I. Introduction

It is widely recognized that community and parental participation can play an important role in promoting primary education. It also has the potential to increase awareness levels and to bring about improvements in girls’ health and living conditions. In India, policies have attempted to bring communities and schools closer together. However, evidence from the field indicates that committees and other organizations created to promote more synergy among communities and schools either do not function or seem to function mechanically rather than promoting a genuine sense of participation and commitment (Ramachanran & Saihjee, 2002).

II. The Kuchinerla School in Andhra Pradesh

The Girl-child transitional school in Kuchinerla, a village of Andhra Pradesh, India, was founded by the Centre for Applied Research and Extention (Care) in May 2000 with support from the National Child Labor Project (NCLP). The school provides a one-year basic education program for 100 girls aged 7-14 from Kuchinerla and surrounding villages. The main objectives of the program are to provide girls with a healthy living environment and an accelerated educational program with the aim of transitioning them into the formal educational system.

In 2004, Care and World Education (WE) started a collaboration that focuses on four elements related to improving the quality of education for out-of-school girls. These elements are:

- providing immediate attention to personal safety, health and nutrition issues;
- enhancing parental and community involvement in the school;
- linking what is learned in school to life skills that girls will be able to use throughout their lives;
- improving teacher training on the integration of life skills into the general education curriculum and improved pedagogy.

One of the strategies utilized by World Education and Care to achieve their objectives has been working with communities and parents to build their capacity in the area of life skills and nutrition, in addition to increasing their awareness about the importance of girls’ education. In this policy brief, activities involving parents, teachers, the Kuchinerla School, World Education’s staff and communities are highlighted to exemplify activities implemented to improve girls’ overall and education status and health.
III. Activities Carried out in the Kuchinerla School

Social Mobilization and Parental Involvement

Initially, the primary focus of the social mobilization activities conducted by the Care staff was to increase school enrollment. On a periodic basis, older children would join teachers in visiting the neighboring villages and raise awareness among the parents on the hazards of child labor and the need to send their children to school. The most common approach was door-to-door mobilization activities, where teachers would engage parents individually. Kalajatas (street plays), processions/rallies, role play, dramas and songs, traditional story telling, and house visits by staff and students were also strategies used to raise awareness on child labor and education within the community.

Over the past two years, World Education worked with school staff in further expanding their social mobilization drives and strengthening linkages between parents, children and the local communities, and by channeling local support among authorities and policy makers, such as gram panchayats (village governing bodies), local government teachers, youth groups, and women’s groups. Children have also become more active in the social mobilization activities through raising awareness among community members and especially parents on the importance of education.

Currently, the school uses different forms of mobilization to involve parents in their children’s education. Their involvement is being monitored through their participation in community/parent meetings and through school open days¹. Parents have been visiting the school to learn more about the activities that have been carried out, such as vermi-composting, maintaining plant nurseries, and poultry raising. The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) has also conducted community meetings to discuss issues of health and nutrition with parents in two villages. Those parents agreed to share the information they learned with other parents who were not able to attend the general meeting. In addition, it is known through anecdotal accounts that parents have also been participating in parent-to-parent mobilization to recruit girls to attend school. Approximately, 20 children were enrolled in the school as a result of parental involvement in social mobilization last year.

An example of stakeholders’ involvement in school life was the event that took place during the Kuchinerla School sixth annual day in May 2006. School staff invited parents of children studying in the school and parents of children formerly at the school and now mainstreamed into formal government schools in June 2005. The officials of the NCLP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Education Department, Sub-district Education Officer, Sub-district Literacy Organizer, NGO

¹ Open Days are periodic meetings between teachers, children, parents and local community representatives to review school programs and progress and to create a public space for discussing issues of child labor and education.
members, youth and women groups and the
gram panchayat leader of Kuchinerla were
also invited. Nearly 200 parents attended the
event. The main focus of the event was to
discuss issues around the elimination of
child labor and the problems faced by the
parents in sending their children to school.
In addition, Kuchinerla graduates shared
their experiences in the school to sensitize
parents on the usefulness of education and
school activities. Some parents expressed
that they could not afford to pay the school
fees to send their children to formal school.
An additional reason for withdrawing their
children from formal school was the lack of
proper hostel facilities for children in the
formal school. In response to these concerns,
the Sub-district Officer assured that they
would make an effort to ensure that all
children get enrolled in school and adequate
hostel facilities be made available to them.
World Education staff also met with ILO
officials, Ministry of Education and school
staff to develop a social mobilization
strategy and to discuss ways to mobilize
parents to send their children to school. ILO
officials shared a list with child laborers’
names between the ages of 9-14 in the Gattu
Sub-district with school staff. Children on
that list became the main focus of the social
mobilization strategy for the current year.
With the help of ILO, the social mobilizer
and teachers visited parents and tried to
convince them to enroll their children in
school. Parents of mainstreamed girls’ were
also actively involved in the social
mobilization drives. Some parents
participated in door-to-door recruiting. A
social mobilization chart was developed and
used by the mobilizer during his visits to the
villages. The social mobilization for the
2005-2006 academic year started in July
2005 and lasted until August 2005. A social
mobilizer and teachers visited parents in the
nearby villages to recruit government school
dropouts and children who never enrolled in
school. A total of 308 families in 17 villages
were visited.

IV. Recommendations

1) Create community demand for girls’
education

Unless government carries out massive
campaigns to educate girls in
underprivileged groups and rural areas, only
a minority of parents and community
members will be engaged in issues related to
girls’ education. Although community
engagement and parental involvement in the
Kuchinerla School demonstrates that it is
possible to convince parents to educate girls,
communities and parents still see the
uneducated girl as the “norm”. In addition
to campaigns the government must provide a
system of incentives where sending a girl to
school provide a financial reward to parents
who live in extreme forms of poverty.

2) Create conditions for greater community
and parental participation in schools

The first step in ensuring parental
participation is welcoming parents in
transitional and government schools. A
genuine sense of participation and
commitment can be generated if parents
believe that their inputs are valued. At the
Kuchinerla School, parents’ demands and
suggestions are taken into account as much
as possible. Parents have voiced their
concerns and interest in what their children
should learn. Life skills were incorporated
into the curriculum and girls demonstrate
practical knowledge about issues that affect
lives in rural areas.
3) Create a forum to discuss policies and rural problems that affect girls' education

It is important to create a bridge between parents, communities, political representatives, and international agencies so a dialogue to discuss community problems and needs can start. Parents and communities need to have opportunities to exert pressure on politicians and other officials who can improve access and quality of education for girls. In Kuchinerla, parents demanded schools with hostels to ensure their children’s access to and retention in school, and the authorities are taking steps to meet those demands.

REFERENCES