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Education for All: The Role of NGOs in Primary Education in District Chiniot and Faisalabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting primary education in two districts of Punjab, Pakistan—Chiniot and Faisalabad—and assesses the sustainability of NGO interventions and community satisfaction. Data were collected from a purposive and randomly selected sample of 431 respondents, including NGO managers, head teachers, class teachers, students, and parents, using structured interviews and focus group discussions. Findings indicate that NGO activities (awareness campaigns, community mobilization, school events, and short-term material support) contributed to increased school enrollment and renewed parental interest in schooling. However, community committees and other local mechanisms established during projects frequently failed to sustain activities after NGOs withdrew. The study concludes that while NGOs play an important role in expanding access, durable educational improvement requires planned exit strategies, capacity building of community institutions, and sustained coordination with government bodies.

Keywords: NGOs; primary education; sustainability; community participation; Pakistan; educational access

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been active actors in development policy and service delivery across the world. In Pakistan, NGOs have become particularly visible in the education sector, where government provision is uneven, especially in semi-urban and rural districts. NGOs typically provide a mix of awareness raising, material support (books, uniforms, furniture), and community mobilization to increase enrollment and retention in government primary schools.

Despite these contributions, questions remain regarding the long-term sustainability of NGO projects and whether short-term interventions lead to durable institutional or community-led change. This paper investigates the role of NGOs in promoting access, equity and quality of primary education in Chiniot and Faisalabad, Punjab, and examines whether community-level mechanisms established during NGO projects persist after project completion.

NGOs (non-governmental organizations) are a particularly diverse group of organizations which are playing an important role in the development of a country, and they have different shapes and forms within the country and across different country contexts. The term NGO was invented at about the time of the founding of the U.N. in 1945 to differentiate private organizations from intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). Since 1908, the NGOs have expanded not only in number but also area-wise and, at the same time directly or indirectly increased the influence over personalities, countries and benefactors (Green, 2008). But this is not exactly the way to measure the influence or status of any institute, as it varies from society to society depending on the social circuit of the country, political situation and environment of any country. The role of NGOs is preferably service provider rather than advocacy-based (McCormick, 2012). Where the NGOs are keenly observed by the government, the NGOs get more supervised by the state, and the NGO works more as a dependent organization rather than an independent organization.

Doubts and strains between the government

and the NGOs lead them to mistrust and which directly influences policy making of the countries for development, and all the later energetic social workers' work is always affected and mistrusted by the government, just because of the former selfish persons. Here, at the same time as the NGO are unable to act as governments' few, the NGOs make their own policies and programs to execute their project. (Frank et Al, 2007) It often leads to the hatred between the government and NGO and which directly results in the community being deprived of holistic development. Because of the said issue, mostly the communities get deprived of sustainable development, and after the completion of the project, no one goes back to the community and asks about their practices. It is needed to find a mechanism to create more effectively with the collaboration of non-governmental organizations, and it is really very important to appreciate all the efforts and hard work of the stakeholders in policy-making.

According to Pettit (Pettit, 2012), it is needed to find out whether the work NGOs are doing sustains or not. Because, as far as I had been working with NGOs since 2015 and in a few of the organizations, it could be clearly observed that they are actually serving humanity, and obviously, it was clearly sustainable because it was like a blood bank for hemophilia and thalassemia Patients. But further, when I experienced and observed in more NGOs so it was really disappointing to see that the projects failed as nothing was practiced by the community. Different contradictions and confusions affect the efficiency of the project. The roles of the team are not clearly defined, and everyone feels like he/she has the authority, so this confusion may lead to the ineffectiveness of the project. By using their skills and schemes, all the players frame their own agenda, as each one of them has the authority.

NGOs work independently, and sometimes these are aid agencies depending on developed countries, private organizations working independently as self-help associations and local government. The policymakers got

fascinated when they observed the rise of NGOs, and they claimed that the NGOs are at the core of a discreet upheaval.

The Union of International Associations defined the NGO as an organization which is not officially controlled by the national governments (UIA, 2005). Most of the NGOs shared that the objective of the NGO is to create a civil society. The NGOs work for the labour class and educate them on the aid provided by the donors; moreover, they facilitate the public on a wider level. MGD frequently works to do great while putting aside their own benefit or governmental issues. They are viewed as instrumental in changing outlook and mentalities (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). To be a more productive supplier, they give merchandise and enterprises (Edwards and Hulme, 1998).

As indicated by the Bank of World Bank association, NGOs incorporate numerous gatherings and organizations that will be that are completely or to a great extent free of government and that have principally compassionate and helpful instead of business goals. With the improvement in correspondence in more privately based gatherings, alluded to as grass root associations or local area based associations, have become dynamic or public or even on the global level. Progressively, this happens through the arrangement of alliances with different NGOs for specific objectives.

Various social scientists have enlightened this crucial phenomenon where education assumes a significant role in the improvement of the country. Education is an effective tool to reduce poverty in the result of building a strong framework for the development and betterment of education in society. (Jomtien Conference, 1990) Education is thought to be a strong and effective tool not only for economic development but also for the sustainable development of social, political issues, inflation, a rapidly increasing population, corruption and political instability. (Syeda Wadiat Kazm, 2005)

Local area-based associations are polite society non-benefits that work within a single local area. They are basically a division of the

more extensive gathering of non-profit organizations. Like other non-benefits, they are frequently run on a deliberate premise and are self-supported. Inside people group associations, there are numerous varieties regarding size and authoritative structure. Some are officially included with a composed development and a governing body (otherwise called a council), while others are a lot more smaller and are more informal. (Bjaas Etal, 1991).

Literature Review

NGOs, development and education: international overview

Scholarship has tracked the spread of NGOs from the post-war era and their increasing function of service provision, advocacy, and community mobilization (Green, 2008; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). NGOs are celebrated for flexibility and community reach, but criticized for donor dependency and challenges to scale local models to sustainable services (Fowler, 1991; Edwards & Hulme, 1998).

Education and NGOs in Pakistan

In Pakistan, NGOs have made up for the gaps in the public sector—especially in rural Pakistan and among the poor—by providing materials, conducting awareness campaigns, and supporting non-formal education initiatives (Aftab, 1992; Baqir, 1998). Nevertheless, ongoing problems—limited funding, poor governance, and inadequate state-NGO coordination—have limited their long-term effectiveness (Sethi, 1993; Syeda, 2005).

Theoretical perspectives: effectiveness and sustainability

Two interrelated ideas inform this analysis: effectiveness (the capacity to deliver short-term project objectives, e.g., enhanced enrollment) and sustainability (the continuation of positive effects and local ownership after the project has ended). Edwards & Hulme (1998) and Fowler (1991) emphasize how donor agendas, project planning, and organizational accommodation of the state influence outcomes. These frameworks are applied to understand empirical evidence on community committees, mobilizing

strategies, and post-project paths in this study.

Statement of the Problem

Needy school-age children in districts Chiniot and Faisalabad needed to enjoy increased accessibility, equity and equality of education in public primary schools. However, the problem of low enrolment, high dropout and low completion had persisted for the past forty years in the division and had impacted negatively on the needy children's access, equity and quality in education. Therefore, the needy child is unable to enjoy full access to basic education. This study was to take notice of the needed education in both districts. The study shows that NGOs are playing a role in the development of education in backward areas. In most families, I could see that the people are living below the poverty line. Pathetically, this problem was the greatest obstacle in the way of getting an education and educating their children, too. Consequently, the parents started forcing their children to start labour work with their parents, and the number of dropouts increased. The main concern for this study was to quantify the NGOs' contribution to needy primary school children in Faisalabad and Chiniot Districts in relation to access, equity and quality of education during this era of FPE (Free Primary Education) in the period of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of the NGO on the development of primary education in Chiniot and Faisalabad districts during the FPE (Free Primary Education). In addition, it was concerned to know that is the provided facilities and assistance are sustainable or not.

Rationale

The broad usefulness of the study is to discover the background and targets of NGOs, the role of NGOs in imparting essential schooling and the significance of these associations in Providing Education. This investigation would likewise assess the extent to which NGOs have been prevailing in regards to accomplishing their objectives with respect to providing education and increasing the literacy rate, and the role of NGOs in wiping out destitution from the common

society. This examination would likewise investigate the connection of NGOs with the Government in Imparting Primary education and the role of NGOs in policy-making related to Primary education. This study can help to identify the weaknesses of NGOs in imparting primary education and suggest ways of dealing with those weaknesses. The assessment can help to identify other factors that were previously ignored in community participation but are clearly vital to successful community participation. NGOs can do a great deal for the spread of education, a successful arrangement of assessment and observation of proficiency, and post-education programs, and to dispatch persuasive missions by NGOs at the local level are required (Aftab 1992). NGOs are believed to be privately established and naturally touchy, adaptable, easy and genuine, and in this way a legitimate instrument to contact the individuals (Sethi, 1993) and to be smarter to advance the mainstream cooperation need for manageability of advantages (Fowler, 1991).

Research questions

What are the strategies of NGOs promoting primary education in Punjab?

- ✓ What is the people's behaviour of Punjab Province towards NGOs' role in promoting primary education?
- ✓ What are the main barriers to promoting primary education in Punjab?

The researcher wants to know what kind of approaches the NGOs are using for the sustainable development of primary education in Punjab, such as framing organizations with neighbourhood common society and government, receiving inventive ways to deal with offering types of assistance, and developing the limit of the local community and private Schools. At the same time, it is necessary to find out how the people of communities react to the NGO's efforts and how they cooperate with the organizations for their own development. The barriers, like socio-economic and psychological behaviours of the community, actively affect the work of NGOs, so those behaviours would be found out by the

researchers.

Methodology

Research Design and Locale

This study employed a qualitative descriptive survey design to evaluate the role of NGOs in promoting primary education in Punjab. Two districts, Chiniot and Faisalabad, were purposively selected due to the absence of prior studies on NGO contributions in these areas and the uncertainty of sustained support for poor children post-NGO withdrawal. The study focused on government primary schools with high enrollment of children from low-income families.

Target Population

The target population included stakeholders associated with 34 government primary schools supported by NGOs. A list provided by the Children Global Network of Pakistan (CGNP) identified 470 schools across three districts, from which 34 were randomly selected (17 each from Chiniot and Faisalabad). The overall target population was 4,522 individuals, including NGO staff, head teachers, class teachers, students, and their parents.

Respondents	N
NGO Managers	5
Head Teachers	335
Class Teachers	102
Needy Children	2,040
Parents of Needy Children	2,040
Total	4,522

Sample of the Study

A total of 431 respondents were selected using multistage sampling combining purposive and simple random techniques:

Respondents	N
NGO Managers	5
Head Teachers	25
Class Teachers	25
Needy Children	188

Respondents	N
Parents of Needy Children	188
Total Sample	431

Sampling Strategy

- **NGOs:** Six organizations (e.g., Akhuwat, PEF) were purposively selected.
- **Head Teachers:** Sampled from 34 schools using random sampling.
- **Class Teachers:** 25 teachers selected using stratified random sampling.
- **Students and Parents:** 188 needy children and their parents selected through purposive and random sampling based on NGO support records.

Research Instruments

Five tools were developed:

- **In-Interview Schedules** for NGO managers and head teachers.
- **FoCUS Group Discussion (FGD) Guides** for class teachers, students, and parents.

Interviews were semi-structured, containing both open- and closed-ended questions focused on NGO assistance. FGDs gathered detailed perspectives on satisfaction and sustainability. Discussions were organized separately for each stakeholder group to encourage openness and avoid bias.

Though the study used structured interview schedules and focus group discussions that produced some quantifiable counts (e.g., enrollment figures, frequency of NGO visits), the primary objective was to understand stakeholder perceptions, community dynamics and the processes that support or hinder sustainability. A qualitative descriptive approach is therefore appropriate because it permits rich, contextualized description and analytic interpretation of participants' experiences and meanings. While a mixed-methods design could quantify some effects more precisely, the core research questions concerning perceptions, local ownership, and sustainability processes required depth of qualitative inquiry to capture local meanings and power relations that shape program continuation.

Findings and Discussions

Effect on access and enrollment

NGOs' mobilization strategies incentive provision (school uniforms, textbooks, chairs) to door-to-door and street mobilization, meetings with community groups, and school walks, evidently boosted attendance in the focus government primary schools. Several respondents (head teachers, mobilizers, parents) mentioned admissions and re-admissions after NGO campaigns, and some schools reported enhanced classroom environments as NGOs provided basic furniture and education materials. These observations confirm previous research indicating NGOs' ability to increase immediate access through mobilization and targeted provision of materials.

Analytical note:

Impact on enrollment is most evident as long as external supports and active mobilization are in place; evidence of short-term behavioural change (parents sending children to school) linked to conspicuous incentives and social marketing.

Challenges and barriers

Field accounts identify recurring obstacles: poverty (children needed as breadwinners), resistance at the political level by local elites, lack of male parental involvement in school matters, and sporadic NGO presence. Mobilizers reported instances of direct resistance from powerful local leaders; such gate-keeping can slow or prevent community involvement. Teachers and parents highlighted economic pressure as opposed to unwillingness to maintain regular attendance.

Analytical note: Such barriers imply that access interventions have to take into consideration wider livelihood constraints and local power relations; enrolling children is insufficient without resolving economic trade-offs between families.

The sustainability issue

While NGOs had set up community committees and trained mobilizers, the majority of committees did not sustain active roles upon NGO departure. Committees were described by school staff as "formalities" that lacked momentum in the absence of monitoring and

sustained support. The key proximate factors of failure were brief project durations, inadequate capacity building (committees did not have clear mandates or competencies), poor incentives to volunteer regularly, and a lack of formal institutional linkages with the local government. These trends are consistent with the literature warning that brief projects and poor institutional linkages lower long-term sustainability (Edwards & Hulme, 1998; Pettit, 2012).

Analytical note: Exit strategies must be clearly stated to ensure sustainability, shift responsibilities gradually, include monitoring, and build community structures into formal local government or school administration systems.

Community perceptions and satisfaction

Generally, communities valued NGO work. Mothers and parents emphasized the short-term gains (books, uniforms, outreach) and reported changes in attitudes in some homes toward education. Still, high levels of expectation that assistance would continue were evident; many parents indicated they resumed previous behaviour (sending kids to work) once NGO support ended. The gendered participation pattern stronger female representation in FGDs but weaker male parental participation, indicates the value of targeted male participation strategies.

Analytical observation:

Positive impressions are an NGO's valuable asset, yet they can be a source of dependency in the absence of handling exit and handover.

Focused Group Discussion.

The group of the discussion consisted of 7 people that included one mobilizer, two parents of the needy students, two community influential persons and two head teachers, two committee members, the committee made by the NGO's Members in both districts.

The main focus of the discussion was on how much development has taken place in the communities after the project of the NGO. The researcher asked the questions one by one to the group, and every person in the group

responded to them.

Firstly, I asked what actual support the NGO has given you. Mr. Atta Ullah shared, *"The NGO has supported us in various dimensions as they enrolled so many students in our school."* (School's head Teacher)

Miss Arfa Shared, *"They have motivated the parents for the admissions of their children, which made it so easy for us to educate the children of our community as much as we want."*

Fayyaz Baqir (1998) states that community-based organizations have worked a lot for the education of males and females both at all times. He shared that

This arrangement of proficiency, in view of the idea of intentional work and self-improvement, was not at that point known as NGO work and was a lot bigger in scale contrasted with present NGO activities." [Fayyaz Baqir \(1998\)](#)

A committee member shared, *"Hmary ilaqr k bht se bachy esy hn jo bht ghareeb gharon se taluq rakhty hn or school ki fees ka boj nae utha skty or agar fees na bhi ho tu kitaabyn or kapiyan kharidna bhi un k bus mein nae tha. Lekin NGO k kuch log un k gharon mein gy or bchon ko parhany k lie un ki kitaby or kapiyan bhi khareed kr di."*

As per the participant's view, the majority of the community belongs to the labour class, and they cannot pay the fees for the schools. Afterwards, they shared that the education is supposed to be free in the government schools, so they cannot pay the rupees for the stationery used by the students. Commonly, it is thought by them that the actual only fee is not the major issue of the schools, actually the rest of the expenses like paper fee, copy, books and others. The parents of the community are actually worried about the higher expense.

As I heard from the participants that most of the people in that area are unable to afford the fees of the schools, I could also see that most of the families had a too low standard of living as they were living below the poverty line. But people of those areas were keen to get an education, and they were desirous to educate their children. At the same time, they shared the efforts of the NGO. They shared that the team

members of the NGO came to their area and visited the needy people's houses. Furthermore, they shared that the team facilitated the students by providing them with books, notebooks and other required stationery.

The second question the participants were asked by the researcher was, Is the help adequate to meet the children's educational needs?

Mr. Zamin Abbas (Mobilizer) shared first the services they gave to the community. He shared, *"We facilitated the different schools as per their need. But the main objective of the project was to increase the enrollment of the schools."*

Mr. Zahid Ali (School Head) shared, *"This project helped us to increase our strength for they used so many tools and ways. As they conducted meetings and walks in our communities to motivate the parents about their children's education, but still it is a need for our community to continue a project as the previous one was."*

Conclusion

This study examined NGO strategies for promoting primary education, community perceptions of NGO roles, and the sustainability of NGO interventions in Chiniot and Faisalabad. The main findings are:

- NGOs used community mobilization (walks, meetings), door-to-door persuasion, school events, and in-kind support (uniforms, books, furniture) to increase enrollment.
- Communities generally appreciated NGO efforts; mothers and teachers reported improved awareness and short-term increases in attendance. However, male parental involvement was limited and economic pressures constrained sustained participation.
- The principal barriers to sustainable change are short project durations, weak local committee capacity, economic needs of families, and political/elite resistance. Community structures created during projects typically failed to sustain activities without continued external support or formal integration with local authorities.

Policy and practice implications

1. **Design exit strategies:** NGOs should plan phased handovers, with milestones for building local capacity and transferring responsibilities.
2. **Embed community structures institutionally:** Committees should have formal roles, clear mandates, training and linkages with local education authorities to survive beyond project timelines.
3. **Address economic constraints:** Combine education promotion with livelihood or conditional support measures so families are not forced to choose child labour over schooling.
4. **Engage local power actors strategically:** Work with, rather than around, influential local leaders to reduce hostility and build legitimacy.
5. **Monitoring and follow-up:** Periodic follow-up visits or low-cost monitoring mechanisms help sustain committee activity and community motivation.

This paper contributes to the literature by providing grassroots-level evidence from two understudied districts of Punjab about the short-term effectiveness and long-term sustainability challenges of NGO educational interventions. Its multi-stakeholder perspective (NGO managers, school staff, parents, and students) offers actionable insights for designing NGO exit strategies and for policy measures to institutionalize community participation.

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