

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

See our World "Students as Learning Partners"

Dear sponsors,

We send you our warm and happy greetings from Pakistan!

We are members of the School Representative Councils that have been established with Plan's support in 30 primary schools in Chakwal district over the past two years. We would like to share with you some of the problems we faced at our schools and how we have overcome these problems to create model schools.

After our school representative council was established, we learned building our capacity by actively participating in the school learning process. We also had the opportunity to understand and discuss our issues that affected our lives by bringing practical solutions. However, unfortunately almost all parents, teachers and other school authorities confuse student's participation with merely attendance in the school. The parents, teachers and school authorities believe that the students' participation is merely their attendance. Even students themselves think that just attending the classes regularly and passing examinations are enough.



Children discussing their concerns and exploring possible solutions

We and our teachers in the schools were aware of the importance of

education but we kept to the old concepts of gauging a student's success with his/her regular attendance in the school. No efforts were made to provide opportunities for teachers or students to participate actively in the process of decision making.

We want to give our hearts to learning...but we have faced many challenges. Children do not attend school regularly, sometimes teachers do not turn up, and in some schools there are not enough teachers. There are only two teachers in one primary school which includes grade I to grade V. Our classrooms are not big enough for all of us so sometimes we have to sit under the shade of a tree and in the rainy season we have to return home. Our parents don't visit our schools or interact with our teachers because they are of the opinion that the school is the teachers' domain and they have full authority and independence to train their children. In many cases girls are not allowed to continue their studies beyond grade V. However, we have become aware of the importance of girls' education after being part of the school improvement program. Also, we realize that a literate mother can support her children in their school work while an illiterate mother has limitations.

We can bring change... We represent those 30 schools which were selected by Plan and their partner agencies to implement the school improvement program. This program included capacity building of teachers, leadership and management (both teachers/students), community participation, children's participation, developing the physical environment in the schools, curriculum enrichment, school governance, ownership, advocacy, local resource generation and establishment of school representative councils (SRCs).



Girls are planting trees on their school grounds

Usmara, a member of one student council, said: *"I do not like the garbage and smelly surroundings of my school but didn't know how to handle this problem. After becoming a member of the school representative council, I participated in a session on how to handle the garbage situation. Now, our school has a clean learning environment."*

All school representative council members learn how to be more organized and learn the importance of cleanliness at home as well as at school. We prepared dustbins for our classrooms, how to use them and ways to dispose of rubbish properly. We planted trees in our schools and the watering responsibilities have been shared among each class so everyone has equal ownership of the plants. We shared our cleanliness learning with our parents, siblings and other children in our village. We displayed around the village health awareness messages on preventable diseases. Many people who could not read the written messages approached us to explain what the messages meant.

Assad and Umair said, **"After being members of School Representative Council we regularly hold assemblies and complete our assigned tasks on time and encourage others to also complete their assignments on time"**

Teacher enhanced skills...Our teachers have learnt new modern learning techniques. They participated in training sessions such as preparation of lessons on a quarterly basis and making classroom learning more interactive and interesting for the students. We have learned to prepare interesting drawings and even learned to make clay models. Activity based teaching methods through games, poems, colours and songs are interesting, fun, and encourage the children to come to school.

Students are education players... Students must play a meaningful role in the school by participation. This problem is not only restricted to the students of government run schools. Even the students of



School Representative Council members enthusiastically reading their contribution in the

private schools only attend the classes and follow, or try to follow, the academic and non-academic activities as devised by teachers or school authorities. They have no say in the matters that concern them. In fact, they are not even supposed to ask questions related to their studies because this irritates the teachers. But if we are genuinely committed towards society whose citizens are capable of thinking critically and taking initiative, then our present schools need to become places of learning where students are not only involved in active thinking, learning positive values and exercising their decision making capabilities but also in sharing the burden of their teachers and acting as education partners. We would like to see ourselves as future education partners in our schools. We will continue sharing our learning with other youths and adults on the importance of being active players in our education.

This document was reviewed and edited by Plan staff.

This communication was prepared through the combined efforts of eighty (80) girls and boys (ages between 7–12 years old) who are members of Students Representative Councils from six schools in district Chakwal.

The process was coordinated by Khurram Ihtesham, Plan Sponsorship Coordinator, Chakwal and Plan partner staffs

Tanveer, Saira, Saima and Mehtab