

**Improving Education Governance and Learning Outcomes through Citizen Led
Campaigns**

The Case of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2010

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Improving Education Governance and Learning Outcomes through Citizen Led Campaigns – The Case of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2010

I. Introduction

The past two decades have seen a rise of citizen led initiatives across the world in response to concerns such as; lack of effective democratic institutions, government's increasing inability to respond to social issues and the desire to expand and strengthen civic space to increase citizen's involvement in governance. In both the developing and the developed world Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) are emerging as frontrunners in policy/advocacy campaigns as well as direct service providers. CSO broadly defined is "a group of people who believe in a cause and form an association or volunteers to defend the cause" (Ibrahim and Hulme, 2010). Civil society includes not only non-profit organization (NGO's), but a vast array of citizen associations such as faith-based organizations, informal community groups, cooperatives, think tanks, advocacy groups, recreational and cultural organization, academics and the media.

This paper will highlight how CSO/citizen led campaigns gathering hard core evidence can influence governance at the community, provincial and national levels. It will explore how a community led approach to data gathering and analysis in context can bring about appropriate response from stakeholders, viz. local community, market forces and the government. Focus will be on The Annual Status Education Report (ASER) Pakistan which is one such citizen campaign for accountability initiated through unique border crossings between Pakistani and Indian educators in 2008. The paper will also draw attention to the evolving relationship between the State and the citizen, where active collaboration of CSOs is providing innovative approaches to outcomes based service provision conceived earlier as the sole prerogative of the State. Case studies from rural Pakistan will be shared from two village communities who used ASER findings for their own children to take action for improving learning deficiencies.

II. Rise of Civil Society Organizations

According to Ibrahim and Hulme (2010) there are three broad perspectives that explain the term 'civil society'. Under the 'Triadic Perspective' civil society is the third sector along with the state and the market with overlapping borders between them. The role of the civil society in this model is to correct both market and state failures. In contrast to the triadic model the 'Rights Perspective' stresses the importance of citizenship and human rights. Under this perspective those organizations that work on human rights or rights based related issues focus on norms and democratic values while those that operate on the development side emphasize on service delivery. Finally, the 'Arena Perspective' focuses mainly on the collective/associational nature of the civil society and emphasizes the intrinsic value of civil society as carriers of values. This

vision allows more room for the civil society to set its own agenda and views it as an associational expression of people's power (Ibrahim and Hulme, 2010).

There have been a few major global policy changes in the recent past that have brought about significant changes in the relationship between CSO's and policy makers. Globalization and increasingly open markets have brought new actors into the political arena and has generated demand from the governments for greater policy inputs. The recent shifts towards government decentralization have also increased citizen participation and promoted formal and informal civil society activity as people have started responding to expanding opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives. Development in information and communication technologies and mushroom growth of media has helped increase access to information at very low cost thus providing ways of sharing new ideas across the globe (Court, 2006). In addition to this a key policy change has been that donors are now explicitly supporting the civil society. The recognition among donors that the transition towards democratically elected governments did not, in itself, guarantee a more democratic culture has led to a more positive approach to the promotion of good governance in the form of support for civil society. (Clayton et.al, 2000) The basic idea is that a strong civil society in the face of supply side failures will organize itself to generate demand for a more democratically accountable, outcomes based and transparent state that will in turn lead to good governance.

A critical factor that may explain the increasing trend of CSO's has been state weakening due to corruption and poor service delivery and/ or failure in many developing countries. The external and internal pressures that led to economic crisis faced by the developing world in the 1980's and 1990's have left them incapacitated (Salamon, 1994). The structural adjustments programs of the IMF and the World Bank that provided loans to bring these economies back on track were made conditional on public sector reforms notably, reducing both public sector expenditure and public sector's influence in the economy. The huge cuts in public sector expenditures had adverse effects on the basic social service provision capacity of the states. Because of these policy changes the poor were hit hardest, with governments unable to provide adequate levels of health care and education. A vacuum was created as the states contracted under these policies and CSO's started to emerge as major service providers, critics, and organized groups capable of systematic and participatory evidence gathering on key social indicators , working at the grass roots levels and at sometimes at impressive scale.

Today CSO's throughout the world cover a broad range of organizations involved not only in service provision but mainstream development activities. These include huge international NGO's like Oxfam and Greenpeace, national NGO's like, Pratham and the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) in India, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Bangladesh and the Rural Support Programs (RSPs) in Pakistan which have multimillion dollars budgets, to small grassroots level organizations.

The Economist estimates that the number of international non-governmental organizations rose from 6,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 1996. According to the 2002 UNDP Human Development Report, nearly one-fifth of the world's thirty-seven thousand INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) were formed in the 1990s. The Independent Sector, a non-profit organization that serves and tracks developments in the third sector of society, estimates that there are currently 1.5 million non-profit organizations in the United States. Similarly, India was estimated to house more than one million NGOs (McGann and Johnstone, 2006).

By 1993 there were an estimated 28,900 international NGOs worldwide, with approximately 20,000 of these in Third World countries. In 1980, funding from the international donor community accounted for less than 10 percent of NGO budgets, but by the 1990s their share had risen to 35 percent. As a result of increased donor funding, NGOs in some African countries now provide or implement more than a fifth of total aid flows, compared with less than one percent fifteen years ago. (Makoba, 2002)

The non-profit sector now provides 40% of all health care and education services in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya. Bangladesh boasts approximately 10,000 registered nongovernmental organizations. In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement has organized more than 8,000 villages to produce small-scale improvement projects. Elsewhere, some 21,000 nonprofit organizations have formed in the Philippines; nearly 100,000 Christian Base Communities built on local action groups now dot the Brazilian countryside; some 27,000 nonprofit organizations are now reported in Chile and 2,000 in Argentina. (Salamon, 1994)

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of NGO's working in Pakistan mainly due to the fact that an NGO in Pakistan can be registered under five different laws in all the provinces of Pakistan. Also there are no systematic procedures in place to update this data therefore, only rough estimates are available. According to an ADB report on the NGO sector in Pakistan the number of registered NGO's in Pakistan is anywhere between 8000 to 16000. If non registered NGOs and community based organizations (CBOs) are added to those registered under the five laws, the number of Pakistani NGOs can be anywhere between 25000 and 35000. (Asian Development Bank, 1999)

This rapid spread and expansion of the NGO sector is a testament to the fact that it is increasingly becoming an alternative to state provision of basic services to most people. Because of their targeted approach that focuses on marginalized groups in the society they are now being seen as agents of social change. Moreover, as they tend to work at the grass root level, they are better able to promote participatory development initiatives that in the long run will be crucial for sustainable development.

III. Social Accountability for Improved Governance

The World Bank defines social accountability as “an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability” (Ackerman, 2005).

Social accountability practices are important in any society as they lead to improved governance, development effectiveness and empowerment of the citizens. By promoting dialogue between all concerned parties public decision making becomes more transparent and the effectiveness of service delivery is enhanced. Misallocation of resources is prevented and governments are able to formulate policies that actually account for the priorities of the poor.

Civil societies are not simply collections of associations and networks; they also function as spaces for public dialogue, argument and dissent. They work as communicative public spaces in which, social problems, public policy, government action/inaction, and matters of community and identity can be openly shared and debated. These spaces are crucial for the formation of healthy democratic institutions in a State. If only certain voices (those of the wealthy, for example, or those of a particular political orientation) dominate the public sphere, if only certain truths are represented, and if alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression, the “public interest” suffers. Civil society provides a balance to the otherwise-overbearing influence of state authority and the temptations and incentives of the market (Edward, 2005).

According to Putnam (1993), civic engagement leads to better governance and economic progress in following ways; first it fosters norms of generalized reciprocity and trustworthiness. Where people are trusting and trustworthy and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions become less costly. Second, it facilitates coordination and communication which amplifies the information about the trustworthiness of other individuals. When people lack connection to others, they are unable to test the veracity of their own views, whether in the give or take of casual conversation or in more formal deliberation. Without such an opportunity, people are more likely to be swayed by their worse impulses. Such connections when found in economic and political dealings reduce incentives for opportunism and malfeasance.

Civic engagement also tends to broaden the circle of people who are increasingly aware of their rights and entitlements. This includes people belonging to the most vulnerable and poor strata of the society. Due to this they become armed with tools which can help them engage effectively with the government and make them more articulate in presenting their demands to the policy makers (Malena et.al, 2004). In an article by Rukmini Banerji where she shares her experiences of community gatherings in Indian villages regarding the state of public schools, a common theme that emerged was people considered public schools as ‘government schools’ literally.

There was no sense of ownership as the people did not realize that it was *their* tax money that the government used to run these schools. According to them, the government had money and it choose to waste it and, that they have no say in how the money should be spent. This is precisely why it is important to provide information to the citizens about their rights and entitlements, only when they are aware will they be able to seek accountability backed by informed activism (Banerji, 2011).

IV. Role of CSO's in Social Accountability and Governance

CSO's today tend to have 6 main functions in the development process of a country (Court, 2006):

Representation (organizations that aggregate citizen voice)

- Advocacy (organizations that lobby on particular issues)
- Technical Inputs (organizations that provide information and advice)
- Capacity Building (organizations that provide support to the other CSO's, including funding)
- Service Delivery (organizations that implement development projects or provide services)
- Social Functions (organizations that foster collective recreational activities)

The concept of social accountability is cross cutting across the above functions. A core function of the CSO's is to exact accountability from the state when it is unresponsive to the needs of its citizens.

Traditionally, the channel of accountability has been 'top-down', where administrative rules and regulations, and formal law enforcing agencies like courts and anti-corruption bureaus have been in-charge of keeping checks and balances. With the emergence of CSO's, social accountability is increasingly becoming a 'bottom up' approach where citizens are collectively strengthening their voices to further their demands to policy makers and service providers. Their approach to the process is also evolving, where previously the method was public demonstrations, protests, union strikes and lawsuits, now it is more towards using hard core data evidence and real world case studies in public policy debates with government officials. "...enhanced space and opportunity for citizen/civil society engagement with the State, have led to a new generation of social accountability practices.....These include, for example, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery."(Malena et.al, 2004)

An example of citizen monitoring of public service delivery is that of the Bangalore Score Card. Public Affairs Center (PAC), a non-profit society established in 1994 in Bangalore India, collects information through surveys on the quality, efficiency, and adequacy of the various public

services to create a 'report card' that rates the performance of all major service providers in the city. The report card presents a quantitative measure of satisfaction and perceived levels of corruption, which, not only mobilizes citizens to push for government reform, but also prompts the rated agencies themselves to respond positively to civic calls for improvement in services. The goal of the exercise is to improve governance in India by strengthening civil society institutions in their informed interactions with the State. The report cards are such a success that the worst rated agency – the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) – reviewed its internal systems for service delivery, introduced training for junior staff, and along with the Bangalore Municipal Corporation, began to host a joint forum of NGOs and public agencies to consult on solving high-priority problems such as waste management. The report card exercise has been replicated not only in other Indian cities, but also internationally in countries like the Philippines and Ukraine, and cities like Washington D.C., have endorsed the usefulness of the 'model' in exacting accountability from public enterprises (Social Development Notes, 2003)

Another such example but more relevant to the education sector is that of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). It is a citizen led household based survey report that collects information on the educational status of the country. Pioneered by an NGO in India by the name of Pratham, ASER is now published in 4 countries besides India namely, Pakistan, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. In the three African countries the report is published under the name UWEZO. ASER not only provides information on various educational indicators like out of school children, enrollment rates, school facilities etc but also reports on the learning levels of children in the age-group 6-16 years. Instead of focusing just on the access to education it also collects information on quality of education. The report includes data right down right down to the village level, which is extremely use full for community mobilization. Widespread dissemination of this report helps create awareness among communities about the educational status of their children, which in turn, helps galvanize public response and action to the formal schooling system. Through the use of this data the community becomes better equipped to make informed demands from the State regarding the provision of education services in their respective communities. There is great trust and ownership of the data as the survey is conducted by the local community/citizens themselves. This report like the Bangalore score card is pure data evidence that is used by the respective countries to not only to inform the government about the state of education provision in the country but also to devise programs and policies that are in line with the actual need rather than the perceived need. Case study of ASER is discussed in detail later on in the paper.

V. Effectiveness of CSO's

Theoretically the concept of social accountability is noble but, is practical and useful in the real world only when certain conditions are met. Most obvious one is the political climate of a State. A democratic regime that supports access to information and freedom of expression is more

likely to be open to policy dialogues between all stake holders (itself, the market forces and the citizens) rather than an autocratic State, ridden with conflict and violence. Another factor is the capacity of the CSO's. "The level of organization of CSO's, the breadth of their membership, their technical and advocacy skills, their capacity to mobilize and effectively use the media, their legitimacy and representativity, and their level of responsiveness and accountability to their own members are all central to the success of social accountability activities" (Malena et.al, 2004)

Ackerman (2005) suggests that the success of any social accountability campaign depends mainly on the synergy between the State and the CSO's. The most effective strategy is to have a balance between civil society leadership and the State. The reason being that if an accountability campaign is seen as solely the initiative of CSO's it may create strong resistance among the public sector. The public sector will adopt a defensive stance and may employ acts of repression against the campaign. On the other hand an entirely government initiated project will have difficulty in finding support or participation of the civil society as there would be fear or co-optation or otherwise complete control. The best approach then is to have mutual participation of the State and societal actors and the building of state-civil society synergies.

VI. Using Evidence for Policy Influence

Synergies are important but the question arises how to form effective synergies. An effective synergy between the state and the CSO requires trust and mutual acceptance. CSO's aiming to influence policy need to first prove their credibility and second present their practical on ground expertise and knowledge in a way that can successfully convince policy makers. Use of evidence or research would then be the best way forward. According to Pollard, rigorous evidence can help CSO's understand problems more clearly, design better interventions and make their practices more effective. Evidence can also help them better share their lessons with others and have greater policy influence and greater pro-poor impact (Pollard, 2005). Evidence here is being defined as "any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice" (Court, 2006).

Policies based on systematic evidence are more likely to produce better outcomes. Evidence based approach to policy influence is effective because it helps bring societal issues to the forefront and ensures that they are recognized as significant problems that need to be addressed by the State. Evidence also promotes transparency and builds credibility of a CSO as clear, conclusive and irrefutable arguments can be put forward to a wide audience and because these arguments are backed by solid evidence; they create stronger pressure for change (Pollard, 2005).

CSO's are involved in development projects that involve planning, implementation and monitoring. Their work also has an advocacy aspect where they share their best practices with

other CSO's, government and donor agencies. Evidence gathered at the implementation stage, can help transmit their technical knowhow, expertise and practical knowledge to others working in similar fields. A criticism generally faced by CSO's is that the policy changes championed by them are more or less ideological stances and have no connections with ground realities. Policy changes based on research and rigorous evidence can help mute this criticism and bring CSO's and policy makers together to better understand different problems and their causes, and thereby giving them the tools to come up with informed policy solutions.

VII. Case Study: Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

Citizen led campaigns backed by evidence are gaining momentum globally to offset State inertia in improving outcomes based service delivery for education, health, shelter etc. The Annual Status Education Report (ASER) Pakistan is one such citizen campaign for accountability initiated through unique border crossings between Pakistani and Indian educators in 2008. ASER was initiated in 2005 by a non-profit organization named Pratham in India. It is a household survey that measures educational outcomes of children in the age-group 6-16 years. Facilitated by Pratham, Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is now the largest rural household survey undertaken in India by people outside the government. It annually measures the enrollment as well as the reading and arithmetic levels of children in the age group of 6-16 years. In 2010 ASER India had reached 308,636 households in 522 districts of India (ASER India, 2010).

The survey's stated objectives are threefold:

1. To get reliable estimates of the status of children's schooling and basic learning (reading and arithmetic level) at the district level;
2. To measure the change in these basic learning and school statistics from last year; and,
3. To interpret these results and use them to affect policy decisions at various levels.

In 2008 ASER was brought to Pakistan through the South Asia Forum for Education Development (SAFED). SAFED is essentially a platform for cross country learning, discussion and debate on issues pertinent to the education sector in the South Asian region. It lends substance to areas of research, practice and policy, as well as the strengthening of linkages of development and peace between countries in the region. SAFED's geographical scope spans all the SAARC countries, including Afghanistan and Myanmar (<http://safedafed.org/>).

As in India, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi which is a nonprofit organization in Pakistan is the facilitator of ASER in Pakistan. The survey is conducted under partnerships with local organizations based in various districts of Pakistan. ASER is not conducted by any single organization. Instead, ASER is done in collaboration with a variety of civil society organizations, universities, research institutions, government organizations and citizens' groups. Collaborators

voluntary supporters, teachers and students devote their time and resources to conduct ASER in their region/districts.

To date, two Annual rounds of ASER Pakistan have been completed; ASER 2008 covered 16,737 children in 330 villages in 11 districts across 2 provinces whereas, ASER 2010 was completed in 32 districts across Pakistan, it covered 54,062 children in 19,000 households in 960 villages. The districts covered by ASER so far have all been rural districts. In 2011 ASER Pakistan is underway to cover 82 rural districts across 4 provinces and 2 urban districts one in the province of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and the other in Punjab.

ASER is not just a survey report but a nationwide citizens' audit of education. Citizens themselves voluntarily collect information from their communities and villages using a common set of tools and a common sampling frame provided by the facilitating organization. It is a campaign that mobilizes citizens to assert their right to evaluate government performance and demand response in case of poor performance. A precondition to expression of demands is the awareness of one's rights and entitlements and how they are being unmet by the State. When citizens conduct ASER survey in their own communities, they end up building their own social capital which helps them not only in effective engagement with officials responsible in their areas but also provides them with a base to build upon in case they want to take any initiative at the community level.

a) Need for ASER

ASER owes much of its impact to the current situation of education in the South Asian region. With low levels of education to begin with, initial focus in the field of education in South Asia was primarily directed towards increasing enrolment and access. But with progress in enrolment and access targets, the task now is to give due attention to what the child is actually learning inside the school. Through ASER, district, province and national level data is gathered on an annual basis. This exercise in education research has the potential to pay huge dividends in education in Pakistan as it has been demonstrated by the Indian experience of ASER.

ASER India has had major national policy impact by bringing the challenges of quality of school to the forefront of government planning and policy. ASER India is now an important policy input and is a referred study in the Planning Commission's Approach paper to the 11th five year plan 2007-2012. ASER 2006 report was also presented to the Indian Prime Minister. ASER Pakistan on the other hand is relatively new but aims to have the same impact in policy circles as ASER India. To date ASER Pakistan has been extensively quoted in Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-2011, the Global Monitoring Report 2011, the Pakistan Education Task Force reports 2011 and used by many think tanks and coalitions in their advocacy work. Education ministers and senior decision makers often quote the data for underscoring the need for learning outcomes based approaches to address the education challenge

ASER Pakistan is also paving way for new and innovative researches. It is now becoming an integral component for knowledge creation in the field of education. Most recently ASER methodology and technique has been used in an ongoing cross country research of the title “Research Dimensions of Privatization in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh” under the Privatization in Education Research Initiative (PERI). The research funded by the Open Society Foundation’s (OSF) Education Support Program focuses on understanding the role of non-state education providers and how has it evolved in the three countries – juxtaposed against the political economy of education and whether private sector emergence has improved or aggravated social justice and equity issues. ASER contributed to the research by lending it its sampling methodology as well as its survey tools that included learning assessment tools and household and school survey formats.

ASER Pakistan (2010) data is also being used in a study by Monazza Aslam and Paul Atherton titled 'The 'Shadow' Education Sector in India and Pakistan: the determinants, benefits and equity effects of private tutoring'. The study attempts to identify the extent of the spread of private tutoring in the two countries and whether this spread is in response to failing school system in the two countries. The study also looks at the equity effects of private tuitions in the two countries.

b) ASER 2010 Result Highlights

ASER 2010 survey was conducted in 32 rural districts of Pakistan, where, 13 districts were selected from Punjab, 5 from Baluchistan, 4 from KPK, 6 from Sindh, 2 from Azad Jammu Kashmir, 1 from Gilgit-Baltistan and ICT. A total of 19,006 households were surveyed in 960 villages across 32 districts. Information was collected on 54,062 children from the age group 3-16 years.

School information on both public and private schools was collected from a total of 1297 schools (852 Public Schools and 445 Private Schools).

ASER 2010 also collected information on Mothers and their literacy levels. Total of 19,915 mothers were surveyed.

Mothers’ Literacy

Out of the total 19,915 mothers, 54% agreed to be tested for literacy whereas 30% were not available and 16% were available but refused to be tested. Of those tested, only 32% were able to read a simple paragraph in their own language and 68% fell in the illiterate category.

Enrolment in Age Group 3-5 Years

Of the total 10,246 children falling in the 3-5 age bracket, 44.7% were enrolled in some kind of a pre-school facility.

Enrolment in Age Group 6-16 Years

School enrollment across all grades stood at 80% whereas 20% of the children in this age bracket were not enrolled in any type of school. Of these out of school children 68% were drop outs while 32% had never been enrolled.

Of the enrolled population 70.9% went to public schools while 29.1% were attending non state educational facilities.

Learning Levels

Under ASER learning levels are tested of children in the age group 6-16 years. Children are tested for up to grade II & grade III level competencies. The overall reading ability of story level was only 34% and Math (subtraction) was, only 19%. Only 51% of grade V children could do grade II reading at story level and only 34% of grade V children could do division of grade III level.

An interesting finding in ASER 2010 was the fact that out of school children were found to have some learning competencies. In some cases learning outcomes of out of school children were better than in-school children. A case in point was the province Balochistan where 26% of the out school children could read a sentence in Urdu as compared to the 20% children in school who could read a sentence in Urdu. Out of the surveyed population of 54,062 children, 20% were found to be out of school. 34% of the out of school children could read a sentence in their own language out of which 50% were female.

Attendance Levels

Overall attendance in government schools stood at 85% while in private schools it was 89%. Teacher's attendance in public schools was 87% while in private schools it stood at 90%

School Profiles

Of the total government schools surveyed, 57.5% had useable water facility (hand pump or water tap) and 45.3% had a functional toilet. 66.4% of the government schools had a boundary wall while only 44% had a playground

Of the total private schools surveyed, 80% had useable water facility while 69% had a functional toilet. 81% of the schools had a boundary wall and 80% had a playground.

VIII. From ASER Evidence to ASER Action: Evidence based approach to community development

The idea behind surveys like ASER is to have quality data on the basis of which programs and policies can be formulated. Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) used ASER (2010) data to formulate a campaign to raise the learning levels of the children. Learning outcomes were the focus of the campaign as the data had revealed disappointing results of overall learning levels. ASER data played a crucial role in the planning aspect of the campaign, as the data is available right down to the village level. Availability of this data made it easier to identify villages and districts that had the worst learning outcomes. Another benefit of this data was that when presented in the villages it was accepted as being authentic since the community itself was a part of the survey when it was conducted in 2010.

The new campaign Chalo Parrho Barrho (CPB) (Let's read and grow) is designed to address the core problems of reading and numeracy as highlighted in the ASER data. More importantly the campaign is a step towards action research that explores evidence based citizen action. It is a citizen led initiative designed in a manner where the citizens' themselves are working towards improving the educational status of their community's children. Under the program accelerated learning classes are conducted in government schools by volunteers from the same community. The beneficiaries of these classes are in school children in grades 1-5 with low learning levels and out of school children. Morning classes are held for in-school children while out of school children are catered to in evening classes.

The campaign was initiated with Baithaks (community meetings) organized in ASER villages by ITA, to share with the citizens the outcomes of (ASER) survey. This exercise created awareness among the community about the educational status of their children. It also built the credibility of the data as the community confirmed that the data on learning levels, enrollment and out of school children matched the real life situation. These meetings were an opportunity to not only gather the inhabitants of the villages and understand their problems but also to learn the key steps and processes being explored for education activism with local groups/citizens.

The pilot phase of the campaign was launched in April 2011 in Multan and Rahim Yar Khan, two districts in Southern Punjab. Two villages; Rawani in Multan and Wahid Buksh in Rahim Yar Khan were targeted. There were two government schools in both the villages. Rawani had a boys' primary school and a girls' elementary school while Wahid Buksh Lar had two primary schools, one for the boys and the other for the girls. The program was initiated in all 4 schools for 12 weeks. Educated volunteers were recruited from the villages to be trained by ITA to conduct CPB classes in the local government schools. 2 volunteers were attached to each school. Volunteers were trained in the Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CAMAL)

methodology, which is a highly effective technique for teaching language and arithmetic in a short span of time.

The CAMAL methodology has been designed by Pratham India and is used in their nationwide program by the name of Read India. Teams from Pratham not only trained ITA in this methodology but also shared their learning and teaching materials which were later revised by ITA in accordance with local context and curriculum. Besides ASER this particular training and sharing of technical knowhow is another example of how experiences of one country can help the other in formulating robust programs to counter current problems in the education sector as well help build capacity for further improvement.

The pilot was a huge success as there was significant improvement in the learning levels of the targeted children. There was an overall 25% increase in the number of students who could do simple division problems, another 31% increase was found in students who could read story level text in Urdu and a 30% rise in the number of children who could read sentences in English.

Accelerated learning outcomes of in school and out of school children were the intended program outcomes. There were some unintentional beneficial consequences of the initiative as well. During the 12 weeks of the program, in both the villages the school enrollment increased substantially. This can be attributed to the community mobilization done at the start of the program where ASER data was shared with both the communities. Moreover, at the start of the 12 weeks the schools administration in both the villages was quite slack in their responsibilities. Teachers arrived late in the school, children would go out of the school as and when they pleased, there was electricity in the schools but no fans were installed despite the fact that there was a substantial sum of money in the school fund. As the community was mobilized the parents started taking interest in the school activities which in turn put some pressure on the school administration. Government education officers were brought to the schools to introduce to them the new program. They were able to see for themselves the condition of the school facilities which were not being improved despite the availability of funds. The school administration was made conscious of their duties and within weeks repairs were done for drinking water facilities and fans were installed.

Achieving these results in just 12 weeks was a huge accomplishment and a testament to the fact that citizen led initiatives can work effectively to cater to the needs of the community. Given these encouraging results the campaign is now being scaled up to the district level under which around 150,000 children are being targeted (<http://www.cpbpakistan.itacec.org/>).

IX. Conclusion

The last two decades have seen a rise of CSOs and other community based organizations as major service providers in developing countries. This has come around both due to policy

changes as well as the harsh economic realities of the developing countries. Public investment required to overcome poverty and provide basic services is now beyond the reach of most developing countries. In this situation the CSOs have emerged as alternative service providers who in addition to service provision also focus on influencing government programs and policies.

CSOs today are increasingly moving from simple service provision to advocacy and policy influence. Their focus now is to empower citizens by creating awareness about their economic, social and political rights. Their aim is to strengthen citizens' collective voice so that it has greater weight. It is not important here that the state be the actual or the sole provider of services but that the state responds to its citizens and ensures that they have adequate level of basic services provided to them. Creating awareness about rights and entitlements also feeds into greater social accountability as citizens start reviewing, critiquing and monitoring public performance. Rise in public awareness of key policy issues and constraints increases social capital which leads to more objective and meaningful approaches to social accountability practices. Social accountability in itself is exceedingly important to societies as it leads to better governance and effective development.

In order to have an effective citizen voice initiative that elicits a response from the state it is important that there be a substantial knowledge base at the grassroot level to gain legitimacy and to present policy makers with evidence of action that can be considered in future policy formulation. Action based research starting from small pilot projects to test alternative solutions and options is the best approach to collect evidence of what works, which can then be shared with the government to design better interventions that have greater pro poor impact.

The case study of ASER is good example of how citizens can be engaged to act as monitors of public provision of education by collecting information in their own communities and villages. An outcome of this exercise is that the community becomes aware of the educational status of their children and can use the collected information to push for reforms in their respective communities. It also provides them with a base for future ventures such as the citizen led learning enhancement campaign of Chalo Parrho Barrho (CPB) (Lets read and Grow) where the communities have used the ASER data to initiate a program that addresses learning problems of their children.

Social policy dictates that the role of the government is to secure for its citizens access to quality education, health care and social safety nets. In face of current economic challenges this is becoming exceedingly difficult for governments across developing countries. Fortunately, the global political systems have also changed where the traditional boundaries of the State, civil society and the private sector are becoming blurred. This opens up new opportunities to redefine roles and responsibilities. Governments can fulfill its obligations through creating and supporting a pluralist setup where all stakeholders can effectively come together and engage in

the task of governance and policy formulations that lead to better interventions in service delivery.

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