

# The Society for the Advancement of Education's Community-based Schools Program in Pakistan

The Society for the Advancement of Education (SAHE) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Lahore, Pakistan. It was established in 1982 to improve the quality of education. It is one of the oldest NGOs in Pakistan and a pioneer in the NGO movement.

## Basic Concerns

SAHE sees a number of fundamental issues confronting the education system:

- high dropout and low retention rates of primary-school children, especially girls;
- girls' lack of access to education;
- poor quality of formal and nonformal education programs;
- low literacy rates;
- poor quality and irrelevance of the curriculum;
- inadequately trained teachers;
- authoritarian teaching methods;
- increasing poverty;
- the need to educate working children;
- insecure social environment; and
- the need for human resource development and education among NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs).

SAHE's commitment to improving the quality of education through community participation is the basis for the success of its development efforts and networking with its partners, including the government, NGOs, private institutions, and donors.

It aims to develop human resources by training teachers and personnel of NGOs and CBOs working for nonformal basic and primary edu-

cation, as well as to empower poor rural and low-income urban communities to take ownership of their schools.

It supports the educational effort and ensures its sustainability by providing training, learning, and advocacy material in the national language.

SAHE's networking program facilitates the participation of NGOs in its programs and in advocating for educational issues. For the latter purpose, SAHE initiated the NGO Forum and Education Watch program.

## Main Programs

### Teaching methodologies

Qualitative improvement in education requires ongoing training of teachers using learner-centered teaching methodologies.

Training is conducted in

- multi-grade teaching methodologies,
- accelerated learning,
- child rights and teaching methodologies,
- classroom management,
- low-cost teaching aids,
- environmental education,
- nonformal school management, and
- participatory rapid appraisal for education (development of learning materials according to the situation).

### Community participation in education

Community participation is essential to ensure that quality education is available to the majority of children.

Training is conducted in

- community work,
- planning a community-based school program,
- participatory rapid appraisal,
- education,
- community participation,
- project development, assessment, and monitoring, and
- training of trainers in all the above areas.

#### *Community-based primary schools*

SAHE has established 41 community-based schools for children of primary-school age in disadvantaged rural and urban Punjab communities. The schools are staffed by 41 female teachers, who teach 1,230 children, mostly girls. The sustainability of and continued support for quality education is a matter of concern.

### NGO Forum and Education Watch

The program aims to identify persistent issues that constrain the provision of quality education, and to lobby against them with government and concerned bodies. An annual report on issues in education is part of this program.

### Governance and Development Program

The program is conceptualized as a university without walls, with regional outreach. It grew out of SAHE's experience with working with NGOs and graduate students over the years and the expressed need for a program aimed at providing a broad perspective on the dynamics of social transition and development. The program is realized through an interactive learning process combining theory with

practice, and the testing of a number of courses on governance, community work, and development issues.

### Development and Publication Program

The program produces training, learning, and advocacy material focusing on educational issues and problems, reading and reference material for teachers, training manuals for trainers, resource packs, translations of books and other material, posters, an NGO directory, and videos of SAHE's television series and training sessions.

### Advocacy and Networking Program

Under the program at the national level, SAHE works with the government, private sector, NGOs, and CBOs. It also networks at the international level.

### Seminars and conferences

The SAHE Seminar Series focuses on topical issues, including education, governance, democracy, development, and rights, and encourages serious dialogue with scholars and researchers. An annual conference on education brings together practitioners and thinkers.

### Gender and Human Rights Education

Given the low number of girls in schools and negative attitudes toward women, there is a need to address issues of gender in education. SAHE believes that access to quality education is a basic right. Awareness of rights is critical to improving attitudes and the quality of education.

Training is held in the following:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

- human rights and the global market economy, to show the socioeconomic causes of human rights violations;
- the State and its ideological and repressive apparatuses, with emphasis on how education is used to violate human rights and how it can be used to promote human rights;
- development and human rights, to show how development must be sensitive to human rights;
- peace issues, to show how war violates human rights;
- the use of both old and new curriculum materials to teach the above issues using role play, drama, music, poetry, dance, and play;
- gender issues in education;
- human rights and educational management;
- gender and development; and
- the use of participatory rapid appraisal for integrating and assessing gender issues.

SAHE has been connecting human rights and education since 1991, when it produced a kit for teaching human rights. The kit included a book, *Our Human Rights*, which contains several ideas on and exercises for teaching children about equality, liberty, and democracy, and an illustrated version of the Declaration. With UNICEF, SAHE also published an illustrated version of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Since 1996, SAHE has conducted teacher training workshops on human rights, child rights, women's rights, development and human rights, peace and human rights, and political economy and human rights. The workshops are not only meant to make teachers and children understand the UN instruments but also to make them analyze the causes and dynamics of human rights violations. In each workshop, Pakistan's human rights situation is discussed in detail and teachers are asked to

analyze case studies in light of the UN instruments. The issues are then connected with teaching methods and the use of different curriculums to teach children about peace, equality, and freedom of speech, expression, and movement.

The teachers themselves devise activities and develop material during the workshops, keeping in mind that the children are at the primary level. SAHE believes that it is best that children learn to respect and fight for human rights while young. Once they are older, they become more resistant to new ideas.

The methodology devised for children includes drama, role play, story telling, poetry, songs, dance, and games. SAHE is developing a handbook on how to teach children about the importance of peace, and it includes the work produced by teachers during workshops.

SAHE's work is activity based and focused on child-centered learning methods derived from research in child psychology. SAHE believes that children can easily understand seemingly complex issues if teachers use the right approach and methodology.

It believes that human rights concepts should be introduced in social studies and civics and that violations should be seen as rooted in the context of social and political structures. Through small classroom activities, children should also be taught that the State is responsible for guaranteeing rights and how to fight for their rights at all levels.

SAHE has conducted training workshops on human rights education for 200 teachers and school administrators in all four provinces of Pakistan. It plans to develop an alternative curriculum based on human rights since the government curriculum is hopelessly inadequate for teaching children about tolerance, equality, justice, fair play, and freedom of speech, action, expression, movement, and association. The alternative curriculum will be in Urdu and contain lively stories, poems, and activities. The current didactic, lecture-based approach does not suit children.

SAHE believes that integrating human rights issues into social studies and language subjects helps create a just and democratic social order. Children have to be trained to think democratically from an early age so that, in the long run, an equitable and just system will develop in which all citizens, including religious and ethnic minorities, women, peasants, and workers, have just and equal access to power and resources.

SAHE also designs activities for teaching children about rights (e.g., by managing a space journey). Teachers agree that children are able to grasp the idea of basic needs and that a person's right is another's duty.

Children learn about peace through "A Message of Peace," a story about children who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. They also learn the song "Keepers of Peace."

The idea of the sanctity of life is presented in "A Boy's Dream," a story about a boy who likes to catch butterflies or kill them even though he would not like the same to be done to him. Workshop participants thought that the story "Ali's Dream" could teach children about respect both for people and animals.

### Community-based Schools Program

An important program of SAHE, it set up nonformal schools in 1996 with the support of the Pakistan Literacy Commission in rural and peri-urban areas of Bahawalnagar in Punjab. This experience led to the development of SAHE's own community-based schools program. In 1997, it set up 20 such schools in Pakpattan District, also in Punjab. Since then, the number of schools increased to 40, with 40 female teachers and more than 1,000 pupils. Those who started schooling in March 1998 are now in class 4. There is one teacher for approximately 30 children. The same teacher teaches them until grade 5. The schools are located in 15 communities (9 in Arifwala district and 6 in Pakpattan).

SAHE selects communities where the schools can be established according to the following criteria:

- lack of schools for girls;
- at least 50 households each with two school-age girls who do not go to school;
- availability of female and preferably matriculate teachers;
- interest on the part of the community to have a girls' school and to provide space for it; and
- readiness on the part of the majority of parents to pay a small amount as school fees and to buy school books and other educational material for their children.

When SAHE started to set up its own nonformal schools in 1997, it took several steps:

- Identified, surveyed, and selected communities, mostly rural and populated by landless workers. Daily wage laborers and petty shopkeepers populate the peri-urban communities.
- Formed community-based Village Education Committees (VECs) and Women's Village Education Committees (WVECs) made up mostly of parents and other supportive community members. Each committee consists of six men and six women, most of whom are parents.
- Trained VEC and WVEC in school management, school policy development, opening of school bank accounts to be managed by the VECs, and setting up of a school fund.
- Identified, verified, assessed, appointed, and trained teachers with the participation of community members.
- Enrolled children and provided school start-up materials (floor mats for the children, a table and chair for the teachers, a steel trunk for storing the classroom learning materials and charts, etc.) to the VECs.

### *School program*

The duration of the program was initially set for three years. It was believed that since there would not be long vacations and the children were older than the usual school age (which is common in rural areas), it would be possible for them to finish primary schooling in a shorter time. Six months later, the communities realized that the children were not able to complete the syllabus of class 1 and agreed to extend the program's duration to four years.

As the program developed and communities began to recognize the need for proper education, the duration of the program was further extended to five years, which is the international requirement for primary schooling. The lesson learned is that the effectiveness of any intervention must be demonstrated to ensure the ownership of the program.

To ensure the maximum participation by the community and reduce the risk of exclusion of the poorest children, only one child per household is enrolled in the school on a first-come-first-served basis.

The books used are prescribed by the Punjab Textbook Board. In addition, supplementary materials are developed by SAHE. Teachers are trained to use the supplementary materials, which are tested in the classroom and finalized at the end of the year. Books and educational kits developed by other NGOs and some government programs are also used in the schools.

The teaching methodology used is child centered and activity based. English is taught from class 1. The children show a great deal of interest and enthusiasm in learning a new language. Children also draw, paint, and make models from mud and other low-cost materials. Each child develops a portfolio.

The schools employ ongoing assessment procedures to test the skills of children in writing, speaking, and reading, and in relating and analyzing what they see in their environment

and in books. SAHE developed its own assessment techniques and tests. Teachers are trained in administering the assessment procedures. The results of the assessment tests are shared with the teachers and VECs. The final assessment is conducted by SAHE Lahore, which also prepares the examination papers.

Punishment is strictly forbidden and the teachers are trained to be friendly and to play with children. They encourage the mothers to keep them clean. The children are also given information on basic health issues as well as a health card.

Although no uniform is required, the children and their parents decided that since children have new clothes made once a year on the occasion of Eid, they should have a uniform.

### *Teacher training*

Teachers receive a 10-day initial training and 4-day training every alternate month after this. Each teacher trains five times a year with SAHE trainers from Lahore. Local education promoters (one female and one male) and teacher trainers (both female) have been trained to take over this activity in the long term as an essential continuing support to teachers to ensure the quality of the program. Regular supervision and monitoring of the program ensure that the teachers apply what they have learned.

Teachers are trained in classroom management, lesson planning, and in teaching science, mathematics, social studies, English, and Urdu through activities and games and the use of local materials. They are also being trained how to assess children regularly. The year-end assessment is held jointly by the Lahore-based and local teams.

An important aspect of the training of teachers is that it is shared with the members of the VECs and WVECs who visit the SAHE regional office, where the training is held. This ensures their cooperation and support in adopting activity-based teaching methodologies. It also gives the educated committee members

the opportunity to follow up on the training in their own communities. Similarly, the VECs are encouraged to visit the schools during the assessment period. The teachers are encouraged to visit the children's homes and meet with mothers in the community.

An exposure visit of the female teachers from the Arifwala and Pakpattan schools was organized in June 1999, during which the teachers visited SAHE Lahore, Ali Institute of Education, and the Lahore Science Museum.

#### *Human rights content in the school syllabus*

Children learn about human rights using SAHE supplementary materials that discuss the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. But because the government has not ratified human rights instruments such as the Convention, such international documents are not taught directly but are presented in training activities to allow participants (including teachers) to better understand the human rights issues involved.

#### **Conclusion**

How much SAHE has succeeded is difficult to assess as a follow-up program has not yet been

created, although SAHE's own school program has limited follow-up activities. Changing the curriculum of schools is a difficult process. The students have to pass government examinations to be able to pursue further study. Thus, SAHE tries to teach human rights within the limited opportunities provided by the current curriculum.

But as far as the values of human rights are concerned (such as self-expression, right to ask questions without fear, and right to criticize), SAHE can boast some achievements. The children in its schools are more confident than those in others. The relationship among the children, teachers, and SAHE's team is friendly. The children can criticize SAHE's activities and teachers can collectively change SAHE's decisions that do not benefit the schools. They have even challenged the community and powerful groups within it regarding values imposed on the schools and the children.

Students, mostly girls, are encouraged to ask questions. In communities where even reading and writing are considered bad for girls and therefore for the community, children from SAHE schools organize Child Rights Day, role play, and act in front of big audiences.

In its own limited way, SAHE has bought some changes to schools.

## ANNEX 1

### Three-day Workshop on Peace Education

#### Objectives

- Familiarize teachers and educators with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights movements.
- Acquaint participants with the causes and dynamics of human rights violations in Pakistan.
- Enable participants to understand how militarization and nuclearization lead to human rights violations.
- Enable participants to understand how the political economy of globalization affects people's fundamental rights.
- Enable teachers to teach peace concepts.
- Develop the definition of peace in collaboration with the participants.
- Give participants an idea about conflict and why it comes about, and guide them in making the idea accessible to children.
- Discuss methods such as story telling, role play, poetry, drama, etc.

#### Session 1

Kishwar Sultana introduced the workshop and SAHE. She highlighted the major areas of SAHE's work and its basic aim, which is to give quality education to all children. She also spoke about gender and rights.

Participants introduced themselves and spoke of their experiences and interests. At the beginning, some did not think they could create anti-war sentiment among their students merely by telling them the pros and cons of war. After the discussion, however, they became convinced of the possibility. They then devel-

oped a definition of peace. They also created symbols of peace such as the sea, birds, flowers, trees, and a picture of children playing peacefully.

#### Session 2

The resource person showed participants a few pictures depicting conflict and asked them why they thought it was happening. After examining pictures of people fighting, striking workers, and a man shot with a gun, for example, participants said that the conflicts occurred because people were unable to achieve their rights or were poor, jealous, unemployed, or dishonest, and that they all wanted to dominate each other.

The other activity involved self-analysis through brainstorming and drawing charts showing the self in relation to other institutions such as family, religion, education, and social structures. The resource person added that the mass media is also as powerfully influential as the judiciary and the law. She noted that each identity has an ideology and that the strongest institutions have their own interest behind these identities, which is to dominate the lower classes, manipulate resources, and create social prejudice.

#### Session 3

Participants were divided into three groups to discuss how to convey ideas to children. To teach religious tolerance, for example, they use the concept of the rainbow: in the same way that every color is equally important, so is every religion.

## ANNEX 2 Publications

- *Hamaray Insaani Huqooq* (Our Human Rights), a human rights teaching book by Hamid Kizilbash and Mohd. Zubar.
- An illustrated bilingual version of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Human Rights Manual for Trainers
- *Pakistan National Report: Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 1995* (translated and user-friendly version)
- *A Guide Book for Community, Parent Involvement in Schools*
- *Gender Issues in Education (I Woke Up!)*
- *Hundred Years of the Women's Struggle in Pakistan*
- *Teaching Methodologies for Primary School* (teachers' manual)
- An illustrated version of Convention on the Rights of the Child for grade 1. With UNICEF, SAHE published an illustrated version for grade 3.
- *Women Are Not Born But Made* (about patriarchal language as a repressive structure)
- *Symbolic Violence: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Society.*