

# Non-Formal Education In Pakistan: A Fundamental Step Towards Life Learning

By

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*Pakistan had formally recognized the importance of education by convening the National Conference on Education in November 1947 - just after two months from its independence, and, perhaps more importantly, made specific reference to non-formal learning, informal learning and a variety of delivery approaches and learning systems. Undoubtedly this established a base for lifelong learning within Pakistan. However, regardless of how well meaning the intentions may have been, formal support for lifelong learning does not automatically create an integrated, fully developed system for learning opportunities that are available to all citizens everywhere throughout the life-span. This paper describes the development of elements of what will, hopefully, in time, become an integrated system of lifelong learning. Specific emphasis is placed on non-formal programmes of learning, and these are described in some detail. The paper will conclude that there is an imbalance between resources currently expended on formal education when compared with the money spent on, and the potential that exists within the non-formal sub-system.*

## Introduction

Education is now universally recognized to be the primary key to moral, cultural, political and socio-economic development of a nation. Being conscious of this reality, Pakistan has for some time recognized and clearly institutionalized the paramount importance of education. Article 37(b) of the 1973 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan states that

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*"the State shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory education within minimum possible period".<sup>1</sup>*

The present leaders in education, Government, religion, business, non-Governmental organizations, and professional associations also posit a lifelong learning orientation. They believe it is important to educate people not only for academic gains, but also to support economic competitiveness, cross-cultural understanding, social transformation and the development of a national identity. All of this will then bolster the platform from which Pakistan reaches out to the rest of the world.

According to Knapper & Cropley<sup>2</sup>, lifelong learning is based on the notion that education is a continuing activity taking place throughout the life-span for everyone who lives with the accelerating pace of change. It involves learning by the people of all ages and from all walks of life, using the multiple learning resources of society in order to learn whatever they need or want to learn. Three basic concepts about the nature of lifelong learning are implied. First, people should be encouraged to become self-directed learners and active agents of their own education. Second, there are alternative educational sources besides schools and colleges that serve the educational needs of the people. Third, these learning resources and experiences are available to all, anytime, and on a full-time or part-time basis. Lifelong learning also establishes that self-improvement and enrichment are goals that are equally as important as the need to update professional and vocational skills.<sup>3</sup>

## **Educational System In Pakistan**

Pakistan's educational system is composed of two major sub-systems, the formal and the non-formal. The formal sub-system consists of sequential academic schooling at several levels. Included are eight years of elementary education (primary & middle level), two years of secondary education, and a variety of post-secondary programmes. The post-secondary levels include one to three years of technical/vocational education or a minimum of four years of tertiary education. The completion of each level is a prerequisite for entry into the next. The formal education sub-system provides students with basic skills of numeracy and functional literacy and grants certifications of proficiency in different academic disciplines.

Non-formal education may be described as "any educational activity organized outside the established formal system—whether functioning separately as a significant component of a broad activity and designed to serve identifiable clientele and educational objectives".<sup>4</sup> Definitions aside, the characteristics of non-formal education make it quite different from the formal sub-system in a number of ways. First, non-formal education addresses the needs of those who were not able to participate in the formal sub-system. In this regard, the clientele are quite different. A substantial number dropped out of the formal sub-system, the reasons for this being numerous though mostly centred on poverty. The organization, specific activities and delivery methods associated with non-formal education are designed to meet the express needs of the distinct clientele. At present, non-formal education in Pakistan has the following thrusts:

- (i) Family life skills, including health, nutrition, childcare, household management, and family planning.
- (ii) The promotion of literacy programmes for the attainment of basic skills that include numeracy and functional literacy and which are basic needs for every individual.
- (iii) The development of livelihood skills which manifest in the individual specific competencies that prepare, improve, and enhance employability and economic productivity.
- (iv) The expansion of certification and equivalency programmes, which are administered by the formal education sub-system, into the non-formal sector.

Non-formal education is provided separately and apart from the formal school sub-system and does not serve as an entry point to a higher level of formal education. In this regard the two sub-systems are separate, and little room for movement between the two is currently available. Non-formal education concentrates on the acquisition of skills necessary for

employability and competitiveness in the labour market. The availability of non-formal education expands educational access to more citizens representing a variety of demographic characteristics, socioeconomic origins, and general interests. In effect, the non-formal sub-system could make education available to a very large number of Pakistanis who would otherwise not have an opportunity to participate in any educational opportunities.

Given this brief description of the formal and non-formal sub-systems of education in Pakistan, it is apparent that a sub-system of lifelong learning would lean heavily on both. Knapper & Cropley<sup>5</sup> describe lifelong learning as an overarching umbrella, perhaps best characterised as a context rather than a programme or programmes, from whose central hub radiates a variety of spokes each of which, perhaps, represents an educational opportunity. To take the metaphor further, in Pakistani context, the formal and non-formal education sub-systems, as defined and described here, are major spokes, from which a whole series of other spokes arise. (It is important to note that neither reflects the very significant and important "informal" component of lifelong learning.)

Most interesting and germane to this paper is the fact that *schooling* in Pakistan has been equated almost entirely to the formal sub-system rather than the non-formal, in spite of the size and importance of the latter.<sup>6</sup> The structured period of formal schooling, which involves preparation for adult life and which ends when one receives a diploma, is the primary concern of legislators and educators. The formal diploma, for its part, is the passport to economic and social mobility and, as a result, emphasis and support in terms of resources, policies and programmes have always been given to the formal education sub-system notwithstanding recent efforts to promote the visibility and advantages of the non-formal sub-system.

### **Development Of Non-Formal Education In Pakistan**

A review of the development of the educational system in Pakistan reveals that there have been significant efforts directed towards the development and institutionalization of non-formal education. By acknowledging that the formal sub-system was not able to meet the broad learning requirements of individuals and communities, a variety of educational projects and delivery systems were necessary. Different Governments, with the help of various aided agencies, stressed the

importance of various non-formal learning approaches and methodologies to supplement, complement and enrich formal education. The existence of following agencies is indicative of the large reservoir of experiences and activities, which may form the basis for a viable programme of *Non-formal Education* in Pakistan. Although non-formal in nature, some have links to the formal education sector.

### **Iqra Pilot Project & Nai Roshni Schools**

The Literacy and Mass Education Commission (LAMEC) established in 1981, which started *Iqra Pilot Project* and *Nai Roshni Schools*, both aimed at to literate people within a shortest possible time. These two projects could not work out successfully because of mismanagement, inefficiency and lack of coordination.<sup>7</sup>

Another problem, which has been encountered in the delivery of non-formal education, is the lack of coordination and systematic planning amongst the various implementing agencies. Each organization has specific target clientele and activities, but there remains considerable overlap. As a result, there is a continuing need to consciously evaluate the functions and resources of all the deliverers involved with non-formal education in order to minimize overlap and maximize the use of scarce resources. Closer coordination and ongoing communication between officials and leaders in both the public and private sectors, as well as Government and NGOs, are required. Systematic linkages are the key to avoiding duplication.

### **Agency For Barani Area Development (Abad)**

The Livelihood Skills Development Programme of Agency for Barani Area Development (ABAD) is designed, in the Punjab Province, to equip the unemployed and underemployed with vocational and technical skills through short term training programmes. Examples of courses offered include auto and farm machinery, welding, tailoring, motor winding, etc.

Also involved in skills training are Government Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology, vocational institutions and technical training centres. They target clientele in the out-of-school youth group, as well as,

like ABAD, the unemployed and underemployed. The skills training programmes that they offered are: drafting, electrician, auto, surveying, welding, computer trainings, etc.

### **Adult Basic Education Society (ABES)**

Another livelihood skills project is Adult Basic Education Society (ABES)<sup>8</sup>, established in 1971, which is a Non-Governmental Organization. This is a community-based education intervention programme that seeks to improve the quality of life and develop skills needed locally within the community. The following programmes are offered by this organization:

- (a) Primary Education Projects
- (b) Financial Literacy/Poverty Alleviation in Semi-urban, Under-Privileged Communities
- (c) Female Functional Literacy on Health Issues
- (d) Literacy Teachers/Supervisors Training Programme
- (e) Multigrade Teachers Training for NFPE
- (f) In-service Teachers Training Programme involving Activity Based Child Centred Techniques Through Multigrade Approach

In 1977, the Government in collaboration with UNESCO launched the Experimental Pilot Project Integrating Education and Rural Development (EPPIERD) aimed at to upgrade human resource base through literacy programming, industry training and upgrading, and value enhancement for development.

### **Allama Iqbal Open University**

In 1974, the Government of Pakistan established the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), an institutional arm that embodies the philosophy of *open learning system*. AIOU reaches out, through the distance and open learning modes to people who are not able to participate in classroom style education. The AIOU is the *biggest* campus because it offers courses throughout the country.

The movement towards non-formal distance education by establishing the AIOU is a timely one. Distance education has the potential to contribute significantly to human resource development by widening access to higher education and reducing costs for students, industry and the Government. In Pakistan, a country with more than 140 million population, the distance education has opened windows of opportunity, break down barriers of time and space, and unleash the full potential for non-formal education as a viable alternative to the formal sub-system. This is the opportunity that faces Pakistan as it stands at the threshold of the third millennium, and policy makers need to focus directly and with deliberate reflection on the opportunities presented.

From the very beginning, the AIOU has been carrying out variety of non-formal educational and learning programmes and projects that respond to the specific and immediate needs of the communities they serve.

The programmes offered by AIOU focus on a multiplicity of curriculum areas using an assortment of delivery approaches. Included are livelihood skills training, vocational and technical training, and course delivery through evening programmes for adult learners, instruction in family life skills for men and women, and courses and programmes in values formation. These programmes and the associated extension services seek to empower learners and improve the quality of life for the individuals and their families. The AIOU faculty members act in an advisory capacity for the programmes, alongside students and graduates. At the same time, the AIOU supports the wider community by making its physical resources available for non-formal education, and it establishes ongoing links with non-formal education graduates in order to provide them with upgrading and retraining initiatives. In various ways, therefore, the broader programming associated with non-formal education directly provides and supports greater service to the community.

## **Recent Developments In Non-Formal Education In Pakistan**

Recognizing and supporting it in National Education Policy 1998-2010 further elevated the importance of non-formal education, as well as

informal and indigenous education. It reveals that effective steps shall be taken for imparting and spreading non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems, as well as self-learning, independent, and out-of-school study programmes, particularly those that respond to community needs, and provide adult citizens, the disabled, out-of-school youth with learning in civics, vocational efficiency and other skills.

As described earlier, both public and private sector organizations conduct non-formal educational programmes. Within the Government, the primary agency is the Ministry of Education. Almost all Government agencies, including the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, and Social Welfare and Development, have developed and integrated non-formal education into their activities.

Regardless of Government support and involvement, the strongest proponents and most active implementers of non-formal education in Pakistan have been and continue to be the private schools, mosques, churches, civic organizations and foundations. Their activities range from basic level skills training through to values formation. The delivery systems for many of these activities include seminars and workshops, community assemblies, television and radio<sup>1</sup> broadcast programming, correspondence courses, home visits, self-directed learning modules, and practical work. The curricula designs of the various programmes vary from agency to agency and are tailored to the specific needs of the clientele.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to acknowledge that many initiatives related to non-formal education have been implemented within Pakistan during the past few years. However, there remains a need for the educational system broadly, and especially institutions of higher education, to redirect programmes and services in an effort to balance these with the larger society's need for lifelong learning opportunities. Higher education institutions need to assume a far greater role in promoting the goals of lifelong learning. Universities and colleges should take the lead by introducing a full range of innovative programming and other academic services. Curricula should embrace and reflect technological, economic,

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<sup>1</sup> Both PTV & PBC have vitally contributed for the development of a sound policy line and workable action plan for non-formal education [Dr. Shaukat Ali Siddiqi, Pakistan Journal of Distance Education, The Need for Non-Formal Education in Pakistan, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Vol.I, Spring 1984, p.25



social and cultural issues, and non-traditional delivery methods should be part of every institution's repertoire. In a rapidly changing world, colleges and universities need to cater to the demands of a more diversified clientele and respond to the growing needs of the labour market.

Despite significant progress in the development and delivery of non-formal educational opportunities within the last two decades, there continues to be a shortfall in terms of what has been achieved versus the full potential to enrich the overall system of education. Although the Government formally supports non-formal education, and has specifically referred to its importance and value in the constitution, funds for non-formal educational programmes continue to be inadequate. National Education Policy 1998-2010 has openly lamented the disparity between funds allocated to formal and non-formal education.<sup>9</sup> Lack of funding and other resources hampers the delivery of non-formal education services in Pakistan, and will likely continue to do so into the future. This lack of support or imbalance in funding can be attributed in part to the strong and long-entrenched interests within the formal sub-system, coupled with the relative newness of the non-formal sub-system. Policy makers need to be encouraged to assess the relative potential of the two sub-systems, the formal and the non-formal, and direct funding in such a way as to benefit the largest numbers of learners. In turn, this will have the greatest economic effect and benefits for Pakistan as a whole.

## References

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