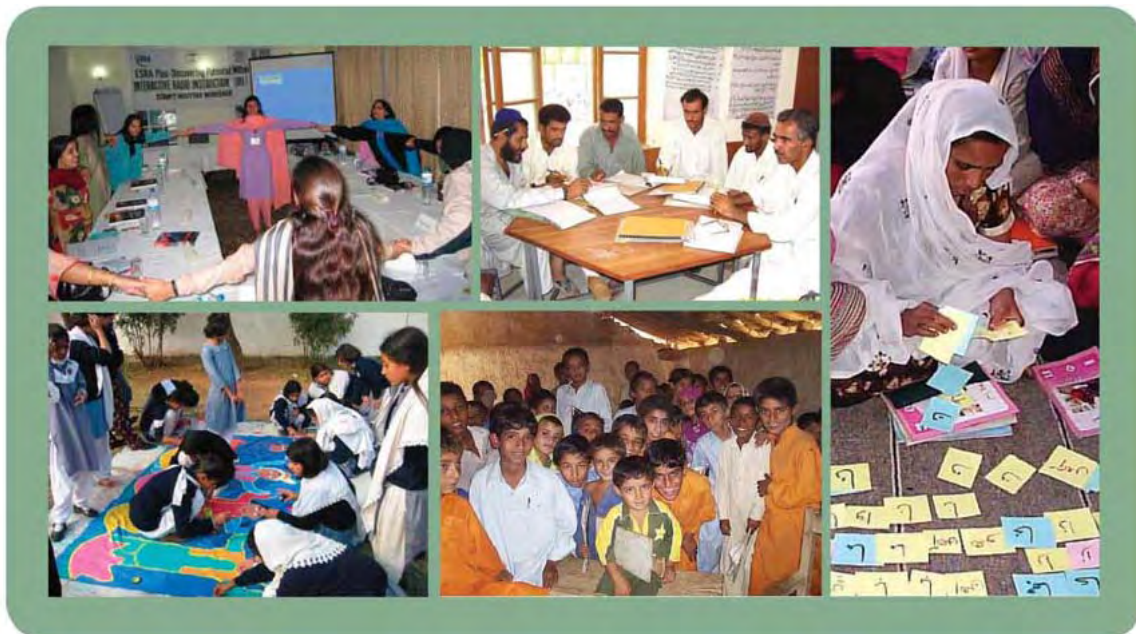




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Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) Program

Best Practices, Success Stories, and Lessons Learned during Program Implementation



Cooperative Agreement 391-A-00-03-01000-00

<http://www.esra.org.pk>

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during Program Implementation

Main Implementing Partners:

Research Triangle Institute (RTI)
Aga Khan Foundation–Aga Khan Education Services (AKES)
Aga Khan Foundation–Aga Khan University (AKU)
American Institute for Research (AIR)
Balochistan Consortium for Professional Development (BCPD)
Education Development Center (EDC)
Indus Resource Center (IRC)
International Reading Association (IRA)
LEAD Pakistan
National Rural Support Programme (NRSP)
PAIMAN Alumni Association
Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP)
Save the Children Foundation–US (SC)
Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan (SCSPEB)
Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO)
The Asia Foundation (TAF)
United Education Initiative (UEI)
World Education (WE)

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Abbreviations

ADP	Assistant District Officer
BCPD	Balochistan Consortium for Professional Development
BOCEC	Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Centers
CSO	civil society organization
DEMIS	District Education Management Information Systems
DEP	District Education Plan
DIG	District Improvement Grant
DIP	District Improvement Plan
DoE	Department of Education
EDO	Executive District Officer
EMC	Education Monitoring Committee
EMIS	education management information systems
ESR	Education Sector Reforms
ESRA	Education Sector Reform Assistance
FDE	Federal Directorate of Education
FMIS	Financial Management Information System
FOG	Fixed Obligation Grant
FRP	Family Reading Program
ILM	Integrated Literacy Model
IR	Intermediate Result
IRC	Indus Resource Center
LGO	local governance ordinance
LRC	Learning Resource Center
MNA	Member of the National Assembly
MPA	Member of the Provincial Assembly
NEMIS	National Education Management Information Systems
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PCP	public-community partnership
PDF	Professional Development Forum
PHCR	Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights
PITE	Provincial Institutes of Technical Education
PKR	Pakistan Rupee
PSO	Project Support Officer
PSU	Project Support Unit
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RC	Resource Center
RSMAC	Region Specific Modular Alternative for Construction
RSU	Reform Support Unit
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
SEMIS	Sindh Education Management Information Systems
SIG	School Improvement Grant

SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
SO	strategic objective
UEI	United Education Initiative
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Background Information

The Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) is a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded program which supports the government’s Education Sector Reforms (ESR) initiative. Operating under a bilateral agreement between the Governments of Pakistan and the United States, USAID/ESRA is organized through national and international partners led by RTI International,¹ North Carolina, USA.

The program’s objective derives from USAID’s strategic objective (SO) which seeks “increased knowledge, training, and infrastructure to develop high quality education programs for girls and boys throughout Pakistan.”

USAID/ESRA seeks to achieve this SO by producing five Intermediate Results (IRs) (see Figure 1). Each IR derives from a corresponding IR from the USAID results framework for the education sector in Pakistan. The relationship between USAID and ESRA results frameworks is described in the table below:

Figure 1. Relationship between USAID and ESRA Results Frameworks

USAID	ESRA
IR 3.1 Strengthened education sector policy and planning	IR 1 Demand responsive government education planning, management systems, and procedures in place and functioning
IR 3.2 Improved capacity of teachers and administrators	IR 2 In-service education professional development systems and structures strengthened, in place and functioning
IR 3.3 Improved youth and adult literacy	IR 3 Youth and adult literacy provision framework and systems in place and functioning in each target area
IR 3.4 Expanded public-private partnerships to improve the delivery of educational services	IR 4 Public participation/support mechanisms/systems in place and functioning
SO3: Increase knowledge, training, and infrastructure to develop high quality education programs for girls and boys throughout Pakistan.	IR 5 Innovative Information Communication Technology (ICT)- and pedagogy-based models and approaches developed and tested to support USAID/ESRA initiatives (ESRA Plus). ESRA Plus tests USAID/ESRA’s strategy in rural and semi-urban settings in 66 schools of Islamabad Capital Territory.

¹ RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.

Introduction

During five years of program implementation, USAID/ESRA experimented with various strategies and apparatus for effective delivery of its support to the Ministry of Education in policy work, system strengthening, and service delivery. Through this process, some practices were altered by experience, others were refined, and some were discarded altogether. Program design was continuously revised and restructured with an aim to achieve targets in the most effective, cost efficient, and sustainable manner. Along with its focus on service delivery, the program also concentrated on strengthening the systems that delivered education services and on supporting the creation of a policy environment conducive to quality service delivery.

This document presents a collection of best practices, success stories, and lessons learned, selected from five years of implementation. The practices have been chosen both because they proved effective in achieving targets and in making an impact on beneficiaries. Success stories are gleaned from USAID/ESRA's work to highlight the ways in which program results have begun to touch the lives of beneficiaries. Lessons learned during program implementation have been documented to inform similar programs and projects in the future.

The preparation of this document was based on several broad parameters. Practices were considered "best practices" only if evidence substantiated that they were particularly successful in achieving desired results. We did not select entire activities, but rather practices from within larger activities, and described how actors, procedures, and stakeholders worked together to make these practices effective. For example, Fixed Obligation Grants are documented as a best practice because they proved useful in encouraging School Management Committees (SMCs) to first acquire training and then to use grant funds gainfully. Similarly, success stories were selected only if they had an element of scale and if they were an intended success, not a contingent or coincidental consequence of an activity. Readers will note that a number of success stories resulted from best practices. Lessons learned were reported if they were not situation-specific and would be valuable in informing future interventions. These lessons were used by the USAID/ESRA team to improve program implementation.

The best practices, success stories, and lessons learned presented in this document have been prepared by the program team. The Office of Technical Support selected, evaluated, and revised them according to the parameters mentioned above. The complete document was circulated among the program team and senior management for a peer review and their inputs were integrated into the finalized document.

This document is spread across USAID/ESRA's five areas of focus: (1) policy and planning, (2) professional development, (3) youth and adult literacy, (4) public-community and public-private partnerships, and (5) information and communication technologies in education.

Best Practices



Best Practice Number 1

District Education Management Information Systems Reporting Tool

Improving transparency and participation in the use of data for education planning. USAID/ESRA supports the district Department of Education (DoE) in Sukkur to strengthen its District Education Management Information Systems (DEMIS) as part of a larger initiative to improve the department's planning and management capacities through improved collection, dissemination, and use of data at the district level. To assist data use and presentation, USAID/ESRA developed a Planning and Reporting Tool that prepares simple, indicator-based reports for school, subdistrict, and district use. The model has evolved over time and is now also used at the provincial level. The software consists of three modules: (1) a Reporting module, (2) a Planning module, and (3) a Data Management module. The reporting tool is presented below as a best practice.

Reporting Tool

Initially developed to produce school report cards illustrated with analyzed information in graphs and charts for illiterate parents, SMCs, and local politicians, this tool provides school-specific data and compares school standing to the union council (UC), tehsil, and district averages. School report cards provide information on (a) enrollment by grade; (b) pupil/teacher ratios; (c) pupils per seat; (d) school average test scores on local Grade V and VIII, and (e) pupil/teacher attendance. To assist education management display and understand data, this tool also provides a variety of predeveloped reports. The tool is easy to configure: new indicators can be added according to requirements. It can also be used to generate reports that provide information on enrollment; compare schools within an administrative area; compare a particular school to averages for administrative areas; compare enrollment over time; and provide information such as gender ratios, facility availability, and transition rates.

The tool caters to the planning needs of provincial and district DoEs. In Sukkur, school reports have been used by parents and SMCs to lobby for resources at the district level. District management has used the tool to rationalize teachers, allocate physical facilities plan interventions, and formulate development budgets for the next financial year. The Reform Support Unit (RSU) in Sindh has used the tool to inform the distribution of PKR 100 million to each district in Sindh for improving physical facilities in schools.

Three other districts, Hyderabad, Tando Allah Yar, and Matiari are replicating the tool through their own initiatives. The DoE in Sindh has developed a proposal and budget for replicating the Planning and Reporting Tool in all the remaining districts of the province. It is seeking funds from the European Union for this replication. The RSU has taken complete ownership of the tool; all changes to the tool and the associated software are being made by the Sindh Education Management Information Systems (SEMIS) technical team.

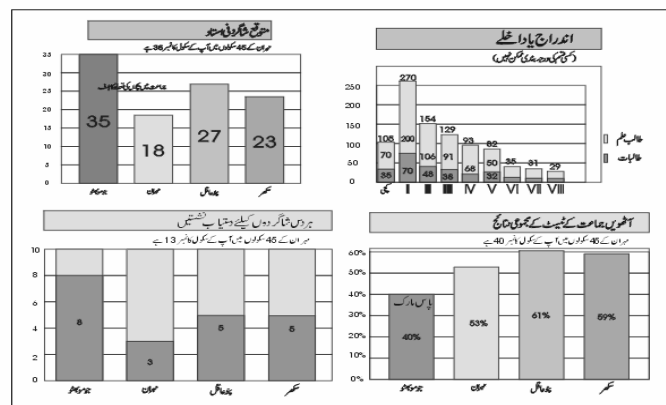
Best Practice Number 2

Sukkur District School Report Cards

USAID/ESRA works with the district Department of Education (DoE) in Sukkur to improve quality and use of data at the school and community level by recording and analyzing information on expected class size, enrollment, bench seats available, and overall test score for Grades V and VIII, and by recording the information on “school report cards.” These report cards allow teachers, parents, and communities to monitor progress of their school and assess their school’s performance over the years as compared to others in the UC, tehsil, and the district.

Communities have used this information to improve their schools by taking various actions. For example, upon studying these report cards, communities were able to approach the school administration and local politicians to improve planning for school enrollment, teacher rationalization, and physical facilities. In fact, school communities were able to point out faulty information and to place pressure on head teachers to fill out school report card questionnaires correctly. A sample report card is shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Sample Report Card



As part of this initiative, USAID/ESRA conducted a series of 56 workshops in Sukkur to train head teachers, SMC members, and local politicians to interpret and use school report cards for improving conditions in their schools. Parents, teachers, community members, and local politicians demonstrated strong knowledge on the contents of the reports, including the respective position of their school to UC, tehsil, and district averages. They were able to identify priorities for their school and to point out issues that could be addressed through SMCs. In addition, they demonstrated keen interest in improving the situation in their respective schools by taking up issues with the local and provincial administration. Communities said that until schools started using these report cards, the communities had been completely uninformed about their school’s performance.

Best Practice Number 3

Provincial Consortiums for Professional Development

USAID/ESRA's professional development program has formed provincial consortiums to plan and implement its professional development activities in target districts. The strategy to form provincial consortiums was adopted to access and train thousands of target teachers and head teachers, a task that would have been difficult for any single organization because of capacity constraints. To leverage public-private partnerships to strengthen public sector teacher education institutions, USAID/ESRA brought together private- and public-sector teacher training institutes in Sindh and Balochistan. The consortium in Sindh, known as United Education Initiative (UEI), comprises the Sindh Bureau of Curriculum and Extension Centers (BOCEC), the Provincial Institute for Teacher Education (PITE) Sindh, Sindh University, Notre Dame Institute of Education, Indus Resource Center (IRC), and Jamia Millia University. With the exception of BOCEC, these organizations came together as UEI in January 2004. BOCEC joined the consortium in 2006. The Balochistan Consortium for Professional Development (BCPD) was constituted by the provincial Secretary for Education, Balochistan, through a notification in 2004 at the behest of USAID/ESRA. It comprises four organizations: (1) BOCEC Balochistan, (2) PITE Balochistan, (3) the provincial DoE, and (4) the University of Balochistan and Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan.

The formation of these consortiums for professional development has set a precedent in Pakistan, and the mix of private- and public-sector institutions has provided learning and growth opportunities for institutions in both sectors. They have learned to draw on each other's strengths to achieve the common objective of training teachers and head teachers across the 12 target districts. Private-sector institutions brought with them a certain level of skills, expertise, and specialization, whereas public-sector institutions had the advantage of being well-versed with the local education systems and practices. The success of this endeavor is manifest in USAID/ESRA's teacher training outcome: the program has successfully provided content-based and pedagogical professional development to approximately 30,000 teachers. USAID/ESRA helped develop the consortiums' capacity by offering assistance in proposal writing, material development, monitoring and evaluation tools and systems formation, and training approaches development, and has assisted them periodically in various other capacities as well. Many issues emerged in the process of bringing various institutions under one umbrella, such as needing to motivate the individual organizations to work amicably with each other. This problem still exists to some extent, but it has been mitigated by engaging the partner organizations in regular meetings and encouraging them to discuss all issues.

All the partner organizations mentioned above brought in specific strengths and distributed their areas of concentration to meet targets in the required timeframe. These consortiums have contributed to strengthening the professional development infrastructure at the provincial level and have committed to continue working together in the future for teacher education at both the provincial and the district level. Their existence does not depend on the provision of funds; the consortiums' sustainability

can be ensured by the partner organizations through their agreeing to work together on similar projects in the future. Support from provincial DoEs would help sustain this innovative arrangement, and the consortiums can go a long way in strengthening provincial level professional development structures and systems.

Best Practice Number 4

Professional Development Forums (PDFs)

As a result of the devolution of governance, district DoEs are required to independently plan and manage education interventions across their districts. Professional development of its staff is one prominent activity that falls under the district's scope of work. To help increase district capacity to plan and manage professional development, USAID/ESRA has assisted districts in adopting the practice of holding Professional Development Forums (PDFs) on a monthly basis. The purpose of these PDFs is to create a district-wide network of professional development planners to contribute to district education planning.

These monthly PDFs provide opportunities for teachers, professional development staff, and education managers to discuss issues related to professional development, share progress, and plan for the future. The overarching objective of these forums, as stated earlier, is to embed participatory planning for professional development in the district's planning mechanism. In each of USAID/ESRA's 12 districts—as a result of needs assessment surveys conducted through PDFs—district professional development plans have been developed, and funds are now being sought from district budgets to implement these plans. In Thatta, the Executive District Officer (EDO) for Education has already allocated funds from the district budget. PDF members have adequately contributed to the training plans, and it is expected that these plans will eventually take the shape of annual district professional development plans.

PDFs have not only created opportunities for engaging district-based stakeholders in planning professional development of teachers, they are also an attempt to ensure sustainability of this process after the conclusion of the USAID/ESRA project. For this reason, the district education officials are encouraged to coordinate the forums.



A PDF meets in Noshki, Balochistan.

In addition to the district level forums, provincial level forums have also been held in Quetta, Karachi, and Hyderabad, and an interprovincial forum has been held in Sukkur. The purpose of these provincial level forums was to exchange best practices and lessons and to engage core members of district PDFs in a collective review of progress towards developing a sustainable, professional development infrastructure in their districts.

In recent months, wider ownership of these forums has been witnessed at the district level, and this ownership reflects the districts' acceptance of their usefulness. In Sukkur, Khairpur, Thatta, Hyderabad, Kech, Gwadar, Killa Saifullah, Chaghi, and Noshki, the formation of these PDFs has been formally notified by district DoEs. In Thatta, an application has been submitted to register the forum with the Department of Social Welfare. In Killa Saifullah, the PDF has already registered itself with the Social Welfare Department. The notifications have been signed by district EDOs (Education) and have been acquired in all districts through the efforts of the district PDF members. Core cabinet committees have been finalized and bylaws developed for the PDFs. In Kech, the district Nazim is extensively utilizing the PDF as a platform to launch district-wide education activities such as a children's quiz and a best teacher and best school selection.

It is envisaged that these PDFs will eventually devolve to the tehsil level in each district; input from these PDFs will inform district planning and decision making. Tehsil-based PDFs have already been notified in all districts except Thatta. With the notification of these PDFs and a core group of profession development experts identified in each district to take this effort forward, these tehsil-based PDFs will gradually evolve into consultative bodies for professional development that feed into the district's planning mechanism.

Best Practice Number 5

Spreading Literacy across Families

USAID/ESRA's Family Reading Program (FRP) is a post-literacy initiative that fosters a reading and learning culture among families of recent literates. This program was developed to help recent literates play an active role in the education of their families, particularly their children. It accomplishes this by

- Engaging recently literate adults in reading activities to sustain their literacy skills,
- Creating a reading culture at home by assisting adults in reading to their children,
- Helping adults understand ways that they can help their children in learning,
- Increasing the self-esteem of new literates and encouraging their civic participation in their communities, and
- Creating awareness by exposing recent literates and their families to all sorts of reading material.

Activities within this initiative include

- *Buddy System*—Each literacy learner enrolled as a reader in the FRP is expected to impart literacy skills to one other individual from their family or neighborhood. This unique aspect of the FRP ensures dissemination of knowledge and also reinforces the learners' basic literacy skills.
- *FRP reading corners*—Readers create "Reading Corners" in their homes and set up a regular reading time to develop a reading culture in the home where children are familiar with and interested in literature. Participants read a minimum of 80 books in either Urdu or Sindhi.
- *Discussion*—FRP seminars with the community focus on social, environmental, and health issues.
- *Projects*—Each reader completes the following projects: (1) an autobiography, (2) teaching at least five people how to write their name, (3) conducting at least four surveys in their communities on various topics (hygiene, male-female employment ratio, the number of community members reading the newspaper, number of literates in the community, etc) and writing reports based on their findings, (4) developing at least six story books, (5) developing a newsletter that reports creative activities, (6) making three creative booklets, and (7) composing draft letters to officials to solve local problems and making a booklet of these letters.

The FRP is implemented through local partner, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who train FRP mentors to visit classes and monitor the program, procure and distribute packages to readers, and monitor and evaluate the program themselves to maintain quality. By implementing the program through local organizations, USAID/ESRA is also building their capacity for literacy delivery.



Young participants in the FRP.



At a Reading Corner, little children flock around their grandmother, who is reading them a story.

Participants in the FRP have exhibited an increased sense of confidence and greater awareness of self and community. They have also displayed an increased interest towards learning. Parents can now understand their children's homework and are actively involved in their children's education. Discussion seminars and projects are conducted through the FRP; these help spread knowledge and information, while providing an opportunity to reinforce basic literacy skills.

FRP's claim as a "best practice" lies in the program's creativity in engaging entire families in flexible and appealing literacy programs delivered in the convenience of their own homes. The program has been successful in attracting candidates and in sustaining their literary skills by simultaneously engaging entire families. With a support system around them, neo-literates are more likely to retain their literacy skills. The program is easy and cost effective to implement and flexible in its timing, making it is easy to replicate.

Best Practice Number 6

Literacy Resource Centers

During the last three years, more than 100,000 learners have graduated from USAID/ESRA-sponsored literacy classes throughout Sindh and Balochistan. Although these graduates have expressed a strong interest in reading materials and requested continuous access to them, some come from remote areas where books are a rarity and libraries are nonexistent. In response to this demand from graduates and their communities, USAID/ESRA has established district-wide Literacy Resource Centers. These literacy centers adopt an integrated approach: simultaneously allowing learners and communities to access reading material, and professionals to access other facilities, including computers and photocopiers, provided at the center. To allow literacy graduates to use their newly acquired skills, the centers provide a variety of informative reading materials.

Every week, more than a thousand users visit USAID/ESRA's Literacy Resource Centers. Visitors include literacy graduates, students from local primary and secondary schools, college students, parents who bring their children, and other community members interested in current literature.

In most cases, district governments provide resources towards establishing the center (venue, electricity, learning material, etc) and local businesses and community members donate money, books, and other resources. Local NGOs have also provided technical assistance in the management of these centers and have staffed them with Literacy Resource Center Coordinators. USAID/ESRA donates culturally appropriate books, learning materials, and skill development tools (newspapers, journals, computer, CD player, CDs, games, posters, sewing machines).

The centers have proven to be an important resource for communities to access different kinds of learning materials. Bringing the government, businesses, and the community together to provide a public good for locals has proved to be a good example of an effective public-community partnership. This partnership also ensures the sustainability of the centers after the withdrawal of the USAID/ESRA program. Each Literacy Resource Center has developed a sustainability plan to ensure continuity after USAID/ESRA.

Not only does the center provide a learning and social platform where community members can gather for informational lectures, seminars, or other functional literacy activities, it also allows distant villages to benefit from its services. The Literacy Resource Center provides a Mobile Library for residents who cannot travel the distances to obtain literacy materials—or cannot afford them. Women are not encouraged to travel alone, and this is often the greatest deterrence to their obtaining an education; the Mobile Library is especially beneficial for women. Center Coordinators also function as Mobile Librarians, disseminating reading materials door-to-door in distant villages and keeping fresh reading material in circulation across the district.

District and provincial governments have shown interest in replicating USAID/ESRA Literacy Resource Centers in their regions. The model is easily replicable, requiring nominal contribution from the government, local NGOs, and the community. The center nurtures the growth of a literate culture and exemplifies a productive, cost-efficient way for district governments, local NGOs, and USAID/ESRA to collaborate together to increase and sustain literacy levels.

Best Practice Number 7

Use of Cash Grants as an Effective Intervention for School Management Committee (SMC) Training

Before USAID/ESRA initiated its cash grants program in target districts, local governments had allocated funds for SMCs in their education budget. Because these funds were intended for SMC use at their discretion without specific and agreed goals, they were very seldom used wisely.

SMCs lacked a vision for their schools and, therefore, made financial allocations with only short-term, limited goals in mind. Lack of training in school planning, financial planning, and budgeting aggravated the inefficient use of funds. Often, local governments were hesitant to allocate funds to SMCs; these funds were sometimes not even disbursed to them. When these funds were actually disbursed, SMCs were often hesitant to use them because of audit objections.

To avoid potential problems related to government grant disbursing mechanisms for SMCs, USAID/ESRA opted for a two-pronged strategy to strengthen SMCs and to enable them to successfully develop and implement School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that were used to solicit School Improvement Grants (SIGs). The strategy achieves the following.

1. Strengthens the capacity of SMCs to identify their own problems, to devise solutions, and to plan how to implement those solutions.
2. Provides SMCs with the resources needed in terms of capacity and the finances to implement their plans.



School community preparing a School Improvement Plan (SIP).

After SMCs have received training in core and functional competencies, they—along with school teachers, students, and local communities—are encouraged to visualize and prioritize improvements required in their schools, develop SIPs, and use them to solicit SIGs. SMC training is reinforced by the practice of identifying needs and utilizing grants to meet the needs. The training and support for obligatory

maintenance of SIG financial records, including cash books and vouchers, has permanently increased the capability of SMCs to deal with audit-related problems, even after USAID/ESRA will have withdrawn. The SIG/cash grants mechanism has provided the required leverage to link SMC training to practical implementation. Once SMCs have successfully implemented one round of SIGs, they are eligible to apply for a second round.

To achieve transparency and accountability in the SIP/SIG process, village assemblies are convened to first envision school improvement, and then to hand over copies of the checks and original deposit slips to the grantee SMCs in the presence of communities and other stakeholders. Each SMC discusses SIG deliverables and their approved cost before the village assembly and commits to completion of improvements within a stipulated time frame. The concept of the village assembly has also attracted the community's interest and contribution (in-cash or otherwise) for the cause of school improvement. The necessary involvement and consent of communities in SMC affairs has been instrumental in re-establishing SMC and government confidence and SMC operations.



Communities and local masons working together to improve a school's infrastructure.

Evidence of the success of this best practice lies in the successful improvement of schools through the 6,107 SIGs in the first round and the 4,514 SIGs in the second round.

Village assemblies left limited room for malpractice in finance as well as in implementation of SIPs, and also involved general communities in the whole process. This is deemed to be the first step for the communities to begin taking control of their schools.

Best Practice Number 8

District Project Support Unit (PSU) for Public-Community Partnerships

To encourage and empower school communities to participate in the school improvement process, USAID/ESRA provides them training in school-based planning and management. This training is followed by the distribution of cash grants to participating communities/schools, giving them an opportunity to implement supervised school improvement.

To distribute cash grants among schools, USAID/ESRA conceptualized and set up Project Support Units (PSUs) in its target districts. PSUs are the outcome of an agreement signed with district governments to ensure active participation and support of the district DoEs in the SIG mechanism.

The PSU is a committee comprising the EDO (Education) as a representative of the district government, the District Manager, USAID/ESRA, and a district representative from USAID/ESRA's partner NGO in the district. Partner NGOs are involved in training SMCs and providing them with technical support during processing and implementation of SIGs. This three-member team receives, processes, appraises, approves, and funds SIPs submitted by school communities against a budgeted grant amount. A USAID/ESRA engineer, known as a Project Support Officer (PSO), works as the secretary for this committee and is responsible for preparing and processing school information for a particular cohort of grants. The PSU meets two or three times every month, depending on workload, and after appraising proposals in terms of relevance, equity and access, efficiency, impact, and risk, approves or defers (with observations) applications for grants.

As part of the agreement signed with district governments, the SIG account is maintained collectively by the EDO (Education), the District Manager, and USAID/ESRA, as an institutional framework of collaboration. This mechanism has facilitated the complete involvement of the government in the program without leaving room for bureaucratic and accounting hitches in a model designed for speedy and efficient results.

The PSU is cited as a best practice since it has proved to be seminal to the entire SIG process, primarily because it has been inclusive and has engendered government ownership of the project. With the inclusion of the EDO (Education), it automatically synchronizes government planning and knowledge of local schools with the work being undertaken by USAID/ESRA. Involving the EDO (Education) in the grants mechanism is an effective way of working with government notified SMCs and government teachers who act as secretaries to the SMC. It has also provided an opportunity for training and practical experience of EDOs in dealing with SMC small grants. PSUs have decentralized the granting process and helped make it transparent,

and as a result, the project has been able to utilize project resources on schedule and run a high-turnover, small-grants program at a sustainable rate for an extended time.

Through this mechanism, USAID/ESRA was able to distribute more than 10 thousand grants in less than 2 years, spread over 12 districts, and totaling approximately US\$11 million. Within 2 years of its launch, the program has awarded grants to more than 6,107 primary school SMCs, of which 4,514 have received a second grant, as well. The SMCs have used these grants to construct more than 4,000 classrooms, mostly in shelterless schools; construct over 1,650 toilets; provide furniture, including desks, chairs, cupboards, and tables to over 2,300 schools; and undertake repairs and renovation work in over 2,000 schools.

Best Practice Number 9

Output-based Audit: The USAID/ESRA System for SMC grants

Under the Local Government Ordinance, SMCs have been formed in all four provinces of Pakistan—operating under provincial ordinances and notifications. SMCs are envisaged as localized, community-based entities for managing schools and addressing issues, such as low enrollment ratios, teacher absenteeism, and lack of facilities. Increasingly, they are also being seen as a mechanism through which school needs are identified and improvements planned and implemented with funds provided by the government and donor organizations.

The performance of SMCs has been suboptimal, however. While they are vested with a wide range of functions, their performance is hampered by factors such as lack of support systems and enabling environments. Some specific impediments include the absence of regular capacity building and a supportive audit system. Provinces have tried to tackle these issues through different means and with varying degrees of success. For instance, single trainings are occasionally provided to SMCs in some districts of Sindh and Punjab. Governments usually give grants to SMCs without setting any benchmarks and subject them to financial audits that are not linked to the delivery of outputs.

The aggregate views of SMC performance do not paint a very promising picture. Contrary to initial expectations, SMCs have been criticized as ineffective and corrupt and have been rendered inactive in many instances. SMC ineffectiveness can be attributed to inadequate attention towards establishing necessary support and accountability mechanisms for SMCs. Provincial governments have responded to the issue of SMC capacity building by supporting SMC training programs. However, without an appropriate accountability system, capacity building of SMCs alone is not likely to work.

Since SMCs are recipients of public funds, they must be subject to public accountability mechanisms. This issue is currently addressed by triggering the government's financial audit mechanisms for SMCs. Experience, however, suggests that SMCs are reluctant to spend funds because of the stringent financial auditing. Consequently, instead of ensuring proper use of grants, the financial audit system has

diminished the initiative and drive of the SMCs to carry out school improvement activities.

Taking cognizance of problems associated with extending the financial audit to SMCs, the Government of Punjab has swung the pendulum to the other extreme by eliminating SMC audit altogether. The impact of this decision on the performance of SMCs has not yet been studied.

Based on the belief that public accountability must remain intact as a basic tenet, and recognizing that reservations to SMC financial audit are genuine, USAID/ESRA found a balance in output (performance) based audit characterized by Fixed Obligation Grants (FOGs). The claim is supported by the successful experience of USAID/ESRA's public-community partnership (PCP) component for awarding and auditing SIGs.

Before granting SIGs to target schools, USAID/ESRA requires their SMCs to prepare SIPs that list the items they intend to purchase or construct with SIG funds and provide their specifications and estimated costs. These SIPs are used to develop SIG proposals. Item justification and cost realism are analyzed by PSUs² at the proposal appraisal stage. When a proposal is funded, USAID/ESRA teams and their partner NGOs simply monitor the construction or procurement of funded items and whether they match the quality specifications. Contrary to a financial audit, the SMCs are assessed for their success or failure in meeting the fixed obligations to which they are committed through the award of SIG.

This experience suggests that, in contrast to financial audits, output (performance) based audit has not only resulted in efficient and effective utilization of funds, but it has also led to the empowerment of SMCs. Because they are not questioned about rupee-level details, they feel greater ownership of school improvement activities. This ownership is evident in SMCs matching USAID/ESRA grant funds with voluntary contributions in the form of cash, free labor, free material, and land. Although USAID/ESRA has not made it mandatory, in more than half of the initiatives communities/SMCs have contributed up to Rs 10,000 for the implementation of their SIPs. In a period of high inflation in the cost of construction materials, most SMCs have managed to deliver against their FOGs. This is in remarkable contrast with the experience of giving grants to SMCs under a financial audit regime.

Best Practice Number 10

Evolution of Prototype Construction for School Improvement

From the start of USAID/ESRA's SIG program, it was decided that all construction will be based upon indigenous construction practices. This decision was made for a number of reasons: (1) participating communities are knowledgeable about traditional construction practices; (2) they use local material, which is readily available and inexpensive; (3) local expertise is available and competent; and (4) construction style is easily adapted for additional safety measures in the event of earthquakes or floods.

² A Project Support Unit (PSU) exists in each district comprising EDO (Education), District Manager USAID/ESRA, and a representative from USAID/ESRA's Partner NGO.

Before the end of the first phase of SIG, an initial survey on Region Specific Modular Alternatives for Construction (RSMAC) was completed in all USAID/ESRA districts. It focused on weaknesses of local construction, potential local hazards, and different options for construction in different locations of the project area. It included complete information about construction items awarded under SIG and primarily emphasized

- Different types of construction adopted for the same item
- Environmental suitability
- Estimated cost
- Availability of local expertise
- Availability of local material
- Local preferences

In November 2005, USAID/ESRA organized an after-action review workshop in Karachi and invited all USAID/ESRA engineers and District Managers to share their research and knowledge and devise prototype models for their own districts. The exercise aimed to ensure safety and aesthetics of all construction work under the SIP/SIG initiative. Before finalizing the models, they were again shared with partner NGOs for their input. Finally, each USAID/ESRA intervention district came up with its own prototype(s) according to its specific local environmental conditions.

Prototypes for the construction of classrooms and toilets are the building design models prepared for construction and replication. The evolution of prototype construction is the result of continuous learning and incorporation into the proposed models for construction. The prototype development inculcates three main aspects of workability:

1. Introducing and synchronizing modern building construction concepts in building infrastructure to ensure maximum safety with environmental adaptability.
2. Making the construction compatible with incurred cost by utilizing locally available, low-cost materials.
3. Enabling proper guidance for SMCs by standardizing construction work in different regions according to their local needs.

The prototypes suggested for different regions vary in construction type and architectural design, according to climate, local construction practices, availability of construction materials and local expertise. This initiative is the first that considers environmental hazards such as earthquakes and floods in construction design.

The adoption of region specific prototype structures for construction in all USAID/ESRA districts have opened a new chapter on best construction practices in project areas and has proved to be instrumental in standardized homogeneous construction that ensures safety, architectural beauty, and comfort within the classroom. In fact, it has multidimensional influences on both the construction through the USAID/ESRA program in particular and the local construction in general.

Standardized design of different prototypes has made it possible to provide drawings, specifications, accurate cost estimates, and summary of construction material required

by the SMCs for proper guidance and to avoid wastage that is otherwise not possible when an activity is spread on such a large scale. The ensured demand of specific structural components has provided an opportunity for markets to respond and make all demanded materials available.

From the first phase of SIG, it was learned that when each community applies its own model, it becomes difficult to validate the design of each individual structure. And it becomes increasingly difficult to rectify faulty construction. The evolution of prototypes has made monitoring of standardized construction easier and more efficient. Even a community mobilizer once trained to look for essential aspects of a particular small building structure can effectively communicate the right message to the communities and masons.

Large scale replication of prototypes has increased the knowledge of communities in otherwise ignored aspects of building construction, especially related to

- Safety measures against potential local hazards such as earthquakes, floods, and storms
- Orientation of buildings
- Ventilation and lighting
- Architecture
- Hygiene (especially in the case of toilets)

Local masons once trained for the construction of a particular structural model become efficient at working quickly and efficiently. Because of the similarity of work, the quality of work improves each time and the masons' skill sharpens with every next structure.

Before



After



A school in Mirwah, Khairpur, before and after USAID/ESRA's school improvement intervention.

Before



After



A school in Balochistan before and after USAID/ESRA's school improvement intervention

Best Practice Number 11

Resource Centers: Technology in a Remote Valley (Gokina)

Given the remoteness of the settings of primary schools in the Bhara Kau sector of Islamabad, teachers and students could not even dream of benefiting from the innovative teaching and learning practices prevalent in educational institutions located in the cosmopolitan environment of urban Islamabad. There was no provision for capacity building of students, teachers, or community members; the concept of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in pedagogic practices was virtually unheard of.

ESRA Plus ventured into Bara Kau in 2004 and worked in 66 primary schools divided into 6 clusters of 10 to 11 institutions. For each cluster, it was decided to establish a Resource Center (RC) that would allow students and school communities to benefit from innovative technology and extra-curricular learning material. Assisted by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), the initiative was driven by the need to introduce contemporary educational practices and to create a stimulating environment for integration of ICTs in these remotely located institutions.

One of the six RCs has been established at the Federal Government Girls Secondary School, Gokina. Located in a valley up in the Margalla Hills, the Gokina RC is too remote to have housed state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities. Today, students and teachers of more than four schools located in the vicinity of the RC are also benefiting from this high-technology hub. Many project-based learning activities corresponding to the school curricula are prepared on an ongoing basis, and a learning coordinator has been installed to design activities for students. The RC has stimulated the students in no small way. "They are keen to participate in every activity. They are absolutely fascinated by the center and take immense pride in sharing their experiences with friends studying in adjoining schools," articulated the elated RC supervisor, Farhat Jabeen. "As for me, I experience a lot of satisfaction over having revived their interest in education through the use of innovative teaching techniques," she said.



Learning activity at the Gokina Resource Center: parts of the face.

With the word having spread, children from other schools also turn up at the center in the afternoons to benefit from available learning materials. “Most of the kids stay back at the center after school timings, and I really have to tactfully talk them into going home. Some parents are suggesting that their children be enrolled in the center. Many children have sought admission in the school ever since the establishment of this center, reflecting an increase in enrollment,” shared Farhat.



Students engaged in a learning activity about animals; computers for use by visitors to the Gokina Resource Center can be seen in the background.

In the last two years, these centers have been frequented by 1,879 guests and 48,399 users while 8,022 teaching and learning resources have been issued. The four RCs have also generated an income of PKR 138,406 to date.

Success Stories



Success Story Number 1

Partnership between USAID/ESRA and District Government, Sukkur

In 12 districts in Sindh and Balochistan, USAID/ESRA supports district governments to improve their education planning processes. Through its District Improvement Plan (DIP) initiative, USAID/ESRA supports governments and district DoEs to develop DIPs, and awards approved DIPs with DIGs.

The grants motivate districts to devise plans to improve education delivery, and in the process, district level planners improve their capacity for planning, implementing, and managing short term education projects. To date, USAID/ESRA has awarded three rounds of DIGs in its target districts. The process of DIP development has been continuously improving through these three phases. Initially, for the first round, the districts were assisted in developing long-term, macro-education plans, after which the district staff was provided training to prepare focused, feasible, and time-bound projects based on these plans. For the second round of DIGs, districts were introduced to the concepts of minimum quality standards and needs-based planning and budgeting forming the basis for the second round of DIPs. The third round focused on improving implementation of the plans. A comprehensive DIG Management System was developed and DIG Management Committees were established in each district to review progress and rectify bottlenecks in the implementation of DIPs. District education staff was also provided with training in project planning, implementation, and management, and in monitoring and reporting.

During the third round, district planners were able to prepare DIPs independently on the basis of the training they had received in project planning, implementation, and management. These proposals have focused on district level infrastructure and system strengthening. The projects included establishment of professional development centers and model schools, providing residential facilities to female teachers, strengthening DEMIS, supporting education monitoring committees of the district assemblies, repairing vehicles, and arranging workshops and discussions to promote awareness about the importance of education.

District governments are now chipping in their resources in addition to USAID/ESRA grants. Many districts pledged cost sharing of up to PKR one million during the third round of DIGs. District governments in Sukkur and Khairpur contributed PKR four and six million respectively as their cost share.

The district government of Sukkur proposed to build a district RC at the cost of PKR 10 million. Through its DIG, USAID/ESRA provided PKR 6 million, and the district government pledged four million. The district government decided to obtain the approval of the district council for this contribution. The EDO (Education) and the District Manager for USAID/ESRA briefed the district council on the proposed plan of setting up a Center of Excellence. The council debated the project and approved it with a majority vote. The council also approved the district government's share of PKR four million.

The process that started with a capacity building workshop for the district officials and consultation with stakeholders, including elected representatives, has brought elected representatives and USAID/ESRA together in project planning and implementation. This process set a precedent for government–donor partnerships for education.

The district government has also contributed a building for the center; the building is now under repair to make it usable. The center will comprise a computer laboratory for 20 people; an English language laboratory, with a seating capacity for 20 people; and a library with a seating capacity for 50 people at one time. It would consist of subject-knowledge books and some general material, periodicals, magazines, and a digital library with relevant material both for educationists and the general public.

The center will also provide rooms that can be used as classrooms, if required. Staff from the DoE has volunteered to provide support to the center in their spare time, but full-time staff will be hired to operate the center. A Board of Governors will govern the institution's affairs, and the District Coordination Officer will serve as chairperson.

The center will be sustained through resources generated by offering various classes for the general public for a nominal fee. However, the district government's annual grants-in-aid will remain the main source for operational expenses. The district government has committed to include these grants in the next financial budget estimates.

Success Story Number 2

Education Monitoring Committee (EMC), Hyderabad

In 2001, the Government of Pakistan introduced the devolution of governance to the local level. Among other things, the devolution of power promised a comprehensive system of community-driven monitoring of government service delivery. Article 138 of the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) provides for establishment of monitoring committees in local administrative units (districts, tehsils, and UCs). Comprising elected members of the local bodies, these committees are envisaged to provide community feedback on quality of service delivery and to monitor progress against the targets set by local government institutions. A number of monitoring committees, including a committee for education, was identified in the Ordinance, and are to be constituted by the councils concerned. This model emphasized episodic procedural monitoring of service delivery at the local level by the elected representatives.

Institutionalized monitoring of service delivery by elected representatives empowers the general public with the opportunity to provide feedback to the government through their representatives. It also has the potential to institutionalize policies around services and to create increasing competition on public interest issues in the long term. Monitoring education by locally elected representatives is useful in identifying shortcomings in service delivery at the local level, ensuring transparency, and increasing responsiveness of service providers.

USAID/ESRA supports the Government of Pakistan at three levels: (1) policy development, (2) system strengthening, and (3) service delivery. By supporting the activation of Education Monitoring Committees (EMCs), USAID/ESRA contributes to institution building and system strengthening. If EMCs are provided proper training in education monitoring and allowed to operate for a sustained period, these committees will help institutionalize the public monitoring process at the local level.

Although EMCs are effective tools for oversight, their role in the devolved system of governance is not recognized by district Nazims or by the district council. As a result, they have not been established in most districts. The few districts with established EMCs were not using them effectively. With this in mind, USAID/ESRA started constructive engagement with the district governments and elected representatives in target districts to establish EMCs. Through continuous interaction, district EMCs were established in all 12 target districts of USAID/ESRA. In addition, union council EMCs have also been established in two districts.

A capacity building program was initiated after EMCs were established in target districts. The training was based on a comprehensive manual in Urdu that provides necessary information about the Monitoring Committees and guides EMC members in the specific tasks they perform. EMC training was provided through interactive and participatory workshops that benefited from members' initial experience. Various legal provisions pertaining to members' duties and to the scope and limitations of their work were also discussed.

EMCs' performance has been mixed. Some have been very active, and others are only functional on paper. Among the EMCs in USAID/ESRA's target districts, the committee in Hyderabad has been the most active. The committee visits schools on a regular basis, approximately six schools per day. The district Nazim has continuously supported the EMC in its operations and regularly follows up on recommendations provided by the committee.



EMC training in Hyderabad.

To facilitate EMC monitoring visits, the district DoE provides vehicles and the appropriate Assistant District Officer (ADO)/Supervisor for Education to accompany EMC members. Daily monitoring reports are collected and compiled by the chairman of the EMC, who verbally reports urgent issues to the district Nazim and presents detailed reports to the focal person of the EMC. The focal person works out of the Nazim's office. He reviews these reports regularly and presents consolidated reports to the Nazim every month and quarter. The district Nazim forwards these reports with directions to the EDO (Education) for follow-up. The reports are also presented and discussed in the district council meetings.

Another achievement in Hyderabad is the formalization of tehsil- and UC-level EMCs. The success of Hyderabad's EMCs can be attributed to the support of the district Nazim and of other elected representatives. The committee is encouraged by the effective follow-up to its recommendations and the financial and budgetary support provided by the DoE. The DoE is optimistic that the EMC will play a pivotal role in improving the quality of education in the District of Hyderabad.

Success Story Number 3

Professional Development Forum Evolves into a Consultative Body

As a result of the devolution of governance, district DoEs are required to independently plan and manage education interventions across their districts. One prominent activity that falls under the district's scope of work is the professional development of its staff. To help increase district capacity to plan and manage professional development, USAID/ESRA has assisted districts in adopting the practice of holding Professional Development Forums (PDFs) on a monthly basis. These PDFs aim to create a district-wide network of professional development planners who contribute to district education planning.

Since their inception in November 2004, PDFs have been convening regularly in the districts to provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss and find ways of resolving issues related to professional development. In Thatta, this forum has been particularly successful in creating ownership by the local stakeholders in professional development and has evolved as a body that has taken on some responsibilities for planning professional development activities in the district.

The forum in Thatta has been formally recognized by the district education department through a notification by the EDO (Education). It has also formulated bylaws and a work plan for itself to contribute toward the district's planning mechanism. The permanent-member body of the Thatta PDF comprises a dedicated team of nine individuals who are working voluntarily to increase and improve professional development activities in their district. In collaboration with the district DoE, PDF members conducted an assessment exercise to gauge the needs of teachers and prepared a professional development plan for the district based on that assessment. In May 2006, three PDF members, Mir Ali Jokhio, Manzoor Uqaili, and Muneera Khwaja, implemented the first phase of the plan by arranging a three-day

English language workshop for 32 teachers in Varr, a UC in Thatta. The workshop was arranged on a self-help basis without any remuneration for the facilitators or the participants.



Teachers from Tehsil Varr, Thatta, attending English language training organized by Thatta's PDF.

Since the EDO (Education) and District Officer (Academic and Training) are permanent members of this forum, they have worked to create a sustainable system whereby professional development activities do not lose momentum after USAID/ESRA's interventions end in the district. Funds have been allocated in the annual district budget for implementation of PD activities. PDF members have also submitted an application to register the PDF with the Social Welfare Department to have their status legally recognized in the district. With the notification of the Thatta PDF and a core group of professional development experts identified in the district to take this initiative forward, efforts are now under way to devolve PDFs to the tehsils to ensure that the district's planning mechanism is informed at all levels by the needs of teachers and students.

Although the PDF in Thatta was noted for its exemplary work in 2006, it has since been disbanded by the district government, which has asked that a new body be created. The initiatives for tehsil-based PDFs now have to be carried out by the district PDF; USAID/ESRA team members are currently engaged in the process of facilitating the rebuilding of the PDF body. Once this is completed, the process for establishing tehsil-based PDFs will start in Thatta.

Success Story Number 4

Transforming Teaching Practices with Low Cost Teaching/Learning Aids

USAID/ESRA's professional development program provides content-based and pedagogical training to primary school teachers in target districts. This training is

provided through a team of approximately one thousand master trainers and mentors that belong to the local education infrastructure. These master trainers and mentors are selected from among primary, middle, and high school teachers; learning coordinators; and supervisors. The trainers are then provided with extensive training by USAID/ESRA's local partners. After being appointed as master trainers and mentors, trainers return to their districts to train primary school teachers in schools known as cluster centers. All primary school teachers within a four- to five-kilometer radius (on average) of a cluster center attended these trainings. In addition to serving as a venue for cluster-based trainings, the schools also house Learning Resource Centers (LRCs), where trainees develop teaching/learning materials and audio-visual aids. These are developed under the supervision of mentors, who guide trainees in using these resources for activity-based teaching. In doing so, they help teachers visualize their lessons and get a better understanding of the concepts they are teaching.

The concept of these cluster-based LRCs is easily replicable, requiring commitment from motivated and creative teachers, and a little financial support. Over 550 LRCs have been established in USAID/ESRA districts, and these centers are providing teachers with convenient access to low-cost teaching/learning materials. Some cluster LRCs are continuing to function on a self-help basis, even after USAID/ESRA's training program has concluded in the cluster school.

One such cluster center exists in Government Boys Primary School, Setharja, Khairpur. A supervisor and four teachers of this school, Allah Obhayo Ansari, Zameer Jaffery, Muhammad Akram Haji, Abdul Karim Kubar, and Imdad Hussain Lund were trained as mentors by USAID/ESRA. After concluding training, they returned to their village to start cluster-based workshops for trainee teachers of 16 primary schools within their UC/cluster. In addition, they met on a daily basis in their school in Setharja to brainstorm for ideas for creating low-cost or no-cost teaching and learning aids that teachers could easily implement with activity-based teaching in their classrooms. This group of mentors worked as a team, and each member was assigned a specific task—for example, Muhammad Akram had good carpentering skills and was responsible for assembling models out of wood and cardboard. Because the mentors were interacting on a regular basis with teachers from other schools in their training workshops, they sought feedback on the material they were developing and made changes to the teaching and learning aids based on this feedback. Some of the teaching aids created by these teachers include sign boards, maps, geometrical shapes, mathematical symbols, scales to measure weight, charts and models showing the results of experiments, and various devices made out of cardboard to explain language, mathematics, and science concepts.



Low-cost/no-cost material on display at the Learning Resource Center in Setharja, Khairpur.

More than a year after the conclusion of the training program, a fully functional resource center exists in this school, and it is being used by teachers of all 16 neighboring primary schools in the same UC. Allah Obhayo Ansari, who is also a Supervisor of Primary Education has set up his office in Government Boys Primary School Setharja and provides informal training on the use of teaching and learning aids to teachers of adjoining schools. In recognition of the exemplary effort made by these mentors, USAID/ESRA arranged the first day of its interprovincial Professional Development Forum in this school and showcased it as an example of a sustainable resource center to teachers and teacher educators from Hyderabad, Sukkur, Thatta, Khairpur, Kech, Gwadar, Noshki, and Killa Saifullah.

Success Story Number 5

The Advantage of Being Literate

The success story narrated below is the story of a single literacy graduate, but this story represents the story of the average graduate from USAID/ESRA's literacy program.

Shireen, born to a poor family of six brothers and sisters in a village near Hyderabad, was not allowed access to education as a child. She always wanted to attend school, but instead had to help out at her father's farm and with household chores. At the age of 16, she was married to a man 14 years older, and became a mother at a young age. Although she enrolled her children in school, she did not pay much attention to her children's education. Despite little support from home, Shireen's daughter graduated from school and went on to teach at a private school.

When USAID/ESRA initiated its literacy program in Hyderabad, Shireen's daughter was recruited as a teacher. She encouraged her mother to donate a room in her house as a Literacy Resource Center (LRC) and to enroll in classes herself. Although

Shireen allowed her daughter to run a literacy center out of her house, she did not feel the need to enroll in classes. However, witnessing the literacy classes in progress motivated her, and her childhood desire for education re-asserted itself.



Women participating in a literacy class.

Shireen enrolled herself in the classes, and within six months, she was able to read and write. Through the literacy program, Shireen learned about her civil responsibilities, such as keeping her environment clean, and familial responsibilities, such as ensuring hygiene in the house. She learned to budget her household expenses and about the importance of education. She started visiting her children's school and discussed their academic progress with their teachers.

Upon completion of the literacy program, Shireen enrolled in USAID/ESRA's Family Reading Program (FRP), which required a literate to enlist a member of their family into the literacy program, and to support them with their education. Shireen decided to nominate her husband. He was a driver and found it difficult to perform his duties effectively because he was unable to read road signs and follow directions. Shireen and her coordinator collectively developed a plan for him, and he started the FRP.

Both Shireen and her husband are now literate, and are able to read and understand their utility bills and pay them on time. They know the names of medicines, can read the newspaper, understand programs on television, and budget their household expenses. Shireen also helps her neighbors by writing letters for them and by reading the news. She aspires to join her children's School Management Committee (SMC).

Success Story Number 6

Literacy Teacher Enrolls Entire Family into Literacy Program

Meena is the sixth child among five sisters and three brothers. Her father passed away when she was very young and her eldest brother was 14 years old. Her brother had to shoulder all responsibility for his mother and siblings, because money was tight.

Meena's brother farmed their father's lands until he began having trouble with his eyes and it was hard for him to see, preventing him from continuing his work. The family moved in with their mother's aunt, and Meena's mother and sisters earned money by sewing and doing embroidery. Meena wanted to attend school and approached her eldest brother, pleading with him to help enroll her in a school. He said that they could afford to send her to school, but only at the primary level. Meena attended primary school with much enthusiasm and passed the primary level. Meena's persistence enabled her to continue her education through Class 12, despite financial constraints. However, after this, she was unable to continue her education.

Upon graduation, Meena decided she would earn money to help her family. While watching television one day, she saw an advertisement to recruit teachers for the USAID/ESRA Literacy Program. She applied for the position and was appointed. The first person she recruited as a student was her younger sister, Shenila, who had left school in Class 3.

After successfully teaching the program, Meena was asked to conduct the FRP in her area. With this program, readers are instructed to teach the basic literacy skills they had acquired to reading buddies of their choosing.



Meena (standing on the left hand side) and her family have become literate through Meena's and her grandmother's (sitting, middle row, second from left) encouragement and motivation in Hala Hyderabad, Sindh.

Shenila chose her 75-year-old maternal grandmother to be her reading buddy. Her grandmother was so enthusiastic about learning that she quickly began to read and write. Other family members came to the house to see what she was achieving and were impressed by her progress. Consequently, all the female members of Meena's family joined the FRP and are now literate, except for Meena's mother, who has a severe learning disability.

Meena hopes to engage all the illiterate women on her street in the FRP and also in future literacy courses.

Success Story Number 7

Empowering Communities for School Improvement

When USAID/ESRA initiated its PCP program in Sindh and Balochistan, its partner NGOs found it challenging to engage school communities in its school improvement process. Most communities were indifferent to the education their children were receiving and were not interested in improving their school environment. They felt that education delivery was the role of the government, and even if they tried to intervene to improve the quality of education their children were receiving, their efforts would go unrewarded.

In mobilizing target communities, USAID/ESRA realized that it would need to first establish trust, and then would need to demonstrate the benefits of community participation in education delivery. Through village assemblies, USAID/ESRA's community mobilizers discussed the concept of school improvement planning, and communities were motivated by the fact that their planning would be rewarded with cash grants they could use as they liked for the improvement of their children's school.



Local women participate in a village assembly.

With continued effort, the PCP team trained SMCs to plan school improvement activities and prepare SIPs. These plans were then further developed into proposals and used to solicit School Improvement Grants SIGs. In the process, the USAID/ESRA team witnessed numerous examples of communities committing financial, human, and in-kind resources to the school improvement process. The Government Boys High School, Jadeed, in District Gwadar, provides an example of such contributions.

The SMC proposed a new classroom in its SIP. Simultaneously, the district government allocated PKR 4,000,000 to the school to repair two classrooms and hired a contractor to initiate renovation. While the SMC was excited about the prospect of improved infrastructure, lessons learned during training and the planning process helped it realize that the amount designated for renovation was far more than required.

The SMC approached the district government with the idea that these funds could be used to construct two new classrooms instead of just being used to renovate existing ones. The SMC managed to convince the district government and the district education department, and the government funds were re-assigned to classroom construction. The SMC then revised its own proposal and used a SIG grant of PKR 59,000 to renovate the two existing classrooms.

Success Story Number 8

Infrastructure Enhancement: Rekindling Learning Interest in Sparkling Schools

The FDE, Islamabad, makes a certain budgetary allocation for repair and renovation of its schools to the Public Works Department. Because schools located in the semi-urban Bhara Kau sector of Islamabad did not feature on the priority list of institutions requiring such maintenance, they were conspicuous for their shabby, dilapidated, and student-unfriendly condition. The schools' appearance demotivated both teachers and students.

As part of its PCP initiative, ESRA Plus oversaw refurbishment of schools through SIPs prepared by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and funded by USAID/ESRA's SIGs. ESRA Plus completed the Infrastructure Enhancement activity in 66 Bhara Kau schools in a record nine-month period. This activity involved minor repairs, complete whitewash of the school buildings, and repainting of playground equipment.

“Refurbishment has completely transformed the school's outlook; teachers are working harder than before and the demon of student absenteeism is also fading,” says Fatimah Iftikhar, Chairperson of the PTA and Principal of Federal Government Girls Primary School, Kot Hathial. She attributes the change in behavior, the improvement in attendance, and the revival of interest among students and teachers to this activity. Some principals are convinced that refurbishment has improved the standard of education. The principals compare their school with other institutions in the vicinity to echo the sentiments of delight being experienced by students studying in the refurbished schools.

Before



After



Before and after SIG intervention: Federal Government Girls Primary School, Lakhwal, Bhara Kau, Islamabad.

The Area Education Officer of the Bhara Kau sector says, “Student presence in the classrooms has increased while absenteeism and dropout ratio are sharply declining.” He attributes these positive trends to the improved learning environment in schools. There has been a 10–20 percent increase in enrollment, 10–30 percent increase in parental involvement in schools, and 10–30 percent reduction in absenteeism.



Children participating in an Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) lesson at a school in Bhara Kau-Nai Abadi. IRI has been introduced in FDE schools as a means of teaching English as a Second Language. The classroom furniture in the picture is a result of SIG.

The success of the ESRA Plus PCP initiative has motivated the FDE to now provide its schools with an annual maintenance budget of PKR 50,000 and PKR 100,000 to primary and secondary schools, respectively.

Before



After



Before and after SIG intervention: Federal Government Boys Primary School, Malot, Bhara Kau, Islamabad.

Lessons Learned



Lesson Learned Number 1

The Importance of Creating Interface with Public Representatives

When USAID/ESRA initiated its program under a bilateral agreement with the Government of Pakistan, its Policy and Planning team expected to work closely with the federal government and its provincial and district counterparts. Although the project enjoyed a healthy partnership with the government, program implementation taught that for education reforms to be truly government and stakeholder driven, they had to be demand driven. This meant that education reforms needed to be driven by local demand, by the demand of public representatives, and by democratic processes that generate demand.

In democratic dispensation, the role of public representatives in relation to education cuts across all three of their established functions—law-making, representing constituents, and executive oversight. Public representatives can play a far-reaching role in improving public sector education by proposing and endorsing enabling policy and legislation, articulating the demands of education stakeholders, and keeping a check on educational bureaucracy to ensure administrative and financial efficiency. Additionally, public representatives, especially at the district level, have a direct role to play in education delivery to their constituents.

However, a review of parliamentary proceedings suggests that education is not discussed very often in the legislatures. Whenever it is discussed, the emphasis is primarily on providing infrastructure in a particular constituency and seldom on issues of quality, fiscal and administrative efficiency, and rational fund utilization.

An important reason why political bodies in Pakistan have failed to play an effective role in promoting education and in supporting reform efforts is the disengagement between civil society and political bodies. Some nascent initiatives such as the recently set-up Pakistan Coalition for Education notwithstanding, civil society organizations (CSOs) working on education have rarely had any systematic engagement with elected representatives, which could have given representatives greater exposure to educational problems and a motivation to see education as a political priority. One outcome of this disengagement is that demands involving education do not get conveyed to elected representatives, allowing representatives to treat it as a relatively unimportant public good that does not win votes. A lack of training in areas such as policy and fiscal analysis also restricts the capacity of political bodies to carry out their legislative and oversight functions effectively.

Policy Dialogue

USAID/ESRA acknowledges the relevance of public representatives to the education reform process and engages them in focused policy dialogue on key reform areas. The program has enhanced the capacity of public representatives for better understanding of sector issues and has provided them policy analysis support. This program provides a strategic entry point into articulation of demands to ensure demand-responsive education planning and management. At the heart of this initiative is the belief that

education has to be pushed onto center stage of civil society activism and political dialogue if there is to be sustained pressure on the system to become demand-driven.

The Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights (PCHR), a nonpartisan body of elected representatives from the Upper and Lower House of the Federal Parliament, coordinates this engagement with the legislatures. Eight policy dialogues have been held so far—four with parliamentarians and two each with provincial assembly members of Sindh and Balochistan. Federal and provincial ministers of education, chairpersons of the standing committees, and a large number of senators, Members of the National Assembly (MNA), and Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) participated in these dialogues.

The first dialogue in 2005 touched upon financial management issues, the role of education management information systems (EMIS) in education planning and management, teacher rationalization, teacher training, community participation, transparency and accountability in education processes, and the state of education management. Subsequent policy dialogues narrowed down focus on regularizing EMIS, introducing an education management pool, and providing regular budgets to Provincial Institutes of Teacher Education (PITEs).

As a result of this engagement, education working groups of active legislators have emerged in the Parliament, Sindh Assembly, and Balochistan Assembly. These working groups coordinate efforts to highlight education issues in the legislatures and work with the executive to review policy reforms. As a result of this policy advocacy and technical support, the Federal Ministry of Education has regularized the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) and all the provinces are at different stages of regularization provincial EMIS.

The Federal Minister for Education recognized the need to engage public representatives and invited the education working group of the parliament to give their suggestions for inclusion in the education policy. During a policy dialogue, he also conceded to improve the level of education management by introducing an education management pool. It was a rare scene to see members of different political parties agreeing to the recommendations of a member of the working group and the Minister approving immediately. Similarly, the Provincial Minister for Education in Sindh agreed to provide a regular budget to the PITE and to introduce an education management pool in the province. She also acknowledged the need to brief elected representatives about different reform initiatives of the government and announced the arrangement of a briefing for them at Education Department's RSU.

Concurrent engagement with the legislators and the executive is helping to create broad support for education sector reforms and proving to be a positive force for introducing lasting policy changes.



The Chairperson of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Education, Ms. Tehmina Dasti, Federal Minister for Education, General (R) Jehangir Ashraf Qazi, and Chairperson of the Senate's Standing Committee on Education, Ms. Razina Alam Khan at the Policy Dialogue.

USAID/ESRA has also engaged public representatives at the district and subdistrict level in four rounds of civil society dialogues. Participants at these dialogues have included members of civil society, government officers, community-based organizations, local bar associations, and representatives from the media and NGOs.

Lesson Learned Number 2

Reform Support Unit—Sindh

While working on education reform efforts in Pakistan, it became evident to the USAID/ESRA team that, although much has been done to improve access to education, quality is still relatively low and system-wide inefficiencies are persistently high—even though there has been no dearth of innovative projects in almost all areas of public sector education. Reforms that exist in some areas have made little sector or system-wide improvement. Donors have invested large amounts of capital and technical expertise, but their efforts have been unable to yield sustainable and large-scale dividends. Often, there has been a serious disconnect between reform initiatives at the federal level and initiatives at the provincial/district levels, again resulting in low impact. The impact of several well-meaning initiatives has been minimized because of issues of sustainability and scaling up.

Research on reform efforts has shown that the lack of pressure on the system to be demand-driven is the most important possible determinant for the low impact of reform efforts. In addition, for the dynamic and complex process that education reform represents, there has been no support infrastructure—an infrastructure that could have kept the process on track through coordination, strategic planning, and decision-making support.

If lack of demand and public pressure tends to create an environment where reform efforts are allowed to run their supply-driven course down to dashed hopes, then effective demand articulation, together with a support system, could ensure that reform efforts scaled-up geographically and sector-wide, and that they remained sustainable. In addition, targeted interventions such as those being carried out by

USAID/ESRA through District Education Plans (DEP) and DIGs need to be systematically studied so that lessons can be extracted for replication and scaling-up.

In the course of implementing the program, the USAID/ESRA team learned that successful education reform requires tools, techniques, structures, mechanisms, and institutions that can (1) help generate the widespread demand for reforms, (2) facilitate an informed localized deliberation over the substance and character of reform, and (3) safeguard the phenomenon of ongoing learning-driven change.

Given the need for supporting reform from within the system, USAID/ESRA recommended to the Government of Pakistan to put in place reform support infrastructure led by a dedicated RSU.

This was based on the belief that a donor can at-best provide support and encouragement for reforms and governments themselves are best positioned to implement reform agendas. Initially, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Sindh Provincial DoE were encouraged to establish an RSU. USAID/ESRA's policy and planning team held extensive discussions with the leadership (ministers and secretaries) of both governments and convinced them to establish RSUs. Later, the personnel identified by these governments were provided orientation to reform support.

Establishment of Sindh RSU

On January 5, 2006, the DoE, Sindh, notified the establishment of an RSU for managing education reforms and provided PKR 50 million as its initial budget. A core group comprising the Provincial Minister for Education, the Provincial Secretaries for Education and for Finance, and the Additional Chief Secretary (Planning and Development) was also established to provide strategic leadership to the unit.

The RSU comprises three wings: (1) a policy wing, (2) a monitoring and evaluation wing, and (3) an education management information systems (EMIS) wing. The policy wing is envisaged to provide inputs for policy formulation and to develop the institutional memory of the department. The monitoring and evaluation wing develops reporting mechanisms and evaluates the output of the interventions being carried out by the Provincial Department of Education. The results of this evaluation inform policy making and remedial actions, if needed. The existing structure of Sindh Education Management System (SEMIS) has been made an integral part of the RSU as a first step to having reliable and timely data for further policy formulation. The RSU is also envisioned as a forum to provide a platform for donor coordination as a measure to synchronize different donor resources and efforts in a consolidated vision of educational excellence.

USAID/ESRA held a number of policy dialogues with the Government of Sindh and conducted training workshops for the RSU staff to acquaint them with the concepts of education reform support. This engagement has resulted in the adoption of a number of international best practices by the RSU. For example, the USAID/ESRA team had advised the RSU that the Sindh Government should develop strategic plans and ensure that donors support those plans instead of doing their own thing. The RSU has started consultations for articulating its vision of reform in a synchronized document

providing for a medium-term action plan that delineates strategy for each reform area. For this purpose, RSU is working on a sector framework that may serve as a strategy document for effective and efficient use of resources being provided to the sector.

Data Management

The RSU has been able to bring about some very positive improvements through SEMIS. The completed 2005–2006 school census achieved the hallmark of being conceptualized and implemented in a scientific manner. The questionnaire was developed to provide built-in checks for data reporting errors. For the first time ever, teacher profiles were captured to readily provide an available data bank for human resources to the provincial Department of Education (DoE) and to help in tracking teacher postings and any potential rationalization measure.

To enable the DoE to develop a financial tracking system of its various interventions and to provide for required financial and budgetary information for education expenditures in districts, the RSU has instituted a Financial Management Information System (FMIS) to track education-related expenditures and provide a sound base for financial management and monitoring.

Partnership with Districts

The RSU has entered partnership agreements with all the districts of Sindh to broaden the ownership and facilitate effective implementation of the reform agenda. This agreement provides for the transfer of a conditional/tied grant to all the districts for infrastructure rehabilitation. It clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of both sets of government for achieving the agreed performance indicators for outcome and process targets.

An equal grant is being provided to all the districts for the first year of this partnership; however, in future the amount will be made contingent upon achievement in realizing the agreed targets in enrollment and participation rates.

It has also been decided, in principle, that the rehabilitation exercise will be based on a Functional School Concept by making each school a basic unit to be completed using a holistic approach. To make this exercise useful, the RSU has advised the DoE to adopt a holistic approach instead of disaggregated construction activities. An amount of PKR 2.3 billion has been earmarked in the DoE's 2006–2007 budget for this program.

Using the USAID/ESRA-sponsored EMIS toolkit, district profile baseline information has been extracted from the 2005–2006 Census for the basic indicators, as well as gaps in physical and human resources identified.

Text Books and Stipend Distribution

Prior to establishing the RSU, there were many problems in textbook distribution to the students, with students receiving books months after the start of the academic year. The RSU has developed a more transparent, efficient, and quick system of textbook distribution in the province by synchronizing the efforts of the Sindh Text Book Board, district governments, and the RSU. In 2007, textbook distribution started

before the beginning of the academic year, with books delivered to around 4.2 million children in a timely manner.

The RSU has also streamlined the stipend system to female students. Introducing a fundamental policy change, the RSU started distributing scholarships through money orders at the residential address of each girl. A comprehensive profile of all the girls, including their names, fathers' names, along with identification card numbers and class, was collected through the EDOs (Education) of all the districts and then verified through a third party. This change has introduced transparency and reliability in stipend distribution in the province.

The RSU has also initiated media campaigns to create public awareness about the importance of educating females.

School Based Recruitment

USAID/ESRA has been organizing technical discussions with the Government of Pakistan to introduce school-based teacher recruitment to discourage teacher absenteeism and political interference in posting and transfer matters. The RSU and the DoE have taken a lead by developing a new teacher recruitment system. A new contract policy has been drafted; the policy envisages a school-specific contractual recruitment where eligible candidates will be graded with scores assigned on the weight of local residence and academic qualification, with no weight assigned to interviews. This policy change is expected to reduce political pressure for recruitment and transfers and to deal with governance issues in teacher management and ensure teacher presence in schools.

Lesson Learned Number 3

Formalized Working Mechanism/Memorandum of Understanding Needed with the Provincial/District Governments

To foster smooth implementation and sustainability of its professional development interventions, USAID/ESRA has continuously needed to leverage support from its partner governments at the provincial and district level. Although USAID/ESRA has usually received this support from its partners, the process of requesting and receiving support has been sporadic and haphazard. Some issues and instances could have been avoided if there were a formalized working relationship between USAID/ESRA and the provincial/district governments that are its partners. Thus far, the working relationship between USAID/ESRA and the DoEs has rested upon regular meetings and a concerted effort by the USAID/ESRA team to engage the DoEs, as well as the district government officials, in the project's interventions.

However, the absence of a formal agreement with the provincial and district government means that project activities and deliverables face the risk of being discontinued or curtailed without prior notice. The lack of a contractual or formal understanding with stakeholders also leaves room for teacher unions and other political elements to manipulate the activities of the project to their advantage. For example, USAID/ESRA's professional development program in Chaghi and Noshki was interrupted for 13 months because of a boycott by teacher unions. The unions

demanded higher per diems for attending these trainings. While this issue was resolved through extended dialogue with the district government and the district DoE, over a year was wasted in the process.

In Killa Saifullah, training of head teachers was stopped by a district government official who claimed that the teachers in his district did not require training. In Thatta, trainings were halted intermittently on the orders of the district Nazim. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government or a similar agreement could have prevented these interruptions.

The professional development team also faced considerable difficulty in ensuring merit-based selection for an advanced cohort of master trainers who, post-training, would be required to train 10 teachers in each UC. Although a standardized test was administered to all mentors and master trainers, the district administration in Chaghi refused to hold this test, and in Thatta much political pressure was exerted to include names of mentors and master trainers that the district government had selected. Although most of these problems were eventually resolved amicably by meeting the concerned officials and reaching a consensus, much project time and effort was consumed in resolving these problems.

Lessons learned include the necessity for a formal MOU at the outset with the concerned stakeholders to avoid issues as such and ensure that project activities are implemented uninterrupted and with full cooperation of the local and provincial governments.

Lessons Learned Number 4

National Guidelines for Youth and Adult Literacy

When USAID/ESRA initiated its literacy program in Sindh and Balochistan, multiple literacy services providers were operating in Pakistan. These organizations were providing programs of varying duration and were using their own independent curricula to provide literacy. The length of the programs varied between three months to a year, and some programs included follow-up services for literates, while others discontinued contact with their graduates after they had completed the program. The curricula, modes of lesson delivery, and assessment systems also varied between literacy providers. Each claimed their method to be the most effective in providing and retaining literacy skills.

USAID/ESRA's literacy team realized that it would have to create its own literacy model for its service delivery. The model was developed by researching local and international models and experiences and was named the Integrated Literacy Model (ILM). Measured by USAID/ESRA's standards, the model seemed effective, but it was developed without any guidance or support from the government. How then could the effectiveness of this model be assessed fairly? One way would be to pilot it and then test learners once after completion and then again later to measure retention. The question remained if an assessment of the model would be enough to assure graduates of the program that they would be able to transition into the formal education sector or gain meaningful employment based upon their newly acquired

literacy skills. Would prospective educational institutions or employers even regard their literacy diplomas as valid—they could easily raise questions about the credibility of the program. Discussions with other literacy providers revealed that they faced the same issues. In the absence of any guidance from the government, literacy providers were left to plan and implement their programs independently—and it was at the discretion of the education system and prospective employers to accept graduates into their systems.

While the ILM was developed in consultation with literacy providers across Pakistan, it offered a curriculum different from other literacy providers. In the process of developing and offering the ILM to nonliterates, USAID/ESRA realized the need for standard guidelines for youth and adult literacy. The idea of such guidelines was presented to the Federal Ministry of Education, and it was decided that USAID/ESRA would provide technical assistance to the ministry to develop the National Guidelines for Youth and Adult Literacy.

The guidelines were developed through a series of workshops in all provinces and at the federal level. Workshop participants included government officers, literacy providers, academics, and educationists. They were first developed in draft form and distributed among all stakeholders for their comments. Upon receiving these comments, the guidelines were finalized. With these guidelines, literacy providers now have a blueprint that helps them in designing content, lesson delivery, and course duration, and in ensuring that their programs meet the minimum quality requirements for providing literacy services. These guidelines provide direction for curriculum development, teacher training, and material development. The guidelines also guarantee that the education provided to enrollees is uniform, meets minimum standards, and is compliant with government requirements. The minimum requirements provided by these guidelines also give prospective employers and education institutions the assurance that graduates from these programs meet the standards that are expected from literacy program graduates.

Lesson Learned Number 5

Technical Assistance and Monitoring are Essential for Project Success

The objective of USAID/ESRA's cash grants program is two-fold: (1) to provide hands-on training to SMCs to plan and implement school improvement programs, and (2) to bring about visible improvements in the primary school infrastructure. Through the program, each participating SMC has received approximately US\$2,000 in two tranches, with which they can undertake school improvement interventions according to school needs. Under this program, USAID/ESRA disbursed approximately US\$12 million in about 20 months with exceptional results in over six thousand schools.

Implementing a microgrants project covering approximately 7,000 schools spread across 13 districts in 2 provinces makes quality assurance a challenge, especially when the program is being implemented by the community. Although USAID/ESRA provided region-specific modules in participating districts, the participating communities and partner NGOs had to use their discretion during implementation.

During implementation, the PCP team learned that it was important to consult civil engineers with relevant experience to develop the prototypes and to oversee their construction. The prototypes were based on local construction practices and materials with marginal improvements to ensure future quality construction. Engineers were mobile 90 percent of their time, traveling between participating schools to oversee construction, and providing technical assistance wherever required. Their visit reports were fed into an ACCESS database where a complete record of each school was being maintained. Database records were shared with partner NGOs.

Even before the PCP team introduced engineers into the program, USAID/ESRA's District Managers monitored SMC meetings and recorded school improvement progress to verify whether SMCs were being trained according to their functional requirements and whether they were executing their responsibilities. The managers continued to visit schools to meet with the SMCs while the engineers continued to provide technical assistance to construction. Given the scale and timeframe of this program, continuous monitoring and technical assistance were seminal to its success.