Revitalizing Innovating Strengthening Education (RISE)

The USAID-supported RISE project improved the school experience for students in four earthquake-affected districts in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). RISE assisted education officials, teachers, and communities to build back a better system in which teachers have the necessary skills to improve the quality of their instruction, communities are mobilized to advocate and act for their schools, and education departments are better able to manage resources. RISE operated from the belief that a comprehensive system of support for communities, teachers, and educational officials substantially improves the quality of classroom instruction and student learning.

The project’s long-term objectives were to

- Build the capacity of district education officials;
- Train 10,000 teachers to use student-centered and active-learning methods linked to the content areas of English, mathematics and science; and
- Mobilize communities to become more engaged with and supportive to their schools through the revitalization and formation of 2,300 School Management Committees and Parent-Teacher Councils.

RISE’s proven model of capacity building and professional development in the form of training, on-the-job support, and peer learning opportunities helped build back the district education systems. The governments of AJK and KPK have endorsed key RISE initiatives and developed roadmaps for their sustainability. RISE’s achievements are an outcome of its partnership with education officials, teachers, communities, and representatives of training institutions. In all its activities, RISE took proactive measures to achieve gender parity.

A. Key Achievements

- **Increased Student Learning Outcomes:** RISE assessed the learning outcomes for grades 4 and 8 students of RISE trained teachers in the subjects of mathematics, science, and English. The percentage of students scoring satisfactory or advanced increased by 12 to 17 percent in 5 of the 6 tests from 2007 to 2010; the increase for grade 8 science students was higher.

- **Increased Teacher Attendance:** Teacher attendance, during data collection for our longitudinal teacher absenteeism study, increased 12.5 percent between 2007 and 2010. RISE supported School Management Committees and Parent-Teacher Councils (SMCs/PTCs) and education managers in taking initiatives to reduce teacher absenteeism. Both supported teachers, and education managers took disciplinary measures when required.

The Revitalizing Innovating Strengthening Education (RISE) project is a USAID-supported consortium of the American Institutes for Research, the International Rescue Committee, Sungi Development Foundation, Sarhad Rural Support Program, and the National Rural Support Program. Funding for the project is USD $23,000,000.
From 2006 to 2010, RISE trained:

- Over 10,300 teachers in student-centered and active-learning methods linked to the content areas of English, mathematics and science. In total, 884 head teachers attended training to help them in the provision of instructional support to their teaching staff.

- Over 350 government teachers and trainers of government education institutions as master trainers for primary, middle and high school training.

- Three hundred and thirty four Learning Resource Center (LRC) management committee members from 85 LRCs.

- Over 17,600 members from 2,300 School Management Committees and Parent-Teacher Councils (SMCs/PTCs) in areas such as management, governance and resource mobilization.

- Altogether 161 education managers in six key management areas; data driven decision making; computer literacy (MS Word, Excel, Power Point, internet); and data collection processes.

- Over 30 circle and district-level EMIS staff in data entry, cleaning, analysis and dissemination, and report generation.

Other notable achievements of the project include:

- RISE used mechanisms of support sustained over time in the professional development of education managers, teachers, and SMC/PTC members.

- RISE supported PTCs/SMCs to meet the priority needs of their schools and children that otherwise would remain unmet through advocacy, fund-raising, voluntary labor, and the implementation of a small grants program. All 2300 SMCs/PTCs prepared School Improvement Plans. In total, 1,146 SMCs/PTCs received small grants awards of Rs. 45,000 to undertake a project that they design. These projects addressed basic school needs, such as furniture, drinking water, and the construction of boundary walls and toilet facilities. Also, many SMCs/PTCs applied and received assistance for non-RISE projects.

- RISE built local NGO capacity to better serve communities and the government in the areas of community and teacher professional development. RISE’s NGO partners have been proactive in leveraging other non-USG resources as contributions to the development of these communities.
B. Best Practices

RISE’s best practices are in three areas: strategies that engage government officials and promote government ownership; sustained professional development of education managers and teachers and capacity building of SMCs/PTCs; and the continuous assessment of project interventions.

Government Ownership

RISE’s initiatives to foster government ownership started from the design phase. They include:

- RISE worked within the existing government system and followed government policies.
- Subject specialists and ministry officials, including representatives from the DEE, DCRD, DCTE, PITE, RITEs, and Elementary Colleges, along with RISE staff, made up the teams that authored RISE’s primary, middle, and high school teacher training packages.
- RISE worked with education managers to develop School Supervision and Support Plans, District Education Plans, and other mechanisms and tools to support the professional development of teachers, SMCs/PTCs, and new education managers. Embedded staff worked with EMIS staff and education managers to make the education data management system more useful for decision making purposes. Steering committees, introduced by the education departments with support from RISE, are a forum for coordination among education stakeholders.
- RISE’s master trainers were recruited from the ranks of teachers in local government schools and trainers in district and provincial/state-level education institutions. They mentor and guide their colleagues to sustain changes that are taking place in schools. Many serve as master trainers in ADB, UNICEF, and other teacher training programs.
- RISE’s community development initiative, through its support to SMCs/PTCs, built social capital in communities. RISE’s approach to community development helps build bridges and, ultimately, mutual trust and respect between communities, teachers, government authorities, and other stakeholders in their partnership to revitalize schools.

Sustained Professional Development

RISE’s initiatives were comprehensive and sustained. They include:

- Education managers received training and intensive on-the-job support from RISE staff embedded in the education departments to carry out innovations in their practices.
- In the teacher professional development program, RISE offered a year-long program that consisted of a 12-day training, peer learning meetings, on-the-job support, and follow up training.
- In its community development component, RISE provided training and the sustained support required to assist 2300 SMCs/PTCs become self-managed, self-sustaining
entities. RISE worked with communities over a 12 to 18 month period, fostering SMC/PTC members’ leadership skills and ability to advocate on behalf of their schools and communities.

Continuous Assessment

RISE tracked progress of its interventions through longitudinal studies on teacher absenteeism, teacher classroom behavior, student learning, and education managers’ performance effectiveness in management and EMIS as well as evaluative exercises with SMCs/PTCs. The results of these were used in the review of project strategies and subsequent revisions and in the display of project achievements.

C. Lessons Learned and Recommendations for the Future

Lesson Learned No. 1: High expectations in a relief environment resulted in early difficulty in gaining government and community commitment to a development approach. In response, RISE assisted the government with day-to-day tasks and promoted donors’ application of government policy in remuneration for participation in donor-sponsored activities. RISE supported SMCs/PTCs to help schools return to normalcy (enrollment, temporary shelter, and more) through training and in a small grants program. A recommendation for future programs is a phased entry into communities, starting with SMC/PTC mobilization, followed by teacher training activities.

Lesson Learned No. 2: Long term sustained support is necessary to bring about real change. Training should be needs-based and conducted by the human resources available within the system.

Lesson Learned No. 3: The frequent transfer of government officials, unanticipated by RISE, necessitated the re-training of education managers on a regular basis. Embedded staff responded by working with education managers to design and offer orientations for incoming managers.

Lesson Learned No. 4: Communities learned that they *can* mobilize local resources and *how* to mobilize local resources.

Lesson Learned No. 5: Public recognition of the communities, teachers, and education managers’ work; cluster and experience sharing meetings; and exposure visits are motivating and serve as vehicles for peer learning.

Lesson Learned No. 6: Different geographic locations require different project approaches, particularly with regard to gender issues in areas with greater conservative norms.

Lesson Learned No. 7: Greater involvement of head teachers in professional development activities generates greater understanding and support for the process. Future programs should include training and professional development working groups tailored to head teachers.

Lesson Learned No. 8: Set clear goals, carefully measure results, and show them.