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Improving Access to Education in Rural Areas

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Tajikistan spends around 4% of its GDP on education sector. Of the total 4% nearly 77 % is spent on personnel expenses. Only the remaining 23% is spent to school equipment and infrastructure improvements. According to UNDP Human Development Report for 2010, the literacy rate among children of 15 years and older in Tajikistan was 99%. The number, however, declined to 87% in the past years when assessing the percentage of children enrolled in secondary schools.

The number of school-children enrolled in secondary schools in the districts of Rasht Valley is significantly lower compared to other regions of the country. The phenomenon is due to economic insecurities, but is also directly linked to the physical state of the education infrastructure throughout the Valley. During the Civil War of 1992-1997 nearly 70% of socially vital infrastructure of the Rasht Valley suffered from damages and destructions. Primary and secondary schools were no exception. The secondary schools of Miyonadu, Komsomolobod, Sangdevor, Kaznok, Odilobod, and Karakenja villages, located in five different districts, were constructed or reconstructed during post-civil war period. Nonetheless, due to lack of funds, they were in poor condition due to lack of funds for timely maintenance.

“Rehabilitation of school roofs is very timely and important for us”, says Ms. Vohidova who teaches mathematics and geometry for middle school students in Komsomolobod. She says: “I work here for the past three years now, since the time when the school has moved into this new building. We were hoping that this structure would be better than the previous one, but when the raining seasons began, it started leaking in the classrooms. We had to cancel classes when it rained even moderately. We tried to solve the problem through our own efforts, but the local community does not have so much financial resources, and the government, although promised to look into this a while ago, never did anything to help us.

“It affects how we work and how we educate our children. It has a direct bearing on the future of our children, and we cannot do anything about it”, says Mr. Valiev Shomahmad, the Principal for secondary school in Miyonady village. “It is not an ordinary school. We have 17 students who are orphans, and when it comes to orphans education, I feel a lot more moral pressure. I raised this problem every time when the community meets over its issues and problems, but since most people are unemployed and do not have a steady source of income, they do not have financial means to support the school. Every time when the classes get cancelled due to snow, or even light rain, I feel like the society who vowed to support the orphans, is letting them down by not being able to create proper access to education facilities”, he says. “I cannot find enough words to express my happiness and sense of gratitude to UNDP and the donors who support this organization for helping us with rehabilitation of our school”.

In 2013 UNDP, together with four UN Agencies, namely, UNICEF, UN WFP, UN Women, and UNFPA started “Empowering Communities with Better Livelihoods and Social Protection” project. The project aims to support communities and vulnerable groups whose dignity and sustainability have been threatened by economic and social inequalities and political marginalization.

Within the framework of the project, UNDP supported the rehabilitation and reconstruction of six secondary schools which were carried out in the districts of Rasht Valley. The interventions were carried out through collaboration between several stakeholders, including the local governments, which mobilised communities to

contribute with manpower for construction works. UNDP provided funding for the procurement of construction materials and marshalling people's awareness to realize their own needs and potentials through application of human security concepts, and the communities, realizing the importance of collective decision-making and cohesiveness, played an important role in addressing their own insecurities.

Secondary Schools

Secondary school #86 located in Komsomolobod Jamoat of Nurobod district is housed in a two-store building that was initially designed as an office space to accommodate the local government. As the number of school-children has increased in the past three years, the building they used as a school did not have enough room to



School # 86, Komsomolobod Jamoat, Nurobod district /UNDP Tajikistan



School # 86, Komsomolobod Jamoat, Nurobod district /UNDP Tajikistan

accommodate all the school-children, and the school principal, in order to ensure the continuity of education process, had instituted a three-shift schooling system, which was largely inconvenient for most of school-children as majority of them live far from the Jamoat center. In order to address this problem the local government agreed to vacate and give their building to house the secondary school #86. Although the building looks as if it is in a decent shape from outside, it has incurred much damage to its roofing structure and the classrooms due to its rundown asbestos-slating.



School # 3, Sangvor Jamoat, Tavildara district Before rehabilitation/UNDP Tajikistan



School # 3, Sangvor Jamoat, Tavildara district During rehabilitation works/UNDP Tajikistan

School #3 in Miyonadu village is located in Sangvor Jamoat some 70 km from Tavildara district center and houses 502 students with 31 teachers and other support personnel. The school structure was built in early 1990s and due to the lack of finances it was not maintained or rehabilitated since. Similar to a school in Komsomolobod, it had a dilapidated roofing structure which rendered the education process impossible. It leaked in the classrooms and the classes whenever it rained classes would often get cancelled.

School #14 located in Odilobod village of Langari Shoh Jamoat of Tajikabad district was not an exception. It is located in the mountainous district, far from the center of the Jamoat, and access to the village becomes difficult during winter months. The school has not been rehabilitated due to lack of funds. The doors and window-frames have broken down, and this dramatically affects the attendance rate of school-children during 5 to 6 months of winter season. The heating system of this school is conventional (they use fire-coal stoves with metal pipes) and it lacks efficiency to preserve heat as the classroom doors and windows have cracks and holes.



School # 14, Langari Shoh Jamoat, Tajikabad district
Before rehabilitation/UNDP Tajikistan



School # 14, Langari Shoh Jamoat, Tajikabad district
After rehabilitation/UNDP Tajikistan

Results and Immediate Impact

With the total budget of \$25,000 for procurement of construction materials, 6 secondary schools were rehabilitated and reconstructed. During the two months of the project activities, some 85 members of the local communities from five districts were mobilized and worked in reconstruction of school roofs, installation of doors and windows, and the in-kind contribution of the local communities amount to \$7,000. Some 120 teachers - 72 male and 48 female from six secondary schools saved their jobs, and were gainfully employed. Nearly 2,500 school-children benefited from the uninterrupted education process.

During the implementation of the project activities, the human security concept was embedded. Local populations identified that reaching common goals require cohesive and collective decision-making and action. Through their efforts to mobilize communities, the local governments managed to create synergies that brought different stakeholders together to address their priority problems. The exercise contributed to raising people's awareness and to help them act on their own behalf. It also made people understand the need to strengthen their resilience to conditions of insecurity and finding ways to tackle these threats together through a participatory approach.

"We are ready to work day and night to complete the works. The community knows about the problem, and is ready to help us to finish the construction of the roofing structure before the raining season starts" Mr. Valiev, Principal of the secondary school in Miyonadu village