

GIDS Working Paper No. 01-15

The Role of Donor Agencies in Education: Does it Pay?

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March 2015

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First printing March 2015.

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Preface

The Graduate Institute of Development Studies (GIDS) was established in 2012 by the Lahore School of Economics. Its overarching aim is to stimulate an interdisciplinary approach to development policy and practice that will help promote equitable and sustainable development in a period of rapid globalization and technological change.

An important goal of GIDS is to promote research and discussion on the policy challenges facing the developing world—and Pakistan in particular—through conferences, seminars, and publications. The GIDS Working Paper Series aims to bring to a wider audience the research being carried out at the Institute.

The crisis in education in South Asia is central to the debate on development. This working paper analyzes the interplay between governments and donors in Pakistan. Comments and feedback on the paper are welcome.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPD	continuous professional development
ED-LINKS	Education Links to Learning
EFA	Education for All
ESRA	Education Sector Reform Assistance (Program)
EU	European Union
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IDA	International Development Association
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	nongovernment organization
PEC	Punjab Examination Commission
PEF	Punjab Education Foundation
PEP-ILE	Primary Education Program-Improvement of the Learning Environment
PESRP	Punjab Education Support Reform Program
SAHE	Society for the Advancement of Education
SAP	Social Action Program
SMC	school management committee
TEVT	technical education and vocational training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Abstract

Pakistan's education sector has, since its inception, been a recipient of international development assistance. International aid agencies have leveraged funding to introduce internationally accepted pedagogical practices and perspectives into the country's education system. From the provision of basic facilities to institutional development, teacher training and curriculum development, and education plans, policies, and reform interventions, the canvas of donor interventions is much larger than the actual quantum of aid. Changing aid modalities, agendas, and competing "equity" paradigms have showcased poor governance, leading to a shift in donor support toward research and advocacy. An analysis of initiatives from the standpoint of what has paid off—from both government and donor perspectives—should provide insights for policymakers seeking a way out of the existing education conundrum.

The Role of Donor Agencies in Education: Does it Pay?

1. Introduction

Education is no longer viewed as critical only to the economic and social development of a country—in a globalized world, its impact extends to the international arena. International aid agencies, therefore, have a stake in ensuring that developing countries take the necessary steps to provide education to their citizens. Historically, the education sector in Pakistan has received international aid since the country's inception. Since then, a combination of the political economy of development and new pedagogical approaches has led to a shift in the education policies and practices prescribed for Pakistan. In some instances, these changes stem from the in-country experience of the developed world; in others, they are derived from practices of international development, resulting in what are popularly referred to as “travelling reforms.”

With globalization and neoliberal policies framing the national education reform debate, the agendas of donor agencies reflect inherent dilemmas whereby the concerns of equity and relevance are located within a market-driven efficiency context. The global economic crisis, coupled with a volatile regional and national security environment and the crisis in education in Pakistan, present a portfolio of competing demands for donors. The essentials of restructuring governance in order to enact and implement reforms within a devolved system continue to garner considerable attention. Analyzing initiatives from the standpoint of what has paid off—from government and donor perspectives—should provide insights for policymakers seeking a way out of the existing education conundrum.

This paper looks at the changing modalities of donor funding and their intervention areas. It traces the role donors have played in the development of national education policies and reform agendas over the decades. It also identifies key turning points at the national and international levels that have led to the introduction of new initiatives or a change in the direction of donor support.

2. Development Assistance for Education

Depending on the country's domestic social, political, and economic circumstances and on its external relations with donors and power blocs,

the volume of net aid flows to Pakistan has fluctuated considerably over the years (Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, 2012). Development assistance to Pakistan began with the Colombo Plan (1950), which was instituted as a regional intergovernment organization to strengthen the economic and social development of South and Southeast Asian countries that were part of the Commonwealth. It was based on the partnership concept of self-help and mutual help in the development process and focused on human resource development and South–South cooperation.

2.1. Modalities of Donor Funding

In the early years, development assistance tended to be bilateral, reflecting the donor's political and economic relations with the recipient country. The growth of multilateral aid is linked to the increased role of institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and, more recently, the European Union (EU). Arguably, multilateral agencies can make aid work better by imposing conditionalities on the recipient countries (Rodrik, 1999), although Stone (2004, 2008) contends that the imposition of 'conditionalities'—such as those by the IMF—affect the credibility of such aid. While a number of other studies demonstrate that multilateral aid is allocated differently and more effectively than bilateral aid (Frey & Schneider, 1986; Maizels & Nissanke, 1984), the logic of recipient countries' preference for aid without any conditions is understandable.

The greater part of development aid for the social sectors has been in the form of grants. It was not until international financial institutions (IFIs) expanded their mandate to give loans for development that countries became borrowers and debtors. Another distinguishing feature of aid modalities is whether the funds—loan or grant—are specified for a particular program or project or whether they are given in the form of budgetary support.

2.2. Directing Funds to Education

Under the Colombo Plan, some resources were allocated to adult literacy and skills development, indicating to governments the priority attached to building human resources in the Commonwealth countries. In Pakistan's case, the decline in adult literacy from an already appallingly low 16.4 percent in 1951 to 16.3 percent within a decade reflected the government's inability to meet the challenge due either to the paucity of funds allocated or their mismanagement (Khawaja, n.d.).

During the 1960s, as part of the International Development Association (IDA) credit under the Aid-to-Pakistan Consortium, the US extended support for setting up professional and higher education institutions and for improving local management expertise.¹ With the government having committed to providing universal elementary education as a basic principle of state policy in the 1956 and 1962 constitutions, the financing of education had become avowedly a state responsibility (Bengali, 1999, p. 6). Increased IDA support, mostly from the IFIs, can be linked to the shift in thinking and lending for education in the mid-1970s. The first World Bank education credit (1972) addressed basic education, specifically targeting rural areas and girls' schooling.

The World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000 not only set international goals for education in developing countries, but also obtained commitments from the international community to ensure that lack of resources should not prevent countries from achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals. Malik (2007, p. 3) states that this "aid was tied to policy initiatives to encourage the fiscal arrangements required to ensure governments spent enough and in the right place to meet international education targets." The United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) go a step further by providing clearer targets and timeframes.

At present, international aid for education comprises a pool of over 30 bilateral and multilateral donors, although the bulk of this aid comes from a few donors. During 2009–11, nine donors—including Australia, Canada, the EU, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, the UN, the US, and the World Bank—provided 97 percent of all aid. The World Bank was the largest donor, providing USD 739.89 million for education, followed by the US (USD 291.36 million), the Netherlands (USD 88.40 million), and the UK (USD 87.4 million).

World Bank funding comprises loans for education sector support projects from the primary to tertiary levels. These loans alone constituted about half the total aid for education in Pakistan in 2009, 2010, and 2011. During 2009–12, education loans from the Bank amounted to USD 365.77 million (equivalent to approximately PRs 32.92 billion). On average, international aid to the education sector accounts for about

¹ Establishment of the Institute of Business Administration and the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Institute.

4percent of total education expenditure (Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, 2012).

2.3. Funding Mechanisms

Donors employ a variety of funding mechanisms that include loans, grants (both development and project grants), technical assistance, and budgetary support. As of 2000, donor funds have also been used to pay off debt under debt swap arrangements—a mechanism used by some bilateral donors such as the Canadian International Development Agency and GesellschaftfürInternationaleZusammenarbeit (GIZ). The recipients of international development assistance include federal and provincial governments, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), other donor agencies, private companies, private educational institutions, and international NGOs. A recent shift from international contractors to local in-country contracting firms or a mix of the two has led to an increase in the number of subcontractors, including for-profit contracting firms as well as the larger development NGOs.

2.4. Choice of Aid Instruments

The choice of aid instruments is determined by evolving donor-government relationships and policy developments. Project aid modalities allow for direct interventions in areas of interest to donors and governments; these usually fund capital costs as opposed to recurrent costs (such as teacher salaries), are generally small-scale, and are staffed and monitored by the donor organization. Smaller projects tend to target specific quality interventions, although in some instances they have also addressed school construction. When part of a program, projects can also be relatively large and complex, such as the Primary Education Program-Improvement of the Learning Environment (PEP-ILE), a quality-related project that was added on to a provincial education program. In the case of the Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) and Education Links to Learning (ED-LINKS) programs, several projects were grouped together with the broad aim of improving learning outcomes.

Under the rubric of program support, aid agencies select their preferred basket of interventions and target primarily the capacity building of provincial educational institutions, school construction, training, teachers and education managers, and textbook development. Donors support components based on their own agendas and expertise. This *modus operandi* has continued under changed aid modalities of financing provincial budgets instead of programs or projects.

More recently, the larger donors have shifted to providing budgetary support to provincial governments for the education sector. However, within the overall budget, funds are earmarked for specific interventions and organizations (both public and private), such as the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the continuous professional development (CPD) program implemented by the Directorate of Staff Development. Smaller donors support qualitative components and/or new initiatives such as the Punjab Education Commission.

Taking the Punjab as a role model, donors have encouraged the other provincial governments to replicate its approach in disregard of local contexts. Of late, some educational interventions and policies have been influenced by lending conditions, such as those found in the Punjab Sector Adjustment Projects whereby the release of funds is contingent on the progress made against agreed-on policy changes, for example, a complete reform of teacher employment strategies (World Bank, 2007).

2.5. Reforming Aid Practices

The reform of aid practices has emerged in the interest of donor accountability and aid effectiveness. At the 2005 Paris Conference, the delivery and management of aid was linked to “monitorable actions” and commitments by international aid agencies and governments.² Donors were required to support partner countries to strengthen governance and improve performance so as to reduce poverty and inequality, increase growth, build capacity, and accelerate the achievement of the MDGs. More specifically, the aims were to (i) strengthen national development strategies and associated operational frameworks; (ii) align aid to countries’ priorities, systems, and procedures; (iii) increase the accountability of governments to their citizens and parliaments; (iv) eliminate duplication and make interventions cost-effective; (v) reform and simplify donor policies and procedures; and (vi) define measures of standards and accountability.

Post-2005, the change in aid management modalities under One UN is not reflected in the design of programs and projects supported by different UN agencies in Pakistan, which continue to retain their individual niche and focus. The increased alignment of aid to country priorities is apparent in the support most donors have given to the development of the national education policy and provincial education

²The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action 2008. See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf>

sector plans. The government tends to endorse the budgetary form of aid partly because this eliminates the need for regular monitoring by donors.

The IFIs have chosen a performance-based approach, together with “sector-wide financing in the form of direct budget support, parallel financing, pooled funding, programmatic lending to support medium-term development goals, and approaches that provide greater flexibility at reduced transaction costs” (World Bank, 2010, p. 4). Monitoring has been linked to outcomes and performance formats such as the Punjab roadmap for education. Greater coordination in the formulation of education sector plans with representation from relevant stakeholders and different donor agencies at the provincial level is also evident. Duplication has been addressed with a clearer division of functions among donors. While there is not much change in donor allocations to different levels of education, there is greater focus on providing technical support.

In the interest of making interventions cost-effective, the management and implementation modalities of programs have changed, with national and local partners playing a larger role. A report by the Society for the Advancement of Education (SAHE) (2013) observes that part of this approach entails funding innovative pilot projects that address key issues in education and can, potentially, be scaled up and sustained. International aid agencies are now also linking education to skills and to technical and vocational training in order to meet employability needs.

3. Addressing “Equity” Under Competing Paradigms

Repeatedly, donors and governments have found it necessary to align their priorities on the basis of competing paradigms. This section examines four sets of strategies that continue to inform the debate on education.

3.1. Formal Versus Nonformal Education

With the nationalization of educational institutions in Pakistan in response to the government’s “equity-oriented” agenda in 1971, the UN’s development paradigm of social justice provided an array of alternatives to formal primary education; these included nonformal education, adult literacy, and distance learning for greater outreach. IDA funds helped establish the Allama Iqbal Open University in 1974 on the pattern of the Open University in the UK. Subsequently, IDA focused on several experimental projects to test these ideas with donors, investing in discrete education projects that focused primarily on training for

education providers (for example, teachers) and providing technical support to the education ministries.

The report produced by Faure et al. (1972) for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) played a critical role in promoting nonformal education as a panacea for developing countries. The nonformal route was endorsed as a key policy option for poorer children in the 1979 National Education Policy. The growth of international funding to support NGOs as direct providers of educational services during the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, by bilateral organizations, led to the proliferation of such organizations throughout the country. The Prime Minister's Literacy Commission (set up in the mid-1990s) advocated the establishment of additional nonformal and literacy departments. Nonformal alternatives have also been promoted from the EFA platform by international development partners, including international NGOs. However, not only are data on such initiatives missing, the slow improvement in the literacy level gives little cause for optimism.

3.2. Public Versus Private Schooling

Concurrently, at the end of the 1970s, the neoliberal economic agenda of the Washington Consensus³ extended the notion of "efficiency" to the social sectors. Countries were required to commit to, inter alia, the state reduction of subsidies and privatization to qualify for funding from the World Bank and the IMF's Extended Fund Facility.

In Pakistan, this translated into denationalization, creating a favorable environment for the private sector in education-related interventions. The rapid growth of private schools in the country dates back to the 1980s when several private school chains were set up, initially for the elite and subsequently for other sections of society. This was prompted by the increase in remittances from the Middle East and the rising demand for education, including religious education, which created space for the establishment of *madrassahs* (seminaries) and Islamic schools. The perception that private education was of better quality than what public schools could deliver gained credence as the government itself acknowledged its failure in this sector.

³ The Washington Consensus refers to a set of broadly free market economic ideas, supported by prominent economists, international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, and by the EU and the US.

During the “globalization decade” of the 1990s, four international events—the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Conference on EFA in Jomtien (1990), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the subsequent introduction of the human development index—contributed to a shift in priorities among international donor agencies and, subsequently, governments in the developing world. With the increased focus on basic primary education, EFA, and equity issues, a system of international reporting on key indicators was institutionalized with donor support in order to capture progress in these areas.

The critique of neoliberal policies by UN agencies (see Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987) and pressure by international NGOs on donors and governments at the Jomtien conference 1990 were instrumental in initiating the Social Action Program (SAP) (1993–2000), the first countrywide, multi-donor-designed and -assisted public sector program in Pakistan. Its focus included, among others, expanding access to education by constructing schools in unserved areas, especially for girls.

3.3. Coeducation Versus Single-Sex Schools

Under the SAP, separate schools for girls and boys were constructed in all the provinces. In Balochistan, in particular, a community-based approach was designed to open schools for girls in resource-poor and socially conservative communities. The decision to locate a girls’ school—staffed by a female teacher—near or within the target community was deemed a success. This strategy was replicated in other areas with poor literacy rates, firmly establishing the focus on female teachers and single-sex schools as a way of achieving gender equity.

However, persistent teacher shortages and the duplication of schools in the face of a resource crunch provided arguments for continuing with coeducational schools. From the standpoint of gender, both arguments carry weight: one suggests that a consideration of cultural sensibilities is essential for promoting girls’ education; the other emphasizes the need for a more anti-segregation and inclusive approach. Continued donor support for establishing girls’ schools has, however, paid off as is evident from the reduction in gender inequalities in primary education.

3.4. Technical Versus General/Normal Education

Attempts to promote technical education and vocational training (TEVT) as a separate stream within the education system have proved to be less successful. Starting with the Colombo Plan, international aid agencies—

particularly the International Labour Organization, the Asian Development Bank, GIZ and, more recently, the EU—have extended support for technical education and skills development. The inability of government institutions to provide quality technical education has given it an inferior status compared to general education. However, the establishment of different TEVT institutions—the National Vocational and Technical Commission, the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority in Punjab, and Skill Development Councils at the national and provincial levels—is expected to steer the country’s youth toward acquiring work-related skills. Some donors also support the skills and technology stream in high schools, based on the Australian vocational education and training model.

The proportion of students enrolled in TEVT programs is about a third of those in general education at the higher secondary and undergraduate levels. When the relatively low enrolment in TEVT is coupled with high dropout rates in schools, then it is clear that a major skills gap is developing, which needs to be arrested. Recognizing that Pakistan is the world’s sixth most populous country and has a large youth population, donor support is directed toward reforming the TEVT sector with grants for piloting innovative approaches to provide young people with skills and experience. It is still too early, however, to judge whether these new approaches are working.

4. Key Areas of Donor Intervention: Success and Failure

International development agencies have played a key role in the following areas, some of which have met with varying degrees of success while others have failed to measure up to expectations:

Contributing to the establishment of institutions

Providing professional training to teachers and teacher educators

Setting up systems for data collection and for monitoring and assessing learning outcomes

Introducing child-centered pedagogical interventions

Promoting girls’ education

Developing curricula, education plans, policies, and reform interventions

Improving education governance by taking education to remote, education-deficit, and conflict-ridden areas

Supporting research and advocacy to hold governments accountable while developing viable solutions to improve the education system.

4.1. Institutional Capacity Building

Donor contribution is evident in the establishment of new institutions and the consistent provision of technical support. The Academy of Educational Planning and Management in Islamabad was set up in 1982 with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide school-based data to the federal Ministry of Education. UNESCO and other bodies helped establish education management information systems at the national and provincial levels in 1992 to ensure that data in Pakistan met international reporting requirements. Although donors attempted to set up similar systems at the district level following devolution, these were stalled by the lack of capacity and commitment.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, the provincial departments of education were converted into directorates with improved management structures along donor-approved lines to manage province-wide primary education programs. To meet the growing demand for teachers, the Asian Development Bank helped set up provincial institutes of teacher education in 1994; the government was assigned the responsibility of meeting recurring institutional costs while donors directed development activities, thus setting the modalities of donor dependency for qualitative improvements.

In Punjab and elsewhere, where the government and donors have been equally responsible for establishing parallel institutions such as departments of education and institutes for education and research in universities, overlapping functions have created confusion, mistrust, and inefficiency. A more recent example is the Punjab Curriculum Authority whose role was in conflict with that of the Punjab Textbook Board. The dissolution of the former was a welcome step, but not before the production of textbooks for the current year was in shambles, ultimately wasting students' time. Clearly, the answer to underperforming state institutions does not lie in their duplication.

With the initiation of education reforms in the new millennium, project-specific units set up by donor funds at their behest extend support to the education departments. These include units such as the Project Management and Implementation Unit in the Punjab and the Reform Support Unit in Sindh, which, despite being located outside government

premises, have become focal points for donor projects and coordination. Their performance, however, has yet to be determined.

4.2. Teacher Education and Professional Development

Ever since Warwick and Reimers' (1995) path-breaking report pointed to the urgency of addressing the quality of teachers in order to ensure access to education, donors have initiated several pre- and in-service teacher training projects both as standalone projects as well as part of larger education programs. The Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan project (2006) has helped develop the National Professional Standards for Teachers, which mandate a graduate degree as the minimum qualification for primary school teachers. The four-year Bachelor of Education degree (BEdHons) and two-year Associate Degree in Education programs are other attempts to bring teacher education programs at par with international practices. SAHE (2013) concludes that teacher education institutions face system-level challenges, indicating that donors have yet to come to grips with the chronic issues of system malaise.

An earlier donor-designed quality sub-project, the PEP-ILE, which was introduced in KP in the late 1990s, combined the provision of continuous teacher training with classroom supervision, and the production of relevant gender-sensitive teaching materials and new textbooks under the management of district education authorities. This holistic, systemic approach was successful in leading to a visible increase in provincial primary and middle school enrolment with improved student scores. Subsequently, many of the project's features were replicated by other donors and governments in Balochistan (the Primary Education Quality Improvement Project) and later in the Punjab. Allocating funds for quality inputs and maintaining design standards, however, remain key challenges for the government in the post-project period.

4.3. Increasing Access and Girls' Education

Despite the challenge of political interference in school site selection, the SAP has helped increase access to education, especially for rural girls. In general, donor-designed school improvement projects, especially in Sindh, have suffered from a consistent overlap of donor interventions at the district level. The easy-access argument allows all parties to claim an improvement. The equity-based selection of districts is a recent phenomenon as is evident from the "child-friendly schools" program in the Punjab, which targets the more deprived districts in southern Punjab.

In the absence of dedicated budget lines, it is difficult for aid agencies to hand over such initiatives to the government. Another donor-driven initiative, early childhood education, has been the victim of government neglect. Given the absence of trained teachers in most schools, the recent addition of a “kids’ room” raises issues of prioritizing in a resource-scarce situation.

4.4. From Educational Inputs to Assessing Learning Outcomes

For over two decades or so, the framework for provincial primary education projects as informed by international aid agencies and consultants has focused primarily on educational inputs. Increased dialogue with civil society organizations on the poor quality of education has prompted an assessment of learning outcomes. International research in the context of the “efficiency of aid” also points in the same direction. However, even where the government has accepted projects such as the donor-funded National Education Assessment System (designed in 2004), following initial resistance (World Bank, 2007), their ownership has remained dependent on international technical expertise and funds.

In Punjab, the National Education Assessment System has been replaced by the high-stakes tests conducted by the Punjab Examination Commission (PEC) as part of the education sector reforms. With all students, public and private, required to take the PEC examination, it has become a tool for rewarding and punishing schools and districts. International experience shows that “teaching to the test” can be counterproductive if teaching for good results is based on a narrow curriculum (Habib, 2013). Moreover, by not sharing a detailed analysis of students’ results with teachers, any improvement in the quality of teaching cannot be expected. Despite numerous problems with the PEC, donors and other provincial governments are keen to adopt it as part of their reform agenda, making this yet another example of in-country travelling reforms.

The National Curriculum 2006—an initiative in which international aid agencies have played a key role—aimed to link outcomes-based education and curriculum reform. In the absence of adequate training, the lesson plans developed to operationalize the curriculum under ED-LINKS are seen by teachers as a substitute for textbooks rather than as a teaching resource. Criticism of the curriculum is based on optimal expectations from ill-prepared teachers, under-resourced schools, and deficient management systems.

The National Curriculum 2007 was developed with donor support as part of the education reforms. It has been designed to elicit learning outcomes and skills at each grade level and has helped cull outdated information and duplication. In general, while teachers and educators have welcomed the curriculum, its activity-based design requires adequately resourced schools and regular class interaction. With many public schools lacking the requisite number of teachers, it has not been possible to achieve the objectives of the curriculum. Furthermore, in a bid to incorporate all elements of the new curriculum, repetitious religious content was removed, leading to a backlash from religious lobbies in some parts of the country.

4.5. Focusing Monitoring and Evaluation: The Larger Picture

Development agency partners have launched several initiatives for better monitoring and evaluation as pathways to assess learning outcomes. These include the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey, the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey, and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which was supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). With most large-scale surveys conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and its provincial offices, UNICEF has emerged as a premier agency providing household-level data and field support to research institutions.

4.6. Education Policy and Reform

By and large, donors' attempts to intervene in reforming education policy in 2000 were fruitless. The Education Sector Reforms Plan 2000–04, which the government conceived as an implementation plan, remained within the confines of the earlier National Education Policy 1998. Furthermore, the education bureaucracy was attuned to thinking in terms of specific projects that donors would fund. As such, donors could only influence the rhetoric of the plan, drawing on the international equity discourse and neoliberal efficiency argument whereas, in reality, it comprised a series of projects with targets and funding requirements within a sector-wide approach.

This did, however, highlight “gender” both from the equity and human rights perspectives, and was later concretized in the form of the UN Girls Education Initiative and the Gender Education Support Project. Both these programs have successfully mainstreamed gender by strengthening government machineries and increasing the focus of NGOs on girls' education. Gender parity has improved and the rural-urban divide in education has decreased. More recently, there has been significant donor

involvement in the process of developing the National Education Policy 2009 as well as in the post-devolution provincial education sector plans, following the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

Post-2000, the push for reform is generally viewed as donor-driven. Both the ESRA (2003–08) and ED-LINKS (2008–12) programs were large provincial education programs designed for Sindh, Balochistan, and KP (as the three provinces with lower education achievement indicators than Punjab). ESRA supported efforts to achieve significant and sustainable improvements in Pakistan’s education sector in the areas of policy and planning, professional development for educators and administrators, literacy, and public-private-community partnerships. An audit report for ESRA was, however, inconclusive as to the outcome of the program (see USAID, Office of Inspector General, 2008).

ED-LINKS focused on professional teaching skills, school leadership and management, improved learning environments in middle and elementary schools, and strengthening governance and information systems. The evidence reflects district-level capacity challenges, lack of support for interventions beyond the project life, and failure to utilize data for planning (Malik & Irfan, 2011), while the persistence of “ghost” schools in Sindh indicates systemic failure.

The Punjab Education Support Reform Program (PESRP) (2004) comprised two phases that were supported by loans and grants from bilateral and multilateral agencies. The program’s overarching aim was to improve access to education and implement quality interventions in the province. The PESRP forms the basis for the current Punjab Education Reforms Roadmap. The program’s success can be attributed to its equity-oriented and measurable components—the provision of free textbooks, a middle-school girls’ stipend, and a low-cost private schools initiative launched by the PEF—which have helped increase enrolment among girls and marginalized rural communities. The impact of its system-related components, however, is more difficult to gauge (Barber, 2013). Regardless, the PESRP provides sufficient justification for donors and governments to replicate it in the other provinces.

5. Adjusting to Changing Parameters

5.1. Travelling Reforms

Most quality interventions based on experiments and research outcomes in developed countries tend to travel with donors (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Examples include school-level improvements such as school

development plans, CPD, child-friendly schools, and school management committees (SMCs). When transplanted, however, in centralized, authoritarian political and bureaucratic structures such as public schools, participatory approaches have not worked (Khan, Kazmi, & Latif, 1999). Similarly, in the absence and/or violation of teacher deployment and accountability systems, teacher professionalism cannot succeed.

Post-2000, such reforms have taken firm root. An example is that of SMCs, considered a central policy reform by almost all multilateral and bilateral donors. With the SAP, community participation in education decision-making became an established strategy for all future education programs. Despite their limited success, SMCs continue to attract funding both from donors for capacity building and from governments who are pressurized to accommodate them through annual grants. Most SMCs comprise poor, illiterate parents and their acceptance has been minimal among teachers and education officials alike. Research shows that strengthening the headteacher's capacity is a better strategy and one that is followed by the private sector (Campaign for Quality Education, 2007) as school administrations in general resent external interference.

Despite evidence to the contrary, a recent report on Punjab (Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, 2014) points out that SMC members were ill trained in procurement, school improvement plans, civil works, and construction in the face of PRs 5 billion allocated to these committees during the financial year 2013/14. Under the existing rules, council members have a three-year term, creating the need for regular training. With a new tier added to the management structure—in turn, requiring cash-strapped administrations to spend more on training—the efficacy of focusing on school councils as opposed to teachers and headteachers is called into question.

CPD programs, cluster-based training, and mentoring models carry the imprint of donor-selected consultants. Taken out of context, they have become the answer to poor-quality pre-service teacher education in Pakistan, attracting substantial funds from international donors. Cluster-based mentoring models designed to train public sector teachers might prove successful (Hussain & Ali, 2010), but disregarding demand-side factors—such as trainee motivation and post-training support in the school—is likely to minimize the positive impact of the intervention (Healey, 2008).

5.2. Impact of 9/11

In the aftermath of the events of 9/11, the International Crisis Group (2004) identified quality education as an essential tool for countering terrorism; this scaled up donor support for quality-related inputs (Hathaway, 2005). UN agencies have since focused on madrassah reforms, gender equity, and child-friendly schools, while the IFIs have sought to tie up education with poverty alleviation and development programs. Ten years on, the International Crisis Group (2014) notes that only modest advances have been made. Barring the Madrassah Reform Project⁴ and the insertion of Article 25-A in the Constitution, most programs in Pakistan—such as those on increasing access, deleting religious content from textbooks, and improving the quality of education—show only a modicum of success.

Support for madrassahs or indigenous education dates back to the 1979 education policy developed under the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq. The introduction of compulsory Arabic classes in all government schools diverted substantial resources to hiring a large number of Arabic teachers, while even today schools continue to face a shortage of teachers for mathematics, science, and English.

More recently, some part of donor funds has been diverted to rebuilding schools destroyed by militants and drone attacks. A number of UN country programs now address issues of building social cohesion and creating resilience in communities, using education as an entry point. On donors' part, investing in literacy and educational programs in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, Balochistan, and southern Punjab is a strategy designed to draw the government's attention to the link between illiteracy and militancy.

5.3. Devolution and Governance

Following the first phase of devolution in 2000, donor emphasis shifted to assisting the government in education management reforms at the district level. However, the provincial authorities have tended to ignore the district education plans designed by consultants and funded by donors (Zafar&Awan, 2005). Program similarity has demanded greater donor coordination at the federal, provincial, and district levels. The government's weak capacity for implementing reforms and the

⁴ This refers to the inclusion of secular subjects such as mathematics, English, and science in the curriculum of madrassahs.

shortfalls of the devolution plan itself require time to create new, innovative, and flexible support structures and systems. With devolution fait accompli after the 18th Constitutional Amendment, donor engagement with the provinces has intensified.

In this context, developing comprehensive education sector plans with areas identified for donor assistance is critical. An example is the Punjab Education Reforms Roadmap, which the Independent Commission for Aid Impact(2012) has cited as an innovative monitoring tool and a very good platform for policy dialogue. The report's recommendations include (i) more support for affordable and equitable private sector delivery of education services, (ii) greater focus on building the government's capacity to regulate the private sector, and (iii) improving standards and monitoring delivery. These are key measures, given that Pakistan is unlikely to achieve its MDG targets foreducation by 2015: 34 percentof school-age children (more than 17 million) are still out of school and just under half the adult population (including 60 percentof women) is illiterate.

6. Building a Constituency for Accountability

With EFA and the MDGs driving the education development agenda, international foundations and NGOs have emerged as key players in helping local civil society organizations redirect their focus from education provision to research-based advocacy (SAHE, 2006). The emphasis on evidence-based research to showcase human rights violations is an attempt to counter IFIs' support for private schools, notably by the World Bank and its affiliate, the International Finance Corporation. Organizations that support advocacy projects include Oxfam and its affiliates, a number of German foundations, PlanInternational, the Save the Children Fund, and the Open Society Institute. However, certain bilateral agencies such as the UK Department for International Development and USAID also fund large advocacy projects.

Research shows that students enrolled in private schools havehigher learning outcomes (see Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, Vishwanath, &Zajonc, 2007). The low-cost private schools initiative assisted by the PEF and the Sindh Education Foundation under a donor-funded public-private partnership has also yielded positive results in the form of increased enrolments, although improvements in student learning are marginal, especially for the very low-cost private schools. The strategy of linking financial support with quality improvements has been moderately successful, as in the case of the PEF's foundation-assisted schools.

However, donors need to exercise caution in replicating programs in situations quite different from those in the better-resourced parts of the Punjab.

In the interest of holding governments accountable, donor support now plays a major role in building coalitions and networks to strengthen the voice of civil society. In Pakistan, this has taken the shape of initiatives such as the Coalition of Education, the Campaign for Quality Education, the Annual Status of Education Report, and AlifAilaan. Organizations are required to share their research findings with the government and other stakeholders through policy dialogues. Increased funding has helped civil society organizations access the electronic media for countrywide advocacy messages under projects such as *Zara Sochiyeh* led by GeoTV and the current AlifAilaan campaign. Recent donor support for legislative changes, such as the Right to Education Act under Article 25-A of the Constitution, is part of this strategy.

In the push for accountability, donor support for autonomous and university-based policy research institutes has created fresh opportunities to open the policy debate on critical areas such as the role of teachers, public education provision, the medium of instruction, and the curriculum. Given the slow pace of progress in education, reexamining existing policies is imperative.

7. Conclusion

Aid that contributes directly to government budgets is recognized as an approach that enables governments to prioritize funding. Yet, as a share of total bilateral aid, such support had fallen from 4.8 percent in 2003 to 3.5 percent in 2009 and 2 percent in 2011 (Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2012). This suggests a move back toward project-based aid, which enables donors to attribute change to their own programs. On the other hand, donors' identification of strategic areas of intervention in education, rather than the quantum of development assistance, has made a difference. By plugging the development gap in the provincial budgets, donors have attempted to direct and, at times, reorient government priorities. The absence of sustained capacity within government structures and a planning deficit allows donors to push the envelope.

Following the declaration of the "Education Emergency" by the Pakistan Education Taskforce in 2011, stakeholders have abandoned the blame game and with devolution in place, the provinces are now attracting international aid. With greater donor coordination and more donors in the game, it is difficult to fault anyone party. The acceptance of donors is

thus at a high point and backing them at the highest political level constrains government officials from being critical. Nevertheless, there is a need to guard against micromanagement by donor representatives and stringent reporting lines, as in the case of the Punjab Education Reforms Roadmap.

Donor support for institutional strengthening and opportunities for teacher professional development (especially at the postgraduate level) have a higher level of acceptability. Since the 1990s, the international development discourse on higher education has argued for private sector provision of graduate, postgraduate, and business education. In Pakistan, the stark inequities in basic education are carried over into higher levels of learning. Counter-strategies include scholarships and technical inputs to both public and private institutions through the Higher Education Commission, which was established in 2001 as part of the country's sector-wide education reforms. Donor support for in-country financial schemes based on merit could be strengthened. The need to improve and expand secondary education is critical: families and communities need incentive to invest in education, especially at this stage where the link between education and the world of work becomes established.

The local and global impact of militancy, terrorism, and sectarianism in Pakistan has invited the attention of international aid agencies. The strategies adopted by donors indicate that their priorities include targeting the poor and vulnerable, creating opportunities for growth, promoting global collective action, and strengthening governance. These areas require donors to renew their commitment to supporting education goals beyond 2015.

A more critical analysis suggests that donors have been instrumental in shaping the programmatic priorities, implementation modalities, and exit strategies that various organizations have pursued (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). To change this approach, the government must put its house in order. Deepening and broadening management capacity at both the provincial and district levels is one such area that requires government attention. The demographic imperative of a very large youth population warrants expanding quality and skills-based education, especially to remote and rural areas.

Addressing demand-side obstacles to universal primary education through innovative strategies could provide an answer. Tackling the issue of language is critical for achieving universal primary education and one that donors need to address simultaneously with their unstinted

support for training English teachers. This is important as all research supports the use of students' first language as the most effective medium of instruction. Finally, sustained political commitment and the prioritization of issues would help counter the misallocation of existing resources.

A great deal of hard work on the part of donors and governments has gone into the development of the provincial education sector plans. It is now imperative that they guide overall education development within each province and that donor support be aligned to the areas prioritized therein. Both governments and donors need to be cautioned against the tendency to set up parallel institutions and waste scarce resources, while encouraging them to commit to quality interventions reflected in education budgets. An evaluation of advocacy strategies would help identify where resources should be placed. In this context, the government needs to take charge of the development agenda to utilize donor support strategically.

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