

What can help Pakistan accelerate current education trends for quality, access and gender equality, from pre-primary to secondary?

People say, “If you want to make minor, incremental changes and improvements, work on practices, behavior or attitude. But if you want to make significant, quantum improvement, work on paradigms”. Sixty seven years of freedom, independence and liberty, yet 21% children in rural Pakistan are out of school, amongst which 15% have never been to a school whereas 7% have dropped out (ASER 2014). Worse than this, only 42% females and 49% males can read at least words in English (ASER 2014). These hard facts do not corroborate existing practices, behaviors or attitude. Rather, it confirms the prevailing paradigms about education. It has been sixty seven years, since Pakistan appeared on the map of the world but Education was never a top most priority. Hence, 2.5% of GDP spent on education, while the allocation of four per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for education will remain a distant dream. Education is not just any other institution of the society. Though, it is soul of the society. Education is not only just a tool for literacy but it taps the individual’s hidden potential and brings social development and economic prosperity. It nurtures and prepares an individual to cope with this modern age. Hence, it is a key to change and the hour of need is to use this key to bring a massive change in Pakistan.

Three years down the road, National Assembly has passed the “Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill” to ensure free and compulsory education to all children from aged five to sixteen years. Up to the present time, 25 million children are out of schools (Source: Alif Ailaan). They are being deprived of their fundamental right of being nurtured, of becoming a productive member of a society. They are being deprived of their right to social mobility. Alif Ailaan report brings light to the reason for not attending schools. The reason includes parents unwillingness, cost

of the school, whereabouts of the school along with child oneself unwillingness. Hence, the problem is rooted in paradigm. Measures are required to alter this paradigm. For that, we have to comprehend the needs of the community. Citizen Engagement Activities would not only provide a platform for community members to participate, it will further augment the community ownership. Apart from paving way for children to access school, there is a next step quality of education on which we certainly need to pay heed. Enrollment is certainly the first step in a ladder. However, we cannot sideline the graveness of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are very crucial for the development of any nation. Improvement is urged at the primary level, where children develop their basic attitudes and approaches to learning. Research indicates that improving the curriculum, providing learning materials, time for learning and effective teaching will certainly aggrandize the quality at primary level. Following this, Improving the preparation and motivation of teachers with reference to their general academic background, pedagogical skill development and motivation would also make a difference. Additionally, Dakar Framework proposed strategies intended to ameliorate the quality of education, which includes significant investment in basic education, engagement of civil society in strategies for educational development, integrated strategies for gender equality, teacher status, morale and professionalism, and building on existing mechanisms. Access to education and quality education would do no good unless it is for both girls and boys. ASER 2014 data reveals that 11% females and 10% males in rural areas and 3% males and 3% females in urban areas are still out of schools. The rationale behind these statistics could be that parents are often less educated and may see less value from schooling, opportunity costs for child time may be higher, villages are quite remote with few educated adults who might meet the qualifications to teach and teacher absenteeism increases with commuting distance between home and school. To strive against these daunting realities, Community public girls' schools were established in rural Baluchistan. The schools were opened with intent to increase the female

enrollment rate. Additionally, girls were taught by local female teacher. The program was based on a partnership between the government and the community. The government provided funding for the community school. Community supplied a temporary school facility, and female teacher from the community. A village education committee, composed of parents of daughters, was responsible for identifying the teacher, motivating parents to send daughters to the school, and monitoring the progress of the school, the children and the teacher. If the school was successfully operated for a probationary period, it was made a permanent government girls' school. The evaluation report indicates that Community public schools increased girls' enrollment by an average of 22 percentage points (Source: Education Notes, World Bank 2007). These bolstering resulting would be possible because of the community based intervention and community ownership.

To sum up this discourse, whether it is enrollment, quality or gender equality, we cannot ameliorate the percentages until or unless we put our feet into others shoes. We have to reflect, and comprehend the needs of community. Yet, every community, every individual is different. The ultimate remedies for these issues are right based and community based approached. Hence, joint ventures of civil society organizations and government would turn this dream into a reality.

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