



Rising from the Ashes:

Fatima's dream renewed



VOICES

Fatima appeared unsettled yet determined to respond to the interviewer's questions. Recalling that fateful day in February 2021, she realised it could have marked the end of her dream to become a doctor. Education was the only chance at it.

It wasn't that her parents were indifferent to her aspirations, but the harsh realities of life didn't afford them the luxury of diverting attention to encourage their daughter to pursue her dream. So all they could muster was a focus on survival.

As Fatima settled into the interview, she began recounting the harrowing details of the fire that consumed a classroom block at the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) Mahuta Primary School. "...*the fire doesn't want me to become a doctor,*" she murmured, remembering the words she spoke that day in the company of other onlookers. Though standing at a distance, the smoke from the burning building filled the atmosphere. If only her tears could conjure rain, then she would have had everything needed to extinguish the flames. The fire outbreak brought a sense of defeat and despair. In many communities like Mahuta, there was no access to emergency services, So, all they could do was watch helplessly as the fire burned faster than the lines with buckets of water thrown at it. This left the 24-year-old school, the only Government School in Mahuta Community, with only three classrooms.

Mr Abubakar Mubarak, a civic education teacher, explained, "*the incident drastically affected the teaching and learning environment.*" Ultimately, what was once a solace for these kids was lost almost as quickly as the ashes from the ruined classrooms dissipated with the winds. Teachers utilised neighbouring buildings, compounds, and the school fields as makeshift classrooms to ensure that the children's education was not disrupted. Kids like Fatima and her best friends Zulay and Fadila had to sit under the scorching sun to learn each day, and on days when it rained, it meant that there would be no learning.

All this took a turn when their Local Government Area (LGA) received N3,496,000.00 in performance grants under a Performance for Results program called the Local Government Fiscal Transparency Accountability and Sustainability (LFTAS). Recipients qualify to receive grants by meeting pre-set indicators that target improvements in their governance systems (read how PERL-ARC supported the conceptualisation and introduction of LFTAS).



Newly constructed classroom blocks at LGEA Mahuta

To allocate these resources, the Local Government Authorities utilised the Community Development Charter (CDC), a participatory governance process introduced by PERL to identify community service delivery priorities. Through the CDC process, citizen constituencies from Igabi, Fatima's LGA, unanimously identified the rehabilitation of the classrooms as a major priority. The funds Igabi received under LFTAS were channelled to rehabilitating the LEA Primary School Mahuta and a few weeks later, Fatima and the other 2,326 spirited children had brand new classrooms. Maryam, a teacher in the school, explained how her colleagues jostled to be assigned new classrooms, while students strained to grab the best seats.

This is one of many stories of how bottom-up approaches linked to performance-incentivised initiatives accelerate governance processes, with the added benefit of directly impacting services and infrastructural development. The twin processes supported by PERL, contributing to change in the governance landscape at the Local Government level are exemplary of the potential of citizen-led initiatives and collaborative governance to reshape communities. Fatima and her classmates can continue their learning with hopes of overcoming the cycle of poverty that plagued the region.

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The Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) is a five-year public sector accountability and governance programme, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The programme provides support to governments in the core areas of policy development and implementation towards delivering public goods and services; supports citizens to engage with these processes and facilitates evidence-based learning and advocacy.

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