



Mainstreaming into secondary school in a private non-formal education programme

Sindh Education Non-State Actors (SENSA) Programme

Executive summary

February 2021

Acknowledgements

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The Sindh Education Non-State Actors (SENSA) programme

SENSA supports three non-governmental organisations to provide a full cycle of primary education for up to 52,000 of Sindh’s poorest children in marginalised communities. HANDS, The Citizens Foundation, and the Family Educational Services Foundation are currently implementing the programme. SENSA works in urban districts of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur and in rural districts of Thatta, Tando Allahyar, Qambar Shahdadkot, and Khairpur. Each non-governmental organisation has a different approach towards teaching and learning, catering to the needs of the communities in which they operate in. The non-governmental organisations are supported through technical assistance activities in teacher training, teacher competency, learning assessment systems, and qualitative research to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes. Oxford Policy Management is the technical assistance management organisation from between and 2020, providing technical assistance and third-party monitoring.

Decision makers and influencers regarding children’s schooling



Research summary

Overview

Taking into view that SENSEA has now been in operation for more than three years, we felt it was important for programme stakeholders to take stock of the process for the purpose of assessing the outcomes of the non-formal education system in terms of stakeholder perceptions, experiences, and practices for any required course corrections, as well as to document lessons and experiences for future programmes and interventions in the sector. The present round of research explores the process and experience of mainstreaming SENSEA graduates into secondary schools in detail from the perspective of the various SENSEA stakeholders, including community education workers, non-profit managers, parents, community leaders, and government officials. The aim of the research is to inform the wider debate about the outcomes of the non-formal education model beyond primary education in Sindh.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the research are as follows:

- a) to develop a deeper understanding of the experience of mainstreaming non-formal students after primary education in Sindh in the SENSEA programme managed by non-governmental organisation partners, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and HANDS;
- b) to understand the roles, attitudes, and perceptions of the household-level, school-level, and community-level stakeholders regarding the mainstreaming of SENSEA graduates¹ into secondary school (or the lack thereof);
- c) to identify societal barriers (e.g. decision making at household level, preparedness of graduates, etc.) to transition (at the household, school, and community level) to secondary school among SENSEA graduates in Sindh; and
- d) to assess and understand the key challenges (in a limited manner) faced by SENSEA graduates in adaptation and retention in a formal classroom environment.

Approach and methodology

A qualitative research approach has been used to capture and explore stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions regarding the mainstreaming of non-formal students into formal education systems at the secondary school level.

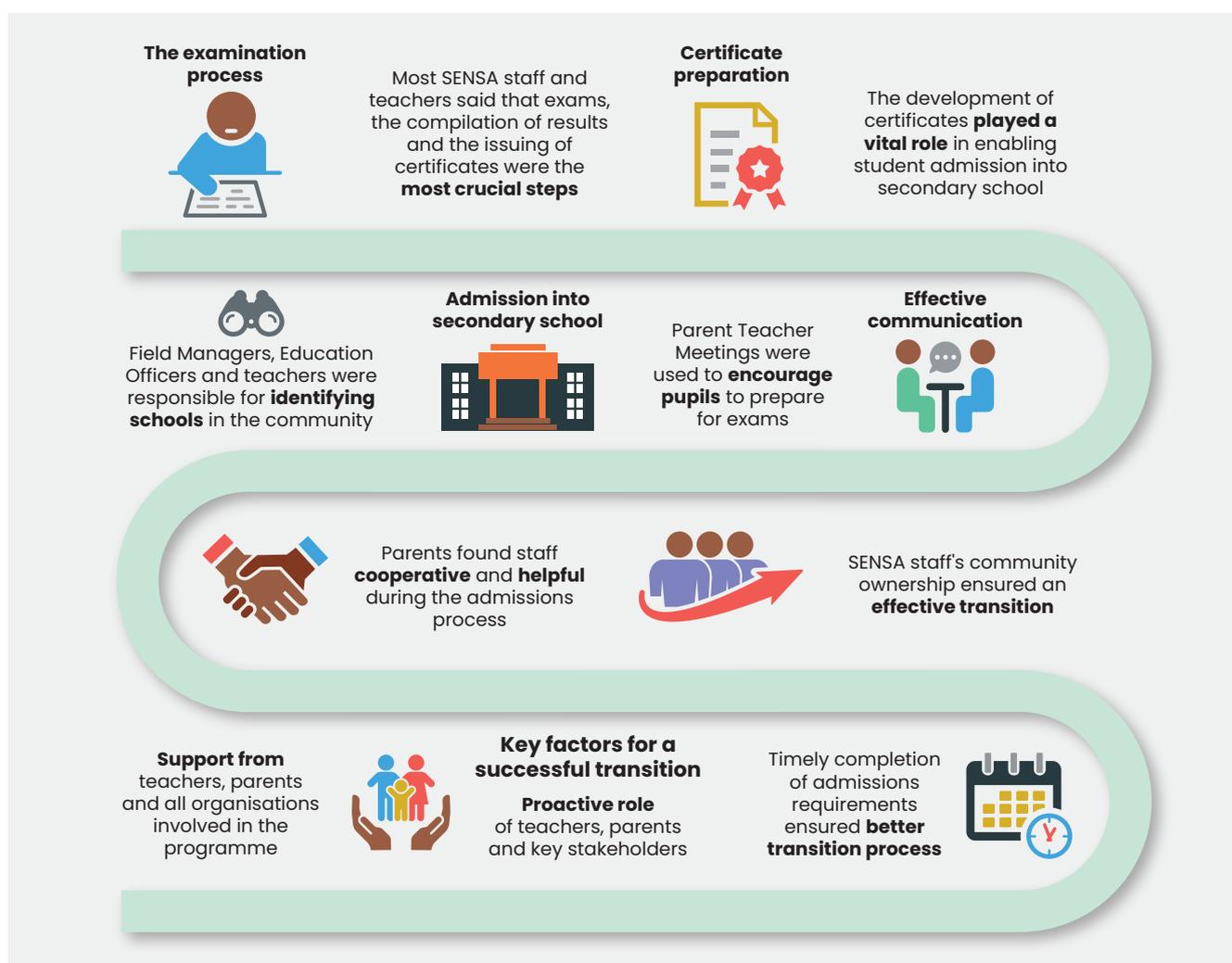
As the research focus was on transition, data were collected from the two graduated cohorts: Cohort C in Qambar Shahdadkot, which completed its course in March 2019, and Cohort B in Karachi, Khairpur, which graduated in March 2018. A total of 12 schools and their catchment communities were covered across the three programme districts. The study participants included management and teachers at secondary schools, non-governmental organisation staff, local government representatives, and parents. Parent interviews were divided into two types: parents of transitioned students who are currently enrolled in a secondary school, and parents of graduated students who are not currently enrolled in a secondary school. Research tools used were key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. The table below shows the type and scope of respondents that participated in the study.

1 The study focuses on the 'SENSEA graduates' enrolled in non-formal primary education model managed by non-profit partners FCDO, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, and HANDS. The term 'SENSEA graduates' in this report refers to these specific graduates only.

Table 1: Types of respondent

Type of respondent	Total
Second school teachers Head teachers; class teachers	29
Parents Mothers/fathers of transitioned and not transitioned students	63
SENSA teachers Teachers of SENSA schools	13
SENSA staff Field managers; education officers	10
Community influencers Community leaders, social workers, and elders	12
Government officials District education officers; liaison officers	9
Total	136

Process of transition



Research findings

The main research hypothesis is as follows:

“The non-formal education system under the SENSEA programmes inculcates a sense of value towards the importance of continued schooling among SENSEA students and their parents, and SENSEA classrooms effectively prepare students for mainstreaming in formal education institutions.”

The research findings according to the research questions are summarised below.

1. What role do parents, teachers, SENSEA staff, and community leaders play in supporting (or weakening) the mainstreaming of SENSEA graduates into formal secondary schools?

2. What influence do other stakeholders (community leaders, SENSEA staff, and teachers) have in this process?

- Education-related decision making is primarily done by the fathers of students. Other family members at times participate in the discussion to support or influence the father's decision making process. Brothers, particularly in absence of a father, also influence decision making regarding schooling. However, the study identified that the final decision making authority rests with the father regarding a child's continuing post-primary education.
- In the majority of communities, SENSEA staff played a focal role in mobilising parents to send their children to secondary schools. The non-governmental organisation staff developed a rapport with parents during enrolment to their community schools for primary education. The same approach was used in encouraging parents to send SENSEA graduates to nearby secondary schools. The influence of community members or leaders was not evident in the family's decision on continuing a child's post-primary education.

3. How relevant and timely was SENSEA staff support in helping ensure the transition of students to secondary school?

- In general, parents gave positive feedback on the role of SENSEA staff during the transition process. Most mothers and fathers reported that SENSEA staff were instrumental in facilitating the transition process of their children, which otherwise would have been more challenging for them.
- The personal network belonging to SENSEA staff and teachers played a key role in ensuring a smooth transition into secondary school. Many SENSEA teachers lived in the community. They knew the parents of the students and understood the local culture. This helped win the confidence of the parents. Similarly, the field managers and education officers also belonged to local communities. This also made it easier for SENSEA to accomplish the various transition tasks for mainstreaming.
- Field staff also helped identify secondary schools in the local area where SENSEA students could transition. Moreover, field staff advised students and parents on the most appropriate school for transition based on their location.
- Education officers and field managers held the responsibility of coordinating with local tehsil education officers for signatures on school leaving certificates. In some cases, students experienced delays in receiving their certificates as the signing process could not be completed on time by the tehsil authorities. Field staff continuously followed up and completed this process for each student.

4. How do parents perceive transition? What factors influence parental attitudes and perceptions around the continuation of children's schooling after completing primary education?

5. What are the key factors that affect the transition to secondary school? What are the key barriers to transition? What contributes to these barriers?

- Data from key informant interviews of secondary school head teachers and teachers indicated there were much fewer secondary schools than primary schools, in both the private and public sectors. Over 50% of the communities in the study did not have a secondary school nearby. The shortage of girls' schools was even more pronounced and was one of the key barriers for low enrolment of girls in secondary schools.

- Many teachers, mostly in Qambar and Khairpur, said the parents of most students were not very involved in the admission process as they lacked the capacity to manage it. This increased the responsibility on the SENSEA field team, as they had to play a more active role during the entire admission process.
- Although parents in general acknowledged the importance of education, key reasons cited for not continuing it included poverty, access to school, motivation of children, child labour, and sociocultural restrictions on girls' education beyond primary grades. The additional expense of sending children to government schools at some distance was also a deterrent. Moreover, when male children grew older, they had a better chance of being involved in income-generating activities to supplement the family income. Female children had increasing household responsibilities as they grew older. Additionally, they faced cultural restrictions on public activity after reaching puberty.
- Most parents were of the view that educating girls was just as important as educating boys. However, evidence from the field indicated that actual practice differed. Many girls only attended school if it was within the community (e.g. SENSEA schools) or if their families could spare them from household labour. Also, in cases where there was the possibility of early marriage for a girl, this was preferred by the parents over schooling.

6. How does the government perceive, support, and view non-formal education locally? How has it contributed or challenged local administration goal and objectives in improving educational outcomes?

- Data from the interviews with the district and tehsil education officers indicated no clear government policy on non-formal education at the local level. District education officers had limited knowledge about the non-formal education system practices by local non-governmental organisations. Interviewed government officials largely only had awareness of non-formal schools managed by SENSEA. The lack of a uniform process and policy for the transition from non-formal education into formal schools contributed to delays in the signing of certificates and other mainstreaming activities.
- There was consensus among all government stakeholders consulted during the research regarding the relevance and effectiveness of non-formal schools in providing children from poor households with a more convenient opportunity to study. Otherwise, in most cases, these children would have stayed out of school.

7. How effective is the SENSEA non-formal school model in preparing SENSEA graduates academically to enrol and to continue in secondary school?

8. How effectively do SENSEA graduates adapt to a formal classroom environment, including learning performance and social interaction? What challenges do they face while adapting?

- Data showed mixed feedback on the adaptation and adjustment of SENSEA graduates into the formal school system. Overall, secondary school management and teachers showed a positive attitude towards students from non-formal schools. In general, SENSEA students initially had problems in adjusting socially and academically. A common observation by a significant number of secondary school teachers and head teachers was that SENSEA students were weak in English and Maths. Academically, secondary school teachers shared that students eventually caught up with the rest of the class after a few months. Some also commented that they lacked self-confidence, proper etiquette, and a tidy appearance.
- Parents and non-governmental organisation staff shared the opinion that, by and large, secondary school staff had a responsive and positive attitude towards SENSEA graduates. A few examples were shared of cases that posed challenges due to stringent conditions set by secondary school management. For example, in one case a secondary school had set a limit on SENSEA students and did not admit more than a certain number of students from SENSEA schools.
- Transition challenges appeared less pronounced for the administration of secondary schools compared to those faced by SENSEA staff and teachers. Most head teachers and teachers said they faced no significant challenges because they had standard procedures for admissions that were equal for all students.

Barriers and challenges



Recommendations

For donors

Documentation and research on mainstreaming

- Our study reveals that documentation and research on mainstreaming and the transition of students from community-based non-formal primary education to secondary schools is valuable to the education sector. The transition process is complex and multi-faceted, particularly for programmes that are not associated with government departments. Better research and documentation of these processes will yield better information on how education workers, policymakers, and government officers can play a greater role in ensuring effective transition in local communities. Such research is valuable to donors and implementing partners in designing relevant and effective interventions in the education sector that take into account local context and dynamics.

For government

Effective coordination and communication between stakeholders

- Non-formal education is one of the key priority pathways for the Sindh School Education and Literacy Department to ensure that out-of-school children are provided their right to education. One of the key areas for coordination between non-governmental organisations and the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Directorate could be through information sharing and exchange. Non-governmental organisations can provide data on students for better planning and resource allocation for the school education department. Meanwhile, education departments can use their management information systems to support non-governmental organisations in identifying mainstreaming options, conducting school mapping, and enabling targeted planning for transition. A systematic information exchange between the government and non-governmental organisations will benefit the efficiency of the mainstreaming process.
- Non-governmental organisations can be valuable partners for government departments as they have local contextual understanding, are accepted by local communities, and have the ability to reach, operate, and sustain work in hard-to-reach areas in Sindh. Public-private partnerships can be effective in terms of complementing the skills and knowledge of government and non-governmental organisation partners. Such collaborations and partnerships can also increase the outreach of organisations providing non-formal education, which has a direct positive impact on enrolment in formal education institutes.
- The government can also facilitate non-government partners by increasing access to secondary schools and building a uniform process for the recognition of NFE programmes.

For non-governmental organisations

Programme design

- Our study has highlighted that non-governmental programmes need close alignment with parents and local government for mainstreaming to be successful. Households in low-income, marginal communities in Sindh do not have the financial and social resources to navigate the admissions process. Further research and documentation are required in this area to strengthen the current model and design of education interventions in the primary school sector in order to increase enrolment, completion, and transition into secondary schools.

Social mobilisation and parental engagement

- Social mobilisation is essential for effective transition from non-formal programmes. Parents in low-income, marginal communities require significant support and motivation to navigate the process. The research study shows that parental engagement, communication, and sensitisation is central to the process of mainstreaming. Parents' decisions based on the sociocultural values they subscribe to are crucial to a higher transition rate, especially for female students. Non-governmental organisations must therefore develop a comprehensive social mobilisation strategy for increased enrolment and transition into secondary schools, targeting parents. A key focus area in this strategy should be the mobilisation of parents to enrol their daughters into secondary schools, focusing on fathers as the main decision makers.

Strengthening of community-based education workers

- It is important to note that the success of transition in SENSEA is to a large extent due to the role of community-based education workers. This role is currently executed by SENSEA teachers and education officers. However, as SENSEA staff have their own designated programme roles, they can give limited effort to community-based work. Therefore, it is suggested that non-governmental organisations should consider strengthening the mobilisation aspects of the education programming and explore more ways of bridging the gap between different stakeholders and the community.
- Non-governmental organisations working in non-formal community schools need to consider the burden of mainstreaming on planning, budgeting, and human resources development. Mainstreaming manuals, procedures, and training are essential for community-based education staff to provide guidance around the diverse skills required for this task, keeping in view the varying local context. There is a high risk that mainstreaming and transition will be neglected, as a lot of the work involved occurs after a student's graduation. The non-governmental organisation management needs to consider the process highlighted by the study and devote enough resources to transition activities in future planning and programme design.

Engagement with government departments

- As an intervention designed to work directly with non-governmental organisations, the SENSEA programme largely focused on the efforts of non-governmental organisations to enrol out-of-school children and to ensure proper mainstreaming. However, a major gap highlighted is that the education department has a large role in providing recognition of non-formal schools, students, and education quality. Non-governmental organisations need to engage early and deeply with government departments to ensure that secondary school education officials are supportive, aware, and cooperative. Other than written and formal procedures, which were eventually followed as part of SENSEA, involving government in outreach and public engagement activities at the local and regional level is essential.

Preparatory process for transition

- The findings of the study showed that non-governmental organisation management and staff need to start the preparatory process for transition six months prior to primary graduation. The study demonstrated four key areas to include in mainstreaming preparation: schooling mapping, government approval, parent mobilisation, and secondary school engagement. Earlier efforts towards orienting secondary school management and teachers on how to facilitate the adjustment of non-formal students can be added to improve the sustainability of the transition process. Moreover, prior engagement with secondary schools can help give parents and students more time to select their school options and also prepare the secondary schools in accommodating non-formal school children more effectively.

