NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITIES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS TOWARDS EQUITY AND INCLUSION

GPE KIX KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION EXCHANGE **RESEARCH PROJECT**

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

How can a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) professional development approach help Afghan school leaders in Peshawar identify and address inclusion challenges in their schools?

This study examined the effectiveness of an online/in-person inclusive education continuing professional development (CPD) pilot program. The pilot involved a small cohort of school leaders (SLs) serving Afghan refugee students. Over a six-month period, SLs learned about inclusive education through an online course, and worked with school leaders from other schools in "networked improvement communities" to solve micro-inclusion challenges at the local level. Researchers used a mixed-methods approach to study the effectiveness of this program to provide professional support about inclusive education to school leaders.

RESEARCH LOCATION
Eighteen schools: UNHCR Refugee Villages in Peshawar; Afghan schools in Peshawar; Pakistan.

THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CHALLENGE

In Pakistan, Afghan students enrolled in UNHCR schools face significant and complex inclusion issues. Inclusion issues identified by our school leaders, based in the literature, and confirmed by our research data include:

- Extreme poverty contributes to child labour and early child marriage.
- Parents do not value Urdu language or Pakistani school subjects which do not align with their life in Afghan communities
- Culturally conservative communities don't see the long range value of education for their children.
- Children with disabilities are not seen as having the capacity to learn, and are overlooked by their parents and school authorities
- Children (especially girls) do not attend school beyond grade 5 because government schools are long distance from refugee villages.

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Based on the 2019 United Nations High Commissioner's report on refugee education, more than half of the world's school-age refugee children do not get an education. Around the world 84% of adolescents have access to secondary education, but only 24% of refugee and displaced youth have the same opportunity. Refugee educators and educators of refugees play a vital role in providing education to refugee children and youth and contributing in many ways to refugee communities.

OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The inclusive education program included three interconnected components:

01 An eight-module online course, comprising readings, videos, assignments and practical activities, and problem solving tools.

02 Networked improvement communities (NICs): four mixed-gender NICs in total, each NIC made up of 6-9 school leaders representing different schools. NICs collaborated in-person once a month, and virtually through the course forum and WhatsApp channels.

03 Two facilitators (one woman and one man), who supported the SL cohort through the course and in the NICs.

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

1 **School leaders became more confident learning online.**
Based on post-program quantitative findings, almost all SLs reported improved confidence in digital literacy:

How do you rate your digital literacy now?

Legend: ■ Very Confident ■ A little Confident ■ Not at all Confident
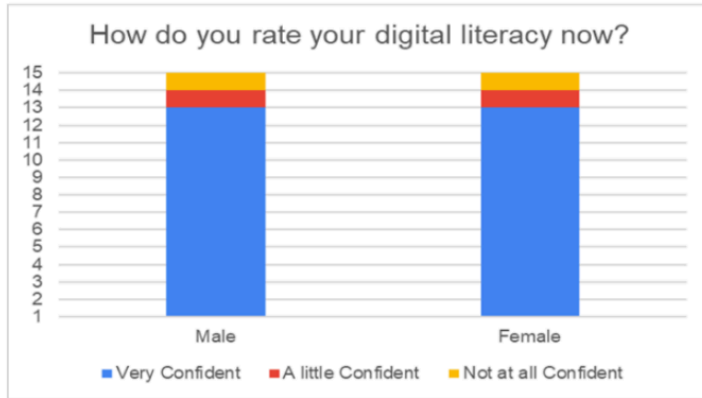
> "I personally had a hard time at the beginning of taking the online course. I didn't know how to use the tablet and join the online group at all. After joining the training, I learned them and now I can do the activities without any problem."
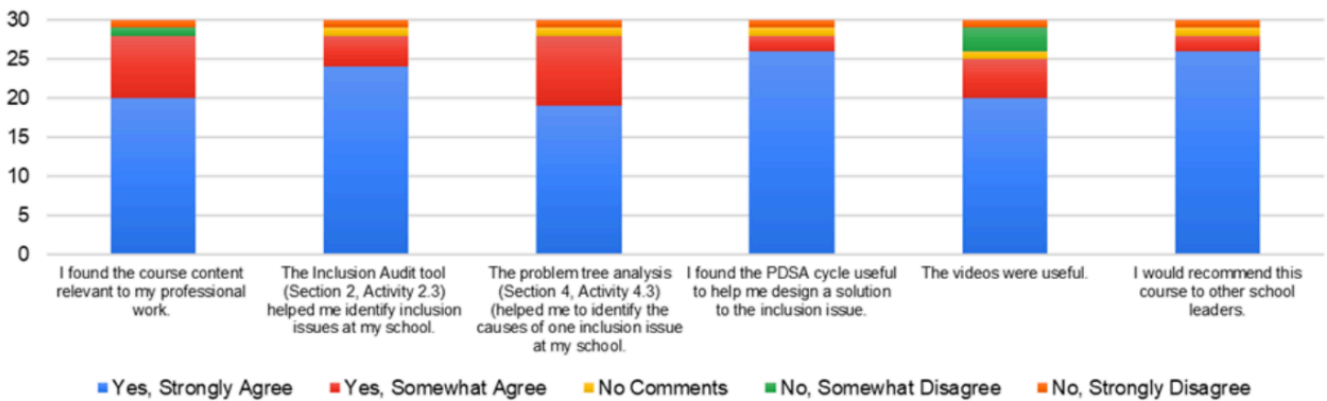
♀ mid-course interview

2 **The online course on inclusion was practical.**

> "The techniques that we learned, the knowledge that we acquired, for example, problem-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle is very helpful. Before, we only had delivered the lessons and solved the problems without proper planning. Now we develop systematic plans which are very effective in our school."
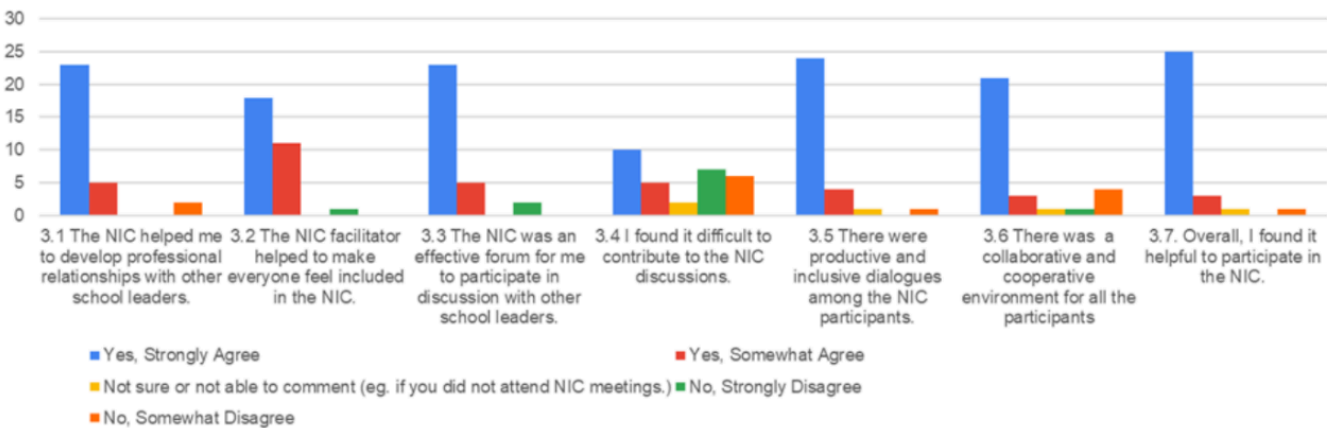
♂ mid-course interview

To What extent do you agree with the following statements? Please tick (✔) one answer for each statement

Categories: I found the course content relevant to my professional work. | The Inclusion Audit tool (Section 2, Activity 2.3) helped me identify inclusion issues at my school. | The problem tree analysis (Section 4, Activity 4.3) (helped me to identify the causes of one inclusion issue at my school. | I found the PDSA cycle useful to help me design a solution to the inclusion issue. | The videos were useful. | I would recommend this course to other school leaders.

Legend: ■ Yes, Strongly Agree ■ Yes, Somewhat Agree ■ No Comments ■ No, Somewhat Disagree ■ No, Strongly Disagree

3 **School leaders valued the "Networked Improvement Communities"**
Based on a post-course survey, the SL cohort was overwhelmingly positive about the NICs.

Perception on Participation in NICs

Categories: 3.1 The NIC helped me to develop professional relationships with other school leaders. | 3.2 The NIC facilitator helped to make everyone feel included in the NIC. | 3.3 The NIC was an effective forum for me to participate in discussion with other school leaders. | 3.4 I found it difficult to contribute to the NIC discussions. | 3.5 There were productive and inclusive dialogues among the NIC participants. | 3.6 There was a collaborative and cooperative environment for all the participants | 3.7. Overall, I found it helpful to participate in the NIC.

Legend: ■ Yes, Strongly Agree ■ Yes, Somewhat Agree ■ Not sure or not able to comment (eg. if you did not attend NIC meetings.) ■ No, Strongly Disagree ■ No, Somewhat Disagree

FINDINGS RELATED TO CHANGED BEHAVIOURS, ATTITUDES, & SKILLS

4 School leaders became motivated and <u>committed</u> to addressing inclusion challenges at their school.

> Teachers are now implementing new techniques in the class and learning observation and using the data to make decisions for improvement.

♀ mid-course interview

5 School leaders realized they needed to <u>work with others</u> (teachers, parents, Shura, and community members) to solve inclusion challenges.

> After enrolling in the course, I have extended my communication and coordination with parents, community elders, religious leaders of the community and School Shura to motivate them to educate their girls and boys and I am observing their behavior change towards education.

♂ post-program interview

6 Through the program, school leaders identified inclusion challenges for the <u>first time</u>.

> I had students with visual impairment so I coordinated with the other school leaders in our group and modified classroom and teaching practice."

♂ post-program interview

> We were not focusing on enrolling children with disabilities in our school before but now they are a priority for us.

♂ mid-course interview

7 <u>Facilitators</u> were essential to supporting school leaders and NICs.

8 School leaders <u>addressed micro-inclusion challenges</u> in their schools.

> We were facing student absenteeism in their schools. We were communicating with parents on this issue before the start of the course but it had very low level results in addressing the absenteeism issue. After completing the course, we have started using the PDSA cycle (Plan Do Study Act) and increased the involvement of parents and Parent Teachers Committee (PTC), which is the School Shura in addressing the inclusion challenge (absenteeism). We have involved students in the School Shura meetings.

(participant not noted)

Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan

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