

Book 2:

Working with Families and
Communities to Create an ILFE



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TOOL GUIDE

Booklet 2 describes how you can help parents as well as community members and organisations to participate in developing and maintaining an ILFE. It gives ideas about how to involve the community in the school, but also how to involve students more in community life. It will help you identify in what ways this is already going on, and it will offer ideas for involving families and communities in promoting and developing an ILFE.

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Tool 2.1

Teacher-Parent-Community Relationships in an ILFE

WHO IS THE "COMMUNITY"?

The community includes all those who live and work near the school. Everyone in the community can make significant contributions towards developing an ILFE in schools.

In an ILFE, we are responsible for creating a learning environment where ALL children - girls and boys - can learn and develop to the best of their abilities. Parents and community members have an important responsibility to support the development of ILFE in our schools and classrooms. For instance, they need to work with us to ensure that all out-of-school children are found, enrolled and that we find ways to help them stay in school.

Involving the community is of crucial importance for developing an ILFE, however in reality there is often little contact between schools and communities. This is due to many reasons. Many parents find it difficult to attend school activities during the day because they are busy with work and household duties. In Afghanistan many parents have little or no formal education, many of them will feel intimidated when talking with teachers and headmasters, and will therefore often shy away from active participation in school activities. Many Afghan families are large. This is another factor why many parents find it difficult to spend time participating in school activities as they are busy raising and caring for the other children. If we, as teachers, are assigned to schools outside our own home communities, we may not even live in the same community we teach in, or we may live at the school and leave on weekends to see our own families in distant communities. For these and other reasons, communication is often one-way, from school-to-parent or school-to-community, and very rarely from parents-to-schools or communities-to-schools. Yet these obstacles must be overcome when a school begins involving families and the community in creating an ILFE.

WHY SHOULD WE INVOLVE COMMUNITIES?

The active participation of families, community leaders, and other community members are of vital importance in getting all children into school and helping them to learn, develop, and participate actively. If families and communities value the education we give their children (and value us, as teachers), then children will also value their opportunity to learn. It will encourage them to respect us and ALL their classmates - especially those with diverse backgrounds and abilities - and encourage them to apply their learning in their daily lives.

Communities offer information, practical knowledge and skills that we can use to improve our teaching and promote the learning of our children. For instance, we can incorporate traditional stories or songs into our language lessons, use different techniques for growing and nurturing local plants or raising animals in our science lessons, or use traditional building and carpet-weaving techniques in math classes.

Moreover, if we want to mobilise all the resources needed to improve the education for ALL our children, the quality of our schools, as well as to achieve sustainable change, then **schools and communities must work together!**

WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS?

As teachers, what are our roles and responsibilities in working with parents and community members so that they can support an ILFE?

All teachers have the responsibility to;

1. communicate regularly with parents (or guardians) about their children's progress in learning and achievement;
2. work with community leaders to find out which children are not in school and why, and to find ways to bring them into school;
3. explain the value and purpose of an ILFE to the parents of the children in their classes;
4. prepare their students to interact with the community as part of the curriculum, such as through field trips or special activities and events, and to;
5. invite parents and members of the community to be involved in classroom and school activities.

Some teachers also will take on the responsibility to;

6. work with other teachers and the headmaster to communicate about ILFE to parent and community organisations (School Management Committees, Village Education Committees, Parent Teacher Associations), and to;
7. encourage and work with parents to be advocates for ILFE with other parents and community members.

Action Activity: How Can We Work With Our Communities

Begin by listing every school activity that you are aware of that involves families and community members - such as field visits, parent-teacher meetings, religious celebrations - and that brings teachers, children, their families, and communities together.¹

Next to each activity, write down:

- whether you assisted in this activity or not; and if so, in what capacity;
- the positive results from this activity, and;
- the negative (or not-so-positive) occurrences that happened and how these could be avoided in the future (for instance, few parents attended, or only the mothers attended while the fathers stayed away).

Ask yourself:

- Which activities are the most important in making your school and classroom inclusive and learning-friendly?
- Which activities are good events for promoting a better understanding of ILFE among families and communities?
- How have these activities motivated parents and other community members in volunteering to help with classroom activities?
- How can you incorporate successful ideas from the activities of others into yours?
- How can these activities be expanded - for example, holding an Open School Day at the beginning and end of each year, rather than only once a year? The Open School Day at the start of the year can focus on what the children will learn and how families can help, while the one at the end of the year can exhibit the children's work and celebrate everyone's achievements in working together and creating an ILFE.

¹ This activity was adapted from The Multigrade Teacher's Handbook (1994) Bureau of Elementary Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF Philippines, and UNICEF at <http://www.unicef.org/teachers/environment/families.htm>

Tool 2.2

Information and Advocacy for ILFE in Families and Communities

For educational interventions to have real impact, community must fully support them and be actively involved. For communities to be actively involved, they need to be contacted, informed, and motivated.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES



One of our most important responsibilities as teachers is to communicate and work closely together with families and other members of the community. Children learn better when their parents and other family members are interested in, and involved with, the school and with their education. When we involve families in learning, we increase the potential for learning in our classrooms, and we create support for our teaching in many ways. Consequently, making contact with our children's families and important community members is vitally important in creating inclusive, learning-friendly environments.²

² This section and activity were adapted from *The Multigrade Teacher's Handbook* (1994) Bureau of Elementary Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF Philippines, and UNICEF at <http://www.unicef.org/teachers/environment/families.htm>

There are many effective ways to begin communicating with families and communities. Below is a list of some of them:

- Hold meetings with family and community groups where you introduce yourself, describe your goals for teaching and for children's learning, the value of diversity in an inclusive, learning-friendly classroom, and discuss the ways in which families and community members can participate in your classroom activities. For you to succeed it is important that ALL the parents feel that you respect them and value their opinions and contributions, regardless of their background, abilities or circumstances.
- Schedule informal meetings with parents once or twice a year to discuss their children's learning. Show them examples of their children's work. Stress each child's talents and positive achievements, and talk about how each child can learn even better.
- Send your students' work home to show parents how well their children are doing. Ask them for their opinions about their children's work, and what they think their children should learn next.
- Encourage children to talk about what they learn at home and use this information in your lessons. Also talk with the parents about what their children are learning in class relates to their life at home, and what they learn at home, related to the curriculum they follow at school. Remember that many children in your classes may be first-generation-learners, it is therefore important to value and show respect, both for the formal and informal knowledge they bring with them from home.
- Conduct community field visits or ask children to interview parents or grandparents about their own childhood years in the community, and then have the children write stories or essays about "Community Life in the Past." This will encourage to more communication within families and between generations.
- Encourage family members to participate in classroom activities and invite community elders and others to share their knowledge with your class.

KEEPING REGULAR COMMUNICATION

Informing Parents about Their Children's Progress

As teachers in an ILFE, we need to communicate regularly with parents about their children. We may visit parents in their homes, send notes home with children about their progress, or invite parents to school to meet with us. Consequently, it is essential to create a welcoming atmosphere for all parents and community members at school.

Meeting with parents (or guardians) early in the year is important so that teachers and parents can develop a relationship and a partnership for children's learning. However, many parents are used to home visits or invitations to school only when their children are underperforming or have misbehaved, you therefore need to state clearly at the beginning of your visit or in your invitation to parents that this conversation will be different. Tell them that you want to learn about the child from them so that you can teach the child more effectively. Tell them also that you want to inform them about their child's skills, so that they can help the child at home and reinforce what the child is learning at school. Encourage the parents (both mothers and fathers) to volunteer in school to help their own child and the other children to learn. Explain to them that they, as parents and families become more involved in school and classroom activities it will affect their children's performance in school.

It is important to inform parents regularly about children's progress in learning. This means using assessment methods that help teachers, students, and parents know which skills a child has developed in literacy, numeracy, life skills, and other subjects. Parents need to know what their child has learned well and what the child still needs to learn.

One of the ways to do this creatively is through colour-coded charts, which are particularly effective with parents who are not literate. For example, in Chart 1 below, a colour corresponds to math skills. It is important that the different colour levels are defined, not only based on the skills needed to pass class tests and exams, but that they are also adjusted to the individual abilities of each child - as different children have different learning abilities and capacities. The individual targets for each child should be set at the beginning of the school year.

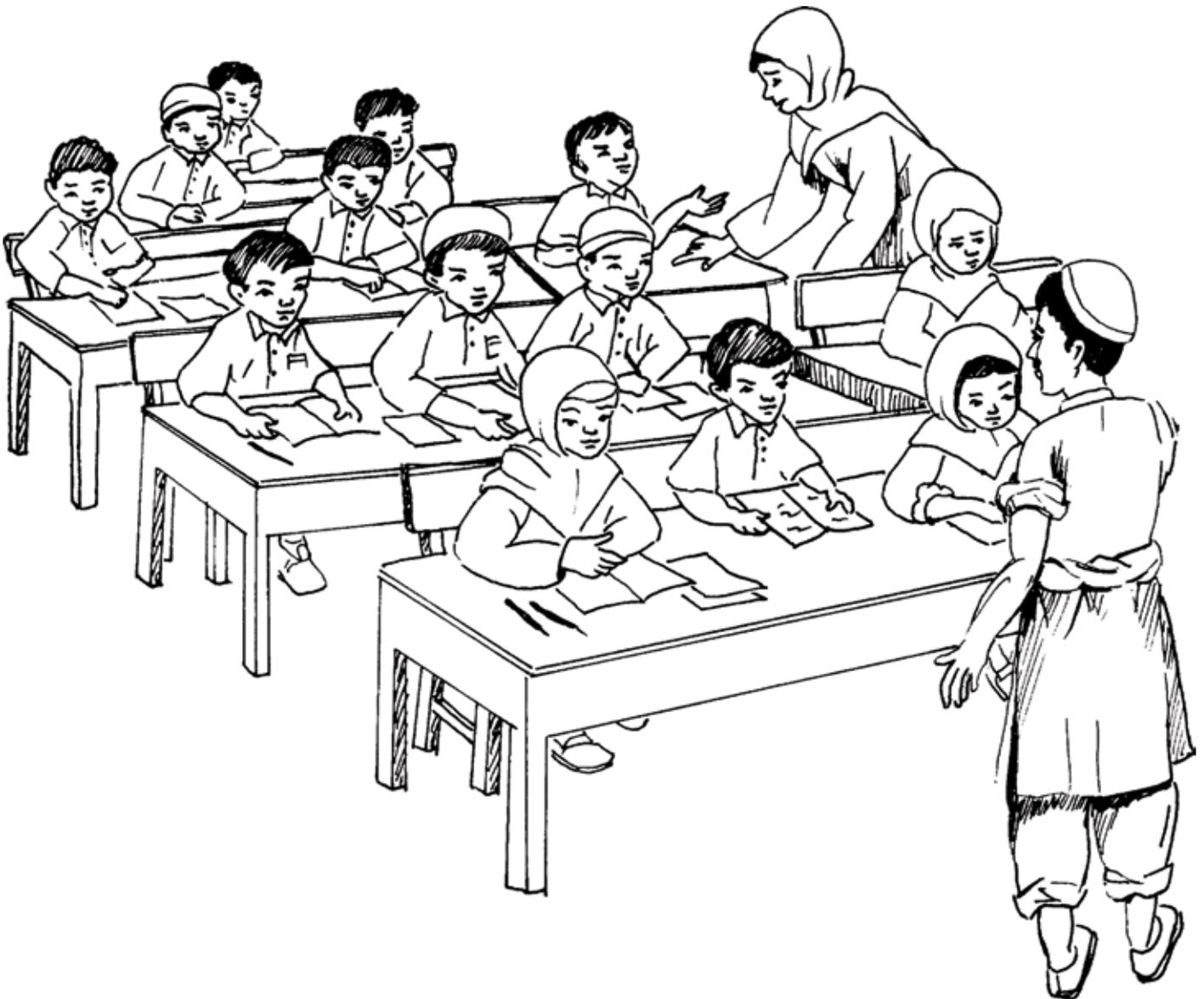


Chart 1**Sample of a Colour-Coded Chart of Content and Tasks for Math for One School Year.³**

This is the Individual Chart for Leyloma who is in Third Grade who did well in Math in Second Grade:

Level	If 8 out of 10 questions are answered correctly he proceeds to the next level
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of currency (up to 100) • Writing numbers • Subtraction - single digits; addition - single and double digit numbers
Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental arithmetic (addition, subtraction) • Division - single digit numbers • Reading math problems
Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication • Subtraction and addition of double digit numbers • Measurement (height, weight, distance and volume)
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying numbers up to 700 • Subtraction and addition by regrouping • Subtracting a triple and a double digit number • Identifying triple digit numbers
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication - double and single digit numbers • Division - double and single digit numbers • Reading word problems
Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication - triple and single digit numbers • Measurement (distance and liquids)

³ Adapted from duPlessis J. (2003) Rainbow Charts and C-O-C-O-N-U-T-S: Teacher Development for Continuous Assessment in Malawi Classrooms. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Chart 2**Sample of a Colour-Coded Chart of Content and Tasks for Math for One School Year**

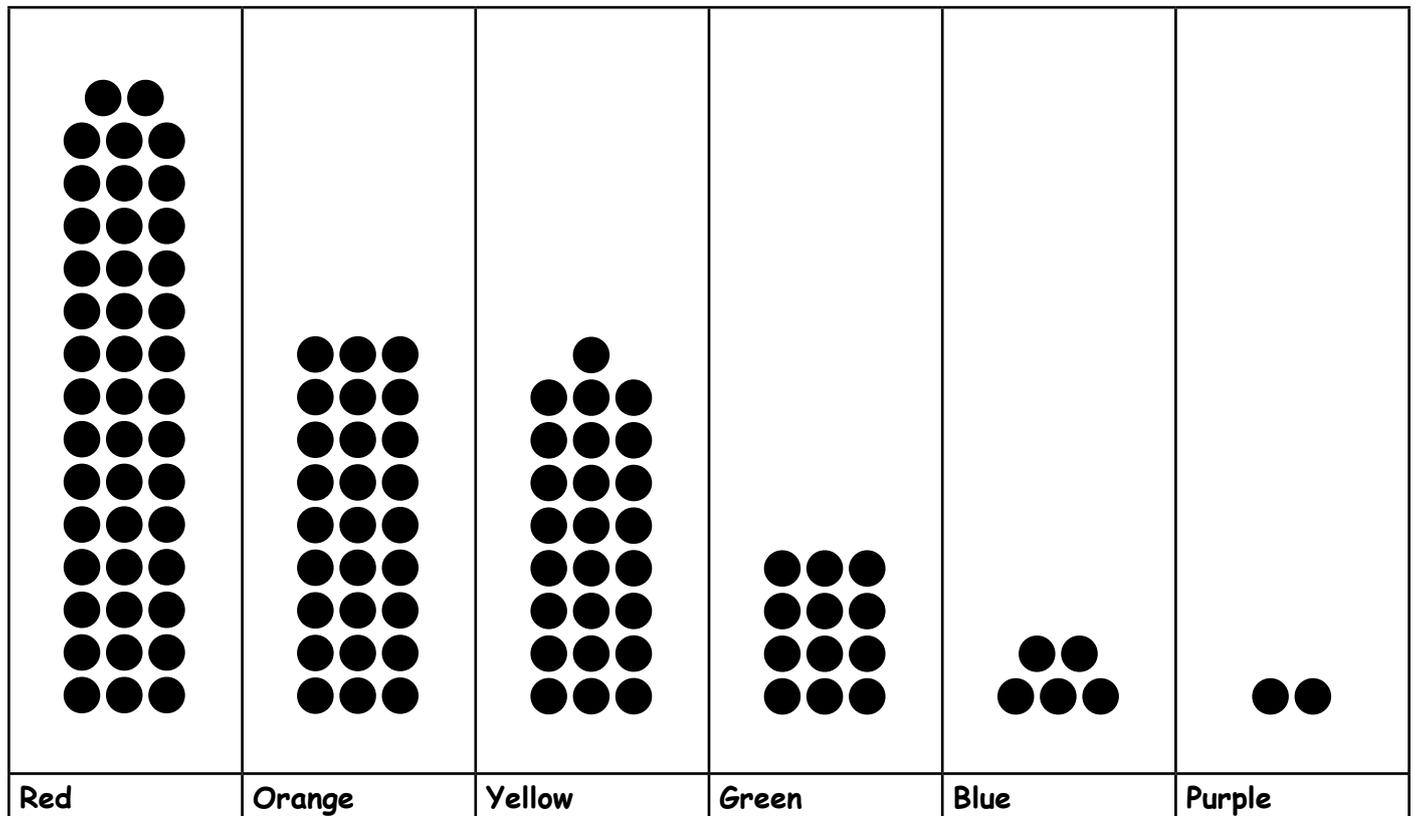
This is the Individual Chart for Noori who is also in Third Grade but Struggled with Math in Second Grade

Level	If 8 out of 10 questions are answered correctly he proceeds to the next level
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing numbers from 1 to 10 • Addition - single digit numbers • Subtraction - single digit numbers
Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of currency (up to 50) • Writing numbers from 11 to 50 • Addition - single with double digit numbers • Subtraction - single digit from double digit numbers
Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of currency (up to 500) • Writing three digit numbers • Mental arithmetic (addition, subtraction) • Measurement - height and weight
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition - double digit numbers • Subtraction - double digit numbers • Division - single digit numbers • Reading simple math problems • Measurement - distance
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying numbers up to 1000 • Subtraction and addition by regrouping • Subtracting a triple and a double digit number • Multiplication - single digit numbers
Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication - double and single digit numbers • Division - double and single digit numbers • Measurement - volume and liquids

Using Charts 1 and 2, colour-coded "Rainbow Charts" are then made to show children's progress and ensure that teachers, students, and parents together monitor the children's learning. In the Rainbow Chart (chart 3), each child has a "happy face" marker with her or his name on it. As they progressively improve their math skills as indicated in the chart, their marker is moved to the colour that matches her or his individual performance level. If you, as a teacher, observe that some children have stayed in a level too long, you can try to find ways to help the children learn what is required to move to the next level, or re-evaluate you expectations.

Chart 3.

Rainbow Chart of Student Progress for the Entire Class



Whether teachers use a Rainbow Chart, a skill list, or a progress report card to send home, informing parents about their children's progress is enormously important in creating and sustaining school-home communication.

It is important to ensure that these charts do not create unhealthy competition between children (which can result in teasing and bullying of those who underperform), and that children are not being punished by their parents if they struggle to perform according to our expectations.

Informing Parents and the Community about ILFE

In talking with parents (or guardians) about their child's learning, it is important to explain how your classroom and school are becoming inclusive and learning-friendly. You will need to explain carefully what you mean by "inclusive," as we learned about in the first Booklet in this Toolkit, and use some of the case studies as examples of how inclusive learning can benefit **ALL** children. In addition to talking with parents, some teachers can work with the headmaster and the schools' ILFE team or coordinating committee to explain the development of an ILFE to larger groups including community members. Some of the ways you can explain ILFE include the following:

1. **Printed Information.** Prepare school brochures or newsletters to give out. Invite journalists from the local newspaper to visit the school and encourage the local press to write about ILFE. Show the journalists the benefits of an ILFE school, and explain the school's plan to provide a quality education for all children.
2. **Radio and TV Public Service Announcements.** Schools can use radio and television to show and tell parents about the need for schooling their children.

3. **Community or Group Meetings.** Plan to hold short workshops or training sessions. These sessions are helpful in introducing the school to people who are new, especially for families whose children are not attending school. The sessions can explain the school's mission to educate all children as well as explain about ILFE. Also during this first meeting and later meetings, as well as getting their ideas about how the quality of education at your school can be improved even more.
4. **Involve Social and Health Services / Organisations.** Since institutions and organisations working with health and social services may become involved in your school as it becomes more inclusive, stay in touch with them as one of your important strategies. They can provide important resources and help protect the rights of your children.
5. **Create Networks with Other ILFE Schools.** In some countries, three or more schools (cluster) work together to support each other in becoming more inclusive and learning-friendly. Teachers share ideas about new teaching methods they are using or ways they are involving community members in their classrooms. They host school or cluster workshops to get updates on new teaching techniques, and on special topics related to ILFE. They jointly organise community events to get all children in school, or conduct field trips so that children can learn from communities other than their own.

MOTIVATING SUPPORT FOR AN ILFE

Parents as Advocates for Change. In some communities, parents themselves will be the advocates for an ILFE at the school level, together with teachers and headmasters. In a school in Shahr-e-Naw in Kabul, for example, parents whose children had been rejected by the school in the past because they had learning difficulties or disabilities, experienced the benefits of ILFE when the same schools suddenly welcomed their children to their school. They now share their positive experiences with ILFE with other parents during teacher-parent's meetings. Their stories are published in newsletters and publications to encourage other schools to move towards inclusion as well.

Parents as Barriers to Change. In other communities, parents may resist change. Some parents, often mirroring the values of society, may initially not want children who are different from their own to be play and learn together with their children. These communities should therefore be targeted with the advocacy activities discussed below.

Advocacy Strategies

Advocacy involves education, information, publicity, gaining support, and getting support from others to promote your message. How can parents and community members become advocates for an ILFE?

1. **Encourage Parents to Tell Others about Your ILFE School.** Parent advocates may want to use some of the same information you used when telling them about ILFE, such as brochures, newsletters, or children's work. They can be especially effective in talking with parents who resist change, in explaining the value of diversity in the school and classroom through their own experiences, and in convincing them that quality education comes first in an ILFE school.
2. **Involve Parents in the Classroom to Help Children who are Vulnerable to Exclusion.** As parents understand that they are welcome in your classroom, they may volunteer to come more often and assist you. If they do not, plan tasks for parents or community members and invite them to help you. For example, parents or community members can serve as volunteers in language instruction or for assisting children with disabilities. They can read to children and listen to children read. They also can help supervise group activities and free the teacher to work with individual children or small groups who may need more attention. We'll explore other ways of involving parents and community members in the next Tool.

3. **Involve Parents in Child-Seeking Activities for Children who are Out-of-School.** For example, work with the leaders of the local Mosque to announce the enrolment dates and times in the school before the beginning of the school year to attract all families from the community to send their children to school. Local merchants and businesses may want to contribute small gifts for the children when they enrol in school. Many other ideas for involving parents and communities in child-seeking activities can be found in Booklet No. 3 on getting all children in school and learning!
4. **Link School Management Communities with ILFEs.** Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or School Management Committees (SMCs) are ways of involving parents in a long-term relationship with schools. They help to provide onsite supervision, as well as improved quality and accountability.

Village Education Committees

The Community Support Program in Balochistan in Pakistan supported the establishment of women's village education committees. There are now over 1,000 of these groups, each with five members, modelled after the men's education committees. The women have proven to be better than the men at sustaining attendance and other daily activities in the all-girl schools.

For more information on this programme, see <http://www.worldbank.org> and search for "Balochistan."

5. **Outreach through Home Visits.** Connecting with families whose children are excluded from school is not always easy. One way to provide information about ILFE is for the school to ask someone from one of the many groups that is vulnerable to exclusion, such as a person with a disability, or a person from an ethnic or religious minority, to be an outreach person for the school. A group meeting with that outreach person or individual home visits can be effective in explaining the school's approach to ILFE.

Tool 2.3

The Community and the Curriculum

THE COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Practical contributions by parents and communities are important for ILFE development. For example, community organisations, parent-teacher associations, and school management committees often get involved in helping to improve school facilities. This is important, especially for schools that have physical barriers preventing children with physical disabilities from entering the school buildings. If there are steps, community members can help to put in ramps in place of steps. In many countries, community organisations are also active in improving school water supplies and sanitation (toilet facilities).

How to encourage parents to participate and volunteer in school activities by:

- Creating forums where they can share problems and ideas (for example setting up Parent-Committees or PTAs)
- Organising adult literacy classes - teaching parents how to read and write
- Teaching basic life skills
- Teaching livelihood skills
- Teaching about nutrition
- Teaching about hygiene
- Teaching about family planning

In the last Tool it was mentioned that one way to involve parents directly (mothers and fathers) is to invite them to visit the classroom. There are many ways in which parents, grandparents, and guardians can be involved in a student's education that will contribute to the ILFE nature of the classroom. Here are some ideas - Parents and other family members - both those who are literate and those who are no - can;

- volunteer to assist teachers with classroom activities, such as reading or preparing learning materials, helping with extra-curricular activities like sports or field trips, or organising special activities like the celebration of religious and cultural festivals;
- be classroom guest speakers who share information about their work and their lives,
- talk about the history of the community, share folk stories, or demonstrate how to make traditional crafts, and how to develop and sustain businesses;
- become involved in and attend PTA meetings and other school events;
- donate needed materials to the school or help to find financial contributions to meet school and classroom needs;
- reach out to other parents whose children are not in school, or are thinking of dropping out, to encourage them to complete their education;
- participate in efforts to keep their children's schools safe and clean;
- help the school to hold an Open School Day;
- help to assess children's learning achievements;
- hold a career day every year - invite men and women with different background to discuss their careers and how girls and boys can prepare for their future careers, and;
- successful graduates and dedicated parents can serve as role models, especially those with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Female Role Models

Female teachers and other women from the community can be involved in role model programmes. Parents or other relatives of the students, as well as religious, artistic, athletic, or political figures from the community are often willing to become involved with a school or classroom that tries to give girls positive role models.

If local women are available to do this, invite them to come in several times during the academic year. Ask them to address how gender roles have affected their choices, successes, and failures. In addition to speeches, demonstrations of their work and consultations with individual students, they can help direct and comment on role-plays with students. **It is important that these activities are held both in girls' and boys' schools as well as the few schools that are open for both girls and boys.**

Have a female teacher and a group of girl students who have made it successfully to secondary school visit rural schools where girls usually drop out during or after primary school. All the girls should meet together to talk about what girls need to do to stay and do well in school. Have the visiting female teacher and older girls meet together with the girls and their parents to discuss specific ways to help girls stay in school and complete their education.

Adapted from the *Gender-Fair Teacher* (2003) UNICEF/Eritrea

THE CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY

Besides inviting parents and community members to the ILFE school a relevant curriculum requires that children learn as much as they can about various topics concerning their lives, their culture, their background and their communities. For instance, children can;

- find articles or get information from their home or community that relate to a lesson at school;
- interview parents or grandparents about their childhood;
- find plants or other materials that relate to a lesson;
- bring materials (such as used cardboard) that teachers can use to make teaching and learning materials;
- participate in redesigning the classroom or in assessing and improving upon the school grounds so they are more "child-friendly" (especially for children with disabilities), safe (reduce conflict), and gender sensitive;
- improve upon the school grounds can also lead to more outdoor classroom spaces;⁴
- participate in community service activities - for example helping the elderly, the poor, widows and orphans;
- help tutor working children who are not able to join school every day;
- map deforestation, pollution and other environmental destruction in their home communities;
- plant trees and participate in reforestation activities as part of science class, and children can;
- map their communities and assist in finding children who are not in school, but should be.

Student Participation in Meetings. Students can also extend their real-world experience by attending and participating in school-parent meetings, community meetings, or other civic events. You can role play the meeting in advance with students in the classroom and practice when they will participate and how. Students can organise activities and projects from their classroom lessons and show them in a student fair, or a small group of students can present a dramatic play, song, or poem. In this kind of activity, students get to explain to their parents (or guardians) what they are learning. This improves communication between the school and parents, and it reinforces for the child what he or she has learned.

⁴ UNICEF. *Children as Community Researchers*. <http://www.unicef.org/teachers>

Tool 2.4

What Have We Learned?

This Booklet has given you several tools that you can use to involve families and communities in ILFE. Can you complete the following activities?

1. List the responsibilities of ILFE teachers in relating to the community.
2. In what ways do you tell parents about their child's learning skills?
3. List two ways in which mothers and fathers can help to include traditionally excluded children (a) in school and (b) out of school.
4. Name several ways in which the community can come into the classroom.
5. List several ways in which students can get more involved in their community or in using materials from home or community.

Involving the community is critical for the success of an ILFE. There are many ways in which you can prepare students to engage with the community, and with their local environment. There are also many ways in which teachers can work with the parents (or guardians) of students to inform them about ILFE and encourage them to become advocates for the school in the community. This Booklet has listed many ideas for this. **Now ask yourself, "What can I do to start working more closely with my children's families and communities?" Come up with three personal targets and compare and discuss them with your colleagues, your students, and their families. After two or three weeks, compare how you are progressing and what further actions you can take.**