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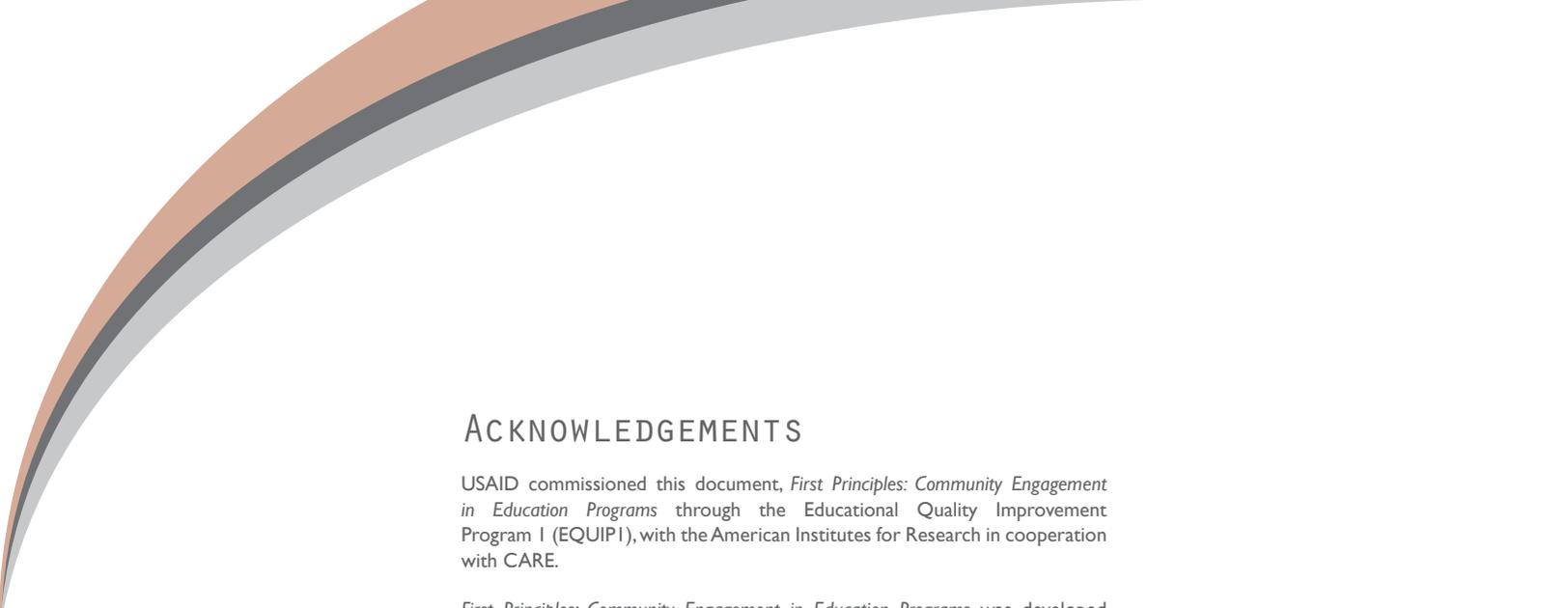
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

COMPENDIUM



Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR

This *First Principles: Community Engagement in Education Programs Compendium* provides an overview and guidance for designing and implementing education programs through the active involvement of communities. The principles, steps, and indicators are primarily meant to guide program designs, including the development of requests for and subsequent review of proposals, the implementation of program activities, and the development of performance management plans, evaluations and research studies. The *First Principles* are intended to help USAID education officers specifically, as well as other stakeholders— including staff in donor agencies, government officials, and staff working for international and national non-governmental organizations— who endeavor to improve education by engaging communities. The guidance in this document is meant to be used and adapted for a variety of settings to help USAID officers, educators and implementers grapple with the multiple dimensions of professional development and overcome the numerous challenges in mobilizing and meaningfully involving communities in supporting education. The last section provides references for those who would like to learn more about issues and methods for engaging community in education programming. This *Compendium* version provides greater depth for those who are interested to know more about key considerations when engaging communities in education. There is a shorter companion piece called a *Digest*, which is brief to quickly provide basic information on this topic.



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EQUIPI: Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools, and Communities is a multi-faceted program designed to raise the quality of classroom teaching and the level of student learning by effecting school-level changes. EQUIPI serves all levels of education, from early childhood development for school readiness, to primary and secondary education, adult basic education, pre-vocational training, and the provision of life-skills. Activities range from teacher support in course content and instructional practices, to principal support for teacher performance, and community involvement for school management and infrastructure, including in crisis and post-crisis environments.

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## ACRONYMS

AED	Academy for Educational Development
APEAE	Association des Parents d'Elèves et Amis de l'Ecole - Parents' Associations
BOT	Board of Trustees
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
COPE	Communtly Operated Primary Education (CARE Afghanistan)
COPE	Community Options for Protection and Empowerment (Save the Children Malawi)
COVCC	Community Orphans and Vulnerable Children Committee
DCOF	USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
EAP	Education Action Plan
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
GESC	Girls' Education Sub-Committee
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSP	New Schools Program
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PACEEQ	Participation Communautaire à l'Education de Base pour l'Equité et la Qualité (Community Support and Equity in Guinean Primary Education Project)
SAGE	Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education
SMC	School Management Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VEC	Village Education Committee

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## INTRODUCTION

Community engagement in education is widely recognized as a vital force in the effort to remove barriers to achieving quality education for all. Although generalized problems can be identified externally (i.e., low school enrollment), it is a community's engagement in the reflective analysis of its particular situation that leads to locally generated, locally viable, long-term solutions. Successful engagement empowers communities to participate in multiple facets of education support. Community involvement in school management has shown to increase accountability for both learning outcomes and school resources; involvement in curriculum development, which ensures the cultural relevance of subject content and teaching styles, leads to a wider embrace of the educational process. Community engagement also fosters the willing contribution of local resources (human, material, and economic) for the benefit of education. Community ownership of education initiatives endows such initiatives with a greater likelihood of being successful, and of being sustained over time.

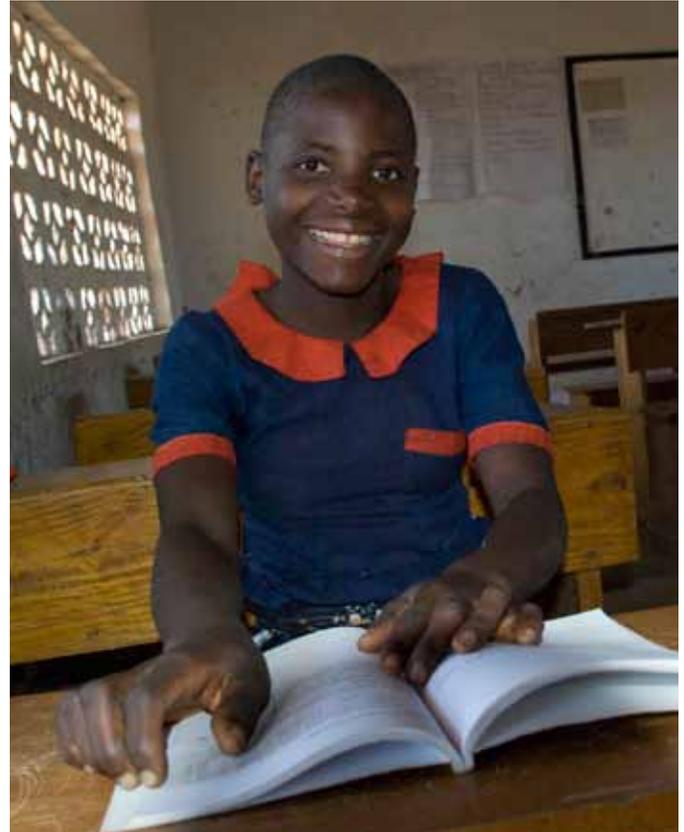
### Background

The importance of engaging communities in addressing barriers to education has come to the forefront as governments worldwide strive to reach their commitments to Education for All goals by 2015. Governments are increasingly recognizing the value of working with communities and sharing responsibility for, and ownership of, educational systems.

Where traditional practices or beliefs prevent marginalized populations, particularly girls, from attaining education, government mandates alone are not enough to remove these barriers. Communities themselves must address the underlying factors that prevent children from accessing education and then develop solutions that are relevant to their particular situation. Additionally, the multiplicity of crises around the world, both natural and human-made, has interrupted schooling for millions. Reestablishing schooling in these settings and helping establish a sense of normalcy often fall on the shoulders of the community.

Countries with concerted alliances among government, communities, and international partners have made great strides. Communities have contributed greatly to improving school systems by addressing issues of access to education, educational quality, and safety and security. See Table 1 for examples of specific activities undertaken by communities to address these areas. Community participation in education

Credit: Allen Clinton/CARE



is a sustainable way to increase resources, improve the accountability of schools to the communities they serve, ensure a more cost-effective use of resources, and be responsive to local needs. As a result, it intends to improve equitable access, retention, quality, and performance of schooling (Rose, 2003).

Key reasons for engaging communities are as follow:

- **Local, in-depth understanding of problems can create more-viable solutions.** Problems that look unsolvable at the national level can often be reasonably managed at the school level.
- **Community engagement fosters local ownership. Local ownership helps ensure the long-term sustainability of initiatives.** Communities that have taken ownership of and sustained initiatives have done so because they have embraced the importance of education for their children and not because they are motivated by external resources.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF EDUCATION ACTIVITIES THAT COMMUNITIES SUPPORT

Area of Need Identified	Sample Activities
Access to education	Holding student enrollment campaigns; monitoring attendance; establishing community schools or alternative learning programs; addressing child labor; providing for the support/financial needs of orphans and vulnerable children
Quality of education	Tutoring; assisting with extracurricular activities (sports, cultural, crafts); providing exam support; making teaching/learning aids with locally available materials; adapting curriculum to local context and culture; providing relevant life-skills content in school programs
Safety/security	Establishing and monitoring codes of conduct for teachers as they pertain to sexual harassment and corporal punishment; establishing schools as safe zones in conflict; developing disaster risk reduction plans
Management/school oversight	Recruiting local teachers; monitoring teacher attendance and absenteeism; monitoring exam results; overseeing the inventory of school materials
Gender equity	Encouraging girls' enrollment; helping with uniforms and other costs; addressing the need for separate, working latrines; encouraging active female role models through the involvement of women in community organizations; establishing mentoring groups and clubs
School construction, repairs, improvements	Constructing and/or repairing schools; providing water and sanitation needs; planting trees; fencing a play area
Financial/material needs of school	Providing teacher compensation (including housing); providing chairs/desks; fundraising; providing alternative space in the absence of a school

- **Local ownership can ensure a culturally sensitive approach to education, leading to greater parental buy-in.** Parents are more likely to support the entire education system—curriculum content, location of schools, school personnel, school calendars, and so on—when they believe that the practices and content are relevant to, and have consideration for, their own lives.
- **Accountability to stakeholders increases quality.** Communities have demonstrated that with appropriate training, they are capable of demanding and monitoring school accountability, including monitoring teacher attendance, managing school finances and resources, and assessing learning outcomes (Gillies & Quijada, 2008).
- **When school personnel and parents mutually support and recognize each other, opportunities for learning are maximized.** Teachers need support and recognition from communities to perform effectively; parents need guidance from teachers and other school personnel to understand how they can support their children's learning.
- **Local resources are contributed.** Even communities living in entrenched poverty have intellectual, physical, social, and material resources that they can leverage to support education initiatives. These resources are usually contributed willingly when community members have a sense of ownership and an understanding that the initiative is for the betterment of their children and their community.

- **Community participation is an exercise of a democratic right.** Community participation is important as an end in itself as an opportunity for citizens to exercise their right to participate with and give input into structures and initiatives that affect them personally.
- **The process of engagement can strengthen community relations.** Learning together and practicing the processes of participatory consultation and decision making can change community dynamics and transform relationships between groups. Gender relations are often transformed, for example, when opportunities are created for women to be involved in decision making alongside men. Communities have proved that with support and guidance, they are able and willing to address the cultural norms and values that promote discrimination (CARE, n.d.).

Although full engagement in community initiatives is highly desirable, for many communities it is a new concept. Entrenched power dynamics or traditional practices may have established hierarchical, authoritarian structures that have limited participation in a broader sense. Training, practice, and accompaniment are indispensable components to ensure the success of any community engagement until such time as community members have consolidated the skills and confidence necessary to take full responsibility for the process.

### Defining Community Participation

Community participation is a generalized term that is used to reflect a gamut of levels of involvement with communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) characterizes community participation on three levels: marginal, substantive, and structural. In marginal participation, community input is “limited and transitory and has little direct influence on the outcome of the development activity.” Substantive participation is characterized by the community being actively involved in determining priorities and carrying out activities, even though the mechanisms for these activities may be controlled externally. In structural participation, the community is involved as an integral part of the project, and its participation becomes the ideological basis for the project itself. In this last case, the community plays an active and direct part in all aspects of the development process and has the power to ensure that its opinions are taken into account (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009).

Credit: Patrick Sebe Soadwa/CARE



The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) defines community participation as including both the processes and the activities that allow members of an affected population to be heard, empower them to be part of decision-making processes, and enable them to take direct action on education issues. It uses symbolic/token participation, consultation, and full participation to identify the different levels (INEE, 2004).

Another model (Shaeffer, 1994) delineates eight levels of community participation that vary by the degree of engagement and activity. Within this classification system, participation ranges from passive collaboration or involvement with the education system to an actively engaged role (Rose, 2003). Table 2 illustrates the eight levels, describes some of the characteristics of the participation, and gives some specific examples of how the participation has been manifested.

TABLE 2: LEVELS OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

Form of Involvement	Characteristics	Specific Examples
Manipulation: Communities are manipulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities do not understand the issues with which they are confronted.</li> <li>Communities are not given feedback on actions taken.</li> <li>Problem analysis is not shared with community members.</li> </ul>	
Decoration: Communities are used as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities are not involved with the root of the problem; their participation is incidental.</li> <li>External providers use community members to support their cause in a relatively indirect manner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community provides materials and/or labor for a project as directed by an authority.</li> </ul>
Tokenism: Communities are used in a perfunctory or merely symbolic way to give the appearance of real participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities appear to have been given a voice, but in reality have little or no choice about the subject matter.</li> <li>Communities have little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.</li> <li>Conditions do not exist that enable women and other traditionally excluded groups to participate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some PTAs whose members are appointed by community leaders or school authorities, and primarily serve to “rubber stamp” decisions.</li> <li>Parent meetings where parents are given information but have no voice.</li> </ul>
Communities are assigned but informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities are given complete, accurate information about their actions, and understand why their participation is needed.</li> <li>They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why.</li> <li>They have a meaningful role to play in the development of a project.</li> <li>They volunteer for a project after having been given all the necessary information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some school-feeding projects</li> <li>Some school construction projects</li> </ul>
Communities are consulted and informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects are run and designed by external agencies, but communities understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some PTA strengthening projects</li> <li>School Construction</li> <li>Some Girls’ Education initiatives</li> </ul>
Communities participate in project implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decisions are initiated externally.</li> <li>Communities have a high degree of responsibility, and are involved in the production and design aspects of projects.</li> <li>Communities contribute their opinions before final projects are implemented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PACEEQ in Guinea*</li> <li>COPE Schools in Afghanistan*</li> <li>New Schools in Egypt*</li> </ul>
Communities initiate and direct decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External agencies do not interfere or direct community-run projects.</li> </ul>	
<b>Communities initiate, plan, direct and implement decisions.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The community develops decisions and projects.</li> <li>Actions are implemented by the community.</li> </ul>	

<sup>1</sup> Source: Adapted from IIEP (2006). These projects are described in detail in the case studies section

The INEE Minimum Standards point out that full participation is often difficult to achieve, particularly in emergency circumstances. However, consultation is the minimum target, and all-inclusive, full participation is the goal (INEE, 2004). This should be the norm in nonemergency situations as well. (See Box A for a brief discussion on education in emergency settings.)

### **Box A: Special Consideration for Education in Emergency Settings**

Education is a basic right for all children. Wars and natural disasters often deny generations the knowledge and opportunities that an education can provide. Thus, maintaining this right can be both life-sustaining and life-saving for the tens of millions of children affected by emergencies by providing physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection. Consider the following global impact of emergency conditions:

- Approximately 75 million children are out of school worldwide; more than half of these children are living in conflict-affected states.
- Millions more are living in situations affected by natural disasters.
- In conflict zones, 20 million girls are out of school.
- Girls account for only 30% of refugees enrolled in secondary school (INEE, 2004).

The general emergency context implies greater instability among affected communities and their environments that may result in the disruption of the community's usual social, political, and economic roles and relationships. Communities in early phases of an emergency may be in such a state of flux or trauma that they are unable or unwilling to assume additional responsibilities beyond basic survival needs. It is likely to be more difficult to obtain their participation and will require greater capacity building and time to engage them than is necessary for communities in more-stable environments (International Institute for Educational Planning [IIEP], 2006).

### **Box A: Special Consideration for Education in Emergency Settings (continued)**

The SHIKHON project in Bangladesh had a Nevertheless, the burning desire to reestablish normalcy can also make communities more willing than usual to assist in education. Communities are a key resource for providing education during emergencies and reconstruction. Although crisis situations often raise conflicts within communities on a variety of issues, the reestablishment of regular schooling provides a common task around which community members will rally. Community engagement for education during times of crisis has the potential for bringing people together in broad agreement, helping establish a sense of routine and normalcy, and serving as an important factor in psychosocial healing.

For more information about education in emergencies, see the INEE website: [www.ineesite.org](http://www.ineesite.org). The INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility includes a member from USAID.

## **Enabling Factors in the Practice of Community Engagement**

A number of significant factors support the practice of community engagements:

- Increased recognition on the part of governments of the importance of partnerships to achieve education goals.
- Increased democratization of many societies that has been fostered by the emergence of civil society groups. These groups, including local nongovernmental and community-based organizations that formed to address a variety of political and social concerns, are creating awareness of the right to, and the value of, wider participation.
- Cohesive community structures in many small, rural communities. Smaller communities tend to have an established central leadership structure with some credibility.

## What Does Not Work? What Should Be Avoided?

The greater part of this compendium focuses on proven strategies for successfully engaging communities and for addressing potential obstacles. It is also important to note, however, what does not work in this area of practice. Several negative consequences have been known to arise from hastily conceived and implemented initiatives that increase the burden on the poor, reinforce gender inequities, lead to a loss of trust as a result of token participation, and have unsustainable short-term results.

**Increased burden on the poor.** In some cases, community participation is seen as a means to access local resources and shift the responsibility for providing resources for education from the government to communities. Community schools, which are often established in poor, remote communities, can require greater contributions from the community than government schools in wealthier areas in terms of fees, support for the instructors, and school construction. This need can widen the economic divide and increase the discrepancy in the quality of education available to the poorest communities. Even when community members providing skilled labor are paid for their services, those with skills are already likely to be the better off members of the community. Those less likely to have access to paid employment are expected to volunteer their services.

**Reinforced gender inequities.** Community contributions to a collective project may actually reinforce inequitable gender patterns of participation. In many rural societies, men have traditionally provided financial or material resources while women are expected to provide labor. In cases where both genders provide labor, the degree varies. In a number of school construction projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women were responsible for hauling sand and water for construction while men were responsible for molding the bricks, laying the bricks, and doing carpentry. Some initiatives, in an effort to counteract the increased burden on the poor, paid community members who provided skilled labor. Thus, brick making by men was paid for because it required a skill, whereas carrying of water by women, often over long distances, was not given any monetary value despite the time and energy expended (Rose, 2003).

**Token participation.** The label of community participation is sometimes given to initiatives in which all decisions are made outside the community by the government or the implementing partner, and communities are merely informed about what will

take place. They are then expected to commit time, labor, and resources to the initiative without having had any say or input into it. Such token participation results in frustration, lost trust, and reluctance to participate in future initiatives. Experience has shown that token participation is a missed opportunity and is ineffective in providing quality and lasting programs (INEE, 2003).

**Short-term, one-time commitments.** Short-term engagements have very limited effectiveness and engender little to no ownership or sustainability. This result has been demonstrated in case after case where material resources (e.g., learning materials, school furniture) are given to a school in a one-time effort, and monitoring visits a few months or a year later show that many of the materials are either lost or damaged. Pushing donor resources at communities before a community-driven process is in place can also result in the rise of opportunists, which then undermines genuine community ownership and responsibility (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006).

## Case Studies: Examples of Successful Engagements

Numerous examples illustrate successful partnerships with communities to improve both access to education and educational quality. The five USAID-supported examples below highlight a range of levels of community engagement, from mobilization around a specific issue, such as girls' education or the needs of orphans and vulnerable children, to local management of a community school:

- Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) in Ghana and Guinea
- Raising Awareness of the needs of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Malawi and Zambia
- Strengthening of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) through the Community Support and Equity in Guinean Primary Education Project (PACEEQ) project in Guinea
- Community Organized Primary Education (COPE) in Afghanistan
- Community Schools in Egypt

A synopsis of each initiative is presented here, and specific illustrative examples of good practices, challenges encountered, and lessons learned are integrated throughout.

Credit: Josh Estey/CARE



### **Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (1999–2002)**

Implemented by the AED, with funding from USAID's Office of Women in Development, the Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) project worked in five countries (Guinea, Mali, Ghana, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) to develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. In Guinea and Ghana particularly, work was also done directly with communities to strengthen local management of girls' education initiatives.

In Ghana, although the SAGE project worked primarily at the national level, work was also done at the community level to increase the number of women on School Management Committees (SMCs), develop girls' education subcommittees (GESCs), develop community action plans for girls' education, and establish girls' clubs. Training was held with the SMCs and PTAs, and a cross-section of the newly appointed women volunteers to the GESCs also received training in leadership skills, guidance and counseling, and gender issues. Results included an increase in women's voices being heard prominently

in the decision-making process at meetings, women supervising girls' evening study, and members of the GESC going house to house to ensure that all girls were enrolled in school and stayed in school (Schumann, n.d.).

In Guinea, SAGE supported the development of local alliances to promote girls' education. The 19 local alliances set up across the country came about as a result of community consultations that addressed barriers to girls' education. The alliances included community and religious leaders, women's associations, PTA members, business entrepreneurs, and representatives of school administration and local government. An outline of specific training provided to the alliances is included in Appendix B.

Through their efforts, the local alliances achieved measurable improvements in girls' education. Reports highlight increases in overall school enrollment, particularly among girls, with girls' retention being successfully addressed by at least one alliance. Alliances also successfully mobilized their communities to build schools and school furniture (Schumann, n.d.).

Credit: Phil Borges/CARE



### **Raising Awareness of the Needs of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Malawi and Zambia (1995–2002)**

USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) supported work addressing the needs of orphans and vulnerable children through Save the Children US's COPE (Community Options for Protection and Empowerment) program in Malawi from 1995 to 2000. In Zambia, DCOF supported a similar approach from 1997 to 2002—first through Project Concern International (PCI/Z) and subsequently through CARE's SCOPE-OVC project (Strengthening Community Partnerships for the Empowerment of Orphans and Vulnerable Children).

Representative community members were engaged in a participatory process to analyze the impacts of HIV/AIDS in their community. The results of the analysis were shared with the wider community, which in turn generated a commitment among community members to respond. Committees were formed, and capacity-building workshops were held to help

committee members learn how to develop a common vision, share it with the wider community, and then turn it into an action plan. Specific activities to address the problem varied in each community.

When a review team visited 30 community-level committees 4 to 6 years after external support had stopped, it found that all but 2 committees were still active. Committee members stated that seeing positive results had sustained their enthusiasm. Community members reported recognizing that it was their responsibility to act, using whatever resources they had; the mobilization process had galvanized and empowered them to act collectively to address the impact of HIV/AIDS. In some cases, neighboring communities were inspired to seek the help of existing committees to start their own initiatives for children. For the review team, such examples were a powerful endorsement of the initial community's efforts and of the ability of mobilized communities to offer benefits beyond that of targeted programming (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006).

## Strengthening Parent Associations in Guinea through PACEEQ (1997–2007)

Community Participation for Equity and Quality in Basic Education in Guinea (*Participation Communautaire à l'Éducation de Base pour l'Équité et la Qualité – PACEEQ*) was a USAID funded initiative led by World Education, with the AED, the Education Development Center (EDC), the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), and Save the Children-US as consortium partners.

PACEEQ worked with parent associations (known as APEAE in French) and other community-based organizations to develop key skills in decision making and resource management, thus building their capacity to work in partnership with school administrators to improve the quality of education. Where possible, PACEEQ included the alliances already established by the SAGE project (see Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education, above).

The formulation and implementation of education action plans (EAPs) was at the core of the PACEEQ approach to building the capacity of parent associations. Planning was launched by first involving the entire community in a participatory situational analysis. On the basis of both the data gathered and the subsequent community dialogue, needs were prioritized and an inventory of community resources conducted. These discussions resulted in a first draft of an EAP, which was then finalized and budgeted with technical assistance from PACEEQ. The final EAP was then discussed and validated by all members of the parent association during a general meeting.

A subgrant component of the project partially financed EAPs. Parent associations were required to contribute from 5% to 25% of the total subgrant as an in-kind or cash community contribution.

Evaluations found that parent associations participating in the PACEEQ program demonstrated a significant and enduring change in their performance. In particular, parent associations showed increased transparency, accountability, and participatory decision making, and they worked collaboratively with school administrators to improve the quality of education, resulting in good governance in the co-management of schools. Many APEAEs continued to carry out school improvement activities after direct assistance from PACEEQ ended. Interviews with APEAE members indicated that they were proud of the positive change in the status of the parent associations. They were aware that they have earned a reputation as a transparent organization that contributes significantly to school quality and

were highly motivated to keep this status (World Education Guinea, 2007).

## Community-Organized Primary Education in Afghanistan (1994–present)

CARE's Community-Organized Primary Education (COPE) program provides sustainable access to quality primary education, particularly for girls, in remote communities in Afghanistan through community-managed schools. The program has been supported through funding from a variety of sources, including USAID. Established during a period when secular girls' schooling was outlawed, the COPE model was initially designed to operate independently, outside the Taliban government, although conditions often required agreements with local Taliban officials. In recent years, CARE has worked closely with the Afghan Ministry of Education, and a number of well-established COPE schools and students have been integrated into the government-run public school system (Balwanz, n.d.).

As part of its protocol for identifying target communities, provincial and district-level education authorities are consulted about which communities are most in need of a primary school and least likely to be getting one soon. Surveys are conducted in those communities to assess the need for and the willingness to support a primary class. The program then applies five selection criteria: the target community demonstrates a strong interest in primary education; no other functional primary school exists within a 3-kilometer radius; the community must produce a list of potential enrollees, 30% of whom must be girls; the community must provide a space for the school (e.g., a local mosque); and the community must be willing to form a Village Education Committee (VEC) and pay a teacher's salary, in cash or in-kind (Chabbot, 2006).

VEC members are trained in community participation, school management, resource mobilization, and conflict resolution. (For the specific training topics, see Appendix B.) VECs are responsible for identifying and managing school space, managing teacher selection and payment, resolving school problems with the community and local authorities, and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system.

COPE schools have exhibited dramatically higher retention rates and lower dropout rates than public schools. COPE schools have greatly increased girls' enrollment. At one point, the schools accounted for 100% of the girls' enrollment in four provinces (Balwanz, n.d.).

## Community Schools in Egypt

UNICEF and the Egyptian Ministry of Education launched the community school initiative in 1992 to respond to the needs of Upper Egypt's underserved areas. The initiative was conceived as a system through which innovations in community and school interactions could be tested. Education committees formed at each school function as local school boards. The community provides a school site in an existing structure, determines the hours and days the school will be in session, and participates in teacher selection. Community input ensures that the curriculum and activities focus on the community's work and reflect the local culture.

The Ministry of Education supports the schools by paying teacher salaries, providing supplies, participating in staff training and school supervision, and issuing students official primary school certificates at the end of grade 5. Community members serve on education committees and play an active role in the schools, including teaching or supervising students.



Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR

In addition to improved learning outcomes as measured on national exams, the community schools dramatically changed other aspects of life in Upper Egypt. Children in community schools demonstrate a positive sense of self and their role as active learners. In particular, girls began to see themselves as educated, capable, and empowered. Families have begun to value children's schooling and have ceased consigning their girls to labor and chores at the expense of education. Community school governance has also provided Upper Egypt with new decision-making processes and models of collective action (DeStefano, 2006).

USAID's involvement in the community schools initiative was through its support of the New Schools Program (NSP) implemented by CARE (2000–2008) which built on the UNICEF/MOE model. Parent associations formed in each community perform a variety of tasks: providing learning spaces, managing aspects of the educational process, providing funds for some school activities, and addressing obstacles that prevent girls from attending school. Parent association members work collaboratively with facilitators on tasks such as raising awareness with parents about the importance of girls' education, collecting birth certificates or issuing birth certificate for girls who do not have one, and making home visits to girls who have dropped out. During the 8 years of project support, NSP established 189 multigrade classrooms providing access to accelerated primary education for 6,276 students, of whom 6,118 are girls (CID Consulting, 2008).

## 8 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The following section explores the principles of community engagement, gleaned from practical lessons learned.

### **Principle I: Establish and maintain trust.**

Establishing and maintaining trust is the foundation for all productive, mutually beneficial relationships. The importance of establishing trust applies to all parties engaged in the school environment, including trust between external parties and the community and between community representatives and community members at large. Trust is engendered when there is demonstrated credibility and transparency in all stages of the development of the relationship.

Credibility is best established through clear communication, regular consultation, and reliable follow-through. With these in place, community members gain confidence that they will be dealt with honestly and can reasonably depend on the authenticity of what they are being told. Establishing the credibility of all partners in this way is essential to maintaining motivation and involvement among participants. Conversely, a lack of credibility, particularly a lack of follow-through on agreements made, is a common reason for participation to drop off abruptly.

Transparency includes being open about intentions and motivations as well as processes and resources. An extensive review of the literature on trust identified five common factors of trust: benevolence (the intent to see the issue and possible solutions from the point of view of the community), reliability, competence, predictability (honesty), and transparency (Randell, n.d.).

Shaeffer (1994), in a review of community participation initiatives, writes more specifically:

The important thing in all of this process is to ensure transparency and clarity. This requires clear, but flexible guidelines, rules, and frameworks for collaboration and participation; open dialogue, frank feedback, and clear channels of communication and information transfer among the participants; and, for each of the participants, clearly defined (and written) policies, guidelines, and parameters regarding tasks and functions, rights and responsibilities, limitations and resources, and procedures and formats for reporting and accounting.

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Transparency was one of the sustaining factors consistently identified by local committees working on OVC awareness in Zambia and Malawi. They felt that this was closely related to level of participation, and many committee members felt that this factor strengthened their unity as a committee. In fact, community support encouraged transparency on the part of the committees, and a perceived lack of transparency often undermined the work of the committees (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006). The importance of establishing mechanisms to ensure absolute transparency is multiplied when financial or other material resources are an element of the engagement.

Staff of the New Schools Project (NSP) in Egypt found that trust developed through concrete actions and was fostered when community members saw that their ideas and concerns had not only been listened to, but acted upon. Originally distrustful of the initiative, parents significantly increased their support for the idea of multigrade community schools when they saw that the design of the schools reflected their concerns about the conditions through which their daughters were enrolled in education, such as proximity to the home, single-sex classes, female teachers, and the ability to attend school without neglecting household chores (AIR, 2008).

## **Principle 2: Education initiatives are community driven and led.**

Efforts to improve the school environment that arise from, and are led by, communities themselves have been shown to lead to genuine ownership and long-term sustainability. An external party can often assist a community in recognizing its options or opportunities to improve educational quality. This assistance is most effective, however, when the party serves the role of facilitator only and is not perceived as controlling the process or being directive. Communities should be consulted through a process that respects their beliefs, culture, and aspirations. Methods should be used that enable different voices within the community (e.g., elders and leaders, women, men, children, property holders) to assess the current situation and expectations and develop a common purpose. These methods are explained in more detail under Step 1.

In an analysis of the effectiveness of community schools for girls' education, one of the significant factors identified was the importance of ensuring consensus among key constituents in the community around establishing a school. The choice should be a conscious act of self-selection whereby mutual respect and an equal relationship are established and communities select the program as much as the program selects the communities (Hartwell, 1998).

In early 1997, CARE's rural rehabilitation project in Afghanistan carried out participatory rural assessments in communities where it was working. Twenty of the 38 communities ranked education as one of their top three priorities. The COPE community schools were thus established in partnership with the communities as a response to a community-identified priority. A project evaluation credits this process with the degree to which many communities have taken responsibility for their schools. For example, during the Taliban rule, some communities were cut off for a time, but many of the schools continued to operate, particularly when they had the support of local religious leaders. In such cases, the classes maintained their identity as local rather than foreign donor-supported initiatives (Chabbott, 2006).

The most successful partnerships include community members' leadership and participation in all aspects of the initiative: assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Community members in Malawi linked full ownership of the process with avoiding fraud: As one community member put it, "There must be a strong partnership between leaders and community members. Everyone should see how and to

whom resources are distributed. Monitoring must be done by the local leaders and cross-checked by donors, while clearly putting most of accountability on the local leaders. Donors should avoid the impression that they are driving the process of decision-making at the community level." (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006)

## **Principle 3: Partnerships to increase educational access and quality are inclusive.**

In an inclusive partnership, the partners actively seek to involve all groups in the community, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups, such as ethnic or religious minorities, refugees, or those living with HIV/AIDS. Although any education initiative naturally seeks to involve parents, other community members are sometimes forgotten. Community members who are not necessarily parents (e.g., religious leaders, youth, private-sector representatives) can be beneficially engaged in education efforts. Genuine inclusion and participation provide substantive, meaningful opportunities that are not merely representational. This type of inclusion not only increases support for the educational initiative but also can have an impact on the environment in which children live, often transforming attitudes about schooling and opportunities for previously excluded groups.

However, inclusive participation is often more difficult than it first appears. Many attempts to include women, particularly in places where they have been traditionally excluded, have failed to address the conditions that prevent women from participating. A study of community participation in education and gender relations in Sub-Saharan Africa found that attempts were made to include women as members of school committees in a number of countries. Often, however, conditions were not addressed to ensure that women felt free to speak out on these committees or that their opinions were considered in decisions being made. Meetings were often held at times women could not attend because of household commitments (Rose, 2003).

Young people are another valuable group whose perspectives are frequently discounted in addressing community concerns. Children and youth often view problems very differently than do adults. When addressing the issue of children's vulnerability in Malawi and Zambia, for example, adults focused more on material and physical needs. Young people, however, felt that being prevented from going to school and having no free time to play with other children were more significant than material hardships (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006).

Credit: Valenda Campbell/CARE



The difficulties of inclusion can be addressed in several ways. Involving all groups in the community during the initial participatory assessment is an important first step. Different groups who have never listened to each other, such as women and men, adults and children, or different religious groups, are often surprised at the wisdom that can come from the other group and the shared concerns and aspirations that are expressed. Recognizing the similarities as well as the differences in perspectives helps forge a common bond around addressing a community need.

Another avenue for addressing inclusion is through organizational structures. One community school initiative in Ghana, for example, mandates that the school committees include three women and two men, one of whom is usually a representative of the chief, local assembly, or women's organization (Hartwell,

2006). The selection process for community membership in the community education teams in Egypt was seen as key to the success of a wide variety of NSP initiatives. Sufficient time and care had to be taken to ensure that the selected team included a solid representation of a cross-section of the community, such as parents of school children, women, religious leaders, power brokers, resource managers, community development, and education advocates (AIR, 2008).

**Principle 4: Cooperation with local government is sought and sustained to enhance program sustainability.**

The long-term sustainability of educational improvements often depends on the cooperation of local leaders. Coordination with local government and community leaders, as well as

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with other implementing agencies operating in the area, can ensure continuity and avoid perceived conflicts with other initiatives in the same community. Including local government representatives in training opportunities can facilitate their recognition of the viable role of the community in promoting not only educational quality but also other development needs of the community. It is equally important that communities be encouraged to foster accountability from service providers, as well as national, regional, and local governments in an effort to ensure development and sustainability.

Small, rural communities in particular often have deeply rooted traditional leadership structures that lend stability to community life. Regardless of their perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness, these leaders have a significant degree of influence and should be consulted and kept informed of the planned initiative. Community members may be hesitant to engage in programs initiated by outside agencies unless they know that the local leadership has been consulted and has given its approval.

Among all community school models working inside Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, COPE was unique in developing a protocol with the Taliban and in expanding girls' schools in rural areas throughout the Taliban regime. This ability to work with ultra-conservative groups continues to the present day. COPE field staff reported being particularly proud of their success in working in Tagab district, a very remote area almost a day's drive from Kabul that they say had resisted all other outside efforts to help establish girls' schools. They attributed COPE's success to staff members' ability to establish rapport with conservative local religious authorities and community leaders (Chabbot, 2006).

Partnership with local officials was seen as a key element to the success of the PACEEQ Parents Associations, who learned to see themselves as partners with the school administration, traditional and religious leaders, rural development councils, and locally elected officials (World Education Guinea, 2007).

**Principle 5: The relationship between parties is equitable.**

The parties seek to engage in a genuine partnership for the common good, where neither seeks to use the other for its advantage. Opinions, insights, solutions, and criticisms are sought, respected, and acted upon. This can be a special challenge in schools because power structures are highly connected to those who are better educated (e.g., school personnel, government officials, NGO workers, certain community leaders) and less so to those who are illiterate (e.g., first-generation learners and their families). To avoid falling back to local power structures, it is important to clearly assess how different actors will exercise influence and decision making.

For example, in Afghanistan, CARE entered into formal agreements with communities seeking to establish community schools. These agreements clearly defined the roles of each party. Village Education Committees (VECs) agreed to provide school space, manage teacher selection and payment, resolve school problems with the community and local authorities, and implement a monitoring and evaluation system. CARE agreed

to provide training to VECs and local teachers, supply classroom materials to students and teachers, and offer additional management support (Balwanz, n.d.). These agreements are noted as success factors of the COPE schools because they established an equitable, balanced partnership.

**Principle 6: Capacity development enables community members to take on greater levels of responsibility.**

Capacity development gives community members opportunities to augment their existing skills and acquire the new skills and increased confidence needed to participate, plan, manage, and evaluate. Capacity development includes training in specific skills such as participatory planning, project design and management, financial management, educational quality and supervision, and literacy and numeracy. Training for school administrators and local leaders can help them recognize the value of community participation. Ongoing mentorship reinforces and consolidates the use of the newly learned skills. The transfer of skills within the community itself is necessary to strengthen the pool of human resources and ensure long-term sustainability.

An example of the applied benefits of training comes from Ghana, where SMC and PTA members received conflict resolution training as one component of their capacity building. One community related that it was able to resolve a conflict with a nearby community, which resulted in the children from that community being allowed to attend the school and also benefit from other SAGE interventions (Ofori-Bah, Kudzi, & Donnay, 2004). Detailed explanations of considerations in capacity building and examples of how they have been applied are in Step 2.

**Principle 7: Flexibility in approach allows adaptation to local context.**

Communities are organic entities and differ widely. Community engagement in education will take different forms depending on the specific circumstances, needs, beliefs, goals, and so on, of a particular community. This principle is closely tied to Principle 2: Education initiatives are community driven and led. There is a tendency sometimes to want to implement wholesale successful models from other contexts. A flexible approach allows communities to be involved in adapting a particular model to their context and circumstances, thus increasing the likelihood of community ownership. Flexibility also allows a community's plans to be adapted to fit a change



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of circumstances within that community, particularly in the case of emergencies.<sup>2</sup>

Strongly held attitudes about gender segregation in education constitute one of the most challenging issues in the current social environment in Afghanistan. The importance of this issue varies widely and is expressed differently in different locations. One factor that led to the success of the COPE schools was the project's flexibility in its classroom arrangements from one community to another, with separate shifts or classrooms for boys and girls beginning in grade 1 in one place and co-ed classes through grade 6 in another (Chabbott, 2006).

**Principle 8: Genuine community ownership of educational initiatives requires long-term commitment.**

Experience has shown that most changes are processes that need to be consolidated over time. This is particularly true when the changes are behavioral or attitudinal. Evidence

shows that the effect over time is greatly diminished when engagements are of short duration for a specific objective. Every community and situation is different, and there are too many variables to offer a generalized timeline. Variables include community demand for quality education, the community's history with previous initiatives (either positive or negative), the ability to establish genuine trust, the commitment of government and local leaders to follow through, and the levels of education and experience of the human resources within the community. Seeking out partners who have been engaged with communities in a specific context and have some local knowledge is invaluable in establishing realistic timelines for specific initiatives.

A review conducted by Catholic Relief Services of its work in several countries concluded that having a long-term presence in and commitment to countries and communities facilitates a gradual shift from communities' participation in specific projects to their taking a more-central role in supporting education. Mutual trust and the relationships that develop and take root during this time build the foundation for strong, effective partnerships (Carneal & Pozniak, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on special considerations for education in emergency settings, see Box A.

## 5 STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The following section describes five steps to operationalize the key principles and engage in meaningful partnerships with communities around education initiatives.

### **Step 1: Conduct a participatory assessment of current situations, attitudes, concerns, opportunities, and aspirations related to education.**

The first step in working with communities is to involve community members in a participatory assessment of their current situation. The results of the analysis will not only reflect immediate concerns in the school environment but also identify broader challenges that may be the underlying causes of problems. A variety of tools are available to guide the analysis and reflect diverse issues: enrollment and attendance, quality of the learning environment, engagement of caretakers and school personnel, educational funding, and treatment of gender in the classroom, among others. Several sources for these tools are presented at the end of this compendium. Specific tool selection will depend on the stated purpose of the assessment. Adaptations should be made, as necessary, to ensure that the selected tool is appropriate for the local context. Employing more than one tool or method may be necessary to ensure full participation. In some communities, an open meeting may be appropriate; in others, smaller focus groups with separate genders, age groups, and ethnic or religious minorities may provide the spaces needed for otherwise marginalized perspectives to be heard. All these groups should be engaged in opportunities to generate solutions and plans for action, not merely to voice grievances.

Rural parents in Egypt were commonly perceived as not interested in educating their daughters. When parents and local religious leaders engaged in discussions, however, it was discovered that often they did not object in principle to girls' education and frequently expressed support and desire for it. However, what the communities did object to was the specific conditions under which traditional education systems offered schooling, including the safety of girls who had to walk to distant village schools; classrooms with male or nonlocal teachers; and school hours that kept girls from contributing to their daily household economies (DeStefano, 2006). This assessment process identified the underlying reasons for resistance to girls' education, and collective strategies addressed these concerns and made it possible for girls to enroll in school.

As mentioned previously, the COPE schools in Afghanistan came about in response to participatory rural assessments in which 20 communities ranked education as one of their top three priorities. The fact that the schools were established in response to a community-identified need was credited as a significant factor in their long-term sustainability.

If the reason for initiating engagement with a selected community is based on a government- or donor-identified need or program, this should be communicated at the outset. Communities should not be led through an extensive open-ended process exploring all their aspirations and challenges for education if the predetermined focus is specifically on girls' primary education, for example. This does not exclude looking at broader community challenges that very often have an impact on the problem at hand; the point is that the assessment should be transparent, have no hidden agenda, and not be steered to reach a predetermined outcome.

Engaging with communities in crisis situations may require greater effort initially because they are often in a state of flux or trauma and are unable or unwilling to give time to anything beyond basic survival needs. However, the strong desire to reestablish normalcy may also make communities more willing than usual to assist in education initiatives (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009).

The principle of "Do no harm" is also important when engaging with communities in an exploratory process, particularly one that seeks to draw out traditionally excluded groups. Opening avenues for the expression of criticism or frustration without providing ways for people of divergent perspectives to work together to address their concerns can leave people vulnerable to repercussions within the community. Engaging the expertise of partners who have experience in participatory assessments in both selecting tools and conducting the assessment is advisable.

The overall findings of the community analysis must be made available to all. In Zambia and Malawi, for example, sharing the results of the participatory analysis with the community stimulated a sense of ownership of problems and action beyond the leadership and committee members to the wider community (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006).

The findings should be presented in various formats that are accessible to all members of the community, including those who are not literate. The methods can include presenting them orally and preparing visual posters and displays. The arts

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(e.g., music, drama) are also very effective tools. Regardless of the specific methods used, the principles of facilitated open discussion, inclusion of all voices, and sharing of findings openly are applicable in all settings.

## **Step 2: Strengthen or form formalized structures for engagement.**

Once an assessment is complete, a formalized structure must be identified for taking action on the results. The type of structure required will be determined by the overall outcome or level of engagement anticipated. Coordinating a campaign to encourage parents to send their daughters to school, for example, requires a different type of organization than establishing or managing a school.

Where primary concerns focus specifically on a local school, either problems with an existing school or the lack thereof, school SMCs or parent PTAs may be the most effective structures for engagement. However, if the Ministry of

Education already has a formally recognized community-level mechanism, it should be engaged and strengthened. Wider, formal alliances may be more effective for targeting broader community-wide concerns, which may be a specific issue, such as child labor or the needs of orphans and vulnerable children, or oversight of several education programs in one area. One model of such an alliance is a community education committee, which is representative of all the groups in the community and may include school administrators, teachers, and staff; parents or caregivers; children and youth; civil society organizations; religious organizations; traditional leaders; and health workers (INEE, 2003). Examples are SAGE local alliances in Guinea, which involved a broad range of organizations and agencies (including PTAs); community, religious, and business leaders; women's associations; and other interested parties (Shumann, n.d.).

Where an existing structure is in place and holds community confidence, it is most appropriate to work within that structure. In some cases, however, existing structures are ineffective or reinforce entrenched power dynamics in communities. If the community is amenable, an existing body can be restructured to better reflect the makeup of the community. For example, a PTA that was previously appointed can be democratically elected. Where resistance to changing an existing albeit ineffective format is strong, an alternative structure may be established. This was the case with the local alliances, which were more effective than the PTA alone had been.

Regardless of the specific structure used, criteria should be adopted to ensure that its members are representative of the makeup of the community, including women and other traditionally excluded groups. The successful School for Life Committees in Ghana, for example, have five members and specify that there must be three women and two men, one of whom is usually a representative of the chief, the local assembly, or the women's organization (Hartwell, 2006).

It is imperative that the relationships between various bodies are clear from the outset so that competing parallel structures are not set up. Clearly established roles and responsibilities or terms of reference can greatly facilitate this clarity. Any new structure should have the approval of the community and make every effort to develop a good working relationship with local government or leadership. In some countries, government guidelines may exist with regard to community-school involvement, and these should be consulted to ensure compliance.

### **Step 3: Assist school management committees, parent teacher associations, or other coordinating bodies in setting goals and developing plans.**

The members of the formal structure should be assisted as necessary in formulating a plan based on the input received from the community. Such plans are known by various names, such as school improvement plan (SIP), school performance improvement plan (SPIP), or local education action plan (LEAP), depending on the focus. All plans should include specific objectives, activities to meet those objectives, benchmarks or indicators of success, a breakdown of tasks and persons responsible, a timetable for implementation, and a budget. The budget should include financial, material, and human resources. This is particularly important in impoverished communities because it acknowledges the importance of both in-kind and monetary contributions.

The complexity of the plan will depend on the community's experience and its goals. Plans may include a variety of educational activities, depending on the community's identified needs and aspirations. Types of activities may include ensuring school attendance, monitoring teacher performance, or building new facilities. Table 1, found on page 2, illustrates a range of activities for which communities have been known to take responsibility.

Experience in a variety of settings has shown that initial efforts should start small, be concrete, and be doable without outside financial resources (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009). In Zambia, for example, where communities organized to address OVC awareness specifically around an opportunity to leverage external funding, the commitment dissipated once the funding was no longer available (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006). That being said, it is also clear that a lack of resources is a real barrier, and small grants to local communities have contributed significantly to school improvement efforts. These grants are most effective when built into a multiyear engagement, are distributed no sooner than the second year, and are contingent on a demonstrated commitment on the part of the community through matching contributions of local resources and participation in capacity-building programs. Waiting at least 1 year before introducing grants provides the time needed for necessary planning and financial management skills to be learned and also helps discourage opportunists who may be eager to participate in an initiative if there is perceived monetary gain from the beginning. This issue is addressed in more detail in the Challenges and Limitations section.

Capacity building will be necessary in most cases to assist communities in implementing their plans. Specific capacity-building needs should be included in the plan. See Step 4.

The plan should be presented to the community for feedback and be revised as necessary. As pointed out in Step 1 on sharing findings, the plan should be presented in various formats that are accessible to all members of the community, including those who are not literate. These methods can include reading the plan orally and preparing visual posters and displays. Using the arts has been very effective; drama and music can be powerful tools to convey key elements of the plan.

It is important that the community maintain ownership over the entire process. In one community engagement program, when the planning process was over, the external facilitators took the flip charts to write up the plan and have it translated. It was a considerable time before the community received the final plan, and when it did, the format bore no resemblance to the flip charts developed during the planning process. This left the community with the feeling that the process was being externally controlled.

It should be understood by all, as the plan is being developed and presented, that the plan is a guide and can be adapted as new information becomes available or circumstances change.

### **Step 4: Build capacity to strengthen community-level human resources.**

In communities with limited experience in implementing education initiatives, capacity development will be required to assist members in acquiring the skills and confidence needed to participate, plan, manage, and evaluate. Specific capacity-development needs should be identified early and be made part of the community plan. This process should include identifying existing skills of individuals in the community and areas of need. Depending on specific needs, training can include, but not be limited to, participatory planning; project design, management, and evaluation; financial management; and educational quality and supervision. Appendix B provides some examples of specific training plans used in various countries and settings.

Training should be provided not only to members of the formal implementing body (PTA, SMC, etc.) but also to other interested community members, especially those who are underrepresented in leadership, such as women, youth, and ethnic or religious minorities. The goal of all

capacity-development activities should be to build a pool of human resources for the community to draw on in the long term so that the community can take charge of its own development. Expanding the range of participants to those traditionally excluded may require providing initial literacy and numeracy training to facilitate their fuller participation in other training opportunities.

In the PACEEQ program, the literacy component was shown to be an effective source of motivation and inspiration for parent association members that went beyond the acquisition of basic literacy skills. Learners reported increased self-esteem after participating in the literacy program, and women who participated were more likely to be active members of the parent association (World Education Guinea, 2007).

Care must be taken to ensure that training sessions not only are open to underrepresented groups but also are accessible. Schedules should be set to maximize participation and not be held during prime working time for women, farmers, and other groups, thus excluding them by default.

Capacity development takes different forms, such as formal training, experiential learning gained from participation in processes, and mentoring. A variety of methods should be employed to ensure that training is as interactive as possible. Methods such as role plays, simulation games, and practical exercises, including preparing meeting agendas and minutes, making a budget, and facilitating a meeting, often help participants quickly internalize new skills. COPE trainers in Afghanistan used a combination of lecture, brainstorming, group work, problem solving, storytelling, and field trips (Chabbott, 2006). An activity used in PACEEQ trainings asks participants to make an illustrated daily calendar in which they “map” how boys and girls spend their time. Faced with a visual reality, participants draw their own conclusions about how the unequal distribution of household chores can have a negative impact on girls’ education and what practical steps can be taken to ensure that girls have adequate time to devote to school (World Education Guinea, 2007). Exchange visits with other communities engaged in similar education initiatives were also found to be effective in some settings.

Experience has demonstrated that training is also important for school administrators and local leaders who may not initially see the value of community participation and feel threatened by it or think it a waste of time (see Box B).

Ongoing mentorship reinforces and consolidates community members’ use of newly learned skills. Wherever possible, mentors from within the community should be sought out and engaged in the process. Transferring skills within the community itself can guard against consolidating newly learned skills in only a few individuals. Broadening the pool of capable individuals also makes long-term sustainability more likely.

This challenge was noted in Guinea, where many parent associations at the school level continued to maintain their records in French, not in national languages, despite encouragement from the PACEEQ-supported literacy program. This tendency created a dependency on the limited number of parent association members literate in French who could maintain association records. As a result, record keeping and activity and financial report preparation of the parent associations tended to be weak after the project assistance was completed. Additionally, the high turnover of village literacy trainers who sought employment with other projects resulted in a need for repeated training of new village literacy trainers (World Education Guinea, 2007).



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A powerful example of the ability to transfer knowledge and skills gained to others was found in Malawi, where OVC committee members were able to assist neighboring communities who asked for help to begin similar initiatives.

### **BOX B. An Example of the Transfer of Knowledge and Skills in Guinea**

Prior to the PACEEQ project, it was widely believed that parent associations (APEAE), whose members were largely illiterate, could not contribute to the quality of education in their communities, with the exception of handing over contributed funds to school principals, who managed these funds with no oversight or accountability. This ambitious capacity building program was viewed by many with skepticism. However, the results have been tangible and significant. As a result of the *Internal Governance and Financial Management* training workshops, APEAE members have gained a solid understanding of how to organize the structure of the APEAE, manage basic administrative tasks, prepare activity reports, create an education action plan, develop a budget, prepare financial reports, and justify expenses. More important, they understand and appreciate the authority of the General Assembly as a decision-making body within their organization. No longer are decisions made by a few individuals in private. Accountability and transparency are demanded by the APEAE members. They are no longer complacent to let the school principal appoint the president—they want to elect their own board members by secret ballot. They want to be informed of how their contributions were spent by the board.

Understandably, there has been some resistance from school principals, who perceived the empowerment of parents as a threat to their own influence. However, with support from PACEEQ and the inclusion of school principals in all APEAE trainings ... school administration officials at all levels are beginning to see that an empowered and efficient APEAE is more of a help than a hindrance in addressing the many problems at the school level (Midling et al.).

### **Step 5: Conduct continuous monitoring and follow-up.**

Regular monitoring should be an ongoing, integral component of any education initiative and should be budgeted for from the outset. Successful projects ensure adequate resources for regular visits to schools by appropriate staff and dignitaries. As stated in Step 2, benchmarks or indicators of success should be included in the initial plan. This important aspect of transparency can help community members understand that it is not individuals who are being monitored, but rather the implementation of the plan and its outcomes. Periodic monitoring can provide opportunities to modify the plan if benchmarks are not being met or circumstances change.

Specific indicators of success will naturally depend on the objectives set out in a community's plan, which will vary by the level of community commitment. A list of some general indicators by which community education initiatives can be assessed is a later section.

Although specific quantitative results are an important indication of the efficacy of an initiative, a review of USAID Girls' Education Activities found that monitoring and evaluation often ignored the value of formative evaluation (Rugh, 2002). Periodic reflection on the process can help stakeholders understand how to shape and adjust the initiative and can provide opportunities to modify the plan if benchmarks are not being met or circumstances change.

Monitoring should be done not only of progress toward completion of the community's specific plan but also of the process of engagement itself and should include both the community's internal processes and the efficacy of the external partnerships. Joint periodic reflection on the first seven principles of engagement is an important component of monitoring, in addition to reflection on the progress of specific plans and activities. This can also help gauge progress toward ownership and guide the process of handing over full responsibility for the initiative to the community and an eventual exit for the external partners.

The INEE *Good Practice Guide: Community Education Committees* (2003) provides an example of a simple, easy-to-use checklist for ongoing assessment. As stressed in the discussion of participatory assessment tools in Step 1, tools for monitoring and evaluation should be adapted to fit the local context, taking into consideration cultural relevance and appropriateness.

As mentioned briefly in Step 4, training in project evaluation is an important part of a capacity-building plan. Training in formative evaluation techniques, in particular, allows local ownership of the process of continuous assessment and helps avoid a situation where community members wait for someone from outside to come to tell them how they are doing.

Opportunities for celebrations of successes can sustain motivation and lead to progressively greater engagement by larger numbers of people and in more substantive ways. While these celebrations of success will ultimately be tied to the defined indicators or outcomes, it is equally important to acknowledge the completion of the incremental steps along the way that make the achievement of the desired outcome possible.



*Credit: Cassandra Jessee/AIR*

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

As with any programming area, challenges and limitations must be overcome or worked around. It is impossible to anticipate all the challenges that may be encountered, but some of the more common ones are discussed below.

### **Traditional Exclusion of Some Groups**

Traditional exclusion of some groups (women, minorities, youth, children) often limits their freedom to participate in community-wide initiatives. Ingrained prejudicial attitudes toward marginalized groups can manifest themselves through a reluctance to include or work together with them and to value their contributions. To counteract these barriers, quotas for representation on the formal bodies (PTA, SMC, etc.) may be implemented initially, until the value to the community of full participation is recognized. Training in participatory processes as part of the capacity-building plan can develop an awareness of the difference between genuine participation and tokenism. Ongoing mentorship can provide a means to monitor participation. See Step 4.

### **Entrenched Power Structures**

Many communities have entrenched power structures, including at schools, which are often characterized by authoritarianism, corruption, and a lack of transparency. Local leaders may be reluctant to share power and may try to direct the process of community engagement by designating who is to be involved, assigning roles, and so on. In some cases, they may be motivated by a desire to receive kickbacks or other unfair benefits from their participation in the partnership. In contrast, strong community leaders can be a great influence for committing local resources and increasing participation in support of education. Involving local leaders in the participatory assessment process can help generate their buy-in and support and also make them more accountable to community members.

Formalizing each party's role in the partnership with specific criteria in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other form of written agreement provides clear expectations and a point of agreement to refer back to when needed. These agreements should be made public in various forms that are accessible for illiterate community members as well (i.e., read aloud, illustrated on posters), so that a sense of accountability to the community is fostered. Fulfillment of each party's commitments in the agreement should be part of the ongoing monitoring process.

### **Learned Helplessness/Apathy**

Communities that have been continual recipients of aid either from external agencies (religious, humanitarian, governmental) or their own government or leaders, or who have been shut out completely, sometimes develop a learned helplessness or apathy regarding taking initiative to resolve community problems. Such issues are more prevalent in communities where school supplies, uniforms, or infrastructure improvements have been traditionally provided by the government or NGOs. This view can manifest itself in the attitude that "if we just wait, someone will come and take care of us" or in a fatalistic position of just accepting the situation as it is. In such cases, it is advisable to seek out and support those champions of education who are willing to take the initiative and who can win over others in the community. The participatory assessment process can foster participants' awareness that they have the right to ask questions, seek information, and be involved in decision making. It can also be a catalyst for community members to realize, or be reminded, that they are capable of participation.

### **Contributors to Sustained Poverty That May Initially Limit Participation**

Illiteracy, lack of economic or material resources, and ill health are among the contributors to sustained poverty that can limit community members' participation in community-wide initiatives. When individuals are focused on day-to-day survival, it is difficult to set aside the time, energy, or resources needed for engaging in long-term plans, even if the desire and an understanding of the needs are present. As communities become more skillful in addressing challenges, these more-complex barriers can also be addressed, leading to fuller participation.

### **Parental Reluctance Stemming From Cultural Attitudes and Safety Concerns**

Many rural families do not see the relevance of education to their lives. There is no obvious need within the household for children, particularly girls, to know how to read or write or acquire other knowledge that schooling provides. If parents do not see the value of attending school, particularly if the quality of the education available is poor; more-immediate demands, such as the need for children to contribute financially or through labor to the household, take priority. Additionally, physical risks, especially for girls, are a real concern, especially when the nearest school is several kilometers away. The risks are not only in the daily journey but also often from teachers

or older boys at the school. Even if the actual danger of abuse is slight, cultural values of propriety prevent girls from traveling unescorted far from home (Hartwell, 1998).

Parental input into the curriculum and the school calendar can effectively address concerns about both relevance and scheduling around household chores. The establishment of local community schools, such as the COPE schools in Afghanistan and New Schools in Egypt, successfully addressed parental concerns about distance and safety, particularly for girls. A successful feature of the New Schools was the involvement of community members in teaching the students how to make handicrafts or other small items that could be sold as income-generating activities.

### **Participation That Occurs in Small Steps Initially and That Cannot Be Rushed to Fit External Goals**

Cultivating partnerships takes time, particularly in the early stages. Communities with limited or no experience in implementing development initiatives are likely to see their involvement in education as associated with a specific, finite project.

Vision in Action, an international NGO, and the local chapter Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) working together in Liberia indicated that it was not uncommon to spend a year or more in a community before the project began to gain trust and a better understanding of the local environment. Vision in Action stresses the importance of learning from the community and spending an extended time in the field to lay groundwork through participatory assessments. The time devoted to this activity cultivates familiarity on both sides by forging partnerships and building trust (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009).

Creating a clear plan of action with opportunities to celebrate success along the way provides encouragement, sustains motivation, and helps increase participation and develop a sense of ownership and pride in the results. In Egypt, cross-visits among participating communities and events celebrating community achievements were found to be key tools in motivating communities, especially those having doubts about the goals of the NSP (AIR, 2008).

Through their engagement in a series of small projects, community members begin to see how they can have a more-central role in supporting education over the long term.

### **Dependence on External Resources**

There is a fine line between providing much-needed resources to assist communities in achieving their goals and creating a dependence on external resources that can jeopardize long-term sustainability. In Malawi and Zambia, for example, providing external resources before a local OVC committee was established with their own internal resources and before opportunists were ousted actually subverted community ownership and responsibility.

Similar lessons were learned from the IRC's work in Liberia, which reinforced that community work should not focus on income-generating projects during the initial phases. The monetary element confused the motivations for engaging with the project, raised expectations of external support, and undermined the project's sustainability. In Southern Sudan, a USAID-supported education program had difficulty convincing communities to support the volunteer teachers and provide other in-kind contributions to schools because communities were used to receiving payments or stipends from NGOs for similar in-kind contributions (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009).

Internal resources (material, physical, financial) should be the starting point, if the goal is sustained community action. After community groups have solidified ownership by investing their internal resources to carry out their priority activities, it is helpful to link them to a wide variety of assistance from multiple sources, including their own government. If external financing is available to respond to locally identified priorities, its provision should be arranged through participatory consultation to ensure that external funds will not overwhelm the management capacity of the group or create dependency. The impetus for support and its purpose should emerge from the community level; the external organization can formulate its agenda around community priorities, concerns, capacities, and commitments. Community decision making tends to be personal and focused on specific local concerns and priorities. Agency decision making, in contrast, tends to be shaped by such factors as efficiency, donor requirements, organizational capacities and priorities, and a bigger (if not national) picture. Both the agency and the community approaches are legitimate, but long-term effectiveness requires that an agency work at the community's level, pace, and approach (Donahue & Mwewa, 2006).

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Careful timing of resources and a sound, transparent process through which they are channeled can offset the erosion of community ownership. There is no formula to say how much time is ideal, because every community has different circumstances. As Principle 8 states, genuine community ownership of educational initiatives requires long-term commitment.

### **New Demands**

Community involvement in education sometimes creates a demand that cannot be met by existing facilities or services. Successful campaigns to increase enrollment in schools, for example, can overcrowd limited classroom space and overstretch teachers. Creative solutions can often be found if these problems are anticipated during the planning phase of the initiative.

## SUGGESTED INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The overall goal of community engagement in education is to increase access to quality education for all children, particularly girls and other marginalized groups. Specific indicators of success will be contextual and will depend on the specific objectives set out in a community's plan. However, general clusters of indicators are common to most community education initiatives. These indicators can be divided into two categories, those whose results can be measured in a short period of time and those whose impact takes more time to become evident and measurable. Outcomes should be disaggregated to ensure that the assessment of progress is targeted and not too general, particularly for girls and other traditionally excluded groups.

It should be noted that community involvement in education is now widely accepted as standard best practice and is therefore becoming an integral component of most education improvement initiatives, be it small-scale community education or formal public schooling. It is often therefore difficult to pinpoint results that are specific to direct involvement as separate from teacher training, for example, but it is possible to attribute significant gains to increased parental and community involvement in schooling.

### Short-Term Indicators of Success

***Parents and other community members are more involved in school activities and support of the school.***

- More parents and other community members are attending school functions.
- More parents and other community members are providing material or economic support for school needs.
- More parents and other community members are contributing their time or labor for school projects.
- More parents and other community members are ensuring that children are attending school on a regular basis.

***Teachers and school administrators recognize the value of community involvement.***

- Teachers and school administrators give anecdotal accounts of the benefits of community involvement in schools.
- Teachers and school administrators actively solicit the involvement of parents and other community members.

***Parents and other community members recognize the value of community involvement.***

- Parents and other community members give anecdotal accounts of the benefits of their involvement in schools.

### Longer-Term Indicators of Success

***School enrollment, retention, and completion rates increase, particularly for previously marginalized groups. (Number of learners enrolled in USG-supported primary schools or equivalent non-school-based settings<sup>3</sup>)***

- More children are enrolled and attend school regularly.
- More children complete their basic education.

***The community is empowered to ensure that schools and the educational system are functioning effectively. (Number of PTA or similar school governance structures supported)***

- Community members make informed choices about the resource needs of their schools.
- Community members play an active role in the maintenance and upkeep of school facilities and infrastructure.
- Community members are engaged in evaluating the effective use of school resources.
- Community members have input into the educational processes that affect learning outcomes.
- Community members are actively engaged in monitoring learning outcomes and educational practices.

### **Educational quality is improved.**

- Teachers are in classrooms during school hours and actively teaching.
- Student learning is increasing, as measured by determined national/regional or project learning outcome indicators.
- Students' attitudes about education are more positive.
- Community members' attitudes about the importance of education are more positive.
- Community members' opinions of the effectiveness of their local school are more positive.

### **Examples**

Several examples of where and how some of the indicators have been used are given below.

*School enrollment, retention, and completion rates increase, particularly for previously marginalized groups.*

**PACEEQ:** Data on gross enrollment rates among girls show an increase from 46% in 2002 to 63% in 2005, which represents a percentage increase of 37%. For the same period, data at the national level show an increase from 63% to 73%, representing a percentage increase of 16% (Midling et al., 2006).

**COPE:** From 1998 to 2003, female enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment in COPE schools increased from 34% to 55% (Balwanz, n.d.).

**NSP:** NSP exceeded its target for students enrolled, reaching a cumulative enrollment figure of 44,197 (AIR, 2008).

**COPE:** COPE schools have exhibited dramatically higher survival rates and lower dropout rates. A 2002 estimate demonstrated that only 37% of students enrolling in grade 1 continued on to grade 5 in public primary schools. In contrast, COPE schools have survival rates to grade 6 of at least 50%. In 2003, of the 783 students graduating from COPE schools, 531 (or 68%) continued on to secondary school (Balwanz, n.d.).

*The community is empowered to ensure that schools and the educational system are functioning effectively.*

**PACEEQ:** Members of parent associations have a good understanding of the importance of a quality education, the role that communities can play in the decentralization of the education system, and the activities required for school improvement. Many regularly contribute materials and labor to construct classrooms, latrines, walled enclosures, and teacher housing, as well as for school repairs and for regular cleaning of school grounds. In all the rural communities visited, designated parent association members make daily school visits to monitor students and teaching personnel. Associations conduct other activities such as school maintenance, tree planting, analysis of quarterly student results, and the organization of review classes. They also purchase petrol lamps and other materials such as pens and notebooks. Some associations adopt measures to persuade personnel to remain at the school, such as allocating land for cultivation, encouraging personnel to marry into the local community, and paying teacher salaries (Midling et al., 2006).

**NSP:** Parent Teacher Committee/Board of Trustees (BOT) and parent association members spoke enthusiastically about their connection to the school and the responsibility they felt for its upkeep and sustainability. Much of this support was offered through in-kind contributions of labor: "I have a voluntary role. I take care of maintaining school electricity and providing spare parts for the school." "I'm the head of maintenance committee. I keep track firsthand of what needs to be done in the school building or garden." A principal in Minia stated: "The people did all they could. They donated the land, supervised and monitored construction. They used to stay at the construction site and help." Finally, a BOT member from Beni Suef recalled monitoring the principal: "He went on vacation without telling the BOT. When he came back, I demanded to know where he had been" (AIR, 2008).

*Educational quality is improved.*

**NSP:** An average of 95.6% of all students in NSP schools passed the final examinations in 2007 (AIR, 2008).

**COPE:** All stakeholders agreed that COPE schools provide a better quality education than nearby government schools. In one lower secondary government girls' school, former COPE students were among the best students and several had skipped grades. Community involvement and monitoring, as well as ongoing support and training from COPE, were most often cited to explain this outcome (Chabbott, 2006).

## ESSENTIAL READING

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## APPENDIX A: CROSS-SECTORAL LINKAGES

One significant benefit of working with communities is the multiplier effect that it has. Once community members have acquired organizational and problem-solving skills—and the confidence to use them—they are quick to apply these skills to other areas of their lives. Training in transparent management and decision-making processes can create or reinforce a tradition of democracy. Training for school management committees and PTAs in financial management and accountability has been shown to have an impact on small business practices. Community members who have experienced the impact of having their voices heard have engaged in advocacy on a broader scale for the benefit of their communities.

A few illustrative examples are captured below.

### ***Democratic Community Leadership***

“Parents who have found their voice and realized their capacity to contribute are less likely to be complacent when abuses are noted in other community-based associations or in other sectors. In this sense, capacity building of APEAEs has contributed to good governance at the local level.”

“Resource persons trained by PACEEQ are becoming more and more recognized by their communities and other development partners and are invited to assist other sectors outside of education, such as the health sector. Resource persons are emerging as leaders within their communities.” (World Education Guinea, 2007)

Democratic principles are taking root in the practices of parent associations and are generating a ripple effect in the political life of the communities. Reinforcement of values of participative democracy and transparent management has gone beyond the school walls. On a broader scale, civil society organizations, particularly parent associations, also reinforce local governance through the regular conduct of assemblies and meetings, in which parents are informed about school and association finances (Midling et al., 2006).

### ***Improved Small Business Practices***

In Guinea, a tailor who participated on a parent association board used his understanding of financial management techniques to purchase cloth at wholesale rather than retail prices and to manage his expanded inventory of materials and improve his profitability (Midling et al., 2006).

Changes were reported in the local marketplace. One informant noted: “Before PACEEQ it was difficult to find receipts in the market place. If you bought something and asked for a receipt, people had no idea what you were talking about. Today, because the APEAE (PTA) always ask for receipts to justify the purchases made for education activities, you can now easily find receipts in most places in the market” (World Education Guinea, 2007).

### ***Advocacy***

Application of advocacy skills learned through training has resulted in community members’ successful engagement of local development associations, rural development committees, and private businesses in support of schools. In Katakodi district, the community successfully convinced the large bauxite company to construct classrooms at a school. In Gama Béréma, parent associations solicited funds from a lumber company to build classrooms, storage rooms, and latrines (Midling et al., 2006).

### ***Conflict Resolution and Problem Solving***

In Senegal, a school management committee that received training through a USAID-sponsored initiative played a role in arbitrating a long-running dispute within the village regarding a grain mill. As a result, the village cooperative now has an income-generating project and the workload of women is reduced. The school community, through the SMC, made an independent request for adult literacy classes, showing the desire to initiate and organize their own development activities (USAID, 2002).

### ***Cross-Sectoral Collaborations***

It became obvious in Ghana that addressing child labor was inextricably linked with strengthening agricultural practices so that families were not dependent on their children as a labor source. Farmers groups, Agricultural Extension Officers, and SMCs/PTAs successfully worked together in making strides toward improving farming yields and providing better educational opportunities for their children (Pittman, 2007).

Education programs that have worked effectively alongside other community projects, such as child protection initiatives or skills development/livelihood initiatives, have been able to address broader issues, such as child welfare or issues affecting school attendance (Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly, 2009).

## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF CAPACITY-BUILDING PLANS

<p>SAGE – Training for School Management Committees and PTAs</p> <p>Guinea Academy for Educational Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why an Action Plan: Setting the Context</li> <li>• Identifying Priorities, Objectives and Results within a Vision</li> <li>• Establishing an Action Plan Time Line Calendar</li> <li>• Identifying and Programming Resources—human, material, natural and financial</li> <li>• Working up an Action Plan Budget</li> <li>• Sharing the Action Plan with the Community</li> </ul>
<p>COPE – Community Operated Primary Education – Training for Village Education Committees</p> <p>Afghanistan CARE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Organization and Participation: Definition and introduction of society, Community Participation, Formation of VEC, Human Rights (emphasis rights of children and women), Importance of education from the viewpoints of Islam &amp; Afghan culture, Environmental hygiene, Mine awareness, Delegation of responsibilities</li> <li>• School Management: What is management, School monitoring, Supervision, Class observation, Planning, Facilitating meetings, Report writing, Keeping records</li> <li>• Resource Mobilization: External Resources: proposal, petition and/or application writing; meeting with government authorities; identifying funding sources NGOs/UN agencies</li> <li>• Internal Resources: Community participation, motivating landlords and businessmen to fund schools.</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution: Underlying causes of the conflict, material factors, psychological factors, Differentiating among conflict and violence, Communication, Negotiation, Meditation, Judgment, Arbitration, Peace building, Tolerance</li> </ul>
<p>PACEEQ – Training for PTAs</p> <p>Guinea World Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Governance: Development of mission statement and organizational structure; obtaining legal registration; handling minutes, correspondence and other administrative documents; democratic processes—preparing and organizing meetings; development of education plans; mobilizing resources; preparing reports; monitoring and evaluation of progress</li> <li>• Financial Management: Creating and managing a budget, opening and managing a bank account, operating a petty cash fund, basic accounting procedures including financial reporting</li> <li>• Quality of Education: Decentralization of the education system in Guinea, definition of quality education, recruiting and supporting teachers, monitoring teacher attendance, teacher training, student enrollment and retention, monitoring and supporting students at home, maintenance of school grounds and property, management of school textbooks, preparing for school exams, analysis of school results, girls' education</li> <li>• Advocacy and Negotiation: Planning, formulation and presentation of advocacy activities; strategies, preparation and execution of negotiations</li> <li>• Health at School: Prevention of infectious diseases, nutrition, vaccination, hygiene, HIV/AIDS prevention</li> <li>• Gender Equity: Dangers of stereotypes and gender discrimination in education, gender equity in education, obstacles to enrollment and retention of girls in school</li> </ul>
<p>New Schools Program – Parent Association Training</p> <p>Egypt CARE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting Needs assessments</li> <li>• The new Parents' Associations laws</li> <li>• How to Form a Parent's Association</li> <li>• Planning Skills</li> <li>• Exchanging experiences with other Parents' Associations</li> <li>• Ethics of home visits</li> <li>• Initiating awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Organizing meetings</li> <li>• Local resource mobilization</li> <li>• Communicating with government officials</li> </ul>

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*First Principles: Community Engagement in Education Programs* is part of a series called *First Principles*, which provides guidance for programming in a range of topics in education and development. Topics in the series include:

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- Pre-service Teacher Education
- School Management and Leadership Development