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SOCIAL SCIENCE AND POLICY BULLETIN

The *Social Science and Policy Bulletin* is published quarterly by the School of Humanities, Social Sciences and Law at LUMS. It provides a forum for debate on the economic and socio-political issues pertaining to the formulation and conduct of public policy as well as its impact. The Bulletin aims to disseminate, to a wider audience, high quality research and policy-oriented work being done by social scientists. The editors of the Bulletin welcome short essays, either analytical or quantitative, that are relevant as well as intellectually stimulating.

In this Issue

Editors' Note

The renewed focus on education comes in the wake of Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan, which has recently granted the young citizens of the country a "fundamental right" to receive free and compulsory primary and secondary education (from ages five to 16). The right to education is thus no longer an abstract principle of policy — it is an enforceable right that can be invoked by citizens in the constitutional courts to compel the state to deliver on its promise. In the context of this "constitutionalised" right to education, this thematic issue presents a dialogue on bridging the gap between pro-education rhetoric and the dismal reality of access to and quality of public sector education in Pakistan. This dialogue revolves around three big questions. First, why is there a lack of collective action on the part of parents to translate the demand for education for their children (which exists at the household level) into broader political reform on education? Second, what can be done to create an impetus for such political reform, particularly in the public sector education system? When contemplating possible agents of change, three more sub-questions emerge: (i) do we need to re-conceptualise education as a basic right as opposed to a good or service dependant on effective articulation and aggregation of demand? (ii) can political motivation be engineered for an issue like education which has historically been a victim of political apathy? (iii) can this political motivation be effectively generated through the "enlightened self-interest" of the elite who do not have a direct stake in public sector education? Third, to what extent can courts really compel a shift in the government's policy preferences and a requisite reallocation of skills and resources through invocation of the right to education?

Faisal Bari, in his article "Public Voice for Reforms in Education", argues that part of the reason for the lack of collective action for political reform in education is the exodus of a substantial number of mostly urban and elite children from the public to the private sector in search of better quality education, and the concomitant encouragement of the private sector by the state to fill the gap in education provision. Though this exodus weakens the possibility of collective action in the public sector, Bari is optimistic about successfully engaging the otherwise disinterested and parochial elite in broader public action towards education reform through the right kind of "environmental and contingent factors". Bari believes that parents, media, civil society organisations, as well as some sectors of the elite can be brought together in a common enterprise and transformed into active and articulate agents of change. Importantly, he proposes making education a contestable political issue by propagating it as an important element of the electioneering agenda of the political elite aspiring to enter or improve their success rate in the political arena.

On the other hand, Irfan Muzaffar asserts that to talk of stimulating the aggregation of the existing demand for education through collective action is to reduce the concept of education as a basic right to one of a good or service, the provision of which is contingent on a purely economic narrative of demand and supply. The appropriate conceptualisation of the issue according to Muzaffar is to view education as a constitutional right to be delivered by the state like any other right. In this view of education, it makes little sense to design interventions to stimulate reform through the democratic process by empowering civil society. Neither, as Muzaffar argues, does it make sense to spur collective action through mediators, as this does not impact the objective conditions that generate political apathy towards education in the first place. Muzaffar is thus much more skeptical about collective action at the level of parents or local communities, given the weight of historical evidence against it. Instead, he suggests that since education is already a "right", its implementation should be brought about through reform campaigns led by the "influential" elite along with civil society organisations and the media.

Abbas Rashid and Ayesha Awan's article, "SMCs in Pakistan" — referring to the School Management Committees that attempt to improve the quality of education — demonstrates that, barring exceptional cases, local communities do not play a decisive role in school improvement. Empirical studies show that SMCs have the desired effect only when either a cohesive community is mobilised by a leader towards community service, or a dynamic school leadership actively seeks community involvement. However, because SMCs are bureaucratically created and accountable to the district government instead of the community, there is generally little scope for success. Community involvement in monitoring education quality is not likely to be effective without political engagement.

Clearly, the central concern of all three articles is how to transform education into a "political issue" for effective reform. Should we, as Bari argues, invest in empowering citizens and strengthening the democratic process through political contestation? Or should we, as Muzaffar asserts, mobilise the influential elite to put pressure on the state to deliver reform, using the judiciary as a rights-protecting institution? Interestingly, both Bari and Muzaffar rely to varying degrees on the elite as change agents. But while Bari emphasises the need for bottom-up accountability of the elite through the electoral process to make the issue of education more politically responsive, Muzaffar focuses on a partnership amongst the influential sectors of the elite, the media, and civil society organisations to enforce top-down reform by the state through its institutions. However, if we are to accept Muzaffar's fundamental proposition that education is unlikely to foment political action, the question remains — how are the influential elite to be mobilised for rights protection, especially given the absence of "enlightened self-interest" on the part of this elite class?

Also, Muzaffar presumes that once something is articulated as a "basic right", it no longer requires broader collective action for its realisation. Legal and political science literature tells us otherwise. There are innumerable examples of dormant rights that remain either unarticulated or ineffective because they lack a wider social support structure. For instance, Charles

Epp — in his path-breaking book on the Rights Revolution — shows that the success of the civil liberties movement in the U.S. depended heavily on a mobilisation structure consisting of rights-advocacy organisations, lawyers, as well as various sources of financing. Interestingly, he uses India as a counterfactual to illustrate that the lack of an effective social structure for mobilisation retards the process of rights protection for the ordinary citizen. One can provide countless such examples from Pakistan as well. Further, Muzaffar overlooks the distinction between protecting "negative" rights (civil and political rights such as speech and association) and realising "positive" ones (social and economic rights such as housing and education). Unlike the former, the latter require active prioritisation on the policy agenda and allocation of tangible resources for effective imple-mentation of that agenda. Consequently, judiciaries worldwide are constrained by the very nature of socio-economic rights in widely and uniformly implementing them or holding political actors to account for policy omissions and failures in respect of them. That said, the one thing that constitutional courts are highly effective at is politicising issues that previously suffered from political deficit, provided that a mobilisation structure exists in society to support this transformation. The collective action that was sparked around the issue of judicial independence through the lawyers' movement in Pakistan is one very visible example of the judiciary acting as a politicising agent through a support structure created by lawyers and civil society members. Thus, while we must reconsider the exclusive emphasis on the influential elite for education reform, we should not entirely dismiss the importance of Article 25A and the role of the judiciary in making education a "political issue".

Public Voice for Reforms in Education: The Case of Government Schools

By Faisal Bari

At the level of rhetoric, everyone agrees that all children in Pakistan, irrespective of contingencies, should have access to quality education, whether it be state officials or political leaders, the business community or civil society representatives, community leaders or parents. If we hope to have *any* sort of future for Pakistan's children, we must educate them in order to a) allow them access to better opportunities in life, b) equip them to realise their full potential, c) facilitate higher growth based on an educated/trained and innovative workforce,[1] d) catalyse the development of a more active citizenry that is invested in the existence of a democratic state and society, and e) perhaps at the most fundamental level, fulfill their basic rights (Pak. Const. art. 25A).[2]

However, the facts related to the educational process — its inputs and outcomes, indeed its very institutions — belie the rhetoric. Nearly seven million children are not attending primary schools in Pakistan (Pakistan Education Task Force (PETF), 2011). The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) is only 20 percent at the middle and 23 percent at the matriculation level (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Not only do students face serious access issues, various assessments show that the quality of education imparted is, in general, very poor (Andrabi et al., 2007).[3] Despite promises in the "National Education Policy 2009" to raise budgetary allocation for education to seven percent of GDP by 2015, budgetary allocations have continued to stagnate at around two percent of GDP (PETF, 2011).

How does one begin to square the rhetoric and the facts? Why does such incongruity exist between the two and how can such rhetoric persist without acknowledging the facts? Why has the voice for reforms in education not become more articulate and effective? And finally, can this *status quo* be challenged to create better political accountability for the education system in Pakistan?

Despair and loss of hope?

Reportedly, about 35 percent of school-going children are attending private schools (PETF, 2011). It is the richer, urban, and more politically articulate parents who have chosen to place their children in private schools.[4] While survey data confirm the connection between income and private school enrolment (Andrabi et al., 2007), the extent and impact of withdrawal from public schools can also be judged anecdotally.[5] Most parents belonging to a certain socio-economic class simply do not send their children to public schools.

Since private school growth has been much more rapid than growth in enrolment, there appears to have been substantial exit from the public school system to the private. Little has changed, even though exit should have been an adequate signal for those running the public education system to indicate the need for reform (Hirschman, 1970). To the contrary, the rhetoric, even in government documents such as the "National Education Policy 2009", has been that the government cannot provide education to all children through the public system, especially with respect to quality, and hence views the private sector as a partner in education, the role of which it would wish to see expand. It is unlikely that exit will, given the conditions, induce quality enhancement responses from and within the public sector.

While exit as such, when overall enrolment in public schools still continues to be substantial, does not automatically signify decreasing articulation of "voice" for quality and/or reform in the public sector system, nonetheless if the more politically connected, educated, and articulate members of society continue to move their children from public schools to private, the ability of the people left behind to argue for and get change is bound to weaken. Where private options have allowed people to opt out of state-provided services, the quality of public provision is no longer a priority. As Khan (2011) states, especially in the case of education, apathy has become the norm:

> Like many others from my background I would complain about the state of the country but would not lift a finger to do anything about it. I was from that privileged class that was not affected by the general deterioration in the country. The schools we went to had an imported syllabus, so if education for the masses stagnated we were not touched by it.[6] (p. 76-77)

The argument given above is neither new nor specific to Pakistan. In many countries, say Canada — where the government still creates substantial entry barriers for private providers in the school market, regulates them strictly, and exerts pressure on parents wanting to swap public for private schools — the rationale used to justify state policy is the same as above: if the elite are allowed to withdraw their children from the public education system, it will be hard for society to compel state schools to either improve existing or provide better quality of education.[7]

Given that the state has announced repeatedly — despite including Article 25A in the basic rights of the Constitution — that it does not have the resources to provide quality education to all children in Pakistan and will need private sector help in order to do so, the option of shutting down and/or nationalising all private schools to attract children to public ones, even if attractive, is no longer viable, given the inability of the state to offer effective governance in any sector it is currently involved

in. Private schools are here to stay, and if recent trends are any indication, they are set to expand at a rapid rate for the foreseeable future. So if having the children of the rich and the elite in the public sector is not an option, does this mean there is no other way for us to build pressure for reforms in the public sector education system?

In a recent article, I pointed out that though parents have a strong demand for education for their children — as is apparent from their willingness to pay even when such payments constitute significant portions of their overall budgets — public representatives have consistently maintained that community members complain of police and other law enforcement agencies, as well as access to state-provided services like electricity, roads, water, sewerage, and solid waste management, but never regarding the poor quality of education in public schools (Bari, 2011). Politicians who were consulted[8] claimed that education-related issues that community members and their constituents brought to them were limited to asking for a public school in their area (if unavailable) or getting a relative/acquaintance hired as a teacher or posted/transferred to a desirable location. The constituents' demands are never about quality of education. The politicians stated that this absence of demand articulation for quality education makes it hard for them to take it up despite the consensus that education issues are important to political leadership, insofar as being a high priority area for the investment in political capital is concerned.

A friend, educationist, and researcher with a deep appreciation of educational issues in Pakistan, responded to my article[9] by arguing that demand for mass education, historically, and in most places where education had been made available and/or was compulsory for all children, had largely been articulated by the "elites" of that country and not by parents or communities.[10] He gave the example of the United States in particular, and argued that the elite wanted to educate all the children of a rapidly growing (largely immigrant) population and were concerned that not doing so would mean not being able to provide them jobs, control them

effectively, or turn them into active citizens in a democracy. Whereas in Colonial India, the state was more than content to educate a minority (Allender, 2007) — even in independent Pakistan, despite the argument for mass education, lack of resources was often cited as the reason for not being able to educate every child.[11]

Since the elite have, by and large, withdrawn from public schools, they do not have a direct interest in being involved. And we have no reason to believe, as evidenced by our history of educational demand as well as the history of other state-provided services, that "enlightened self-interest", of the sort that forms a dominant part of the discourse for mass education in other countries, especially the United States, would be a strong suit of the Pakistani elite.

There are certain points to be made here. The role of the elite[12] mentioned above, especially with reference to other countries, and historically, even for Pakistan, points to exactly that: historical, and hence, contingent facts. They do not clearly point to necessary conditions. In other words, just because the elite have behaved in a certain way in other countries at particular times, and perhaps even in Pakistan, does not necessarily mean that they will continue to behave in the same way in the future as well. As a general statement and rule, the contingent nature of history and the dynamic nature of living make learning from history, in general, a very problematic endeavor. In particular, the argument that since people have behaved a certain way in the past, they will continue to do the same in the future, is a very strong proposition to make and, I believe, to hold.

Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence (empirical, too) to suggest that the same people and the same classes can behave very differently at different times, and under different circumstances. The involvement of the urban middle- and upper-classes, including students (especially from private sector universities), in the lawyers' movement of 2007-08 surprised many political pundits. Where many had been critical of the apathy of the Pakistani youth and middle classes throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the myth was forcefully questioned by their participation in the lawyers' movement. Similarly, the involvement of the elite in the "Arab Spring" has also surprised many commentators.[13]

But there are good explanations for this contingent response. Simply put, people's preferences change over time. And sometimes the changes in preferences occur for many, at around the same time, and in the same direction. This can be driven by factors that are, or have been, affecting them all in more or less the same manner. Albert Hirschman (1982) explains how people might shift between pursuing private interests almost exclusively during some periods of their life to the exclusion of public interests and participation in public actions, and, in later periods, the opposite extreme. Was the participation of the middle class a sign of such a shift having taken place over the years previous to the lawyers' movement?[14] Was the same thing happening to large numbers of people in Arab countries as well, only becoming evident once the movements started? Irrespective of whether the lawyers' movement and/or the Arab Spring represent such shifts, Hirschman convincingly shows that such shifts can and do occur. The elite *can* get involved in public action. The issue has more to do with the right kind of environmental and contingent factors.

Digging deeper

In a way, creating the conditions conducive to elite involvement leads one back to a classic problem of governance: how is the gap between the ideal government and the actual government to be mediated? In a democratic system, elections are supposed to fill this gap. Representatives offer themselves periodically for election and their performance determines if they are to be re-elected. But this is not a complete solution to the problem. Elections may be rigged, restrictions may be placed on those eligible, or the political system may have other flaws that make elections an imperfect way of mediating the gap between the ideal and the actual government. Various political philosophers have proposed specific solutions to the issue. Hobbes[15] argued

that the law-giver himself could resolve the issue. The only problem with this solution is the self-interest of the law-giver. In Pakistan, we have repeatedly witnessed benevolent military dictators assume power in the name of reforms, only to be reduced fairly quickly to undermining governance to ensure personal longevity and other interests. Most recently, we saw this with General Musharraf, starting with his presidential referendum and other constitutional amendments in 2002 to retain his dual office, all the way up to the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) in late 2007 to keep himself in power.

John Locke[16] suggested that the ultimate power lay with the people and they had the right to revolt if they felt that their representatives were not protecting their civil rights. But this too is not an easy option to exercise. The costs of a popular revolt, if one does get organised,[17] are significant, and there is no guarantee that post revolt/revolution, the incoming order will be any better at reducing the gap between the ideal and the real government.

Though Immanuel Kant[18] is not known for his work in political theory, some recent literature has pointed out that he had a very innovative idea, for his time, for filling the governance gap. Kant postulated that the gap be filled by civil society (Ellis, 2005). His rather inclusive understanding of civil society captured the public space that was being created, enhanced, and enlarged during his lifetime. It included what was produced in newspapers, periodicals, journals, and other spaces of public debate by intellectuals, academics, and public figures.

But given his own ethics, Kant demanded that the output considered should represent the public interest. This is also linked to the demand for universalisability in Kantian ethics. Though Kant allowed for the fact that the solution he was proposing favoured order over chaos and, in some cases, might lead to a slower approach to change compared to, say, the revolt/revolution option that Locke postulated, he felt his way provided a much better opportunity for progressive change towards reducing the gap between the ideal and the real government. This also ensured that there could be a continuous tracking of the actual government so that, given the reality of living in an uncertain world, there could be a continuous dialogue between governance ideals and actual government performance.

A lot has changed in the notion of "civil society" and "public space" since Kant's time. But the Kantian notion could be used to create demand for reform in the education sector. The proposal is generalisable to other sectors and services too.

A proposal

The problems seem obvious. Children, parents, and communities are not articulating their demand for education into a priority for political representatives. When constituency-level politicians are not pressurised, they do not pass on any pressure to the political leadership, either. Using the Kantian notion of civil society, and making use of the changes that have taken place in both public space since Kant's time and communication technology, one might be able to find better ways of narrowing the gap between the ideal and the real.

Generation and dissemination of requisite information: Parents and communities need to know what their children are learning and how the schools that their children go to are performing, compared to other schools in the area as well as on an absolute basis, in order to set minimum standards of learning and education. University research departments or research institutes can collect, package, and design the information that needs to be disseminated. Local civil society organizations can not only collect this information, they can also help disseminate it to communities. Local media, whether it is local newspapers or FM radios, can be used for dissemination of information and for getting feedback from parents and communities.

Creating accountability networks: The number of children out of school in any area and the performance

of local schools need to be presented to local representatives and officials. One way to think about this problem is in terms of creating effective competition and/or contestability at the local level. Given that every level of society has elected representatives, for both incumbents looking to make a comeback and those who are desirous of entering the arena of local politics for the first time, it should be possible to not only make children's schooling records and performance a political issue, it should also be possible to create over time some traction for parental and community involvement. This may lead to the beginnings of accountability of representatives on the basis of the performance of education-related variables and outcomes of schools in their constituency. The same process, structured at higher levels, could potentially allow society to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real. By potentially creating some competition and/or contestability amongst various sub-categories of the political elite, the problem of elite involvement could also be challenged while allowing for the fact that it might not be possible at present to create direct involvement of the elite through enrolment of their children in the state-provided education sector.

Conclusion

There is a wide gap in Pakistan between the rhetoric about the importance of education and the actual prioritisation of education by the government and political parties. While the inclusion of Article 25A and our international commitments call for the provision of quality education for all children, the government seems to have given up on this agenda and seems to be relying on the private sector to fill the gap. It is also clear that without creating some connection between rhetoric and government accountability, it will not be possible to close the gap between the two.

The demand for better educational facilities and outcomes from state schools is not being articulated. In turn, local representatives are not taking this demand to their political parties. Part of the explanation for this stems from the fact that there has been significant

withdrawal of the rich from state schools. But state schools still cater to some 60 to 65 percent of school-going children. It seems that the connection that should have been made between the ideal and the real government through the accountability of representatives remains dysfunctional.

Given Pakistan's reality, it does not seem possible to coerce the elite back to public schools. But also given the changes in the nature of civil society and technology, and the reductions in communication costs, elite involvement can be created. One such proposal has been presented above, which is planned to be piloted in one district over the next couple of years. Without creating these accountability connections at various levels between citizens and the state, and without politicising the issue of education in the manner mentioned, it may be virtually impossible to create effective public voice for educational reform, especially in the public sector.

Faisal Bari is a Senior Advisor, Pakistan at the Open Society Institute and Associate Professor of Economics at LUMS (currently on leave). He is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS) and can be reached at fbari@sorosny.org.

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Notes

[1]All growth theories, old and new, emphasise the importance of human resource development for economic growth. The older growth theories emphasised efficiency gains via accumulation of skills and expertise, the newer ones emphasise innovation abilities of people, but in either case, education is considered a pre-requisite for achieving the potential of workers.

[2]Article 25A, Right to Education: "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to 16 years in such manner as may be determined by law." Inserted by section nine of the Constitution of Pakistan (18th Amendment), Act 2010 (w.e.f. April 19, 2010).

[3]The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) results, as well as Campaign for Quality Education's (CQE) work with Punjab Education Commission (PEC), confirm poor quality education issues (not published).

[4]Private schools, on average, offer better quality education than public schools in Pakistan. This is widely acknowledged; see Andrabi et al. (2007) cited above as an example. But it is not clear what this implies for the future of private and public education. It seems to us that the debate is not and should not be private versus public, but rather about improving quality, which is low across both types of schools. For an articulation of this point, see Muzaffar and Bari (2010).

[5]For the last few years in almost every lecture/seminar/talk or policy dialogue I have given or attended, I have asked people to raise their hand if their children or the children of their friends (from their socio-economic class) attend public schools. I have never seen any raised hands.

[6]Khan talks of the Zia period in Pakistan but his argument is more general. It is about the retreat of the "elite" and the richer classes from state provided services (exit) and the weakening of the voice of those who remained state clients in these sectors. Khan refers to health services, electricity, and a number of other state-provided services in the same vein.

[7]The other argument to justify such a policy has to do with peer effects on learning. When children from richer backgrounds withdraw from the public system, it changes the composition of

the class and this can have negative consequences on the learning of children who are left behind. There might be diversity reducing impacts too which may create or exacerbate problems of social and economic inequality, or at least create a negative perception of inequality.

[8]These consultations included representatives of almost all political parties, across all provinces as well as urban-rural constituencies.

[9]The debate was over various telephonic conversations and emails.

[10]Part of my friend's point was also articulated in Bari (2011).

[11]Prior to the insertion of Article 25A, which makes education a "fundamental right", education was part of the Constitution but only as a directive principle of policy, subject to availability of resources. Education sector documents of the 1950s and 1960s explicitly mention that expansion of educational services is constrained by availability of resources.

[12]The concept of "elite" itself is not a monolith. There are different types of elites in urban and rural settings, and not all of them belong to the richer quintiles. Elite interests are also not perfectly aligned for the various types of elites.

[13]There are many issues in the area of collective action that are worth discussing. These were initially pointed out by Mancur Olson (1971) in *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.* But here we are only concerned with a special class of problems within the larger collective action literature.

[14]"By the early 1980s, like most of the privileged class, I was coming to the conclusion that, since Pakistan's problems were so many and so insolvable, the best thing to do was to just look after myself" (Khan, 2011, p. 82).

[15]The A.P. Martinich edition of Hobbes' *Leviathan* (2009) is very readable and accessible.

[16]See any edition of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government.* See *Second Treatise* in particular.

[17]This is where the collective action problems, identified in literature like Olson (1971), become very relevant.

[18]Kant did not produce a single definitive work on politics — his political work is spread over a number of smaller publications. For a flavour of the argument mentioned, see the essay "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"

Education Reform in Pakistan: Through Popular Demand or Political Activism?

By Irfan Muzaffar

W hen worrying about the inadequacy of education reforms in Pakistan, we are often reminded of Albert Hirschman who claimed that public organisations needed political influence (or voice) for improvement in their performance. If voice is to be regarded as necessary to bring about reforms in public schools, then the question of how to inject it in the system naturally assumes salience in debates about education reforms. The current responses to this critical question prioritise *public demand* for quality education. This position presumes the presence of demand for education at the level of households and accounts for its failure to contribute to voice in terms of the inability of the political system to aggregate this demand. The political system, it is said, is failing to articulate and aggregate the widespread parental demand for quality education, and since the un-articulated and un-aggregated parental demand cannot exert adequate pressure on political actors, there is little improvement in schools. This article suggests some problems with this logic by examining the implications of using the supply and demand framework in the public discourse on education reforms.

There exists a critical distinction between *education as a good/service* amenable to laws of demand and supply and *education as a basic right* amenable to political and legal analysis. The latter has assumed greater salience after the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, with its declaration of education as a basic right. I use these distinctions to argue that prioritising "demand"

(its articulation and/or aggregation) is a problematic route to securing education as a basic right for all children. The logic of public demand in Pakistan entails an investigation into the ways in which particular arguments describe *agents* (or actors), their (potential) *actions*, the *purposes* and the *means*, as well as the *scene* (or background) which contains them (Burke, 1969).[1]

Let us begin by setting up the *scene*. The key features of the educational scene of Pakistan, both its supply and demand, are well presented in a policy brief by Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2010). The scene is described by the supply of drastically inadequate and low quality public education, a booming but credit constrained market of private schools, and a strong parental preference or *demand* for education. Here, though, demand is not meant to be an *act* but rather a desire and willingness to pay for education. It is seen as merely existing and playing an instrumental role in the expansion of the market of affordable private schools. In such a market situation, no one explicitly voices their demand. Instead, people express it by purchasing the goods and services offered by particular entrepreneurs. There is no need or grounds for collective action to access a good or service. The scene of the market does not require collective action, but rather, individual choice-making for its operation.

Thus, the market positions education as a private good or service, which is in high demand. This scene needs neither a *demander* nor collective public action to fulfill the demand. Surveys aimed to assess parental preferences may validate the existence of parental demand for education, but it is not paradoxical when said preferences do not turn into a source of public outrage. The market scene does not offer individuals the position of a *citizen* or an *activist* or a *demander* in the political

sense of the term. Rather, it only provides them the choice to be, at the very best, an informed consumer.[2] This, I emphasise again, does not imply political action but rather an informed choice to consume a particular good or service. Political systems do not aggregate demand — markets do. Demand articulation or aggregation is not necessarily about collective political action. Therefore, when the scene is *markets*, demand aggregation signals nothing more than an objective measure of total demand for particular goods and services. But when the scene is *democratic politics*, demand aggregation may signal political action. However, given the historical neglect in placing value on education as a scene for enactment of *democratic politics* in Pakistan, it is very unlikely that it will. If public education has rarely ever been a staple of democratic politics, is it not rather naive to suddenly expect it to be so now? There is little scope for political action in this description of motives. Thus, there is nothing paradoxical if a large majority of parents do not show up on the streets demanding quality education for their children.

Let us consider the scene of public schools while still preserving the notion of education as a public as well as a private good, now to be supplied by the publicly funded education system instead of private education entrepreneurs. In this case, then, we are looking at a scene that also consists of politicians and public servants. Let us also assume that the nature of demand for education is preserved under this transformation from the private school market to the public education system. Here we encounter the problem that has been worrying most policy-oriented thinkers in Pakistan: why does the demand for education — if it is indeed popular — remain unarticulated?

The palpable absence of strong public action does indeed appear to be paradoxical, however, when the anecdotal as well as survey evidence suggests the presence of a huge demand for education. If there is incontrovertible proof of the presence of such high levels of demand for education across Pakistan — and there is — then why, the reformers worry, does it continue to simmer under the thick crust of political inaction? Why are there no

government-shaking eruptions of this huge demand for education? If there was a way to aggregate the currently scattered demand and make the politicians more responsive, the requirement for voice would be fulfilled. With voice injected into the system, public schools will, as Hirschman has foretold, improve. Politicians must somehow be roused into action. However, as I explain below, the rhetoric of demand articulation may in fact achieve the opposite.

The reason this rhetoric fails, I argue, is because it casts the ordinary "citizens" in the role of inarticulate demanders, and politicians in the role of suppliers of education. Let me explain why this does not serve the purpose of injecting voice where it is most needed. But before going any further, let me anticipate some probable objections to casting politicians in the role of suppliers of education. Given that it is perhaps not accurate to speak of politicians as the suppliers of educational services, one could think of them more as those who could set the service delivery apparatus in motion through the political means available to them. This distinction between the supplier and mediator is not important for the argument in this article and I mention it here only to indicate that I have bypassed this distinction to keep things simple. Since politicians are presumably the target of this demand, assuming them to be suppliers does not change the structure of the argument here. Thus, this rhetoric assumes that the much needed political arm twisting of the public education departments will become a reality only when heavy salvos of public demand for education, fired by disadvantaged parents, will begin to challenge the politicians. Unless the demand for education is articulated by these parents, politicians will not seriously attend to school improvement. Since voice resides in politicians, and since it is not given a kick-start by the demanders, the *status quo* of abysmal failures is unlikely to change. However, this narrative construes parents as autonomous, self-contained, rational, and benefit-maximising agents that they are most likely not.

The worrisome consequence of the logic inherent in the demand/supply narrative when applied to public

education is that the disadvantaged parent gets the beating at both ends, firstly by being already deprived of quality education for her children and secondly for inadequately articulating her demand. Actors such as politicians are also constrained (and enabled) by local contexts, history, discourses, resources, institutions, structures, etc. However, in this simplistic narrative, they are easily let off the hook simply because they are seen as passive responders to the public demand. However, as *active* politicians, they are, like anywhere else in the world, seeking re-election. Here it is pertinent to invoke the notions of *selectorate* — the set of people with a say in choosing leaders and with a prospect of gaining access to special privileges doled out by the leaders — and the *winning coalition* — the subgroup of the selectorate who maintain the incumbent in office in exchange for special privileges (Bueno et al., 2003). Bueno et al. (2003) argue that in the case of authoritarian states, the size of the *selectorate* and the *winning coalition* is too small. The implication of this, they argue, is that what appears to be a bad policy from a rational standpoint is actually good politics inasmuch as it helps keep the incumbent in power. I would argue that what Bueno et al. claim for autocracies also applies to fledgling democracies such as Pakistan. While the political office holders in Pakistan are responsive to the interests of a small *winning coalition* to keep them in office, they find it useful to explain their inaction in terms of a lack of pressure on them from their constituents to improve the performance of public sector schools (Bari, 2011).

One way out of this dilemma is to work on the actors on both ends, i.e. by helping both the citizens to demand better and the politicians to recognise that educating the masses is in their own self-interest. This approach then introduces another actor into the scene who occupies the position of neither the citizen nor the politician but a mentor of sorts for both. The trouble with this approach is that it seeks to change the attitudes and behaviours of the *potential demander* and the *potential responder to the demand* without changing the objective conditions which enabled their existing apathies in the first place. As I write this, I am aware of some innovative interventions that attempt to help citizens articulate their demand for education and also help politicians and political parties become more responsive to them. We stand to learn a great deal about their effects with time.

Another way out of this dilemma is to help politicians develop what is called *enlightened self-interest*. This involves reminding them that the positive externalities that follow from quality education for all citizens would eventually work in favour of their own interests in the longer run, and that education for all is a win-win situation. Similar arguments were used by the reformers advocating universal education in the Western countries. While true, it remains a long shot nevertheless. In the near term, politicians' children are not likely to attend the same schools as the children of our disadvantaged parent/inarticulate demander. The demander and the so-called responder live and operate in two mutually exclusive spheres of existence. The crucial common denominator that these different spheres lack is the "to-be-educated-children". It is unlikely that the children of politicians will attend public schools. We need to grasp the significance of this *fait accompli*. What motivation can there be on the part of politicians, or the elite in general, to think about the education of other children, if not either charity (a religious motivation) or an enlightened self-interest (a political motivation)? There is enough, actually a lot, of the former, as exemplified by the foundations of many sorts in Pakistan — those that actually run the schools. But there is too little evidence of the latter. The question then is, why are the elite not motivated enough to think of mass education as a huge self-interest issue? What is the specific aspect of our political economy that enables this absence of "enlightened self-interest"? These questions cannot be answered by simply providing awareness about the importance of education to politicians. It is also unlikely that the objective conditions that have dumbed the voices of the "inarticulate" would change through time-bound interventions aimed at making them more articulate.

Finally, I raise the issue of a distinction between *education*

as a good/service and *education as a basic right* to reflect on the irrelevance of the idea of public demand to the reforms in public sector schools. The former view lends education for analysis in demand and supply terms but the latter leads us to view the problem of education in political and legal, rather than economic, terms. It is mutually contradictory to speak of education, in the same breath, as a basic right that must be guaranteed irrespective of the individual circumstances — and as a good/service that is procured in accordance with the individual circumstance. If it has been secured as a (justiciable) basic right, then we should not expect the public to demand it. Rather, we should expect the legal and executive branches of the state to "protect" it. Basic rights are not supplied. They are demanded as long as they have not been constitutionally secured. After they have been politically secured, it makes no sense to look for their demand. Rather, the activism should focus more on finding legal and political ways of ensuring that the constitutional provisions are delivered in their letter and spirit. Therefore, it is possible that when we invest our energies in stimulating demand by "poor" parents, we move in the wrong direction.

To recapitulate, I have briefly argued that the logic of demand and supply works best when *the scene is market* and *parents are autonomous, self-contained, agentive, and individualistic consumers*. But when the scene is described by the constitution of the state and when education is a basic right, the logic of public demand and its articulation is not as relevant. Basic rights are not goods, and politicians not suppliers. Once secured constitutionally, rights are no longer to be demanded, they are to be guaranteed and protected, just like any other provision of the constitution. The phrase "demand for basic rights" typically finds expression in those situations in which those rights are not yet secured. Would it not sound contradictory to speak about education as a "right" — which requires activism aimed at its protection through political and legal guarantees — and a "good/service" — which is subject to the logic of demand and supply — in the same breath? What happens when, in our rhetoric, politicians implicitly assume the subject position of suppliers? It is only when they assume that subject position that they can turn around and tell us, "Look, no one is knocking at our doors, so what do we do?" This response is appropriate if they are positioned as suppliers of education, but not appropriate if they are positioned as protectors of basic rights guaranteed by the constitution. Once positioned as protectors of basic rights they, as well as the institutions of state in general, need to be held accountable irrespective of demand or its aggregates. The focus of analysis and action doesn't have to be on whether there is (or isn't) enough demand for education and whether or not it is articulated or aggregated. The 18th Amendment provides the reformers with a single point agenda: make the state, its various institutions, and the political guardians of the Constitution accountable for securing the provisions of the Constitution.[3] This requires a concerted, and focused, campaign by the *influential* elites, civil society organisations, and the media. I have emphasised "influential" in the preceding sentence because it is a bit of a stretch to expect disadvantaged parents to collectively voice their demand for education. Some will argue that when people can mobilise to demand freedom and the rule of law, then why is it a stretch to expect the same for education? Such an objection assumes congruence between the (abstract) notions of freedom and education as potential motivators for political action. While there is ample historical evidence for the former as a motivator of political action, there is little for the latter.[4] Finally, by way of a positive proposal, I would like to follow Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze in saying that education is not a sufficiently political issue (1999). Sen and Drèze were concerned with this political deficit regarding education in India. As they put it:

> There is no question that, even in a country as poor as India, means can be found to ensure universal attainment of literacy and other basic educational achievements, at least in the younger age groups. There are important strategic questions to consider in implementing that social commitment, but the primary challenge is to make it a more compelling political issue. (p. 139)

Sen and Dreze argue that such was not the case in the

pre-independence political movements, and they find it "somewhat puzzling…the promotion of education has received so little attention from the social and political leaders in the post-independence period" (p. 110). This deficit is even more pronounced in the case of Pakistan. Given the relatively small size of the *winning coalition* of our political office holders, there is little incentive for them to develop and implement sound policies to deliver quality education to the poorer segments of Pakistani society.

Finally, this brings us to the need for a robust public domain in Pakistan. The political debates about proposals that seek to preserve public interest, as defined by the constitution, ought to occur in a robust public domain (Marquand, 2004). As Marquand puts it:

> Public domain is both priceless and precarious — a gift of the history, which is always at risk. It can take shape only in a society in which the notion of a public interest, distinct from private interests, has taken root; and, historically speaking, such societies are rare breeds. Its values and practices also do not come naturally, and have to be learned. Where the private domain of love, friendship and personal connection and the market domain of buying and selling are the products of nature, the public domain depends on careful and continuing nurture. (p. 2)

It is this public domain that needs articulation and cultivation in Pakistan a lot more than public demand, for it is in the former that the latter finds genuine expression.

Irfan Muzaffar is an educational researcher, a guest faculty member at Michigan State University and a Visiting Fellow at DPRC (LUMS). His current areas of scholarship include history of ideas in education and comparative history of education reforms. He can be reached at muzaffar@msu.edu.

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Notes

[1] As Kenneth Burke puts it: "Any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (1969, p. 15).

[2] Some may argue that the conception of market I am using here belongs to the neo-classical or the Walrasian conception of the market and that within the field of "political economy", voter preferences, collective action, and political demand articulation are considered important determinants of the delivery of public goods and services. Caution, however, is needed in using the political economic models concerning the behaviour of voter-consumer developed in liberal democratic contexts to think about the problems of education in countries with different political arrangements. See, for example: Gladstein, M., Justman, M., & Meier, V. (2004). *The political economy of education.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[3] For a few examples of how legal cases have been advanced through public litigation see http://just-questions.com/category/court-decisionseducation/

[4] As an aside, some have even argued in personal correspondences with the author that higher literacy in the Arab world has played a significant role in fomenting the so-called "Arab Spring".

School Management Committees in Pakistan: Mobilising Communities for Education?

By Abbas Rashid and Ayesha Awan

The crisis in Pakistan's education has to do with access as well as quality. As donor assistance rose in the 1990s, the notion of community involvement in school improvement steadily gained ground. The idea of community involvement in schooling has traveled far, not least courtesy of the World Bank, which in tandem with providing loans, places a high premium on its set of prescriptions for reform. The Bank, while funding public education, has also promoted the idea of public-private partnership. This may take the form of governments providing funds to private sector schools. Alternatively, organisations or individuals from the private sector may "adopt" public sector schools. Another form of "partnership" is community involvement or support in improving the school. The latter mode of partnership will be the focus of this paper.

A review of Pakistan's national education policies almost from the time of independence shows the government's inclination towards seeking partners to shoulder the "burden" of providing education to all. The burgeoning private sector that has emerged over the last two decades is seen by the government as a strong partner, well on track for making up for the deficiencies of public sector education. Parallel to this trajectory, donors are seen as partners helping to make up the resource gap in the education budget. Not least, the community has been nominated as a partner for enhancing quality and increasing enrolment in public sector schools. One look at the dismal figures on out-of-school children, dropout rates, student outcomes, or other relevant indicators would be enough to reveal that these "partnerships" have not resulted in bringing Pakistan anywhere close to the objective of providing children with schooling commensurate with even minimum standards.

In this article we will examine the notion of community-school partnership, embodied in the institution of the School Management Committee (SMC) or School Council (SC),[1] much favoured by international NGOs and donors, and widely embraced by the government. This article contests the idea that the SMC can play the role envisaged for it in the context of school improvement in Pakistan, barring exceptional circumstances. Moreover, it argues that the community, manifest at the local level in whatever form, is not in a position to play a decisive role in school improvement.

Community participation and politics of empowerment

What do we understand by community participation? According to Schaeffer (1994), participation has its degrees and levels depending on the context. Communities can be *involved* in providing services, attending meetings, and even being consulted. However, these are largely passive activities. They can also actively participate in decision-making, identifying options, and judging feasibilities. According to Fullan (1991), certain kinds of involvement in schooling are of limited value in the context of quality: "there is little evidence to suggest that parents' involvement in *governance* (emphasis added) affects student learning in the school, although there may be other benefits and indirect effects" (p. 237). We contend in this article that community participation through the SMC framework in Pakistan conforms to a low level of participation and is unlikely to either impact the delivery of education or improve its quality.

So why does the SMC continue to remain popular as a vehicle for improvement of schooling quality? In the context of Pakistan, apart from the longstanding proclivity of the government to seek partners in what should be a core state obligation of educating its citizens, the "staying power" of the SMC may also have something to do with the travelling reform paradigm. According to Burde (2004), "whether or not they work, PTAs provide a vehicle for INGOs to claim increased local participation in poverty alleviation and social mobilisation programs" (p. 176). So, even though educational transfer implies isolating education from its political, economic, and cultural context, it serves the purpose of providing a participatory and democratic façade, if nothing else.

The import and modification of the SMC format epitomises what Ritzer terms the "irrationality of rationality" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 206) in that the poorest, least educated, and thereby least empowered sections of the community are supposed, by virtue of this "participatory" mechanism, to improve and monitor education delivery at school. The well-off section of the community, barring exceptions, is not represented on the council or at any rate will not be active, given that such parents will almost invariably be sending their children to private schools. Given this crucial "exit of voice" (Hirschman, 1970) from the council, the nominated parents can only play a limited role in relation to the school.

However, exceptions to the rule may be in evidence when the school is performing reasonably well and the teachers appear to be making a real effort, which is to say that community support is triggered in response to the dynamic of a school seen to be making the necessary effort, rather than the other way round. Several studies suggest that the initiative has to come from the school. A study by Dauber and Epstein (Fullan,1991) asserts that:

> Data are clear that the *school's practices* to inform and to involve parents are more important than parent education, family size, marital status and, even grade level in determining whether inner city

parents stay involved in their children's education through the middle grades. (p. 234)

In any case, in the absence of *political* engagement, promoting "community participation" in managing social services may be of limited value. While it aligns nicely with the narrative of equity and democracy, the rhetoric of community participation runs the risk of engendering complacency or worse: "rather than the vibrant civil society it is meant to produce, community participation promoted with uncritical enthusiasm in the field of educational development and education in emergencies, runs the risk of leaving disillusioned and unempowered communities in its wake" (Burde, 2004, p. 73). *Participation*, sans the *political*, invariably means that the power to set and sustain the agenda rests elsewhere and the community, with its low-level participation, acquires little by way of agency.

What we find then is that, regardless of impact, the emphasis on a greater role for the community conveniently lends itself to an implicit alignment with the discourse of democratisation, local empowerment, decentralisation/devolution and school-based management. As such, SMCs are seen as the vehicle for ensuring community engagement in the process of school improvement, not the least in Pakistan.

What we know about SMCs in Pakistan

Community or parent participation committees exist in each province of Pakistan. These committees consist of local education stakeholders, usually parents, head teachers and school teachers, community members, government representatives, and in some cases, students. More recently, in Punjab, "notables" have been added to the proposed list of members.

For the most part, such committees are expected to accomplish some or all of the following: motivate communities to send their children to school and reduce dropout rates; monitor student and teacher attendance; monitor performance of teachers and staff; plan and execute school infrastructure improvement; purchase

furniture, equipments and books; raise local resources; and "develop mutual confidence and trust" between teachers and parents. Taking the example of Punjab, any issues with regard to SMC functioning must be reported to officials who are part of the district bureaucracy, and financial oversight of the SMC is carried out by office bearers of the Department of Education (as opposed to members of the community). Both in terms of formation as well as accountability then, the SMC enterprise is rendered hierarchical, employing a top-down process rather than a community-led horizontal one (as illustrated in the case studies described later).

Community involvement through SMCs as the primary engine for school-based improvement and reform underpins many a government policy formulation. In the Punjab alone, since 1994, the SMC has undergone at least five rounds of reconstitution and capacity-building, each time seeking to address the perennial issue of efficacy. And as recently as 2008, assessments by the government still indicate that the SMC requires more "capacity building". Alongside reform projects, substantial funding has been allocated to SMCs regardless of their capacity to absorb that funding. In Punjab, the 2007-08 budget for SMCs of PKR 772 million was revised to PKR 53 million, indicating that only seven percent of the budgeted amount was spent — yet allocation for 2008-09 was increased to PKR 1,022 million. Similar sums have been allocated in Sindh. Despite such substantial funding and continuous attempts towards improvement, the SMC remains unable to perform as expected.

Perspectives on SMC performance

A number of research studies conducted over the years on SMCs and their performance point to several key issues. A study exploring community participation through SMCs as far back as 1999 (Khan, 2003) looked at a sample of 149 government and NGO schools across all provinces. It found that in government schools, parents and communities were usually oblivious to the existence of the SMC and only one of the 43 government schools had a functioning SMC. The majority of members were teachers, not parents. And generally teachers viewed parents' involvement as a threat and an interference in their affairs. Parents felt that they lacked the time, resources, and ability to play a role in the school, particularly with respect to monitoring quality. The role of the teacher was seen to be beyond the purview of the community.

More recent studies, such as the community stakeholder consultations of the Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP) in three districts of southern Punjab (World Bank, 2006), also found similar issues. First, the study found that community members were often informed rather than consulted on decisions by the head teacher and SMC proceedings were often dominated by the head teachers or district education officers. Secondly, it found that community involvement at a certain level often existed prior to the formation of the SMC as well. Finally, despite the support of district education officials, it had not been possible to improve the attendance and teaching performance of teachers in most cases.

This perception of SMC ineffectiveness is, on occasion, echoed by donors as well, who believe the problem lies in the dominant role of teachers. A study report on devolution in Pakistan by ADB, DFID, and the World Bank (2004), says:

> For their part, SMCs…operate with varying degrees of effectiveness. Most are still largely controlled by head teachers who continue to select members, and school management remains *de facto* with the staff. Most SMC members, moreover, know little if anything about their roles and responsibilities. (p. 11)

In summary, these studies and reports point out that despite the fact that SMCs are dominated by school-based staff, teachers nonetheless resent parent or SMC interference in school matters, while the SMC has limited power to improve the school since it lacks the authority to address issues such as teacher absenteeism. It appears then that participation through the SMCs in Pakistan is largely limited to passive involvement and is actually a form of tokenism, where community members have no

real opportunities to effect change.

Underlying issues with SMCs

What then seems to be the issue with the SMC? There is substantial funding for SMCs, and reform projects make continuous attempts to address their capacity issues. However, it appears that these attempts are missing the point. The way in which the SMC has been conceptualised is itself problematic, starting with the notion that the SMC represents the community.

Instead of emerging as an organically developed community organisation, the SMC is a bureaucratically created, officially notified, and often NGO-assisted community forum. In this scenario, the SMC is subject to written rules of conduct; it is formally notified by the district authorities; its expenditure is subject to scrutiny by district education officers; and the lines of accountability run not to the community, but rather, to the district government. This raises the question as to whether SMCs are, in effect, an organisational construct for the channeling of community energy, or quite simply, the rule-based and government-funded lowest imple-mentation tier of the district education bureaucracy.

At best, communities may seek to support schools, but the kind of participation suggested by the SMC calls for a more energised, pro-active approach. To that end, there is an underlying assumption that the community, as represented on the SMC, has the "voice" to effect change such as curbing teacher absenteeism and improving education delivery. However, the reality is that the SMC usually consists of community members who are the least empowered and thus least likely to accomplish the tasks assigned to them.

SMCs are expected to take on a wide array of roles and responsibilities to improve school quality. However, when most schools conform to a very low quality baseline in terms of infrastructure, teaching, or leadership, how it is possible for an SMC — lacking voice and leverage — to accomplish these goals? Studies have shown that where community organisations are effective, there is

usually some level of existing quality within the school — something the community can work with to improve.

Community participation in Pakistan

Here we explore some exceptional cases of community participation to identify a few of the factors underlying motivation and success. The cases are a part of a multi-case research study of 43 schools, in public and private sectors, spanning eight locations across Pakistan (CQE, 2010). As one of its themes, the study examined the nature of community participation in the relatively better schools.

Case One
In a rural girls' school in Gwadar (Balochistan), we find a dynamic head teacher, Begum. She demonstrates a deep and abiding interest in all aspects of the school. Begum spends most of her day interacting with her teachers and students — visiting teachers during trainings to evaluate and support their classroom practice, while also supporting them as they become equipped with better methods of teaching. She engages in school improvement planning by collaborating with the SMC to develop and implement plans. As a motivator, she works from a position of trust that she has been able to generate in her students, teachers, and school community. Her judicious spending of funds is demonstrated by the transformation of the school from a two-room primary school to a thriving secondary school in less than ten years. As a consequence of this dynamic leadership at the school level, we find increased community responsiveness and a pro-active SMC. Members of the community protested on numerous occasions when the department tried to transfer Begum, thus demonstrating their commitment to protect the interests of the school.

This case is illustrative of how dynamic school leadership *can* make a difference. A school may gain the trust of the community through efforts to improve itself, if it takes the lead in developing a strong relationship with the community.

Case Two

In the tight-knit *Ismaili* community of the Northern Areas — a sect renowned for the value they place on education and community service — we find a school with staff and community in harmony with each other, both respectful and appreciative of each others' roles in improving quality. We find strong leadership amongst the head teacher and teachers. Teachers demonstrate their dedication by providing extra coaching to students over vacations, and daily, after prayers at the community center. School achievement is apparent from the successful entry of many of the school's students to the best high school in Gilgit, while a teacher from the school has been honored with the Best Teacher Award for Gilgit. The Village Education Committee (VEC) commends the commitment of the teachers and points out that because the local community has a very positive image of the school, they have no hesitation in extending their support and cooperation to it.

As a consequence of this, and partly as a result of its somewhat unique community ethic, we find that the VEC has consistently contributed to the school over the years. It works with the school to hire teachers for vacant positions and monitors teacher attendance. It also constructed 12 classrooms, with each household not only contributing a specific amount of money for construction, but also participating in the manual work of the project. Most of the teachers at the school appreciate the role and contributions of the VEC. They like the idea of selecting the VEC members from amongst the parents of their students, because as one teacher commented, "their own children are at the school, they take genuine interest in school performance."

In this case again the community participates and is effective, not least because of the school-based leadership and the general perception within the community that the school and its staff are making a real effort to improve the quality of education. However, in this case there is an additional factor at work. The mobilisation of the *Ismaili* community stems from the pronounced emphasis on education by their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, making them more likely to look for ways to meaningfully engage with the school.

In the examples above, there are clearly elements beyond the rule-based organisational framework of the SMC that ensure community participation linked to school success: (1) school leadership through the head teacher, and (2) a cohesive community mobilised within an ethos of community service. The mere insertion of an SMC does not appear to be of major consequence. Therefore, while effective means must be employed to ensure community engagement, the government, by way of policy reform, needs to work harder to ensure the availability of *motivated teachers, including the head teacher*, as the key instrument for improving school quality.

Conclusion

What is clear from the foregoing is that SMCs, at least in Pakistan's public education sector, have not been able to meet expectations in supporting schools or improving education delivery. The underlying issues appear to be that the SMCs are not organically developed; poorer communities lack the voice to bring about change; and most schools lack even the minimum quality that could allow the community to get engaged.

Parental involvement through the SMCs is limited and often resented by school-based staff that views SMC efforts to monitor or question school conduct as unnecessary interference. As such, when the school representatives come to dominate the SMC, which happens often, they have little interest in making it a viable entity. However, in exceptional cases, where the school staff itself is interested in engaging the community, the results are more likely to be positive. Of course, the community may play a key role in establishing a productive relationship with the school, but that is more likely where the community is already mobilised and has little to do with the formation of the SMC.

Consequently, policies must focus on investing in school leadership through careful identification of good teachers and head teachers, by motivating them and ensuring their professional development. Implicit in such a policy

framework would be the assumption that in school-community relations the initiative can as easily, and perhaps to better effect, rest with the school rather than the community. If the school is seen to be making an effort and achieving some level of quality, the community is often ready to provide support. Therefore continuing to invest in quality elements in the school is extremely important in this context.

Abbas Rashid works in the area of education policy research and advocacy. He is Chairman, Society for the Advancement of Education (SAHE), and Coordinator of the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE). He can be reached at abbasrh@gmail.com.

Ayesha Awan is an education policy researcher affiliated with CQE. She may be reached at ayesha.awan@gmail.com.

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Notes

[1]School committees involving parents have gone by different names over time and across provinces, for example, School Council (SC) in Punjab, Parent Teacher School Management Committees (PTSMC) in Balochistan, and previously Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in several provinces.

Revealing Facts: The State of Education

A comprehensive picture of the state of education in the country requires looking at three core issues: enrolment, equity, and quality of education. For this purpose, an Education Index has been computed that accounts for these aspects of education for children up to the primary school-going age level.

The four quantifiable indicators used to construct the Education Index[1] are:

- Indicator 1: Enrolment in pre-primary education, measured by the percentage of children 3-4 years of age currently in pre-school;
- Indicator 2: Primary net enrolment rate, measured by the percentage of primary school age children attending primary school;
- Indicator 3: Quality of education, measured by the percentage of children entering grade 1 who stay in school till grade 5;
- Indicator 4: Gender equity, measured by Gender Parity Index (ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary schools).
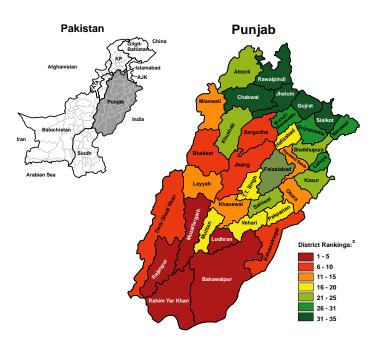
Figure 1: Education Index (EI) for Punjab[2]

Muzaffargarh and Rawalpindi are the lowest and the highest ranking districts, respectively, on the Education Index and the gap between them is substantial. Nineteen of the 35 districts fall below the 0.5 mark on the index scale (scale ranges from 0 to 1 and measures educational deprivation, with 0 for the most deprived district and 1 for the least deprived).[4] The most deprived districts belong to southern Punjab, while the most developed districts are in the north.
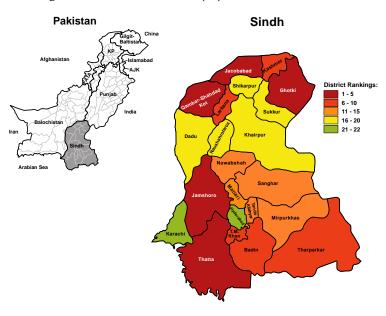
Figure 2: Education Index (EI) for Sindh[5]

Intra-provincial inequality is the highest in Sindh: the EI for Karachi is more than 14 times that for Thatta. Moreover, the province performs the worst in terms of educational attainment, with a shocking 82 percent of the districts falling below the halfway mark on the scale.
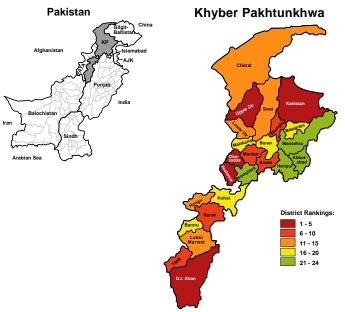
Figure 3: Education Index (EI) for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa[6]

The EI for Mansehra, ranked the highest, is more than two and a half times that of Kohistan, the lowest ranked district. Nine of the 24 districts fall below the halfway point (0.5, on a scale from 0 to 1). An interesting point to note is that the capital of the province, Peshawar, is one of the five lowest-ranked districts.
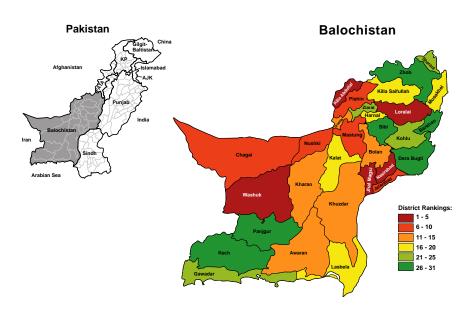
Figure 4: Education Index (EI) for Balochistan[7]

The gap between Washuk and Kech (the lowest and the highest ranked districts), though substantial, is not as wide as that for Sindh: the EI for Kech is more than 5.8 times that for Washuk.
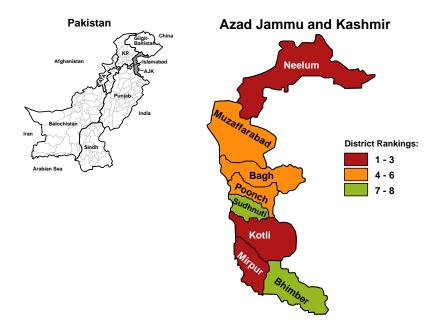
Figure 5: Education Index (EI) for AJK[8]

Sixty-five percent of the districts fall below the midway point (0.5). The gap between Neelum and Bhimber (the lowest and the highest ranking districts) is immense, as Neelum scores 0 on our Education Index.

Notes

[1] The choice of indicators is similar to the one used by UNESCO's Education for All — Global Monitoring Report, except for the 'adult literacy rate' indicator that has been used in EFA's Education Development Index (but not included here because this Education Index focuses only on children). These indicators were normalised to range between 0 and 1. Arithmetic average of all four indicators was then taken in order to get a composite Education Index (EI).

[2] Using indicator 1, 2, 3 and 4. Data has been taken from Punjab MISC 2007-08 report.

[3] The district ranked 1 is the most deprived district and the level of deprivation falls as district ranking increases.

[4] For a district, the 0.5 mark on the index scale means that the value of each indicator, on average, is halfway between the indicator's minimum and maximum value, for that province.

[5] Using indicator 1, 2, 3 and 4. Data has been taken from PSLM 2008-09.

[6] Using indicator 2, 3 and 4. Data has been taken from MICS 2001 & 2008 report.

[7] Using indicator 2, 3 and 4. Data has been taken from MICS 2010 report.

[8] Using indicator 2, 3 and 4. Data has been taken from MICS 2007-2008 report.

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