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The Global Schoolgirl

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How empowerment can build up society

THE CHALLENGES OF poverty and development have long been regarded in terms of transitive relationships, in which the rich help the poor because the poor are not seen as able to help themselves. This view of the poor assumes they have mainly needs and no assets. With so many people believing this view it isn't surprising that the poor themselves share the assumption that they can't play any significant role in improving their own condition.

Belief in the powerlessness of the poor cripples not simply the poor, but both the left and the right, with each looking to the mechanistic solutions of government or market. Neither has an active strategy for empowering the poor themselves to play significant roles in promoting change.

When viewed in distributional terms — the left in terms of equality, the right in terms of mobility — justice is impossible, because equality is itself impossible and because when some “get ahead,” others are “left behind.” When justice is understood, however, in terms of empowerment, it becomes possible for everyone. With empowerment, the case for compulsion to achieve equality disappears, and no one needs to be left behind. With empowerment, the distributional focus disappears in favor of values higher than the accumulation of wealth as the defining quality, in public policy, of people's lives.

Observing empowerment may be easiest in the traditional and tribal societies that have become the new priority concerns of U.S. foreign and security policy. In traditional and tribal societies people live with preconscious concepts of self and live through roles prescribed by tradition, with few or no chances to break free in search of a better life. Because tradition dominates everything people do, these societies are passive, fatalistic, and disempowered in their nature.

The issues become clear in specific examples. In the very tribal state of Rajasthan in India, traditional roles define all perceptions for many people. In a recent survey, therefore, tribal girls had no trouble giving strong answers to objective questions such as “Did you have a bath today?” but had more trouble with more subjective questions, which require strong opinions. As an example, when tribal girls are asked, “Do you think Nabile, who steals from you, is your friend?” they give much weaker answers than on the objective questions. Their subservient, role-defined answers highlight their overwhelmingly powerless and subservient roles.

An experiment underway for almost a decade in two states of India is producing powerful evidence that the poor *can* be empowered to move outside and beyond their traditional roles. They can start to pursue individual aspirations and dreams while also reaching out to each other, in connection, as citizens. These results in India are encouraging indicators that may begin to change how we think and talk about poverty and development, and hopefully about other, larger issues, including the promotion of change in tribal societies and even the reform of governments.

EMPOWERMENT, LEFT AND RIGHT

EMPowerment” AT DIFFERENT times has been prominent in the ideas of both left and right about how to help the poor. In the mid-1960s the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which became the central instrument of the War on Poverty, was the left's major instrument of empowerment, giving “maximum feasible participation” to the poor in decision-making of Community Action Programs (CAPs). For the right, empowerment has emphasized “getting government off people's backs” — including proposals to give people alternatives to failing government institutions — e.g., school vouchers and charter schools. For example, Empower America, an organization led by Jack Kemp and Bill Bennett, focused most of its energy on fighting big government.

But OEO lasted less than a decade, and while some CAPs persisted, showing the potential of empowerment with good leadership and community support, most did too little empowering and too little integrating of the poor into the mainstream society. Empower America has also disappeared.

Both sides have traditionally seen problems in terms of governmental action — public-policy problems — with almost no role for private, nongovernmental action. This is a serious shortcoming because real empowerment, especially for the poor, cannot be accomplished by governments alone. Private civil-society organizations (CSOs) have important roles to play on these issues. Although public-private partnerships (PPPs) are now celebrated in many places, most real experiences with them are about increasing the efficiency of traditional government programs rather than empowering the poor. To encourage real change, more effective partnerships between government and the private sector need to receive much greater priority in the public debate.

The debate on empowerment has made real advances and is now a major component of the theory of development.

The debate on empowerment has made significant advances in the past two decades. The issue is today an important part of the theory of development. It is also the animating theme of many practical experiences on different issues (education, health) in many countries, with experiments funded by the World Bank and by donor agencies. While results are promising in some places, they are disappointing in many others. Education systems as a whole have not yet started to benefit from these experiments. Government schools in many countries are still so bad that many quite poor people are making sacrifices to send their children to nongovernmental schools.

To expand the role of CSOs, the political debate needs to include a prominent role for them and expand the concept of public policy. One of the most difficult challenges of transferring lessons from the new empowerment experiments to mainstream government school systems is integrating the role that civil society needs to play in the new empowerment models.

Many political leaders and philanthropists believe that the poor have only needs and few assets. At a recent meeting of philanthropists, someone captured this idea perfectly when she divided the world into “people who have versus people who need.” The common model of the poor as *victims* continues to dominate discourse, while influencing the poor’s own self-concept and sense of possibility. This is a tragic circumstance. What is the point of *trying*, when you are either the victim of vast social forces or of government policies that are intractably unreformable?

To understand how governments and CSOs can help empower the poor we must be clear about the role of the poor themselves. Robert Hawkins has argued that outside agencies, including governments and CSOs, cannot empower the poor. They can create enabling conditions, which, in Hawkins’s words, “awaken and encourage development of natural capacities of people to govern their own lives.” “Helping,” by “providing services,” retards and often aborts these natural capacities. When the focus is on services provided to the poor, he argues, the poor become *consumers* (passive), while for real empowerment they need to become *producers* (active).

Among these enabling conditions, the most important are ownership and leadership: The poor must have a stake, which means real authority in designing and implementing plans for change. Ownership can be either formal, as in formal property rights, or informal, as in a self-governing government school. CSOs can play an important role especially where ownership is informal. Leadership follows the principles of ownership — avoiding authoritarian leadership and enabling people to fulfill their natural instincts to be self-governing.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND EMPOWERMENT

EMPOWERMENT CAN BE manifest in both public and private spaces. The economist Hernando de Soto has promoted powerful, visible empowerment in private spaces through property rights. Although property rights are widely used in developed countries, many people in developing countries have no property rights. In Egypt, for example, about 90 percent of the people have no formal rights even though they have “informal rights” recognized by local communities.

We are focused on another form of empowerment, in public spaces (government schools). Educate Girls Globally (EGG), following CSOs in other “difficult” places, is accomplishing extraordinary results by empowering poor, rural communities to take ownership of government schools and reform them in two states of India. It is an issue that has proven difficult to reform. Local CSOs, mobilizing citizens to promote change, play an important role in EGG’s model.

PRIVATE RIGHTS IN PUBLIC SPACES

EDUCATE GIRLS GLOBALLY was founded by one of us in 1999 to promote education for girls by reforming government schools. Community ownership is common in many schools in developing countries, but mostly in nongovernmental schools. EGG’s program was modeled on similar programs in Upper Egypt, Pakistan, and southern India. Focusing on reforming operating government schools and partnering with ministries of education, it combines a variety of different components. Early returns suggest it is achieving extraordinary results in promoting change at large scales and low costs. Working in Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand) and Rajasthan, EGG’s model includes noteworthy features of cost, scale, and additional outputs (community projects) that, taken together, may play an important role in nation-building.

Community mobilization and ownership are central features in EGG’s model, working in governmental schools, as in nongovernmental schools. One of its unusual features, however, working in government schools, is that the model is actively supported by three major political constituencies of the left: government itself, important leaders in India’s powerful teachers’ unions, and leaders of civil society.

Leveraging off government investments in schools, EGG works at large scales and low costs. While traditional school-reform programs regard 1,000 schools (or even 300) as very large scale, after six years in Rajasthan EGG’s model was in 4,500 schools serving almost 600,000 children. Plans are in place to expand to 10,000 schools and more, serving more than a million children. The marginal cost of the program is less than three dollars per child per year for the two-year program — compared to other school-reform models costing \$100 per child per year and more. The government not only feels no threat from this empowerment program, but the state ministry in Rajasthan is currently financing about 40 percent of the program budget, and negotiations in another state will soon focus on government’s paying the entire in-country costs.

EGG developed a powerful operational model starting in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand and then expanding to Rajasthan, the most tribal state in the country. EGG’s work in these states was undertaken in partnerships with the state ministries of education and with the World Economic Forum in Rajasthan — and with independent partners in both states. While it is too early to assert the full implications of EGG’s experience, it may ultimately encourage both analysts and policymakers to rethink some of their basic assumptions about social policy and even security policy.

REFORMING GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN TRIBAL INDIA

THE BASIC MODEL for EGG was borrowed and adapted from NGOs in the most difficult environments in Upper Egypt and Pakistan. The specific community mobilization model comes from a nonprofit organization called MAYA, which promotes reform of government schools in the Indian state of Karnataka. Thus was created the most important difference between EGG’s program and many other community-based education models. Most CSOs avoid working in government schools, which they believe cannot be reformed. They are also afraid rampant government corruption will contaminate their work.

EGG’s initial work in Uttarakhand experimented with a very “light footprint” — meaning a single village meeting. It was soon obvious that more intensive engagement was necessary for impact and sustainability. EGG itself then took over management of the program, signed a new memorandum of understanding with the ministry, and intensified the program’s engagement in 1,400 schools, serving nearly 100,000 children. The first third-party evaluation, funded by the Ford Foundation and carried out by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), highlighted the model’s potential significance:

This model appears to accomplish a cultural shift in traditional communities, shifting them away from fatalistic passivity that promotes only a continuation of habits — away from doing things merely because “that’s the way we have always done them” — to a more active, conscious, creative frame of mind that sees possibilities and especially sees opportunities of people to take control of their lives and improve them.

Focusing on enrollment of girls, the program started to address larger issues of equity and quality, and introduced creative learning in “enrollment camps” for dropout girls. (The introduction of creative learning in regular primary schools came later, in Rajasthan.)

Rajasthan is the most male-dominated, tribal state in India. In September 2005 the state ministry of education signed an agreement with EGG to replicate EGG’s model and develop new strategies for general education reform. Even then, policymakers were aware of the potential for large-scale impacts: If EGG could show results, it would be building a model for reform of every school in Rajasthan (78,000 schools serving eight million children).

At the time, the government of India was expanding investments in primary education dramatically and exploring ways of improving effectiveness and efficiency by mobilizing communities to work more closely with schools and help hold schools accountable. This larger initiative was an important reason for the Indian government’s interest in EGG.

TOWARD COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF SCHOOLS

IN TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS, “experts” help “people who need.” There is no place for empowerment. Believing the poor have only needs and no assets, service providers are locked into a supposedly benign hierarchy in which their help often encourages dependency. Part of the dependency problem is in relation to maintenance of aid. Throughout the developing world — and in the developed countries, too; witness public housing projects in the U.S. — wells and schools and housing projects, costing hundreds of billions of dollars, fall apart for want of maintenance. People, when “helped,” get no ownership. Ownership comes with and promotes empowerment, and with ownership comes the sense of active caring that encourages maintenance and sustainability.

While many programs work only in schools that want them, EGG must work in every single school in a jurisdiction. While various factors dictate different timetables for change, the model is successful in every single school.

EGG focuses on empowering parents, teachers, girls, and even government officials to come together as citizens in communities of practice and in an organic process to reform government schools. Robert Hawkins believes the process needs to start in communities, encouraging community members, teachers, and girls to imagine “a real and better future.” Imagining a better, common future includes imagining that people, working together, can create such a future. Fatalism — and its companion, passivity — have no sense of a future, or that people can influence it.

In traditional programs, the “experts” help “people who need.” And empowerment has no place.

Imagining a future — and then developing plans to create one — is the starting place for everything else in EGG’s model.

EGG’s relationship with government officials is a powerful partnership that includes staff structures that imitate each other, active government help in hiring EGG field staff, and (perhaps most important) monthly dinners between EGG’s local program directors and their government counterparts and their families. If there is magic in this program, the monthly dinners are a symbol of it.

EGG’s approach offers, in the words of one expert, potential “even in the toughest circumstances to transform public education on a shoestring budget.” The program transforms traditional communities, empowers women and girls, promotes extraordinary increases in learning even among tribal girls, and encourages social entrepreneurship and implementation of community projects. One observer calls it “PTAs on steroids.”

Promoting private rights in public spaces, EGG, like many empowerment programs, brings “capitalism” into the heart of “socialist” institutions. But in public spaces like government schools, capitalist self-interest means community and connection, combining with self-reliance and social entrepreneurship, to produce extraordinary gains for the common good.

India has a well-deserved reputation for being overly centralized and bureaucratic. Education, however, is a state responsibility, and at all governmental levels, the desire is strong to decentralize the schools. Within this policy perspective, EGG’s approach actually works. The results are extraordinary in education, increasing learning significantly; in social entrepreneurship, promoting community projects without EGG funding; and even in psychology, increasing the self-confidence of tribal girls beaten down by cultural antagonism.

Through an organic, grassroots process, EGG’s model focuses all major stakeholders in schools on accomplishing what they agree about. Thus, the process generates very little conflict. While the approach is happening below the radar in many places, EGG projects work in plain view, in active partnership with the government, in every school in jurisdictions assigned to EGG. While significant work remains to validate the model — as well as adapt it for other issues such as health — the early evidence from these two Indian states points toward significant (and perhaps seismic) shifts in how we think about social policy.

HOW EGG’S PROGRAM WORKS

EGG’S PROGRAM BEGINS with a government endorsement and formal agreement, which incorporates the model into the ministry’s formal education program. In every community EGG starts working with established leaders, including politically elected village heads, teachers, and religious leaders. Since leadership is an important component, priority is given to looking beyond traditional leaders to “natural leaders” in a new, entrepreneurial society. In cultures with some social development, such as many in Uttarakhand, these natural leaders will make themselves known and get involved early in the process. When they do, the central part of the program can begin. In Rajasthan, which is much more traditional and tribal, it often takes longer for these leaders to appear — up to a year and longer — with resulting delays in introducing the central program.

Early in the program EGG staff conduct community-wide surveys of each school and community, including the name of every girl who has dropped out. EGG has learned that real impact does not happen with mere involvement. Real impact occurs with community ownership, followed by action for change. EGG serves as a catalyst for empowering communities, helping to build their capacity to assume active roles, promoting change. Establishing community ownership requires that the program is about *them* rather than about EGG. Community surveys often reveal basic problems such as teacher absenteeism, lack of clean water, lack of bathroom facilities for girls, and so on. The surveys provide the background for community-wide meetings, discussing why educating girls is important, empowering the School Management Committees (SMCs), planning Action Projects, and creating girls' parliaments (*bal sabhas*), which promote girls as leaders. The girls not only become role models as leaders and achievers for girls who need both, but also powerful change agents through the work they organize.

The first community meeting launches the program, when the survey results are used to assess problems and develop solutions. Discussions consider a variety of issues, especially how to return girls to school, as well as action plans for clean drinking water and girls' latrines. Action Committees then assume responsibility for implementing projects.

The girls' parliaments mobilize girls as active agents of change, going house to house, searching for dropout girls and encouraging parents to let them return to school, implementing hygiene and health education programs, and implementing life-skills training for girls.

During the program both SMC members and girls participating in the girls' parliaments receive special leadership training.

Working with UNICEF and several Indian NGOs, teachers are trained in Creative Learning, activity-based learning, and other innovative teaching techniques, all of which are important in promoting learning gains.

PRODUCING MEASURABLE RESULTS

IN UTTARAKHAND, COMMUNITY meetings led to increased enrollment of girls and plans for school infrastructure improvement, and also promoted debate about the economic and social factors undermining girls' education. Initial evaluations strengthened EGG's belief that communities can produce sustainable change if truly empowered through accountable ownership and decentralized governance. The two-year program became operational in hundreds of schools, increasing enrollment of girls and improving infrastructure. When communities raised concerns over quality, EGG introduced creative learning in residential summer camps for older girls who had dropped out of school.

ICRW's evaluation of EGG's project in Uttarakhand focused on 60 schools in the impoverished district of Tehri Garhwal, where male literacy greatly exceeds female literacy (86 percent to 50 percent, according to the 2001 census). The ICRW study reported that the program, which was active in Uttarakhand from 2002 to 2008, increased community awareness, status of women, and girls' enrollment and attendance. In concluding the model might be an inexpensive and scalable approach to reforming education, the evaluation made two principal recommendations: strengthen the relationship with the government, and intensify engagement with communities.

After its initial work in 1,000 schools, the program, starting in 2004, deepened its engagement in 1,400 additional schools. Its objectives were to establish strong, community-based governance structures, increase the status of women and girls, promote understanding of why educating girls is important, install training programs for employment, and promote development of community projects (mostly improving infrastructure). The ICRW evaluation noted the strength of the SMCs, holding meetings and forming action plans for community projects. Teachers reported increased attendance and performance by girls in the schools, including improved performance in classrooms.

In some ways the most important product of the project in Uttarakhand was development of a group of master trainers who moved to Rajasthan, brought different components of the program there, trained the Rajasthan staff, and provided important leadership for the work there. The last of these master trainers left Rajasthan in 2008. The team is now available to bring the program back to Uttarakhand and to travel to other countries to train the field staff needed to launch new projects.

The program in Uttarakhand featured important limitations. Some related to programs (focusing on community mobilization), and some related to evaluation (the ICRW study was limited to a small, new sample of 60 schools and lasted only fifteen months).

In Rajasthan, EGG began work under an agreement with the state ministry of education and the World Economic Forum. In December 2007 it completed a two-year pilot project in 50 schools in two of the state's most impoverished districts, Jalore and Pali. Expansion followed in 500 schools in Pali, serving 70,000 children. In December 2009 EGG completed this second-stage expansion.

EGG added important new components to its model in Rajasthan, especially during the second-stage expansion. These included a Creative Learning Program (CLP) and life-skills training in primary schools, and also more rigorous evaluation. Results on learning measured the impacts of the CLP, which was introduced in fall 2009 in 53 schools. After only three months, and with the overall program costing only two percent of the government's budget for the schools, students registered the following gains:

- Hindi reading (full paragraphs) increased from 42% to 59% (a 40% gain)
- English reading (full paragraphs) increased from 15% to 43% (a 185% gain)
- Math understanding (up to two digits of addition and subtraction) increased from 26% to 57% (a 119% gain)

The evaluation also addressed enrollment, attendance, and other school improvements; community projects; and life skills, including leadership, conflict management, and psychological strengthening (self-confidence and self-esteem).

During the two-year period in 500 schools, the percentage of enrolled girls increased from 90 to 99.5, while the percentage of students who attend class on any given day, a more important figure, increased from 67 to 82. Without any funding from EGG (but often with funding from other sources), communities showed extraordinary social entrepreneurship, initiating a variety of projects. Of these, two really stand out: the percentage of schools with clean drinking water increased from 46 to 82; and the percentage of schools with separate toilet facilities increased from 44 to 71.

One significant barrier to opportunity for girls is low self-esteem and the reluctance to assert strong opinions or speak up in front of boys. To address this problem, which affects every aspect of girls' lives including learning, EGG has partnered with UNICEF and introduced powerful life-skills and leadership training. The evaluation of this program produced the anecdote, noted earlier, about different responses toward objective issues such as having a bath versus statements requiring more subjective and judgmental answers. The evaluation, which was conducted six months after the life-skill training, was based on seventeen questions, both subjective and objective, and showed powerful impacts in promoting self-esteem and the confidence to speak up. Answers in schools that were especially low pre-test increased substantially post-test.

Leadership begins with self-confidence, and the life-skills training provides a powerful foundation for promoting development of leaders. The *bal sabhas* give girls a chance to develop leadership skills and participate meaningfully in school and community affairs. A government evaluation after the pilot project observed that the girls were arriving at school with improved personal hygiene: hair was clean and combed, fingernails were trimmed, and clothes were clean. These small signs of improvement provide hopeful clues about the potential of EGG's program to affect issues beyond basic education, starting with health.

Independence also serves the objective of sustainability, which is a major element in measuring results.

Leadership training is given for the girls' parliaments and also for members of the SMCs. Some 6,500 girls out of about 35,000 received this instruction in the 500 schools, and the same number of adults (6,500) received this training during the two-year program period.

These results are based on 500 schools. As EGG's Indian partner, Educate Girls (EG), became independent and expanded beyond 500 schools, problems started to appear in data collection and analysis. Some indications suggest similar results as the program expanded to the whole of Pali District (2,342 schools), but the data are not adequate to reach a final conclusion, and it is too early to have results from the further expansion to Jalore District.

Despite this problem of cooperation, EGG supports and even celebrates its Indian partner's independence, which serves EGG's longstanding support of decentralizing fundraising and operations, maximizing local support for the program. Radical decentralization imitates the self-governing essence of the program in every community and would multiply implicit partners, implementing the model in many countries, all self-governing and self-motivated. Promoting development of independent and successful partners is the ultimate testament to the power of EGG's model.

Independence also serves the objective of sustainability, which is an important element in measuring results, powerfully affecting the program's cost. The operational question is: What level of presence is necessary to sustain the results to benefit future generations of children? EGG still needs to answer that question.

The answer to the problem of sustainability and also to the challenge of expanded scaling is training the ministry staff for both. This was a powerful innovation in EGG's 2006 understanding with the state ministry of education in Uttarakhand, which featured training for ministry staff as a major priority in EGG's responsibilities. Given the funds they are contributing to the program, it is obvious that governments have powerful incentives to ensure sustainability and provide for expansion beyond EGG's own capacity to promote it. Unfortunately, by 2006 EGG was shifting its attention to Rajasthan, and all of its most experienced master trainers moved there. As a result, the program in Uttarakhand was deemphasized and terminated in 2008.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

EMPOWERING THE POOR presents challenges for leadership both in the initiating CSOs (here EGG) and in the local CSOs. In creating an enabling environment, the outside CSO needs "to provide structure and a convincing vision that energizes potential leaders" (says Hawkins). Then it needs to recognize when local ("natural") leaders are ready to assume their leadership roles, at which point it needs to start withdrawing. As noted elsewhere, that will happen when "social development" (or social trust) has catalyzed the multiple factors that are determining. In some very traditional communities, it can take a year or longer to reach that point — which delays the initiation of the core program.

EGG's experience provides some other interesting lessons on local leadership. One of EGG's central objectives is to empower leaders for a new, entrepreneurial culture. In traditional, habitual cultures, tribal and religious leaders exercise leadership through the habits and roles defined by the tradition. With social development, increasing trust, and a new and active environment, people see possibilities for collective action that are concealed in traditional cultures. These new possibilities bring forth new leaders. Traditional leaders cannot compete in the new, active, conscious environment; they continue in their largely symbolic, traditional roles, while the new, "natural" leaders assert their leadership in the new entrepreneurial environment without any conflict between them.

In decentralized organizations everyone is empowered, and leaders appear everywhere. This happens in EGG's model in various aspects of the Creative Learning Program, in community projects, and especially in the girls' parliaments, which administer the life-skills trainings and play major leadership roles in implementing action plans.

EGG's model is holistic — engaging leaders throughout the organization and creating multiple inputs in all programs, but especially in creative learning. One reason EGG's program achieves the results it does in learning is that it avoids specialized inputs that put all focus on individual factors (e.g., teacher training) and instead creates spaces for multiple inputs — creative learning, community and family support for education, and programs to increase self-esteem — all of which motivate children to learn.

Children in many countries do poorly on standardized tests because their schooling is based on rote memorization, which does not prepare them to understand basic principles applied in different ways. While rote learning does not conflict with traditional, habitual societies, it is useless in creative, entrepreneurial communities. As people's concept of self becomes more individualistic, creative learning becomes increasingly important. It is hard to increase learning without at the same time promoting a more individualistic culture and concept of self — which empowerment models such as EGG's do.

Motivation is influenced by social influences, and also by teaching models. When a teacher simply “talks at” children they often get bored and learn little. Models of teaching that *engage* students increase interest and learning. The creative learning program used in Rajasthan was developed by SERVE, in West Bengal, reflecting principles in widespread use.

EGG’s community mobilization model promotes education for communities, families, and children — each reinforcing the other, while changing the culture of each community and school. The girls’ parliaments are especially important, taking the lead in life-skills training and bringing dropout girls back into school.

Self-esteem is also important for motivation, especially for girls in cultures that keep them down. Training in life-skills and promoting self-confidence strengthens girls’ ability to learn, especially their confidence that they *can* learn. This training, which the girls’ parliaments organize, occurs after school, and draws great interest because the training, done with cards, is fun.

Leadership training for the girls’ parliaments is also important, training girls as role models who are leaders and achievers. And finally, *community pride* can be an important motivating force as communities implement successful initiatives, showing they can achieve what they commit to do. One such initiative was successful lobbying for special school programs for girls.

A final point on motivation and desire relates to the teaching model. Two elements in EGG’s Creative Learning Program engage and motivate children. First is a program, also in widespread use, that breaks classes up into groups and encourages children to teach each other, overseen by the regular teacher. When children become teachers, it often motivates them to learn. Second: the use of games to make learning fun. Both features free the learning process and avoid total dependence on teachers, who, in many rural schools, are often not very good.

LARGER IMPLICATIONS

EMPowerment programs such as EGG’s have great potential significance for policy on issues ranging from education reform and health care to women’s rights and counterinsurgency warfare. Robert Hawkins’s observation that the poor are consumers (passive) in traditional social services, while they become producers (active) in empowered, self-governing communities has powerful implications for both development and security. Energizing the recipients of social services as co-deliverers of service and the populations of countries as powerful activists in fighting insurgencies highlights the potential of the poor to contribute to virtually all major social and political objectives. Hawkins also emphasizes the importance of these issues in promoting a strong concept of citizenship in place of the weak concept one finds today in both developed and developing countries.

EGG’s emphasis on nonmaterial incentives such as empowerment and connection (i.e., community) highlights their value as economic incentives that could be and should be studied by economists. In making this point, we do not mean to argue that monetary incentives are not important — only that, if possible, empowerment should precede or at least accompany monetary incentives. EGG provides no funding for community projects such as clean water. Communities take the initiative and find other funding, from both public and private sources. The importance of private property rights in private space is widely understood; EGG’s experience shows that private ownership of public space can also play an important role in public policy, motivating private action.

EGG’s experience raises important theoretical issues, especially having to do with subjective versus objective incentives in policy, and it questions the traditional, rigid separation between government and the private sector. When an initiative is organized around citizens, both inside and outside the government, new possibilities appear in many forms. An important idea here is to transform formal elements of government responsibility into integrated (public-private) projects, while also transferring the spirit of private engagement into government institutions.

A final remark here needs to focus on what EGG’s experience reveals about the nature of empowerment. We think that many past efforts to empower the poor have failed because they are focused on single objectives — often on protesting. Protesting is about trying to get others to change. Empowerment, on the other hand — in the sense we have been discussing it — focuses on strengthening the poor themselves, and this requires combining two complementary objectives. First is individualism and self-reliance. By itself, however, it is not enough. For real empowerment, individualism needs to be combined with bringing people together for collective efforts to serve the common good.

These two elements, which represent the two great values in all modern societies — freedom and order, or rights and responsibilities — are also embodied in the term “self-governing”: with “self” representing the individual or individuated value, and “governing” representing the community or connected value. Individuals feel stronger when they are part of strong communities, and people can achieve more when they work together.

FOLLOWING LONG-ESTABLISHED practice in health programs, civil society organizations in all regions of the world have used community mobilization as the central operating principle in their education-reform programs. The failure of many governments to incorporate this concept into their plans for education reform is a major reason why independent and informal schools are the choice of many people who cannot afford them in developing countries. While many governments intend to decentralize their education systems and move to community-based schools, they almost invariably fail because they fail to provide a strong role for local civil-society organizations — integrating them into their reform strategies, to connect schools and communities. Part of the problem has to do with language: reforming government schools concerns public policy, and public policy is widely assumed to be about government action alone.

In tribal societies, subgroup loyalties are stronger than loyalties to any government. Moving beyond these loyalties is a challenge of trust.

Building strong SMCS and community-based schools cannot be accomplished by mechanistic governmental action, as the past has shown. The challenge of empowering communities, working through SMCS, is essentially a human challenge, which cannot be accomplished by commands. Governments, in their traditional roles established in constitutions and laws, have shown little capacity to perform the essential, enabling roles that are necessary for empowerment. These roles center on human engagement, connecting people across the subgroup loyalties that divide tribal societies and make nation-building so challenging for them.

In tribal societies, subgroup loyalties are stronger than loyalties to any government. Moving beyond these loyalties is a challenge of trust, a challenge solved by promoting communication and engagement across loyalties. The first challenge of trust, however, is not *between* tribes; it is *within* them — encouraging people to step outside their traditional roles (to which they owe their first loyalty) and engage each other in active, conscious relationships. In EGG's model, this happens around common concern about schools. As trust grows, "natural leaders" emerge and start to play a crucial role, bringing parents, teachers, community members, and girls together to accomplish multiple changes in schools. As the community pulls together and starts to work together, EGG and its partners provide training to strengthen capacities in life skills and learning — producing multiple outputs of school reform and community development.

CSOs play an important role in this process both at EGG's level, creating the enabling environment, and (ultimately more importantly) at the community level — with local civil-society organizations representing the community. We believe that government officials can be trained to play EGG's role — and they need to be for both scale and sustainability — but not the community's role. The latter is for the community alone.

Personal engagement is the key to this process, and CSOs have well-developed methods for promoting that engagement in independent schools. The great need, however, is to reform government schools, which serve most kids.

Some CSO community-based-reform models, such as the UNICEF schools in Upper Egypt, have been very successful, working in some government schools. EGG has developed another model, working in all government schools. Although problems remain to be solved (especially ensuring sustainability), and more and better evaluations need to be implemented, EGG's results in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan are encouraging. Empowerment models, EGG's and others, deserve experimentation in different countries, with different political systems and cultures — and with other applications, starting with health.

The issue of ownership is obvious in these programs, especially in meeting the challenge of sustainability of assistance. In all global regions aid projects in the form of schools and wells are falling apart because people have no stake in them. EGG's model, like de Soto's, shows the extraordinary resources that the poorest people have when they are empowered rather than helped. Empowered communities that "own" a school or a well will protect them against terrorists and insurgents, and maintain them for sustainability.

EGG's experience suggests three important things about scale. First, the poor themselves need to play an active role in reforming schools and in promoting other forms of economic and social change. Second, government officials need to become active in sustaining impacts of the model and in expanding it. And finally, as in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan for the EGG model, governments need to start paying for reform programs. One can imagine the time when governments pay the entire costs of programs that can achieve impacts such as EGG's.

These issues are especially important in relation to women and girls. When educated, women and girls are the most powerful agents of social change in most countries. Without education, they remain greatly underutilized resources for reducing poverty and promoting development. In fact, all of the major stakeholders in education, including government officials, are underutilized resources in reforming the schools. Empowering all of them is the key to reform education, reduce poverty, promote health, and accomplish many other social objectives. Empowerment is the key to *bringing everyone together* in these efforts — and to ending much of the ideological conflict that is paralyzing political systems everywhere.

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