

Death the surface

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... practice, since many of these issues have been identified through many donor-funded programmes, but have yet to be incorporated into new initiatives.

Social disparities within the communities themselves, rather than just neglect on the part of the state, also often cause the collapse of schools and enrollments. The reason for a decline in female enrollment is not always because of a disbelief in girls' education or because of a lack of physical access to such schools. In many cases, this happens because of enmity between the family of the teacher or the headmistress with the members of a community, or simply because the school is run by a

more of a priority, whatever the intentions may be. The slogan that education is a means of economic prosperity is gradually waning thin as more and more educated youth go unemployed.

The influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has also created unwarranted political influence in many cases. While there are many NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) which are actively involved in the uplift of their communities, their resentment of government services often leads to cases of needless conflict. For instance, in one school, a member of the local area NGO strode into a school and marked one of the teachers

"absent" in the school register (she was in fact absent that day), leading to a violent confrontation between the school administration and the NGO. The former resented the interference, while the latter considered it its responsibility to act as a 'watchdog' on behalf of the community. In another case, the influence of the local NGO was so strong that all hiring had to be done with their consent. The hiring was such that it often favoured members of the NGO itself

and bypassed government regulations entirely.

Such cases illustrate a sense of territoriality that NGOs have begun to demonstrate in their area of operation. Competition with other NGOs over limited resources have created marked conflicts and rivalries. In addition, most NGOs are also caste or ethnic based, so outreach is limited only among their own groups and the more marginalized groups tend to be ignored. One NGO will refuse to cooperate with or assist the school in another village because either it is at loggerheads with the NGO of that village or it is at odds with the existing power base there.

These nuances often go unnoticed by education planners, not for any other reason but because they (the planners) are, or choose to be, unaware of the multi-layered power structures in rural communities. In any cases, our planners tend

to concentrate on the macro influences, rather than the micro. Some of these cases, especially those that involve setting up community groups to manage either public or private schools are also plagued with the same issues of political influence, class conflicts and nepotism. The more influential members of the community tend to exert greater clout and end up excluding members of other groups. Similarly, schools in many cases are being used as battlegrounds and forms of leverage to patronize hierarchical and authoritarian structures of local power. Ghost schools or teacher absenteeism then, are not simply the products of administrative failure or corruption. It is not simply that there are too few schools (in fact there are too many), but that the schools are not being used for the purpose they were intended.

These are only some of the issues that practitioners are faced with on the ground. But it is exactly these issues that put into perspective the decline in education that social indicators are so often used to point out. These very issues need to be first identified and then studied and understood in order to influence educational policies and even curriculums for that matter. Furthermore, these issues also need to be examined on a provincial and regional basis before they can be approached because each province has a different socio-political setup that influences its respective social indicators and the decline of its institutions.

It is imperative for practitioners and policy makers to realize that the 'solutions' to problems of education are not simply a matter of increase in enrollments, increasing financial resources or the setting up more schools. Teacher training, school improvement, curriculum development and teaching methodologies — all areas of 'quality' where donors are very keen to invest — will only be effective if there is a structure in place that caters to the local and indigenous systems, be they in rural or low-income urban areas.

As long as the social fabric of the beneficiaries remains the same, so will their problems. Education, therefore, is not so much an answer to poverty alleviation, as it is often assumed. Rather, it is a victim of poverty alleviation 'ideologies', which neglect to delve deeper into the 'psychology' of the areas where they wish to make an impact. ■

... as a basis for policy formulation or problems in Pakistan. Firstly, data is collected and examined under trained circumstances, thus distortion. Secondly, such figures are not significant, social, economic or political, that may lead to a change in such figures are reported. Thirdly, the information presents a fairly accurate current quantitative status of the 'status' does not always present the status

... woman from a rich landowning family who refuses to admit girls belonging to families of poor farmers. Or it could simply be because the school is situated in a part of the village which is inhabited by the labourers and other more well-off families of the village refuse to mix with them due to class differences. Such inter and intra-communal conflicts often go back a long time, for decades or even centuries. In some cases, parents will also refuse to send their children to a school if the teacher belongs to a minority group.

Many have argued that through sustained interventions in the education sector, people have begun to realize its importance and need. This is in fact very true, since many people whom one speaks to in both rural and low-income urban areas are more than willing to send their children to school. In today's age of rapid unemployment and rising inflation, economic livelihood is