Quality Issues in Elementary Education

CUTS Centre for Human Development (CUTS CHD), with support from Save the Children, UK, is implementing ‘Improving the Quality of Elementary Education Project (IQEEP)’ in 27 government schools in 25 villages of Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. The project aims to improve the quality of education in 27 schools and ensure increased participation of stakeholders including children in education planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Defining Quality of Education

Among the ways of measuring quality in education, the concept of quality is linked to the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes. Quality is a relative concept and not something that is absolute. One useful approach could be to select a range of educational indicators that are explicit and measurable representing various facets of quality.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 (revised in 1990) reiterated the urgency to address the quality concerns in schools on priority basis. Among the studies on quality of education, one conducted in Kerala in late 1990s reveal that management of the school is not an influencing factor for improving quality, while infrastructure, availability of teaching-learning materials are sufficient catalyst.

Parents Meeting

Parents meetings was one of the prime activities of IQEEP. The meetings were held in project villages to discuss problems of child education and bring parents on the same dais to discuss the problem of quality education and find a way to address it. It was found that parents are not concerned about their child’s education and their role in school education development plan has been found missing. Parents barely follow up the progress of their child’s education and hardly visit schools. However, they assured to take care of their children’s education.

School Development & Monitoring Committee (SDMC) meeting

CUTS CHD has taken initiative to strengthen School Development & Monitoring Committee (SDMC) of all 27 project schools. These committees have been formed by the administration to administer the progress of education in schools but are inactive. In order to revive the SDMCs, meetings were held in IQEEP villages to interact with the SDMC members and discuss the problem of quality education. The intension was to make SDMC members accountable towards their responsibilities so that level of education could be enhanced.

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Role of Micro Credit in Poverty Alleviation

CUTS CHD is implementing two projects in Bhilwara and Chittorgarh districts on micro credit for poverty alleviation to ensure socio-economic development and enhance livelihood security in rural areas. The projects are being funded by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

Under the project, Self Help Groups (SHGs) meetings were regularly held at Gangrar, Nimbahera & Chittor blocks of Chittorgarh district and Mandalgarh, Banera & Suwana blocks of Bhilwara district. Local banks were contacted and assistance was sought in opening SHG bank accounts. Problems related to some banks of Bhilwara were sorted after consulting higher authorities.

Discussion was held in detail on problems related to account opening of loan recovery. During the meeting, DDM, NABARD and LDM, Bhilwara requested CUTS to help banks in recovering the loan amount, while requesting banks to help CUTS in its work.

Bhilwara NABARD PIMC Meeting

NABARD, Bhilwara Project Implementation and Monitoring Committee (PIMC) meeting was held at Panchayat Samiti Hall, Mandalgarh, Bhilwara on December 18, 2009 in which HS Shekhawat, District Development Manager (DDM)-NABARD, Bhilwara; JL Suthar, Lead District Manager (LDM), Bank of Baroda, Bhilwara; GS Johari, Chief Manager, Bank of Rajasthan; MK Gupta, Bank of Rajasthan; AK Kathuria, Manager, Baroda Rajasthan Grameen Bank, Barundni; and ML Rathore, Manager, Baroda Rajasthan Grameen Bank attended the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the progress of NABARD funded SHG project. Amit Chowdhury, CUTS Coordinator updated the committee representatives about the project. Shekhawat explained participants about NABARD SHGs work and appreciated CUTS’ initiative.

Chittorgarh NABARD PIMC Meeting

NABARD, Chittorgarh PIMC meeting was held at CUTS CHD on December 22, 2009. Sudhanshu Kumar, DDM-NABARD, Chittorgarh; NK Sanidhya, LDM, Bank of Baroda, Chittorgarh; Mathura Prasad, Managing Director, Cooperative Bank, Chittorgarh; and AK Surana, Manager, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, Chittorgarh attended the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the progress of NABARD funded SHG project in which CUTS CHD staff updated committee members about the project. The committee suggested to start inter-loaning among group members and assured full cooperation in opening bank accounts. The committee members also suggested drawing a plan for livelihood opportunities for SHG members.

CUTS with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) is undertaking an initiative over two years (2008-2010) in Nepal, Bangladesh, and two states of India (West Bengal and Rajasthan) to build capacity of consumer groups/civil society organisations (CSOs) to enable them to deal with the issues involved, take-up action research, share experiences, and carryout advocacy with policymakers and regulatory agencies to effect pro-consumer changes in the electricity regulatory/policy processes. The project is being implemented in association with local partner organisations across project territories.

Under the project, Grassroots Interface Meetings (GIMs) were organised in each of the project territories. CUTS CHD organised a GIM at the Centre on December 11, 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to appreciate the role played by different stakeholders in electricity reforms and pass on the advocacy skills to them to enhance the efficiency to continue their good work.

Enhancing Environmental Awareness

CUTS CHD, in association with CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) and with the support of Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF), Government of India is implementing a project entitled, ‘National Environment Awareness Campaign’ (NEAC) to create environmental awareness. The centre organised a workshop on November 15, 2008 at its premises in which representatives from 20 schools selected under NEAC project attended. The purpose of the workshop was to guide participants in completing the project plan and collect judicial stamp papers.
ACTIVITIES AT THE GRASSROOTS

Assessing Learning Skills

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2008 survey training was organised at CUTS CHD on October 17-21, 2008. The purpose of the ASER survey was to assess the learning level of school going students. CUTS CHD is one of partners in carrying out the survey for Pratham, Rajasthan in Chittorgarh. The survey was carried out in 30 villages of Chittorgarh district. In all, 30 volunteers participated for the survey work.

Improving Hand Hygiene

To mark the International Hand Wash Day, CUTS CHD organised a function at Government Primary School in Raghunathpura village of Chittor block of Chittorgarh district on October 15, 2008, in which children were told about the importance of washing hands with soap before eating and after using toilet.

As a pilot project under the Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) along with Government of India has taken initiative to sensitise community about the importance of hygienic life and washing hands before eating and after using toilet. UNICEF has declared October 15, 2008 as the ‘International Hand Wash Day’.

An Aware Consumer is an Asset

To mark the National Consumer Day, a consultation workshop with the support of District Supply Office (DSO), Chittorgarh was organised at CUTS CHD on December 24, 2008. The theme for the consumer day was ‘Sajag Upbhokta, Surakshit Upbhokta’.

Samit Sharma, District Collector, Chittorgarh requested participants to support the consumer movement of CUTS. While speaking on the use of generic medicines, he laid stress on its consumption. He shared his plan to develop Chittorgarh as model district. DSO gifted a sewing machine to Hussain Bibi, a physically challenged woman to start her own enterprise. Various consumer issues were discussed by other participants.

The District Supply Office awarded Bhagwan Lal Sharma and Vishnu Kumar Kumawat (Social workers), Ravi Jadhav (District Supply Office), Amit Chowdhury (CUTS) and Giriraj Prasad Gupta (Member, District Consumer Forum) for their valuable contribution in helping consumers to get justice.

Drive Against Alcohol Abuse

In an effort to create awareness among community about the ill effects of alcohol and for protecting youth from the consequences of consumption of alcohol, Dainik Bhaskar launched a statewide campaign warning the youth against the risks of abuse.

The newspaper requested CUTS CHD to join hands in the advocacy campaign for Chittorgarh. Two campaigns against alcoholism were organised in Rithola village on December 20, 2008 and Ghatiawali village with women SHG on December 21, 2008 respectively. More than 100 women joined hands and vowed to work against alcoholism.

Polio Eradication Initiative

A campaign to support polio eradication was organised in Government Primary School, Rithola on December 20, 2008. The purpose of the campaign was to spread message of National Polio Vaccination Day scheduled for December 21, 2008 and request parents to visit polio booths with their kids for polio drops. A polio booth was opened at CUTS CHD premises on December 21, 2008. CUTS CHD staff helped government volunteers during the immunisation programme.

Successful Advocacy

Admission to School

In the parents meeting at Rithola village under Devri Panchayat, Sunita Kumari complained that although representatives from NGOs persuaded her to send her daughter to school, her daughter was denied admission in the school. In response, Neetu Joshi of CUTS met with the school principal in this regard, who, after listening to the complaint, informed that the daughter of Sunita Kumari did not attend school regularly, and if her parents ensure that she would go to school regularly, the school would admit her. CUTS CHD staff made contact with girls’ parents and requested them to send her to school regularly. Sunita was taken back after her parents assured to send her to school regularly.

‘No’ to Child Marriage

What Durga Kumari, president of the Bal Panchayat of Ghaghsa village in Chittorgarh district did was an exemplary step. She defied the age-old tradition of child marriage plaguing Rajasthan, in general, and Chittorgarh, in particular. When one day, Durga came to know that her father has invited groom’s relative for her marriage, she appeared before them and clearly said that she was not ready for marriage, as she did not attain the marriageable age. Durga Kumari also vowed not to allow any such marriage in her village. Along with guests, her father got angry with her open defiance, but after CUTS staff approached Durga’s father, he relented and decided not to marry his daughter. Because of CUTS’ effort, the life of the teenager has been saved from being ruined.
Amit Chowdhury and Madan Lal Keer attended a training programme on project management for Mother NGO partners organised by the State Reproductive Child Health (RCH) office, Rajasthan and Regional Resource Centre- Voluntary Health Association of India (RRC-VHAI), New Delhi at Jaipur, on October 16, 2008.

Prashanto Baakshi attended a state level consultation meeting on ‘Child Survival Environment in Rajasthan’ organised by Save the Children-Bal Raksha (SC-BR) at Jaipur, on November 05, 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity to share recent initiatives taken by relevant government departments, international NGOs and CSOs and individuals, in improving the status of child survival in the state.

A team of nine people from Apeksha Homoeo Society, Amrawati, Maharashtra and 25-member team including 16 children from TAAL, Dhar, Madhya Pradesh visited CUTS CHD on October 01-04, 2008 and October 14-16, 2008 respectively to view the work of CUTS’ Bal Panchayat.

SH Shekhawat, AGM-NABARD, Bhilwara visited SHGs in Mandalgarh block to interact with animators and SHG leaders and monitor the progress of SHG activities. He promised to extend full cooperation from NABARD for livelihood support.

Pratap Singh Mehta with his wife Shel Mehta and sister Urmila Mehta visited CUTS CHD on November 13, 2008. Pratap Singh appreciated CUTS’ work and wished for success in its effort to establish a trouble free society.

Two teams from CECOEDECON: 32 animators from Dungarpur and 59 animators and field workers from Jaipur visited CUTS CHD on November 17 & 23, 2008 respectively. The purpose of their visit was to interact with SHG and Bal Panchayat members and know about the activities.

Prithvi Singh Mehta and Darshana Mehta visited CUTS CHD on December 23, 2008. They were briefed about the Centre’s activities and Darshana Mehta was requested to take a session on stress management for CUTS CHD staff for which she provided her consent.

Olivia, her husband Frederic and his parents visited CHD on December 13, 2008. They appreciated CUTS work and wished for success in its effort.

Samit Sharma, District Collector, Chittorgarh, Giri Raj Prashad, President, District Consumer Forum, and Jai Prakash, Agarwal, DSO-Chittorgarh visited the Centre during the National Consumer Day function on December 24, 2008.