

Adoption of Government Primary Schools for Girls Mundi Kalan School – A Case Study

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In addition to facilitating access to quality and relevant education for more than seven hundred children in ten villages of Sheikhpura district in the Punjab, Khoj-Society for People's Education in collaboration with Save the Children-UK has been working to contribute to achieving the following two objectives under the project Quality Education for All-Phase 2:

- ? To ensure that Khoj methodology is adopted and replicated by other education partners including government education department
- ? To strengthen government's and communities' capacity for the promotion of quality education of marginalized children in target areas

Khoj adopted five government primary schools for girls in the area. The adoption has provided good ground to keep raising policy issues with the district government. Meetings are held on regular basis and various issues are raised through correspondence.

The following case study of the Government Girls' Primary School in the village Mundi Kalaan in district Nankana Saheb highlights the status of the school at the time of adoption, policy issues, the contribution of Khoj to resurrect the school and the problems on the way.

A school adoption agreement was signed between Khoj and the District Sheikhpura Education Office in February 2005. Later the school fell into the newly carved district of Nankana Saheb.

Most of the government primary schools in the area have a two room building, one teacher and at least five classes to teach.

Status of the School When Adopted

The school was functional in the government records as a teacher had been appointed who was drawing salary regularly. But the ground reality showed a very different picture.

The school building was in ruins, haunted and abandoned. There was not even a semblance of boundary walls. It was difficult to demarcate the boundaries as the whole place was under wild growth and the bushes were more than twelve feet high. With the boundary walls bricks the main gate was also stolen. The compound was used by the community for lavatory purposes, as a number of households did not have latrines. One of the two rooms was locked; wheat straw was stored there by one of the biggest landholders of the village. The government had acquired school land from the same man. There is a strange customary practice in the area that if a school is not functional the ex-owner of the land is accepted by the community as the rightful occupant and user of the building. In the other room, milk animals like buffaloes and cows were kept in the winters. As result, the floor was broken; walls were damaged; plaster had come out; window frames were damaged and there were no window panes. The two rooms had one cupboard each constructed in a wall but there were no traces of their doors. The door was damaged and there were no steps to get into the room. The room and window shades were broken.

Obviously such situation discourages to expect any furniture in the building. Not even a broken piece was found there.

The building had neither wiring and fixtures for electricity nor any electricity connection. Likewise, there was no provision for water.

According to the community, latrines were constructed along with the school building. But there are no traces of such provision.

The government appointed teacher seldom came to the village. Khoj had a center for adult education in the same village for three years and was a witness to the reality.

Khoj Responds

Khoj video documented the pathetic situation, as a first step, in order to raise policy issues and to later assess the organization's contribution.

Then a representative of District was invited to appraise the conditions. Seeing the building in ruins, the Assistant Director was left aghast. He went back and initiated an enquiry against the teacher. She was suspended but in the mean time the new district of Nankana Saheb emerged and the case was transferred to the new administration.

The Nankana Saheb Education Office heard the case and reinstated the teacher with a warning. But there is no change in the status quo.

The Executive District Officer Nankana Saheb, Ms. Zahida Husnain was invited to visit the school. She was shocked to see the situation. She appreciated Khoj a lot for its endeavors, however showed her inability to ensure a teacher to such a hard area, as she put it. She showed her willingness to appoint a temporary teacher if a matriculate woman could be found in the village.

Khoj held a number of meetings with the community and discussed the issues relating to the operationalization of Mundi School. As the school was not functional and was virtually abandoned by the education department, the community started taking off the building material. It was further revealed that the teacher who was presently appointed lived in a village twenty kilometers away from Mundi. She seldom came to the school and had made an arrangement with a girl from Mundi with schooling up to grade 8 that she would teach in her place. The girl was paid Rs. 1000 per month.

The role of the community in the education of their children was discussed at length. Unless they raise the issues at various levels as a collective there would not be any change in the status quo.

It was made abundantly clear that no endeavor was going to be successful unless the community takes initiative and responsibility. They agreed to work in partnership and offered their services to remove the bushes, identify the construction workers, provide labor and supervise the construction work along with Khoj staff. The village provided the labor and the earth for packing the school area to the foundation level. They organized the tractors and supervised the work.

It was also told that there are matriculates and intermediates persons in the village, mostly men. But given the socio-cultural conditions Khoj preferred to hire women teachers or senior retired male teachers.

Challenges in Construction

After the establishment of the new district of Nankana Saheb, the records of the schools falling in the new district were transferred to the concerned administration. A new situation emerged that sent shock waves. The new administration, instead of honoring the agreements of the previous district administration wanted the NGOs to re-apply for adoption. Khoj was also advised to get its contract re signed with the district government Nankana Saheb. Such steps put NGOs on the back foot. Such steps create problems in the smooth functioning, delay achieving the objectives, frustrate the donors and can disrupt the whole process. Khoj was already in the middle of

reconstructing the school building. In the absence of the legal agreement the organization had no reason to continue with the work.

The process of adoption was initiated afresh. Letters were written and meetings were held with the Executive District Officer and District Coordinating Officer to prove the organization's credentials. Things were not moving though the administration's attitude was not negative. Once the DCO in principle agreed to sign the agreement the construction work was re-started without waiting for the signed papers. There was another aspect to the issue. During the suspension of the construction work people started stealing bricks and sand which were kept in the open.

The signed copies of the school adoption were received only on 27 March 2006.

There were many other developments at regular intervals that hampered the pace of work. The village of Mundi falls into a high crime area. The electricity cables on the poles were stolen and they could be re-installed only after a month. The whole village was without electricity. As the bore well was electricity run there was no question of continuing with the construction work. After a five week lay off it became an uphill task to re-hire the construction workers as they were engaged somewhere else. It was equally difficult to find new workers as every body was not willing to come and work in a village cut off from rest of the world.

Non-availability of workers during the harvesting season was another issue as doing the seasonal work in the fields is much more paying than the regular wages.

Reconstruction and Renovation of the Building

The reconstruction could be made possible due to the generous donation of £ 5000/-by Ms. Susan Gibson and Ms. Merijn Mazzocchi from London. Susan Gibson is the chairperson of Learning for Life board.

The following work is completed:

- ? Bushes cleared and boundary walls constructed: A 5 feet high boundary wall was planned but later when the school ground was packed and leveled it had to be raised more than 2 feet further.
- ? Main gate was purchased and installed
- ? Ground level raised and packed up to two feet
- ? Class rooms floors laid anew
- ? Class rooms' walls plastered
- ? Black board made in the walls
- ? Outer side of the building repairing
- ? Classrooms doors purchased and installed
- ? Cupboards' doors purchased and installed
- ? Ventilators purchased and installed
- ? Windows' frames repaired, windows purchased and installed
- ? Water pump boring done and water pump installed
- ? Plantation

The following still needs to be done:

- ? Electricity connection
- ? Electricity wiring, fixtures and fittings
- ? Toilets/Wash rooms
- ? New classrooms

Finally on April 5, 2006, the first class of children could be conducted. Additionally, a group of 8 young women also come for coaching so that they can appear in their matriculation examination. There is no furniture. Mats are provided to sit on.

If there was no video documentary of the building in ruins no body can appreciate the change in place.

Challenges in Operationalizing the School

A teacher has been hired who had earlier worked with Khoj for more than two years as adult education teacher in another village. She was tutored and coached by Khoj staff to appear in the matriculation examination. Now she is holding a matriculation certificate and is well versed in Khoj methodology. In addition, two women from the Mundi adult education center are also given a chance to work as assistant teachers. This has been a pattern of working in the area all along that an endeavor is made simultaneously to develop local human resources in combination with teaching perfect illiterates. There is no other guarantee to social development and sustainability unless there are local teachers, extension workers and health workers.

A Lahore based Khoj staff would visit the school thrice a week for identification and shooting of problems in the process. She would be tutoring the matriculation group as well.

In the meantime a new challenge has emerged. Interestingly, a government teacher has started coming occasionally from the first week of April 2006. By the school adoption agreement she has to work in partnership with Khoj team to achieve the objectives of the school adoption. But she has refused to work with Khoj and stationed herself in the one room boys' school building. The boys' school teacher is supporting her as NGOs are seen as their common enemy. Resistance and non-cooperation is a common place first reaction from the government teachers. They feel that in an adopted school they would have to come to school, that too regularly, and to work. The first policy is to chase the NGO away and if they are not successful in that they get themselves transferred to some other school. Though the district education office supports the NGO but the local level offices throw their weight behind the teachers. Khoj wishes to create an enabling environment. A strategy needs to be devised how to go about in the offices marred by corruption and political strings.

The teacher is trying to create confusion in the community by spreading rumors that she is representing the government school and Khoj is running an NGO school. The children who go to Khoj School will not get a government certificate. A number of meetings have been conducted with the community to dispel the rumors.

On the basis of the lessons learnt from other schools, Khoj does not want to waste its time and energies in wooing the teacher. Instead a long term strategy should be pursued. It is better to have a local woman from Mundi appointed as government teacher. Experience shows that having a teacher from the same village results in more accountability by the community, sustainability and higher quality of work.

A formal request has been sent to the Executive District Officer with a nomination. Their response is still awaited.

Further construction

Because of the peak wheat harvesting season in April and a couple of weeks in May the further construction was deferred to some time in May and June. The following is planned to be completed in the second phase of construction:

- ? Electricity connection

- ? Electricity wiring, fixtures and fittings
- ? Toilets/Wash rooms

As regards the construction of additional rooms it is considered advisable not to invest from the meager resources Khoj has. Instead, attention should be paid on materials required for better instruction in the classes. The construction of rooms can wait with the fact that the school is going to have only two classes to begin with. Additionally, members of the Punjab provincial assembly have been allocated some funds that they may spend on schools. Khoj plans to lobby with the political representatives to spare some funds for the adopted schools.

Policy Issues

In order to ensure education for children in the project area some policy issues need to be thrashed out.

The prerequisite for making a school functional is to ensure a **road link** to the villages. Otherwise the issue of absentee teachers and absence of monitoring by the education department would remain unresolved. In a village where there is no local teacher available and where there is neither a road link nor public transport available the construction of school buildings has proved to be a sheer waste of resources. Those schools are either not functional or running pathetically.

By design there are two rooms for at least five classes. The number of classes in a primary school can be up to seven. **Insufficient space** raises serious issues.

These schools in the rural setting have **one teacher per school**, by default. How can one teacher teach at least five classes and at least twenty five subjects in a primary school single handedly? The concerned department does not call an explanation for teacher's poor performance as it is considered impossible for one person to do the above job. Consequently, the problems persist unresolved.

Lack of flexibility in programming and decision making powers at the local level disallow improvement in the education what to talk about the quality and meaningful education.

Unless the above issues are responded to, any efforts in developing relevant and responsive curricula, better teacher training, providing text books to schools would be an exercise in futility.