevant stakeholders including politicians, government education departments, parents, teachers, students and civil society organizations.
- 3. Governance and Management:** CSNs should be started with two or more schools. Other schools in the same geographic location should be encouraged to participate

voluntarily. At this stage the initiators should constitute a provisional committee for drafting of memorandum and articles of association, the institutional structure and other related documents. Once the documentation is completed and consensus built, there should be a formal election and selection process for governing council, committees and management staff members.

- 4. Strategy Design:** This includes defining desired goals and outcomes, a result based logical framework, preparation for monitoring and evaluation, aligning principles, practices and policies and development of a rollout strategy.
- 5. Implementation:** This includes resource mobilization, establishment of the CSN resource center, professional development, networking, advocacy, and assistance to member schools.
- 6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Scale Up:** CSNs need to maintain internal accountability, data collection, progress assessment, use of data to strengthen activities as well as expanding rollout and scanning the system for improvement.

CSN Governance Structure

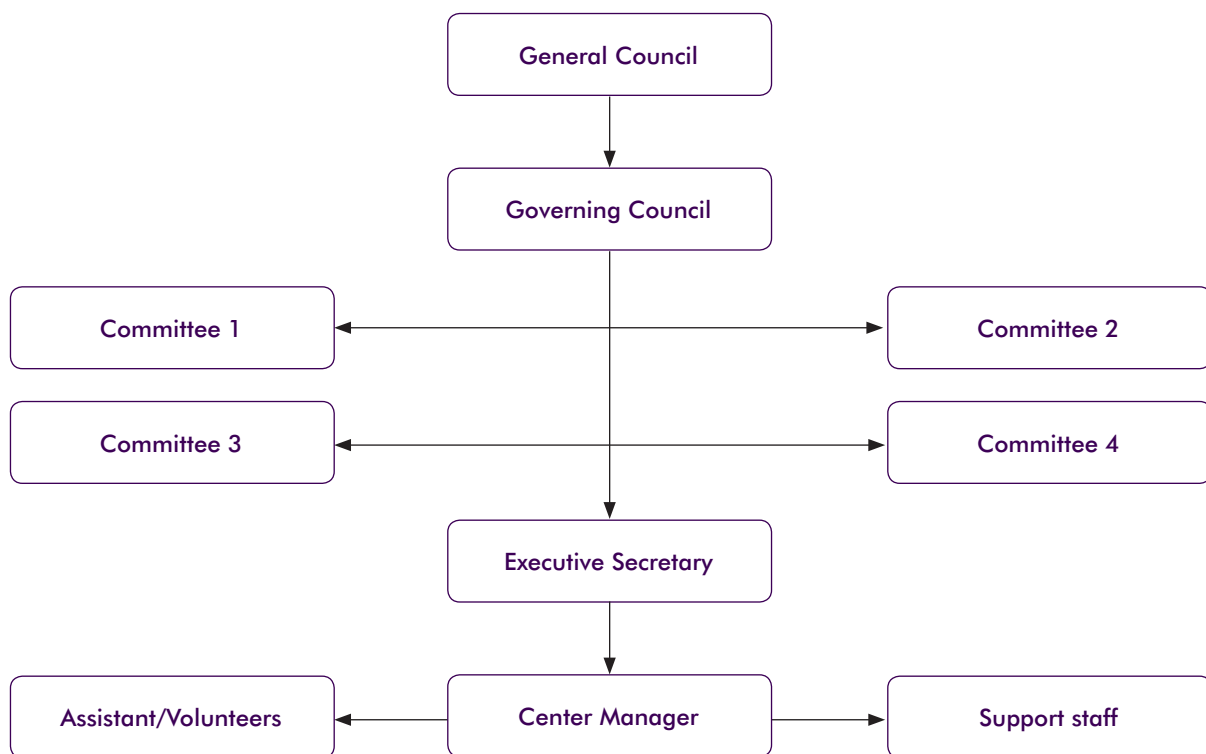
CSNs should be independent bodies led by a Governing Council. Governance structure may vary by CSN. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the CSN should have different management tiers, including a CSN General Council, Governing Council and four committees. Once the provisional committee completes the documentation for CSN, the participating schools constitute a General Council with representation

from all member schools, professional, volunteers and other interested institutions. The General Council elects a Governing Council represented by elected representatives of member schools and education experts, teachers, parents, community members and students. The Governing Council develops the charter for the CSN and establishes the membership fees and services and is responsible for the overall decision-making and implementation of activities (see figure below).

The work of the CSN will be designed and carried out by four committees:

- 1. Resource Mobilization and Networking:** Develops a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy and innovative financing mechanisms to expand the donor base for the CSN. This committee will also develop effective linkages and networking mechanisms with other schools and training organizations.
- 2. Awareness, Communication and Advocacy:** Supports the CSN’s mission of raising parental, community, politicians, government departments and other stakeholders regarding the fundamental right of access to education for

Figure 1: The Governance Structure of Community School Networks



all children, especially girls and children with disabilities. The committee will raise awareness on gender equality and other educational and health related issues, including stigma and discrimination, available services and the need to mobilize skilled teaching staff and health workers in the inclusive schools.

3. Research, Training, Assessment and Curriculum:

Encourages and promotes varied and quality research activities to improve teaching and learning processes in member schools.

4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Audit:

Keeps track of activities, aims and objectives. The committee will encourage improvement, provide evidence on the impact of activities and provide an informed basis for decision-making and planning. This committee will maintain accountability and keep stakeholders' confidence in the CSN by reviewing the network's internal control structure. Whenever it is needed the committee may appoint independent auditors to review of the financial statements and suggest areas of improvement.

The CSNs will employ full-time staff to oversee their operations, including a CSN executive secretary, a resource center manager, a resource center assistant and two support staff for the facilitation of the governing council and committees. All other CSN participants would be volunteers.

CSN Size: Case studies from "The School Cluster Systems in Namibia, Framework for

Quality Education"²⁸ and "School Clusters in the Third World: Making Them Work"²⁹ reveal that in most successful examples, clusters consist of five to six schools. Size depends on the needs of a specific location. In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, the CSN model should accommodate all interested schools in the same geographical area (for example, all primary schools in a union council).

Key Functions of CSNs

CSN have eight key functions, all of which work toward the ultimate goal of creating quality, inclusive education:

- 1. Community Awareness:** Raise awareness among the community on the importance of inclusive education, especially in parents, politicians and bureaucrats. The CSN will provide a platform for local educational leaders to think, plan and take actions to promote quality primary education in member schools.
- 2. Support Teachers:** Provide a forum for teachers to share resources and encourage teachers to engage in dialogue around best practices.
- 3. Improve Access and Quality:** Encourage non-formal education for children with disabilities, integrating open learning centers or home schools into the network and identifying needs for further development.
- 4. Resource Mobilization:** Foster community financial support through bulk purchase of school uniforms, stationery and textbooks for all member schools directly from wholesale markets and factories.

- 5. Accountability:** Fill the gap in supervision and monitoring of public and private primary schools through effective involvement of parents and educational leaders in tracking member schools' progress.
- 6. Partnerships and Networking:** Encourage cooperation in school development projects. CSN member schools may join together for educational visits and unite to lobby and pool resources for additional classrooms, the construction of boundary walls, toilets or ramps.
- 7. Data and Evaluation:** Act as a resource center for the collection of data, especially relating to children with disabilities, enrollment, dropouts and teachers' performance/attendance. In this way the education department, civil society institutions and donor organizations may better position themselves to prioritize and address burning issues.
- 8. Advocacy:** Play effective advocacy campaigns for implementation of government policies and the rights to access basic education for all children given in the constitution of the country.

Sustainability and Resources

As a voluntary, community-based model, CSNs are designed to operate at minimal running cost. It is envisaged that CSNs will mobilize resources from both national and international organizations to address issues of access and quality. The recurrent costs of employing full-time staff members for the CSNs will be generated through membership fees from participat-

ing schools and from assessment test fees collected from the students of all member schools. Presently, all schools — government and private — collect test/exam fees from students and these can be channeled to support CSNs. CSNs in return can facilitate the involvement of all school stakeholders in the quarterly student assessment processes, and can promote a constructive and supportive environment to discuss findings and related curricular topics.

Potential Risks

One of the primary risks is resistance from teachers to new demands on their time related to participation in CSNs. Attitudes of teachers and community members toward school networks have been varied. In Namibia teachers, principals, inspectors and regional education officers voluntarily participated in school networks because they recognized the benefits offered by the cluster systems.³⁰ However, in Zimbabwe, school leaders and teachers resisted because they felt that clusters were expensive to maintain and difficult to coordinate.³¹

To combat this risk, first and foremost, CSNs must demonstrate their impact. Teachers will be more willing to take time to visit the other member schools and resource center for experience sharing and meetings if they see that the experience contributes to outcomes in the classroom. Meanwhile, the communities' heightened demand for high-quality education and teacher performance will also encourage higher levels of teacher engagement with their work and

improving their skills through experience sharing within the CSN systems.

Interested and motivated groups must also develop a credible plan of action and gain buy-in from authorities who can lend credibility to their efforts. Support from higher authorities at the federal government level or ministry level increase the chance of support from government school teachers because they respond to official directives from higher authorities carefully. Teachers may also be motivated by annual prizes for students and teachers, and by school performance ratings tied to improvements.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that good policies and constitutional amendments alone cannot improve education sector in Pakistan. An effective, long-term solution is needed to remove barriers to inclusive education by enhancing community participation in school systems. The aim is to improve access, quality, equity, and awareness on gender equality and the rights of people with disabilities. With national and international support, the CSN model will ensure access and equity in primary education for all children including girls and children with disabilities. This will further help reduce gender disparity in primary education and improve learning outcomes in primary school in rural areas Pakistan.

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