

“Creating Child Friendly Schools”
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Summary of the project

The project aimed at creating child-friendly schools and education where children’s dignity is respected and where their rights in relation to education are put on the agenda of educators, parents and decision makers. In this regard, appropriate training and orientation material were produced in order to facilitate the understanding and practice of these rights. The objectives of the project were:

- To provide the school principal, teachers, parents, and students with child-friendly schools (CFS) concepts to promote the rights of the child and their practice.
- To produce and disseminate child-friendly materials on the CRC and guidelines on the formation of school forums.

Therefore, the project is intended to make children's right to be known and heard a reality by giving intensive training to student leaders, head teachers, school principals, parents and district education officers who are represented from 40 primary schools in the country.

Challenges on the organizational level

Students’ participation processes are hampered right from the beginning because of the inability to set up self-assessment tools in schools and in the monitoring process of implementation through appropriate monitoring tools for children and community members.

Teachers and school administrators need to update their skills and to develop a greater understanding towards child-friendly education in order to gain the trust of students and encourage them to remain and participate in the school. Some teachers’ discriminatory practices against girls or subjective treatment of boys also give the people the impression that they are unreliable or that they are unconcerned. This discourages parents and students from participating in and out of school activities.

Students withdraw from school club participation because of lack of teaching aids/sports equipment, home economics/basic technology equipment, textbooks, student workbooks and other school supplies. These supplies and equipments are supposed to be purchased from the school fees. Teachers affirm that due to low collection of school fees, the school could not provide the required materials.

Normally, textbooks are shared by two or three students and sometimes even more. When girls share the books with a boy, the boy intimidates the girls and gets to take the book home. The girls end up not being able to read the lessons and do the assignments resulting in poor performance in school.

Among the national government officials, the lack of commitment given to public education is a contributing factor that not enough budget, resources and actions are being directed towards the solution of education-related problems. Lack of funds, lack of good facilities, and adequate supplies are very real problems. Despite being on track with the education sector reform, the country continues to face serious challenges. High dropout and fail rates have persisted at primary level. The quality of education is only beginning to be seriously addressed in the curriculum reform, learning standards and learning under the child-friendly schools approach. Overcoming serious inequalities in education through pro-poor policies has narrowed the enrolment gaps, but the gap between the richest and poorest groups still remains significant.

The efficiency of project implementation (use of available resources in achieving expected results) may have suffered because of the time-span of support provided. Creation of CFS requires a long-term commitment of all the stakeholders involved in terms of policy-making and policy-support, provision of financial and human resources and professional development. It is difficult to build such commitment if stakeholders are uncertain about the continuity of activities due to short-term instead of long-term support.

The pilot project focused on only one 'entry point' of the entire CFS concept and none of the pilot schools has introduced all CFS characteristics yet. Thus, the CFS initiative project's overall strategy has been effective and yet a full and shared understanding of the concept still has to be built.

Challenges of social, cultural or religious nature

The lack of understanding and the prevailing attitudes concerning child-friendly education that still dominate in various sectors of the population have been crucial stumbling blocks to the success of the programs. Factors preventing students from effectively benefiting from educational programmes are:

- Little appreciation about girls' problems.
- Lack of confidence in school teachers and administrators.
- Adherence to traditional beliefs such as the preference to educate boys before girls.
- The idea that girls belong at home.
- The absence of a mechanism for communities' participation in increasing the enrolment and retention rates.