

Accountability in Primary Education

CIET social audits Costa Rica, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Uganda

Asked if they like primary school, the children who manage to get there usually say "yes". But their eyes darken as they start to talk about the "daily demand for money for invisible things" in exchange for an education.

In the Sindh province of Pakistan, where only 47% of girls go to school, government policies have been put in place to make access to basic schooling more affordable. This includes no tuition, free textbooks and no obligatory uniforms. Even so, parents reported "costs" the most common reason why girls continue to fall between the cracks in the education system.

CIET social audits of Primary Education were carried out in Costa Rica, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Uganda.

The audits gather data from households, communities, schools, teachers and local civil servants about how well public services serve the population they are intended for. They focus on system flaws and create a wealth of locally identified solutions for regional and national reform.

Despite the pledge by the world's governments to make access to primary education universal, 'system leakage' such as made-up charges, teacher absenteeism and misuse of public resources remains one of the biggest barriers to achieving this fundamental human right.

Evidence-base:

Costa Rica: 1694 children between 6-12 years of age

Nepal: 100 000 people, 144 focus groups

Nicaragua: 6000 people in 70 communities

Pakistan: 146 200 people, 300 focus groups

Uganda: 94 481 people, 1595 service workers, 348 focus group discussions

The situation is not too different in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Uganda and Nepal, where CIET social audits brought to light facts behind petty corruption in primary education.

Detailed information on school costs to households provided the basis for estimating levels of corruption in primary education. Specific target groups for "extra charges" could then be identified.

As is often the case with petty corruption, it is not only those who can afford it who are asked to pay, but those who think they have no other options.

In Nicaragua, 86% said they had to pay "contribuciones" to the teachers. Most people (73%) also had to pay for enrolment that is supposed to be free.

***"The books given by the government for free never reach the girls."
(Mother, Sindh)***

The same was true in Uganda where school fees are covered under the Universal Primary Education scheme.

Yet parents were paying extra tuition for nearly half of the children in primary school. One in ten also had to pay "extra charges" to teachers.

In Pakistan, a joint CIET/ UNICEF communication strategy was devised to inform communities about current government policy and their right to government support.

Despite huge public expenditure on textbooks, only around 16% of them actually reached the children in Sindh province. Journalists involved in the audit publicised these findings, making them harder to dismiss.

Similar evidence-based local solutions were fed into regional and national planning in Nicaragua, Nepal, Costa Rica and Uganda.

Follow-up surveys will measure the success of efforts to reform this sector.

