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Proposal for Education Programme in Rapar Taluka

Working in villages of Kutch, we have observed that some communities are marginalized based on caste, class and gender. These communities are deprived of rights to equality and isolated from mainstream society.

The worst affected are children and women because they are culturally oppressed by society. They often live hand to mouth and children are not able to attend school because they must work to help support their families. Those parents that are interested in sending their children to school do not have access to schools because they are too far away. The situation is worse for girls because they are often not allowed to leave their village. Socially girls have a lower status than boys in the community. They are not given an opportunity to study and are given household chores and responsibility for younger siblings at very young age.

In addition, the education system is inadequate. Teachers have to manage more than 4 grades at a time with children from different grades seated in same room. Teachers are not reliable and many are also not motivated to teach. Often children in grade 7 are unable to solve simple arithmetic problems because they are promoted to higher grades without writing any exams. Finally, the environmental conditions faced by children at school and at home are not hygienic. These factors do not motivate children to study. Parents feel that education is waste of time and money because they do not see any concrete results. They prefer their children to work rather than attend school. This situation is more obvious among the Maldhari (Pastoralists) and laborers of the area.

During the earthquake, many school structures were destroyed. The community needs to be involved in rebuilding the structure or providing an alternate space for children to study in their villages.

In order to address these impediments to education, we propose to implement the following program in 10 villages of the Rapar district.

MARAG has had discussions with the 10 target villages regarding their social and economic development needs. During these discussions, the communities expressed the desire to educate their children. In addition, MARAG is initiating health programs in these 10 villages. We plan to integrate the health and education programs for overall development of not only the children but the whole community. The education program focuses on having a long-term impact on the literacy and education level of the village children. Results require a long term commitment and will become evident only after working in the community for several years.

Program Objectives

- To provide access to education for the community
- To increase enrolment of children in schools
- To change the attitude of the community towards education
- To enhance the status of education in the district

Activities

1. Conduct Children's Fairs. Children's fairs provide an opportunity for children to enjoy themselves and to learn how to socialize with other children.
2. Host Parent Workshops. To change the education status of community, parents must be involved. MARAG will host training workshops for parents on accessing educational opportunities for their children and monitoring the quality of the education they receive.
3. Conduct Regular Children's Events. MARAG will facilitate exposure visits, festival celebrations, training sessions, competitions, quizzes, exhibitions, and other children's activities at regular intervals during the program. In the first month at least one such program would be held. These activities aim to develop socialization and group living skills.
4. Encourage the formation of Bal Panchayats (children forums). MARAG will encourage the formation of Bal Panchayats in each village. The Bal Panchayat (Children's forum) is a replication of the Gram Panchayat body at the village level. The aim of the Bal Panchayat is to encourage children to work collectively and to foster leadership skills at a young age. The members are elected with an equal number of boys and girls. The Bal Panchayats have two Sarpanch (one boy and 1 girl). Bal Samitis (Children's Committees) are formed to look after various issues such as health, education, cleanliness, and recreation. The Bal Panchayat

is also given training on the children's rights and encouraged to share this information with the other children. The Bal Panchayat will take the lead in implementing the activities of the program involving children.

5. Conduct Enrollment Drives. The enrollment drives will be held once a year in all the villages, in association with the local educational institutions, government agencies and other local bodies for increasing the enrolment rate in schools. The enrollment drives will target girls in particular.
6. Organize Health Clinics. MARAG will organize health checkup camps for children. Each camp would serve four villages and will be held annually.
7. Host Meetings on Education for the Region. MARAG will organize meetings at the regional level on the issue of education in the district. Participants will include children from the target villages, experts in child education, other agencies working on educational issues and representatives from government. The goal is to develop a roadmap for change to be presented to policy makers to facilitate the changes needed in the regional education system

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the project, MARAG expects the following outcomes:

1. Increased enrollment rate especially among girls
2. Decreased rate of drop out
3. Increased participation of the children in various activities
4. Increased participation of the parents and teachers in overall development of children
5. Regular immunization of the children in the villages
6. A roadmap for revisions to the education system in the Rapar.

The budget for this project is Rps. 480,000 or Cdn\$13,700.

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