

Who is Meena?

Conceptionalised in 1990, Meena initiative is part of UNICEF's communication efforts aimed at promoting the rights of children in South Asia. The idea of an animated character which would create awareness about the rights of girls in

South Asia grew out of the realisation that girls in South Asia were discriminated against and enjoyed fewer rights and less opportunities as compared to boys.

Meena, the central character of the animated series which bears her name, lives in a small village with her parents, brother Raju, and younger sister Rani. Mitho, her pet parrot, is her best friend. Imbued with a lot of curiosity, Meena uses her intelligence and resourcefulness to overcome the difficulties she faces. She is never afraid to ask questions and, like all children, knows instinctively what is right and what is wrong.

Meena episodes are funny and entertaining, yet they focus on the fundamental problems faced by the families in South Asia. The stories revolve around the plight of young girls and offer agreeable solutions. Meena stimulates debate on gender discrimination and draws attention to fundamental issues with cultural sensitivity, intelligence and compassion. All the episodes of Meena series focus on the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child.



Meena in Pakistan

In Pakistan, Meena is accredited as Special Ambassador for the Rights of Pakistani Children. This innovative application of Meena is the result of a cautious planning, production and utilization of Meena as an effective communication tool.

UNICEF Pakistan was actively involved in the conceptualisation, characterisation, script writing, pre-testing and production of Meena episodes and printing of Meena material ever since Meena was born. The Meena theme song was written and composed in Pakistan.

Along with adaptation of all Meena episodes in Urdu, numerous printed material such as posters, comic books, stickers, buttons, press kits and special video jackets were produced locally. As part of the communication plans for on-going projects and programmes including promotion of girls education, sanitation and hygiene, health, child rights, Meena material is used to generate dialogue and raise awareness.



With the help of all channels of communication including TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, print media, interpersonal contacts and special events Meena was formally launched in Pakistan in late 1999. This strategy was highly effective in making Meena a household name in Pakistan.

BOY SCOUTS ASSOCIATION, BALOCHISTAN

Boy Scouts movement started in 1910 in Balochistan. When Quaid-i-Azam visited Quetta on 18 July 1943, a Boy Scout unit from the Islamia High School Quetta presented him guard of honor. Balochistan Boy Scouts Association came into existence with the creation of Pakistan 1947.

The number of boy scouts in Balochistan has increased from 30,000 in 1996 to 60,000 in 2000. Each year the association holds training courses, rallies, and competitions for the Boy Scouts. Balochistan Boy Scout Association also collaborates with the provincial government and international organisations to arrange different training programmes for the scouts.

Brothers JOIN Meena



THE POSSIBLE SOLUTION



UNICEF PAKISTAN

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The Challenge

Norms and practices, in South Asia including Pakistan, confirm the fact that girls and women lack equality of rights and opportunities because of discrimination they have to face from the day of birth. Discrimination begins from the home when a girl is born and there is little or no welcome from the family. Every passing day exposes them to a new form of discrimination, ranging from the textbooks to social attitudes. In many places official plans and programmes strengthen the stereotype. Lack of opportunities and low expectations from them deprive them from realising their hopes and aspirations. As compared to boys, fewer girls are allowed to attend schools. Girls are expected to drop out of school at an earlier age, and only a small minority is allowed to go beyond primary education. There are hardly any opportunities for girls to learn technical skills or to acquire income generation skills.

In Balochistan, the province of Pakistan with a population of 6.5 million, women's literacy rate is only 15 percent as compared to 36.5 percent for men. Only 2 percent of the girls attending primary schools complete primary education. 79 percent of the homes in the province do not have latrines. The majority of the children under the age of 1 year are not immunised against the six preventable childhood diseases.

Meena & Boy Scouts

Promoting Girls' Education

Years of working with young girls and analysis of situation and implementation assessments led UNICEF Pakistan to a programmatic conclusion that working with girls alone was creating an imbalance. As the girls grew more confident and developed greater self-esteem through several initiatives, many boys were indulging in inappropriate activities and using their energies in negative directions including lack of support for girls and in some cases encroaching onto their grooming.

Having created Meena as Special Ambassador for the Rights of Pakistan Children and availability of a variety of Meena communication material, it was thought to be a unique intervention to combine energies of boy scouts and Meena to promote and protect child rights, particularly girl child rights.

Brothers Join Meena was nothing less than a breakthrough with the expectations that this alliance of Meena and Brothers will help overcome low literacy amongst girls, discouraging immunization coverage and frequent disease due to lack of household latrines where female mobility is restricted.

Initiated by UNICEF Office in Pakistan in collaboration with the Balochistan Boy Scouts Association in 2000, Brothers Join Meena is being undertaken in Balochistan province with the help of 20,000 adolescent Boy Scouts in 13 out of 22 districts. The existing districts include Quetta, Pishin, Kalat, Khuzdar, Killa

Saifullah, Loralai, Sibi, Zhob, Ziarat, Naseerabad, Jafferabad, Turbat, and Gawader.

The Programme Process

The Balochistan Boy Scouts Association embarked on the programme of enrolling girls in schools in Balochistan by motivating parents to send their children, especially girls, to schools, creating awareness about the importance of immunising children under the age of 1 year against six preventable childhood diseases, and urging people to build latrines in their homes.

Adolescent Boy Scouts receive training on child rights issues, interpersonal communication, and data collection through participatory and interactive processes, including role play, demonstrations, and use of Meena material (VHS cassettes, posters, comic books, stickers, and badges).

After receiving training, each Boy Scout collects the following information about 10 homes in his neighbourhood where children under the age of 9 years live: how many children under the age of 1 year have been immunised and the reasons if they have not been immunised; do the children between the ages of 5 and 9 years attend school, do not; and whether there is a latrine in these homes or not.



On the basis of this information, Boy Scouts create awareness in their communities about the importance of girls education, immunization of children under the age of 1 year, and construction of latrines in every home in the area. Every Boy Scout is expected to have regular interaction with the parents and motivate them to educate their girls. He is also responsible to arrange Meena film shows and distribution of Meena and other programme related printed material.

In each district of Balochistan where Brothers Join Meena programme is being implemented, orientation seminars are held to introduce potential partners such as District Education Department, District Health Department, Local Governments, local NGOs and religious and community leaders to the programme and to seek and enlist their support.

Community awareness and motivation, with the help of Meena material, is being culminated at a district level Scouts Camp where selected scouts are invited to combine efforts to sensitise the whole district.

Yearly grand Meena rally in Quetta is the final stage, when Scouts partners from selected districts and the Governor/Ministers get together to listen to the Scouts about their experiences and progress, recognise good work and supplement efforts to promote and protect girl child rights.

