



Balochistan - Early Childhood Development Project

ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

To Improve Nutrition, Immunization and Hygiene Practices
for Children's Health in Muslim Bagh, Qilla Saifullah District
of Balochistan, Pakistan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A child's ability to attain his or her full potential is directly related to the synergistic effect of good health and nutrition and age appropriate quality education access. Good health and education are not only ends in themselves, but also means which provide individuals with the chance to lead productive and satisfying lives. Better Nutrition, immunization and hygiene practices offers many benefits for the development of the child.

More than 200 million children under 5 years fail to reach their full potential due to poverty, poor health and nutrition, and deficient care. Most of these children live in South Asia, and Pakistan is one of the ten countries which accounts for 145 million (66%) of the 219 million disadvantaged children living in the developing world. These disadvantaged children are likely to do poorly in schools and subsequently have low incomes, high fertility, and provide poor care to their children, thus contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and poor parenting outcomes.

Aga Khan University-Human Development Programme is striving for the improvement of early child development practices through enhancement of caregivers' knowledge and skills. Early Childhood Development Project, Balochistan – Ensuring the Best Start in Life for Children has been initiated to enhance the access, equity and quality of education in class Katchi, one and two of 75 government primary schools in three districts (Qilla Saifullah, Quetta and Gwadar) of Balochistan Province. This project is being led by Aga Khan Foundation – Pakistan (AKF-P) and is executed with the assistance of two technical partners (TPs) Aga Khan University-Institute of Educational Development (AKU-IED) and Aga Khan University-Human Development Programme (AKU-HDP) and three implementing partners (IPs) Rural Community Development Council (RCDC), Institute for Development Practices and Studies (IDSP) and Tarqee Foundation (TF). AKU-HDP is mainly providing technical inputs in the establishment of three Family Resource Centers (FRCs) one at each District, capacity building of project staff, develop advocacy material in collaboration with IPs and in designing and conducting research studies for informed decision making and project interventions. Balochistan is primarily a rural, underdeveloped province consisting of diverse ethnic groups. Childcare and early socialization of preschool-age children are governed by powerful family/community structures and traditions.

This action research, aimed to identify the issues and suggest some useful practices for the better nutrition, immunization and hygiene for improved practices in Qilla Saifullah district of Balochistan.

The study commenced in September 2012 and continued until June 2013. (10 months). The action research utilized the concept of “learning by doing” which is an iterative, cyclical process of reflecting on practice, taking an action, reflecting, and taking further action. Therefore, the research takes shape while it is being performed. The action research facilitated in the formation of a youth action group ; comprising of 20 male and female members of 16-24 years of age to design culturally appropriate messages to improve nutrition, immunization and hygiene practices for themselves and the community at large.

Five meetings were conducted over the span of 10 months to discuss the practices, develop messages and disseminate them in the community and change practices of themselves and the community at large. It was found that boys were more active in the dissemination of messages due to their easy mobility in the community as compared to girls. However, girls also took special interest in the content and tried to change their own practices at least. There were huge differences in the knowledge base regarding nutrition, immunization and hygiene among the YAG members. Moreover, the reported improved practices were brushing of teeth on a daily basis, attempting to eat balanced diet, healthy snacking and spreading awareness regarding vaccination.

Young people can be powerful messengers when it comes to influencing their peers, and powerful agents of change in their communities. Through service learning experiences, action research projects, and community organizing strategies related to nutrition , immunization and hygiene, young people can be active partners in educating themselves, their peers and their families and in advocating for environmental and policy changes that would lead to healthier lifestyles.

An action research project does not end with the presentation of findings, or even with action. The purpose of the action research often has as much to do with the learning of the team members as it does with research results. With this Action Research, capacity of the YAG is built on Nutrition, immunization and hygiene practices. The participants of this exercise will be the future opinion leaders in their communities and will surely bring the change in the years to come in Muslim Bagh-Qilla Saifullah.