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Creating an enabling environment for community engagement in school-based governance: A glimmer of hope"

Dilshad Ashraf

Aga Khan University, dilshad.ashraf@aku.edu

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Creating an Enabling Environment for Community Engagement in School-Based Governance: A Glimmer of Hope”

Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

In 1960, the global enrolment of primary school aged children was less than half. By the 1990s, in spite of rapid population growth in much of the world, the proportion of primary enrolled school children was more than 75 percent. The credit to this spread in educational access does not only go to the western or often called the formal form of school operations but to indigenous¹ educational provision and management models as well.

It has been observed in many developing countries around the world that indigenous development governance and management models for the provision of quality educational access lead towards long-term, sustainable development of a targeted geographical area. Models such as the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India, Air Correspondence High School (ACHS) in South Korea, The Philippine Non-Formal Education Project (PNFE), Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE), and many others serve as examples of the variety of ways through which quality education can be provided through indigenous methods. These models have originated from a multitude of educational, economical, technological, and political/ideological concerns, and may have borrowed structures, content, and methods from formal education. However, evidence suggests these models have the potential to provide the equivalent of formal school programs but in a manner that makes education cheaper, relevant, or more convenient for the learners and the communities in which the learners live. The attractiveness of alternative models is heightened as demand for education increases and as educational budgets remain constrained (Vivian Figueredo, 2003).

In the case of Pakistan, **Community Driven Development (CDD)**² models such as the **Community Based School Governance** have traditionally been used between third sector³ organisations and the local communities to strengthen schools in a targeted geographical area. Study of areas where these partnerships have been established demonstrate that indigenous community based education governance and management models have positively impacted poverty reduction and rural development strategies in the long run. This is evident in areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral District and Rural Sindh, especially in parts where poverty due to educational disparities prevail (Shafa, 2008).

Since the 1980s the Government of Pakistan has also supported its educational endeavours by using participatory models in educational management - through an initiative known as the **School Management Committees (SMCs)**⁴. However, over ambitious educational plans and weak and often non-existent monitoring and evaluation systems, feudal influence, and lack of formal roles and responsibilities have led to a fractional success of this initiative (Ashraf, Ali, & Hosain, 2014). With the presence of accountability systems, clearly defined roles and safety nets granted through judicial reforms, these structures can contribute significantly towards quality educational provision in Pakistan.

¹**Indigenous development is defined as** 'the growth or progress of an indigenous community in their originality or within the context of their ethnic identity in a holistic way' - United Nations - Economic and Social Council

²Community-driven development (CDD) is an approach that gives control over planning decisions and investment resources for local development projects to community groups - World Bank

³The third sector is also known as the Non-Profit or Voluntary Sector. The term was first coined by Aimitai Etzioni, in his "The Third Sector and Domestic Missions," in 1973. The term "the third sector", was defined as "an alternative sector separate from and balancing the state and the market, themselves considered separate sectors. If something is ruled neither primarily by market logic nor via a bureaucratic chain of command, it must be part of the "third" sector. Many current operational definitions follow this basic schema." (Etzioni, 1973). For the British government, for example, "The term is used to distinguish such organizations from the other two sectors of the economy: the public sector ('government') and the private sector ('businesses')." (National Audit Office, 2009).

⁴Note: Name of the SMC model may differ from province to province after the 18th amendment, however the concept remains the same.

Rationale

The National Education Policy 2009 identifies two reasons for why educational policies of the past have failed in Pakistan, them being:

1. The commitment gap; and
2. The gap between formulation of a policy and its effective implementation.

A review of subsequent federal educational plans reveals that successive governments in Pakistan have always set ambitious goals for the education sector (Bengali, 1999), yet over the last 35 years educational spending in the country has remained on an averaged 2.3% of the total GDP with unsystematic patterns of educational resource allocation and an insignificant increase in real educational spending. Therefore, we come across the gap between the vision and the commitment of policy makers which has been pointed out by the Planning Commission of Pakistan in its 2030 visioning exercise:

“We cannot spend only 2.7 % of our GDP on education and expect to become a vibrant knowledge economy”⁵

While implementing widespread educational policies, school managers and stakeholders at every tier have a task to perform in order to ensure the quality and efficiency of an education system. Previously, the federalised structure of Pakistan’s education system made it often difficult to track and monitor these tier based tasks due to diverse geographical and socio-economic situations in various parts of the country. Hence to date, public school systems suffer from a definite lack of planning. Coupled with weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms these government-owned educational endeavours and initiatives suffer even more. These weaknesses in turn impede efficient implementation of educational policies and stimulate mismanagement of funds. A variety of literature suggests that skimming of funds exists in all educational management procedures, from teacher recruitment to school maintenance. A fairly simple example of this phenomenon is the existence of thousands of ‘Ghost Schools’ across Pakistan (Save the Children UK , 2010).

The people who are immediately affected by such corruption are the communities in which the schools exist. One of the methods to counter corrupt practices and mismanagement of funds is by placing greater autonomy and ownership of educational processes on

the shoulders of the stakeholders themselves⁶. In Pakistan, this community based governance model has been implemented through the School Management Committee (SMC) initiative by the government.

SMCs are a decentralized method to enable a community take ownership of a local school. It is based on the philosophy that that when parents and other community members are actively involved in decision making processes, principals, head teachers, and teachers take more initiatives to improve learning conditions. However, in Pakistan this model has not been implemented in the full spirit of its underlying philosophy.

Although not new⁷, the SMC initiative has only seen increased spread in recent years due to greater participation by various civil society and other third sector organizations in Pakistan. Projects such as the ‘Rural Based Community Schools Project (RBCSP)’ of the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), the ‘Self Help Schools’ Construction Programme (SHSCP)’ of the Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan (AKES,P), and various others serve as examples of the many indigenous community driven educational development models that have been successfully implemented in Pakistan. The SHSCP today, has led to the creation of a network of over 200 ‘Community Based Schools’ in the northern mountainous regions of Pakistan.

Global examples on School Based Management models (SBMs) shed light on the efficacy of SMCs in the context of a developing country such as Pakistan. Based on the level of autonomy and stakeholder participation, Barrera-Osorio (2009) proposes four kinds of models for school based managements:

- 1) Administrative-Control (principal),
- 2) Professional-Control (teachers),
- 3) Community-Control (parents), and
- 4) Balanced-Control (parents and teachers).

Ideally a school based management should be grounded on a balanced combination of stakeholders. However, the figure below illustrates how educational policies in some countries give more autonomy to Community Based School Governance models than others.

⁵Quote taken from: ‘Pakistan in the 21st Century: Vision 2030, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, 2007’.

⁶Granting autonomy to any stakeholder without the presence of judicial safety nets and accountability processes can greatly weaken community based governance models as observed in previous decades.

⁷The first evidence of the formal formation of SMC’s in Pakistan is seen in the National Education Policy – 1972-80. It proposes “the possibility of constituting local school management committees and district advisory boards...elected by members of the community (and which) should be responsible for providing school buildings, for consulting with the area education officers on the selection of teachers and the school programme, and for supplementing the school supplies and learning materials provided by the directorate.” (Government of Pakistan, 1972-80)



Figure 1: Bruns (2011) Making Schools Work (p. 94)

Research suggests that the current SMC structure implemented by the Government of Pakistan has not yet been able to achieve its full potential. Influences such as the local feudal system, political pressures, socioeconomic and hierarchical structures, ethnic, religious, linguistic and gender differences and illiteracy (leading to the inability of knowing one’s rights) within the community members have created an environment of communal disempowerment and disenfranchisement. However, SMCs have been successful in areas where third sector participation is high (due to the presence of training, awareness and broad based community empowerment programmes) or where the head teacher is very dynamic and passionate about his/her work and regularly involves the community in various aspects of the school (Ashraf & Fernandes, 2015).

Today the 18th constitutional amendment has devolved the responsibility of educational provision and management to the provinces. The provinces now hold the responsibility to ensure quality educational provision to all children within their jurisdiction. Since the amendment, all provinces have proposed various policies, mechanisms and incentives to provide access to quality education through the increased involvement and strengthening of SMCs and the local communities.

The above mentioned policy shift has warranted revisions in the roles and responsibilities of SMCs, which was previously limited to mostly spending allocated amounts on school maintenance and supplementing physical school resources. However today TORs for SMCs also include issues such as out of school children, school attendance, school budgets, etc. Commemorative efforts made by the education departments of all provinces in their recent Education Sector Plans to push reforms for increasing and facilitating community participation in school governance. These reforms include increased financial autonomy of SMC’s, capacity building of SMC members, induction of performance based audit systems and recognition of their work.

This is a first step towards a long awaited reform in the education sector of Pakistan. However, the modifications put forth in the recently developed education sector

plans in terms of SMCs are not enough to bring forth the philosophy of community empowerment in educational management in its full spirit as observed in the past. Therefore, it is suggested that further decentralization of power and responsibilities be taken place from provincial to district and local levels to yield increased and efficient spread of quality education in the country (Winkler, 2002).

Proposed Approach:

Strengthening of school based managements through SMCs is proposed by collaborating with stakeholders at all levels of education policy development and programme delivery. Therefore, efficient implementation of SMC intents and policies would require Broad Based Community Engagement programmes to be initiated, to:

- ensure that all residents are fully aware and informed about intents, policies, procedures and practices of SMCs;
- ensure that there is reduced misperception and mistrust amongst community members;
- identify broader community-based resources and recommendations;
- enhance the cultural competency of engagement plans; and
- increase the ability of community members to translate issues into relevant questions and accessible language.

Considering the commitment and implementation gaps identified in the NEP 2009, several questions regarding SMCs must be addressed before the education sector plans are implemented on grassroots. For example:

- 1) Do communities truly recognise their roles and responsibilities in SMCs? If not, how can communities be made to realise their responsibility on a conscious level?
- 2) Is there a need to conduct in-depth analysis of how SMCs operate in various parts of the country and the factors which impact their operations and practices?
- 3) Are the current modifications in SMC roles enough to create a culture of community based educational management in areas where SMCs exist?
- 4) How can the SMC model be effectively used to provide access to quality education in the country?
- 5) Do the existing and proposed SMC structures, policies and procedures truly represent the diversity of needs and opinions in a given community with reference to religious, ethnic, linguistic, gender and socio-economic differences?
- 6) What kind of policies, procedures, programmes and trainings must be initiated to ensure that

the voices of minority groups are heard during SMC decision making processes?

- 7) Are SMC election processes truly as democratic as perceived to be? If not, what kind of reforms are required to institutionalise the democratic spirit of this process?
- 8) Is the separation of SMCs in executive and general-body groups an effective way to involve all segments in a community?
- 9) What is the role can other stakeholders such as education officers and third sector organisations play to strengthen SMCs?
- 10) How can monitoring, evaluation and accountability practices be incorporated in SMC structures while retaining the community’s autonomy?
- 11) How will the SMCs be financed? To what levels should SMCs be budgeted in public expenditures? Is there a need to shoulder financial responsibility (in part) on the communities themselves?
- 12) What kind of best practices from community based school governance and management models around the globe can be replicated to strengthen the current SMC structures in Pakistan?

Recommendations

Communities:

- i) Communities need to understand their role and actualise their power and responsibility for transformative action to secure quality and accessible education for future generations.
- ii) It is essential that communities question and break traditional lineage based leadership systems and provide space for innovative leaders to emerge from within.

Policymakers:

- i) Call for renewed debate on how quality education can be provided in schools through community based school governance models. Also how these models can be implemented (in their full spirit) through policy action.
- ii) Plan for and include board based community engagement programmes in long term educational plans.
- iii) Address and clarify level of autonomy granted to SMCs.
- iv) Address how the voices of marginalised groups in a given community be incorporated in SMC decision making processes.

Researchers:

- i) Evaluate current state of SMCs in Pakistani schools. Factors for their success and failure in various geographical regions of the country.

- ii) Find relevant models of school-based management structures around the world and propose reforms for the existing SMC structure.

Teacher Education Institutions:

- i) Prepare teachers and administrators to work with and involve their local community in all aspects of school operations.
- ii) Instil a value of community involvement as part of core educational values.

District/Provincial education managers:

- i) Training SMC members in terms of their rights and responsibilities.
- ii) Making sure that transparent election process take place for SMCs.
- iii) Making sure that there are no external or power influences in SMC decision making processes.

Principals / Head Teachers

- i) Regularly involve communities in various aspects of their schools.
- ii) Organize awareness campaigns for communities and strengthen parent involvement programmes.
- iii) Create a culture of openness and pluralism within their schools.

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