Pakistan
(Balochistan)

Using technology to bring education to the most remote areas

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) support to getting more children into school and learning in the most remote areas of Pakistan's Balochistan province is paying off. 53,000 previously out-of-school children —72 percent of them girls—have been enrolled in GPE-supported schools in these areas, thanks to efforts that also promote the use of innovative technologies.

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Balochistan's education indicators have been the worst among Pakistan's four provinces in recent years because of economic, security, and political problems. Access to education in this large province was a particular challenge because many of its communities are sparsely populated. Almost half of the province's 22,000 communities did not have a school nearby—and one million children were out of school. While access to education was a key challenge, an equal concern was the lack of a supportive learning environment for students enrolled in school. 78 percent of schools lacked suitable buildings, trained teachers and adequate learning materials.

These challenges impeded the quality of education. According to a reading assessment conducted in 2013, only 38 percent of children tested in grade 5 could read a sentence in English, and only 32 percent in grade 3 could read a sentence in Urdu, the local language.

Balochistan intensifying efforts to tackle its education challenges

Since 2012, GPE has been helping the provincial government tackle its two most urgent problems in education: getting more children into school, especially girls, and getting them to learn and complete school. To help achieve this, GPE worked with the provincial government to develop an education plan for 2013–2018 that prioritized interventions on both fronts.

The plan also assessed the state of education in Balochistan and helped align partners behind the provincial government's education strategy, mobilizing financial resources from donors and securing political will from the authorities to achieve the education goals.

GPE funded strategic elements of the plan through an implementation grant, which is the largest external contribution to the education sector in Balochistan, at nearly 49% of total external funding.

GPE partner: Since 2012
Challenges tackled: Low access to education in remote areas; low school completion rates
Key interventions: School infrastructure; teacher training; innovation; real time school monitoring system
Grant amount: US$34 million
Grant agent: World Bank
Coordinating agency: UNICEF

Improving school infrastructure

The focus of GPE's support was to promote a community-school model to help ensure long-term sustainability and hence increase students' enrollment and their transition to secondary school. The community-school model consists of two-room schools managed by the community and hiring teachers locally. With GPE's support, some 2,000 community members living close to the schools were trained in school construction and monitoring teacher attendance. Since 2015, some 700 schools with new or renovated buildings were completed, and more than 100 girls' schools from primary to secondary education were upgraded.

To cut building costs, large-scale surveys were done to gather geospatial data and identify abandoned buildings that could be used as schools. This was an innovative and efficient way of identifying these buildings.

More qualified teachers recruited

To improve the quality of learning, GPE also supported the recruitment and training of qualified teachers. A strong focus was on hiring female teachers to help increase the enrollment of girls. Since 2015, 1,200 teachers have been recruited after passing the national testing service exam. These teachers also attended a comprehensive teacher training program before being assigned to a school.

Given the limited educational resources, a WhatsApp group for teachers was created, an innovative measure and low-cost use of technology to promote knowledge-sharing and peer learning between teachers.

School monitoring using technology

With GPE's support, a real time school monitoring system was set up to enable education authorities track data on various indicators in the province's 14,000 schools to improve education in the province and allocate funding to where the needs are.

Replacing paper-based monitoring with an Android application, the system collects data for indicators that include teacher attendance, enrollment, and physical infrastructure such as the functionality of toilets, drinking water facility and electricity. The system provides timely and accurate information at the school level which helps education officials make informed decisions based on real time data.

The school monitoring system is closely linked with the country's education management information system and is an effective instrument to improve governance in the education system.

Thanks to these interventions **53,000 previously out-of-school children**, of whom **72 percent are girls**, are enrolled in GPE-supported schools. With an 89 percent retention rate of children, these schools will help students **transition to higher levels of education**.

New education plan for 2019–2023

In early 2019, Balochistan received a new GPE grant to develop an education plan for 2019–2023 to sustain ongoing initiatives and revise strategies to tackle persistent education sector gaps.

While Balochistan has made good progress, it still has a long way to go before all of the province's children get a quality education. Moving ahead, the provincial government is preparing a new education plan that, with the support of GPE and its partners, will continue to strengthen the province's education system over the coming years.