

The Girl Child Shield Project

Girl Guides Association/ UNICEF, Pakistan

Location: All 4 provinces, Federally Administered areas of Azad Jammu Kashmir, Islamabad, Northern Areas, Pakistan

Target groups: Adolescent girls between the ages of 11 and 16; schools, families and communities.

Strategic approach: Rights based approach to girls' education and health

Area of operation: 800 schools in rural and urban areas throughout Pakistan



The Girl Child Shield Project in Pakistan: The Right to be Equal

Background and rationale

"For the women of most houses in Pakistan, sadly the age of enlightenment has not yet dawned. A woman's role is always conceived to be a light one, not of an actor in a serious real life drama but of a pretty demure character...that my friends are not right! Should we womenfolk not be free to do, as we like and to say what we like? Men might not be ready to hear us but it's about time we take a stand and make ourselves heard!" This is how Sobia Yaqub, a nineteen-year-old young woman who participated in the project three years ago, ended her winning speech to an audience of 600 people on Women's Liberation Day in Islamabad. Not only did she get a deafening applause her pictures got printed in all the local dailies.

Sobia has a vibrant personality, full of confidence and determination to excel. Her aim in life is *"to fight against all sorts of gender discrimination"... "I wasn't like this a few years back...I was actually quite different. I lacked confidence and was an extremely introverted*

person, getting around expressing my feelings was a major feat. Public places and large gatherings scared me."

She says that the project *"empowered me in such unique ways. I actually felt good about being a woman. It made me realize that all the power I used to yearn for is right within me and not with my father, brother or future husband."*

But most women and girls in Pakistan suffer from discrimination throughout the life cycle, and adolescent girls often suffer the most. Already as young women, they are often confined to the home without opportunities for education, knowledge, skills or even the company of other young girls. Facing discrimination from the time of birth, more girl children than boys die before reaching the age of five, fewer girls are enrolled in schools than boys, and more girls drop out before completing five years of education. Skills training and income generation opportunities for girls are almost non-existent. The lack of opportunities prevents girls

and women from rural areas or urban slums from breaking out of the stereotyped roles to which they have been relegated. Thus they continue to be seen as having lesser abilities than boys and men, and are given a lower status in the family and community, further continuing the vicious cycle of discrimination and preference for sons.

In 1997, after several years of informal co-operation and following the development and testing of a pilot program, the Pakistan Girl Guides Association (PGGA) and UNICEF launched a Girl Child Shield Project. The goal of this project is to improve the status of women and girl children in Pakistan. By May 2001, the project had involved an estimated 100,000 girls in over 800 schools in lower and middle income urban and rural communities, trained them as role models on girl child issues, child rights, affirmative communication and team building. It had also reached an impressive number of peers (1,000,000) and families (100,000).

Objectives

The overall goal of the project is to improve the status of girls and women in Pakistan. It seeks to increase the Girl Guides' awareness of the problems girls face in their communities, raise their self-esteem, confidence, communication skills and increase their ability to engage in community service. The acquisition of new knowledge and skills by girls is intended to demonstrate to peers, families and communities the potential of girls and their abilities to act as role models and change agents, and thus to positively influence attitudes towards girls and reduce gender discrimination.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Increase awareness of child rights, girl child issues and importance of health, hygiene and education in the survival and development of children.
- Encourage participation in activities to improve health, nutrition and education of girls, women, families and communities.
- Empower girl guides to communicate with others and address the problems faced by girls in Pakistan.

Programme components

Gender-based awareness-raising

The project builds awareness among girls about child rights, girl child issues, education and health. The Pakistan Girl Guides Association (PGGA) and UNICEF have developed and produced a variety of communication kits, the content of which shows evidence of careful preparation, being based on situation analyses and pre-tested before widespread use. Full use is also made of the Meena multimedia package, an animated film and cartoon series produced by UNICEF, to promote the rights of the girl child.

The project is designed around six proficiency badges, which the Girl Guides have to 'earn'. The badges are activity based and encourage girls to learn about their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to improve the status of girls. Four of the badges increase awareness about the status, education, health, and rights of the girl child; the two others enable girls to learn about participation, interpersonal relations, and collective planning and action.

Each guide in the project has to complete two compulsory badges: Facts for Life and Interpersonal Communication Skills, and two of the remaining four optional badges: Child Rights, Education, Girl Child Issues, or Team building. Once 12 girls in any Girl Guide Company complete four badges each, the



Company receives a special shield, the Guider a special certificate, and each girl an additional Shield badge.

Advocacy and participation

Girls are trained to develop advocacy skills and participate in school, family and community activities. The project also works with the girls to become role models and change agents. The Compulsory Communications badge and the optional Team-building badge aim to develop effective interpersonal skills and to help Guides work together toward collective goals. An important principle of the project is for girls to identify communication barriers and learn to work together with their families and communities to effect positive change.

In 2002, a new component was piloted and introduced: 'Senior Guides' (14 years and older girls) can obtain a 'Mashal' (torch) badge. After having been trained on HIV/AIDS along with advanced training on issues covered in the other badges, these Senior Guides are responsible for conducting 5-10 day camps in their communities to educate about children's rights and health related topics. The younger, regular Guides are working to increase their communities' awareness levels, while Senior Guides are conducting community training as a means of bringing sensitive issues to the forefront of their communities' agendas. Such training in several conservative communities where the program is being implemented, has significantly contributed to reduce the initial resistance among community members to discuss any controversial topics.

Community-based activities

By applying a participatory methodology and undertaking individual and collective activities, Guides can acquire experience in community-based activities, plan-development, and conflict resolution. Most activities take place in regular weekly meetings, during vacation weeks, and at service and work camps. In keeping with the practice of the International Guide Movement, the project relies on activity-based learning and participatory methodologies to build on existing knowledge, develop skills and demonstrate practical applicability. The project is designed to include Girl Guides in all levels of decision-making and to be flexible and receptive to changes in the implementation.

Capacity building at all levels

The project emphasis training of national and provincial officers,

teachers and Guiders. This has ensured a valuable pool of master trainers and experienced Guiders.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To monitor and evaluate the project, PGGA and UNICEF have developed a set of indicators to measure progress. The project also conducts focus group discussions with girls who participate, others who do not participate, mothers and other community members to monitor any changes and progress.

In June 2001, the project was evaluated by an outside expert.¹ The evaluation found evidence of extensive monitoring of the project components, using both quantitative and qualitative indicators, to assess the proficiency and quality of the various activities and to ensure uniformity of knowledge, skills, efficiency and value across the project.

The evaluation report suggests that 'the project has achieved its objectives in raising awareness, participation and empowerment, in the acquisition and advocacy of knowledge and life skills and in effecting positive changes in family and community perceptions of girls.' The positive results were attributed to the well-developed implementation strategies. The commitment and quality of the services by the PGGA's national officers and Guides were highlighted as well developed. National officers and the Guides were seen as good role models for girls and women themselves.

Funding

Funded by UNICEF and the Swiss Development Corporation, the project has been brought to scale, a process begun in 1998. The first

project phase (1998-2001) has been completed and the second phase (2002-2004) focuses on consolidating the results. The second phase of the project also involves networking with NGOs, CBOs, government bodies and other groups that can serve as potential employers for the young women when their time as Girl Guides is over.

Achievements and lessons learned

- **Increased awareness among the girls about child rights and responsibilities and the ways in which these rights might be realized.** The evaluation showed that the girls were familiar with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the importance of these rights for their survival, development and protection. Likewise they were actively aware of discriminatory attitudes and practices that were affecting girls in their own homes and communities. They were encouraged to take action to improve their status, and showed a special awareness of their right to equality in education. They understood how discriminatory practices inhibited their full development as individuals and reduced their abilities to contribute to their families and to society. Many reported how they had attempted to win freedoms for themselves or others.
- **Rights and responsibilities go together.** Awareness of rights and responsibilities has not only increased among the girls, but also among their families and communities. The girls showed an understanding of their rights

and their responsibilities, including the importance of educating their families and communities. The equal emphasis on responsibilities meant that the project enjoyed widespread support by parents, teachers and community leaders despite a social context in which family and community leaders retain considerable authority and control - often to the detriment of the development of the child, and particularly the girl-child. Schoolteachers, family and community members reported many positive findings, for instance that Guides had persuaded their families, schools or communities to upgrade their health and hygiene practices.

- **Using innovative strategies to raise awareness among the wider community.** The Guides became aware of the conditions of others, engaged in outreach activities to benefit others, and acted as role models and change agents. In particular, Senior Guide community camps offered an important opportunity for raising the Guides' awareness about rural conditions, the conditions of girls and women from low income families, and their own confidence in their abilities to help and teach in poor villages. The communities in which they work benefited from the presence of Guides in both tangible and intangible ways.
- **Harnessing broad community support to address possible resistance by community and religious leaders.** Accusations that the project was promulgating a 'western' agenda by supporting women's rights were made but effectively counterbalanced by the local support for the project.

■ **Participatory training methodologies have been successful.** The evaluation found that the Guides were able to discuss and express their opinions effectively, with confident words and attitudes. A number of girls reported on their new status as visible and responsible members of their families and communities. Many described how they had to be quite assertive to overcome the initial opposition by their fathers and brothers. Given that all Guides were school-going girls, it is difficult to ascertain how much confidence and self-esteem was evident before entry into the project and how much was acquired during the project. However, there was consensus among girls, teachers, parents and community leaders, that the project has helped the girls to overcome shyness, insecurity and feelings of inferiority. Guides were also seen as more confident in their own knowledge and abilities and seemed more cooperative.

■ **Partnership between UNICEF and PGGGA,** the collaboration of the both agencies has been crucial. PGGGA's organisational infrastructure, well-developed documentation skills, and careful and creative management have been attributed to the project success.

Challenges for the way forward

Despite the effectiveness and influence of the methodologies and materials of the Girl Child Shield Project on Pakistan's national Girl Guide movement, it has been estimated that only about half the Girl Guide companies and between 25 to 50 percent of all Guides have

participated in the project. Although the numbers of master trainers and experienced Guiders is growing slowly, a major challenge for the project is to **fast track the training and increase the pool of trainers and Guides**. If the project wants to strengthen its current operations and meet the demand by many other girls to become girl guides, the project might have to either expand the number of training programs for the Girl Guide Shield Project or integrate specific training sessions into the general training provided for the regular guiding movement.

It has also been recommended to **extend the project to younger girls in Junior Guides and to older girls in Senior Guides** and to expedite this development to increase the project's reach. Practical constraints on the supply of materials and training for the project will have to be addressed to continue and enlarge its reach.

Further, it has been recommended to identify formal ways to extend the messages and methodologies of the Girl Guide Shield Project to other girls in Pakistan outside the Guide movement. Incorporating the project into school curricula, school assemblies or classroom meetings could prove to be very beneficial. However, consideration should also be given to reach and involve young girls who are not in school. Reaching these girls will be challenging, but critically important.

Given the abysmally low status of women and girl children in Pakistan in general, projects such as these, which **build skills at the individual level and seek to change family and community norms**, should be replicated at a much larger scale. Building **partnerships, networking**

and increasing advocacy efforts with policy makers are vital in this regard.

Like many other projects which work with young people, the project faces challenges to sustain the benefits which the young women have obtained from participating in the project. **Identifying employment opportunities** for young women who have completed the Girl Guide project, could significantly contribute to enable these young women to continue to positively impact on their families and communities – and themselves.

In addition, the project has started to **recognize the importance of HIV prevention**. In 2002, 'Senior Guides' (14 years and older girls) were trained on HIV/AIDS along with advanced training on issues covered in the programme. However, there appears to be a critical need to strengthen the integration of HIV prevention, along with sexual and reproductive health awareness. Incorporating regular **life skills based education for HIV prevention**ⁱ could build on the strengths of the project. The project is in a good position to link the development of psycho-social competencies and interpersonal skills with HIV content information so that young girls can make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively and communicate effectively about matters related to their sexual and reproductive health. In a country, where women and young girls are faced with enormous lack of access to knowledge and services, good quality, gender sensitive, interactive teaching and learning methods combined with HIV/AIDS information could make a critical difference in reducing their risk and vulnerability to HIV infection.

ⁱ Annex 4: 'At a Glance: Life Skills Based Education and Young People'

Although HIV prevalence is so far considered to be relatively low in Pakistan, the country has already an estimated 78,000 persons living with HIV. About 16,000 of them are women. It is estimated that the total number of young people infected with HIV is about 21,500.² As such, the project could **provide creative entry points** to work with young girls to increase not only their knowledge about HIV/AIDS, but importantly to build on their well developed self-esteem raising project components and integrate for instance decision making and communication skills about matters related to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health into the training.

Building on the project's experience with participatory training methodologies, **Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) assessments** will be valuable, not only to determine individual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, availability of services and sources of sexual health information, but also to identify community norms and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS, sexuality and reproductive health. The project has already well established links with the Girl Guides, parents, teachers and community leaders, who could easily be involved in a PLA assessment. Such a participatory assessment would have many benefits. Most importantly the involvement of parents, teachers, girls and boys in conducting and analyzing the assessment can be an empowering process in itself, increase ownership and reduce potential opposition towards integrating HIV and sexual health information.

Further, the project has a valuable pool of trainers and Girl Guides,

who could also be trained to become **peer educators for school going girls**.ⁱⁱ However, barely 40 percent of girls in Pakistan are enrolled in schools and of this only 54 percent complete their primary education.³ Girls who are out of schools have even fewer opportunities to access information on HIV/AIDS and sexual health. As such, the Girl Guides could become **valued peer educators for young girls who are out of schools** too.

Moreover, increased **networking with organizations working with boys and young men**ⁱⁱⁱ, such as the Boys Scouts, will likely contribute to a considerable mass of young people who could be engaged in advocacy efforts for HIV prevention among young people, religious leaders and the community.

Clarifying organizational values and attitudes towards HIV and people living with HIV will also be essential. This may be most useful if undertaken as part of broader strategy to build the organizational capacity in developing and implementing a stronger HIV prevention component. Given the already existent challenge to find further master trainers and Guides this will require significant commitment inside the organization as well as outside support. However, compared to the severe threat which HIV and AIDS pose to the health and development of the country, such proposed early and community based responses can make a significant difference.

The **rights based approach** of the project to girls' development and education does provide the critical framework as well as the rational to make HIV prevention efforts avail-

ⁱ Annex 9: 'At a Glance: Young People and Peer Education'

ⁱⁱⁱ Annex 7: 'At a Glance: Gender and HIV/AIDS'

able to young women and men and children - as stipulated by the Convention of the Rights of the Child.⁴

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¹ Croll, E (2001) The Girl Child Shield Project. Assessment Report. Commissioned by UNICEF and PGGA

² UNAIDS (2002) Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic. Geneva.

³ South and West Asia Regional Technical Advisory Group and UNESCO (2000) Education for All in South Asia and West Asia: A Decade after Jomtien: An Assessment. Synthesis Report. Prepared by Jandhyala B G Tilak, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) General Comment No 3. HIV/AIDS and the Rights of the Child. CRC/GC/2003/1.32nd Sessions