
Oxfam GB Discussion Document



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Delivering Girls' Education in Pakistan

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September 2009

Despite recent improvements in education provision and numerous policies and action plans to that all citizens have the right to go to school, Pakistan's progress on achieving the MDGs has been considered 'off track'. This paper examines issues that impede the capacity of the state to deliver education services to those who need it most, including rural girls.

Introduction

"We must balance this Vision for Pakistan against the reality of its major failure to educate all its citizens... we cannot spend only 2.7 per cent of the GDP on education and expect to become a vibrant knowledge- economy."

Vision 2030, Planning Commission of Pakistan, 2007

The paper argues that the main focus of the Government of Pakistan's programmes should be on addressing both the demand and supply side of the 'education equation'. This includes increased financial investment, and also ensuring that the human resources required for the sector are in place and trained to do their job. Also that decentralised systems of service delivery should be reviewed in order to ensure that the needs of the really marginalised are effectively met. The paper also sheds some light on government policy on education. A brief overview of the Oxfam programme in Pakistan is also provided and the following questions are addressed. First, what has Oxfam GB offered in the context of the particular challenges associated with the provision of education services in Pakistan? In particular, should Oxfam GB focus on education delivery alongside civil society, or, given the scale of the challenge, should it restrict itself to advocacy? What niche areas can be identified where it can supplement the efforts of the government and the private sector and empower those who have previously been denied opportunities to input into decision-making?

Pakistan and Education

In 1947, when Pakistan became independent, it had a population of 33 million with an overall literacy rate of 15 per cent (Pakistan Census, 1951). The Pakistani state as it exists today consists of four provinces (Punjab, NWFP, Sindh and Baluchistan), as well as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Northern Areas, and Pakistani controlled areas of Jammu and Kashmir. Its population is now estimated to be around 160 million, 48 per cent of which are women. It is estimated that half the adult population is illiterate, including two out of three women, and that at least one in four people lives below the national poverty line. Half of these, 36 million vulnerable people, live in the Punjab, which is also Pakistan's most populous province. Meanwhile, 1.2 million children live on the street in Pakistan's major cities and urban centres. Certain regions have particularly striking problems: for example, 97 per cent of the female population in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) cannot read and nearly half of all five to nine year olds do not attend primary school (DFID, 2009).

Pakistan has the third largest out-of-school population in the world after Nigeria and India, accounting for seven per cent of global absentees (UNESCO, 2009).

Government estimates of the overall dropout rate suggest that only 30 per cent of students continue beyond the primary level (Planning Commission, 2009). The literacy rate (for population aged ten and over) has improved by barely one to two per cent per annum over the last decade, which makes it impossible to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015. Recent surveys indicate that the literacy gap, always much more pronounced in rural Pakistan, has also 'improved' but is still strongly associated with gender. The majority of those missing out on education are the most vulnerable and economically marginalised segments of society, including women. Only 35 per cent of rural women above the age of ten have completed primary education (PLSM, 2008). Pakistan still enrolls 83 girls for every 103 boys in primary schools. The primary completion rate for girls is only 58 per cent as opposed to 70 per cent for boys. Of the 6.8 million currently estimated to be out of school in Pakistan, at least 4.2 million are girls (World Bank, 2008). In some parts of Baluchistan, adult female literacy ranges from one to three per cent – one of the lowest levels across the world (PSLM, 2006-07). In Sindh, in Jacobabad District¹, only seven per cent of girls complete primary school compared to 40 per cent for boys. Over 10 districts have fewer than a fifth of girls completing primary school.

State education, which is free at primary level (and at the secondary level in some provinces), makes up 60 per cent of the enrolments in Pakistan, with the private sector providing the remaining 40 per cent. Three parallel education providers exist that are widely divergent in terms of educational outcomes: the public sector (non-profit), the private sector (for profit) and the religious "schools" or madrassas (charitable schools).

The latest draft of the National Education Policy continues to focus on the teaching of religion and ideology. Some analysts have long considered curricula to be a tool for 'subtle subversion' which projects 'others' within and outside the state, perpetuates gender stereotypes (Nayyar, 2003; Raza, 2009), and may even amount to what Longwe (1997) considers a 'schooling for subordination' approach.

Government policy

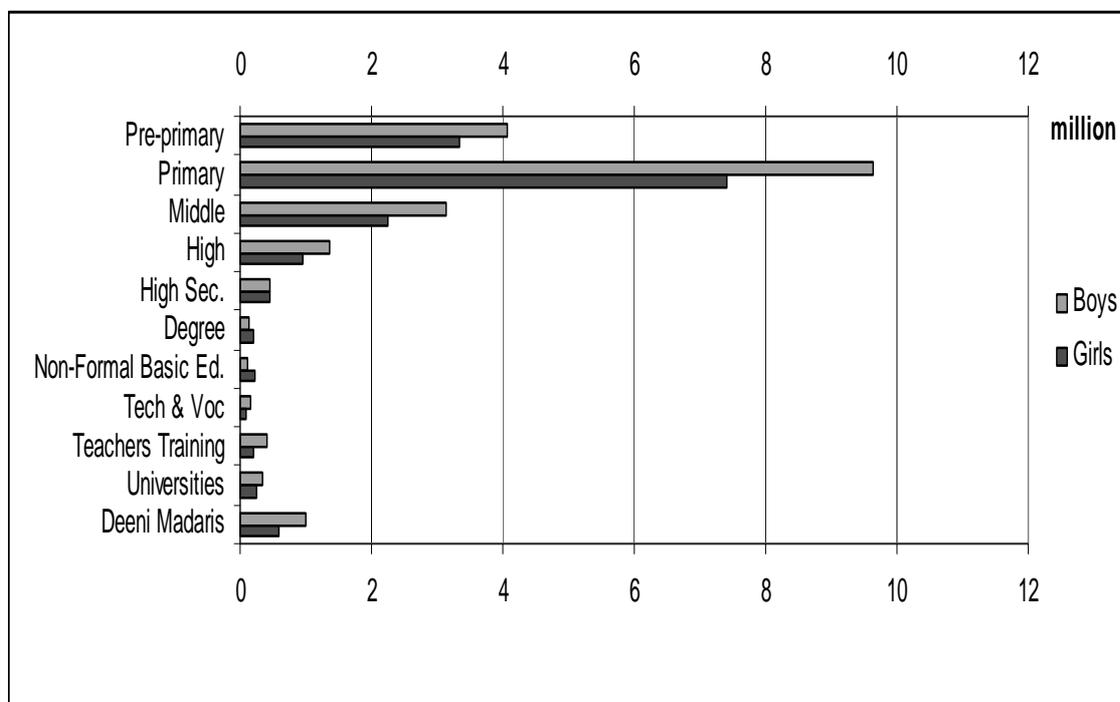
Education has been always given a great deal of attention by policy makers in Pakistan. Since the early 1950s, there have been more than nine policy documents, eight Five-Year Plans, and several Action Plans setting out broad principles of policy, targets, and strategies to address the education deficit in the country². Article 37 B of the Constitution of Pakistan states that "the state shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period". Commitments are also made in the country's Strategic Vision paper for 2030, within the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper), and various international conventions³. However, Pakistan's progress towards achieving the MDGs has been considered 'off track' (DFID, 2007). The Government of Pakistan's recent National Education Policy (2009) notes the lack of political commitment to education.

¹ For administrative purposes, the provinces are broken down into Districts, tehsils and Union Councils.

² For an analysis of all education plans and policies since 1947 see Aly, 2007

³ Pakistan is a signatory to the UN Convention on Child's Rights 1989, the MDG and EFA goals.

Figure 1: Total Enrolment By Stage of Education



Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2006-07, AEPAM, Ministry of Education.

It can be observed that barriers to access to education and attainment exist across all provinces, along gender and income lines as well as across the urban/rural divide (National Education Policy, 2009; Sayeed, 2009; Bano, 2008; Ahmed, 2009; PSLM, 2008). The Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2007-2008 found that more than 80 per cent of the rural women in the poorest quintile are illiterate, PSLM, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that one girl for every three boys attends school in the poorest rural households (UNESCO, 2009). This problem has been highlighted at various international forums, including the Concluding Observations of the 38th United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women Committee Session.

Government Priorities: Delayed agenda for girls?

Government policy since the 1950s has always had focus on the provision of primary education.

Gender equity is also an issue for discussion in a large number of policy documents. For example, the National Education Policy (1998-2000) sets its objectives as reducing disparities and imbalances to promote gender equity; addressing issues related to lack of access of girls through formal and non-formal systems; and enhancing teachers' skills to increase quality. The target for Universal Primary Enrolment (UPE) for boys was set for 2005 and for girls for 2010. The Education Sector Reforms (2001-2005) that followed this policy discussed the UPE

targets. The National Plan of Action for Education for All (2001 to 2005) set separate targets for men and women in early child education, elementary, and adult education. Whilst some of these goals are well intentioned, they also reflect inconsistencies in target setting, which marks much of the broader education policy⁴.

Analysts argue that *the gender gap for achieving the universal primary education and literacy has been maintained in these documents*. "Gender disparity is inherently knit into the policies/plan by giving separate targets, years and percentages of meeting these targets for males and females" (Hassan & Najam, 2007: 4). "Educational backwardness of girls is taken for granted in every policy document. Instead of making extra efforts to fill the gender gap, it is maintained" (Hassan & Najam, 2007: 14).

Table 1: UPE Targets

Policies	Target	Boys	Girls	Gender gap
New Education Policy 1970	Universal Enrolment up to Class 5 by 1980			NA
National Education Policy 1972-1980	Universal Primary Education	1979	1984	5 years
National Education Policy 1979	Universal Primary Education	1987	1992	5 years
Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-1988)	Universal Primary Education	1986	1988	2 years
Seventh Five Year Plan (1983-1988)	Primary Education	1992 (80 per cent)	1992 (60 per cent)	-
National Educational Policy 1992-1997	Universal Primary Education	2002	2005	3 years
National Educational Policy 1998-2010	Universal Primary Education	2005	2010	5 years

Source: Hassan & Najam, 2007 and Pakistan Coalition for Education Position Paper, (not dated)

In the new policy documents that have been recently approved the issues of equity has been discussed, but there is not enough emphasis on increased allocations for achieving literacy targets for girls and women. The provision of education, particularly for girls is not approached as a right⁵.

⁴ For more analysis on the impact of changing targets according to policy terms see Aly 2007, Bano 2008, and Malik, 2007.

⁵ Instead, emphasis is placed on the teaching of religion, the appointment of *qaris*⁵ (*religious instructors*) for teaching institutions and the mainstreaming of *Madrassas* under the Ministry of Interior.

The Scale of the Problem

The sheer scale of the numbers of young people who remain outside the education system compounds the problem of inequitable access to education. There are 61 million school-age children under the age of 15 in Pakistan (World Bank, 2009), with only 30 million enrolments (in primary, secondary education, non-formal basic education, and religious schools (*deeni madaris* (See Figure 1). In other words, even under this conservative estimate, there were more than 20 million school-aged children out of school in 2006 to 2007⁶.

Statistics from the National Education Statistics Report from 2008 reveal that both the public and private sector have failed to sufficiently expand the base of service delivery relative to the potential demand.

Table 2: Numbers of institutions and teachers between 2005-06 and 2006-07

	Institutions			Teachers		
	2005/6	2006/7	New additions	2005/6	2006/7	New additions
Primary public	139821	140505	684	354,117	355,108	991
Primary Private	16911	17,070	159	86,451	87,290	839
Middle Public	15255	15499	244	116,509	117,302	793
Middle private	24115	24597	482	194,244	196,186	1,942
High school Public	9425	9666	241	167,916	170,390	2,474
High school Private	13,484	13888	404	194,272	196,216	1,944
Total	219,011	221,225	2,214	1,113,509	1,122,492	8,983

Source: National Education Statistics Report (2008), AEPAM, Ministry of Education.

As Table 2 shows, from 2005 to 2006 and 2006 to 2007, the total number of primary, middle and high school institutions in the country increased by only 2,200. This number is quite small given the total number of children out of school⁷. The increase in the total number of teachers was also small at around 9,000.

School infrastructure, or the lack of it, is closely linked to levels of children's learning (Andrabi, et al, 2007). In many areas of Pakistan, the existing infrastructure does not have basic facilities, particularly in rural areas. The National Education Census (2006) revealed that 37.8 per cent of government schools lacked a boundary

⁶ Zaidi (2009) assumes that Pakistan's population is around 180m in 2009 of which some 70m were of school going age.

⁷ According to the National Education Statistics report, total enrolment rose by 1.2m over the period.

wall, 32.3 per cent did not provide drinking water, 40.5 per cent had no toilets, 56.4 per cent did not have electricity, and 6.8 per cent had no building at all.

Finding the workforce to teach girls is another major issue. Oxfam's experience of working in remote rural areas with low literacy rates clearly shows that it is difficult to find teachers in villages with the requisite qualifications and training. Overall, female teachers make up only 38 per cent of the total number of teachers in the public sector and 36 per cent at primary level (AEPAM, 2008)⁸. The number of female teachers is higher in the private sector (399,720 females out of a total 597,800, i.e. 66 per cent). This again reflects the disparity across income bands and the urban/rural divide across different provinces.

In general, the quality of education in Pakistan is poor. Even government reports note 'low levels of learning achievement, and wastage of resources through grade repetitions, and high dropout rates' (Shami & Hussain, 2005). Dropouts by the third grade are common at the primary level (Andrabi et al, 2008). The debate on quality has been linked to a whole host of issues such as language of instruction (Rashid, 2009). Other problems are the lack of teacher qualifications (Memon, 2007), training and on site support, incentives provided to teachers, poor school management and motivation of teachers, and little support from the local 'community' (CQE, 2006).

The quality of a child's education depends greatly on the type of school they attend, which tends to be determined by socio-economic class and can range from private schools (offering English and relatively high quality services) and low-fee schools run according to the government curriculum in rural Pakistan, to philanthropic or NGO schools, and religious *madrassas* (which cater for poorer segments of society). In the 1970s, the privatisation of education was seen as a viable policy provision (for more analysis see Aly, 2007; Bano 2008; Malik, 2007).

Although researchers show that educational outcomes are somewhat better in private schools compared to public schools (Aslam, 2007; ActionAid, 1999), the private sector does not have the capacity to deal with the scale of the problem (Andrabi et al, 2007; Bano, 2008; Zaidi, 2009). Others point to issues of sustainability which are common in the non-profit sector (Bano, 2008), and suggest that these low-cost options, located in rural settings, also may not have the capacity to deliver a good deal more in terms of quality than their public sector counterparts (Andrabi et al, 2007)⁹. The *madrassa* system caters mainly for boys and the system is recognised as being in need of reform.

Gender Inequality

Those who are most affected by the inequity of the current education system in Pakistan are rural communities. Female enrolment rates are well below those of

⁸ Counting female teachers from private schools brings the overall national average up to 51 per cent females in teaching workforce (679,223 females out of total 1,345,914) (AEPAM, 2008).

⁹ The private sector has almost 30 per cent of the enrolments in the country and has increased its share with respect to the public sector in recent years (see NEC, 2006). According to the National Education Census 2005, which surveyed 245,682 educational institutions in the country, out of which two-thirds were public and one-third were private. The percentage of private institutions was 42 per cent (Punjab), 28 per cent (NWFP) 21 per cent (Sindh), 15 per cent (Baluchistan), 34 per cent (AJK) and 55.6 per cent (ICT).

boys in rural areas. It is generally believed that 'poor' and 'illiterate' communities hold back their daughters from acquiring education due to 'cultural constraints', and enforce traditional domestic roles.

However, the existing gender inequality and other factors including a lack of incentives to send girls to schools, the absence of proper infrastructure such as toilets and boundary walls at available facilities, and concerns about the distance and the availability of schools also has a role to play. Research in the Punjab has shown that rural communities are acutely conscious of the issues of "quality, cost, and distance", the choices (or lack of them) available within the public and the private sector educational institutions, and how well their child, the teacher and school are doing (Andrabi et al, 2007).

The proximity of a public school where their children are eligible to study was shown to be one factor that could have the greatest influence on families' decisions to send their girls to school. For every 500m distance between the home and the nearest school enrolment rates drop even more (Andrabi et al, 2007).

Private schools respond to a particular demand and consumer, hence, they are *primarily located in relatively richer rural areas*. Children from well-off families also walk shorter distances to school. With a strong bias on paying for boys' to get a good education, girls tend to lose out on quality education (Aslam, 2007).

Government schools, which do not charge fees and provide free textbooks are usually located at a village's periphery, and therefore provide schooling for poorer members of society. Hence the issue for parents is no longer one of whether 'to enrol or not to enrol but where to enrol' (Andrabi et al, 2008), something which is strongly correlated to their socio-economic status. Data from the Pakistan Education Statistics (2008) suggest that there are 41,000 primary schools (public and private) for girls as compared to 68,000 schools for boys in rural Pakistan. The majority of Pakistani villages do not have middle/high schools for both boys and girls.

Shifting responsibilities: Public-private partnerships in Pakistan

Over the past decade, Pakistan has begun to implement its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), including major education sector reform initiatives, and the devolution plan, all of which made 'public-private partnerships' central to dealing with the challenges of delivery of education (Bano, 2008). Under the Education Sector Reform (ESR) launched earlier in the decade, the government identified itself as "an enabler and facilitator, rather than a provider and sole producer" of education (GoP, 2004: 31).

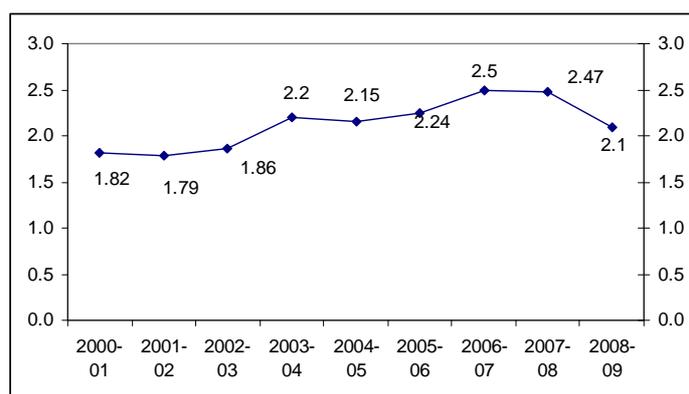
This strategy of piloting partnerships with the private sector aimed "to address access and quality targets" by creating an enabling environment and deregulating the sector (MoE, 2004). While the policy invited the private sector to upgrade schools it was mainly targeted at the non-profit NGO sector, a relatively small player in the delivery of education "as the source of mobilising financial resources rather than as a partner who should actively contribute in the design, delivery, and monitoring of the state education facilities" (Bano, 2008:28). Civil society has indeed undertaken some very valuable work in the delivery of education (formal and non formal), research, and policy advocacy. It is also felt that its impact has been

circumscribed due to the issues of sustainability and scale (Bano, 2008; Ahmed, 2009; Sayeed, 2009¹⁰).

In the partnerships that were subsequently launched, semi-autonomous ‘Education Foundations’ were set up in all four provinces. The incentives and reforms included education vouchers for parents to send their daughters to selected private schools and professional development of teachers. Under the Local Government Ordinance (2001), devolution made the districts responsible for service delivery in health and education. Additional female teachers were to be recruited and primary education was made free at up to the 10th grade in some provinces. All newly constructed primary schools were to be co-ed, and free textbooks and stipends were to be provided up to the middle years for girls. Nutrition programmes targeted at girls were also initiated. On the whole, there was an “exaggerated expectation from the NGO and private sector” (Bano, 2008:3). There were also problems of execution at the local level. In the District Education Departments set up in 2001, head teachers were put in charge of education service planning and delivery, but did not have the technical capacity to manage.

Since then another policy shift has occurred. The various draft policies, that have been circulated recently by the government are appreciative of the work of the private sector and propose to raise finances and use the Inter-Provincial Ministerial forum for broadening the base of state-funded education service delivery. In real terms, however, the shift has not taken place. More funding for this sector (as promised in the PRSP paper, and three consecutive drafts of the National Educational Policy produced since 2007) has not materialised. While absolute budget expenditure on education has nearly quadrupled in the last decade (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2009), government allocations for education continue to be around two per cent of GDP. This is less than half of the percentage GDP recommended by UNESCO. (See Figure 3. For details see I-SAPS, 2009; Akram & Khan, 2007).

Figure 3: Government Spending on Education (as per cent of GDP)



¹⁰ It is estimated that there are at least 60,000 local NGOs registered and operational in Pakistan. 29 per cent are engaged in religious activity, 8 per cent provide primary education and 9 per cent provide secondary education (Ghous Pasha et al, 2002).

Source: I-SAPS, 2009.

This can also be seen at the provincial level, since school education is a provincial matter. The statistics for the country's biggest and richest province are revealing. Punjab's annual education budget for 2009 is Rs 44 billion of which the development budget is 52 per cent, a cut of 23 per cent over the previous year. The total current budget has been reduced by six per cent.

Figure 4: Share in Total Government Spending on Education

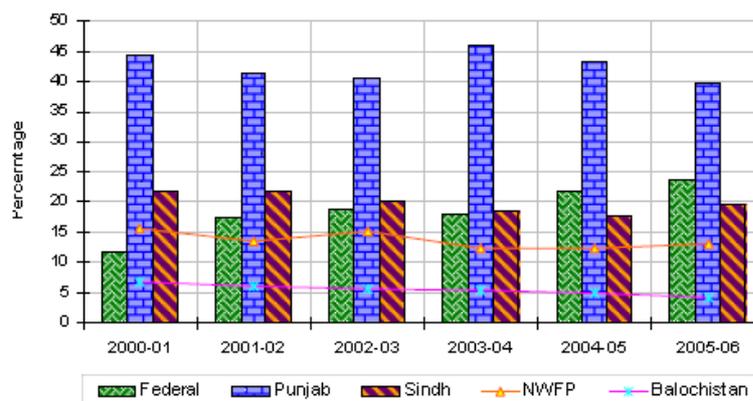


Table 3: Punjab Current Budget (Rs million)

Education Budget	2008-09 Budget	2008-09 Expenditure	2009-10 Budget	Per cent change	
				Budget	Expenditure
Total	22,521.63	29,140.37	21,267.17	-6 per cent	-27 per cent
Salary	9,235.27	9,300.21	11,236.39	22 per cent	21 per cent
Non-Salary	13,286.36	19,840.16	10,030.78	-25 per cent	-49 per cent

Source: I-SAPS, 2009.

Development schemes and projects have been crucial in making up for deficits in physical and human infrastructure in the education sector in Pakistan. With the initiation of the Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (PESRP), investment in education started to rise in 2003. While total expenditure on education tripled from Rs 9,200 million in 2005-2006 to Rs 21,480 million in 2007-2008, the benefits of increased budgetary allocation have to a great extent concentrated on primary schools which have led to some increase in enrolment rates (Ahmed, A. 2009).

Senior policy makers also note that if more resources are mobilised towards broadening the base and quality of education, the capacity to build and manage such a large number of schools in such a short time is a major challenge (Aly, 2007). The problems of 'inefficient financial management and outdated procedures'

continue and the government's capacity to absorb large amounts of funds is low (Shami & Hussain, 2005). For instance, of the Rs 6,560 million allocated by the federal government for the education sector in the financial year 2006-2007, the Federal Ministry of Education could only spend Rs 2,193 million by the end of the financial year. More recently, huge allocations of around Rest. 2 billion made under the Education Sector Reforms Programme could not be utilised.

The government has other constraints as well. Like all sectors, education has suffered from the fact that only 66 per cent of committed Overseas Direct Assistance is actually disbursed by donor countries. The share of donor agencies in the resources for 2006-2007 was only Rest. 33 billion (ISAPS & CQE, 2009) and current grants constituted 20 per cent of total overseas direct assistance from 2000 to 2007-8 (see CPDI, 2009). Nevertheless, recently, there has been support from international agencies for education and the government has made efforts to raise resources for the sector from international banks. However, sector wide planning by the government and donor coordination needs to be strengthened.

Oxfam's education work in Pakistan

In light of the challenges described above, it becomes interesting to examine the role that an international development organisation like Oxfam could play in promoting girls' education, and what sort of support these organisations have offered to date. A key question is whether organisations like Oxfam GB should focus on education delivery, participating alongside civil society or, given the scale of the challenge, focus instead on advocacy to resolve problems. Also, there are any particular niche areas where Oxfam could supplement the efforts of the government and the private sector?

Oxfam has worked in Pakistan since 1973, providing emergency relief and initiating campaigns and projects in many areas, such as reducing Violence against Women, Land Rights and Economic Opportunities, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Reduction. Education has been identified as a strategic need or interest for women (Moser, 1993), and Oxfam's Girls' Education programme evolved from its Gender Equality programme in 2008¹¹. It focuses on issues of access and quality for girls' education in remote areas where education service delivery and poverty indicators are particularly bad and the incidence of violence against women (VAW) is high. The programme supports government schools for girls in poor and rural areas. The main approach is based on community-level projects, with advocacy and policy change at the district, provincial and national level. This is in line with Oxfam's stance on the delivery of essential services. The strategy aims to improve governance and support for the state to become the main provider of services. It promotes active citizenship through empowering local communities to play a full

¹¹ While education sector related work was being carried out by Oxfam GB (Pakistan) over the last few years by the Gender Equality Department, the Girls Education Programme was set up as a separate pillar under the National Strategy (Jan 2009- April 2014). In Pakistan, the process of developing the National Strategy for its programmes for the next five years was driven by a process which involved consultations with 'stakeholders' such as the government, its grassroots level partner organizations as well as other 'allies'.

role in shaping and influencing local-level issues, while at the same time holding the state accountable for maintaining good-quality service provision.

Keeping in view the main issues relating to girls' education in terms of access to schools, gender biases, reasons for dropouts and addressing capacity issues, Oxfam is working in target areas using the Whole School Improvement Planning approach in partnership with local NGOs. Oxfam's education projects in Pakistan primarily try to address the problems of school governance at the local level. With the Whole School Improvement Planning approach, communities are mobilised and sensitised to the importance of education for girls, and teacher training in new methodologies is given. School Management Committees (SMCs) are being established and parents, especially mothers, are becoming involved in them. Missing facilities such as toilets, drinking water, boundary walls, and classrooms, the lack of which may act as a deterrent to girls' attendance in schools or impact negatively on their learning, are provided. Teacher training (on basic subjects, and school management), SMC training on their roles and responsibilities, and monitoring of school improvement activities, summer schools on health and hygiene, and teaching and learning materials are being provided. The approach has been one of addressing the barriers girls face in accessing and receiving quality education and of involving all the stakeholders associated with a particular school. This takes into account the local context in order to address issues, for example whether teachers are absent or late for classes; if the pupil teacher ratio is unbalanced; and if classes are overcrowded. The response to the issues varies depending on the specific context.

Currently, Oxfam is working with 200 schools in five districts in Punjab, training teachers and mobilising parents to join SMCs. School infrastructure is being improved in 43 of these schools. These schools are in South Punjab (Multan, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan and Jhang-Chiniot¹²) and projects are due to expand to Sindh and Baluchistan. All of the districts have extremely low literacy rates¹³.

In addition to community level programming, Oxfam is also engaging in advocacy at various levels to help bring lasting change and address some of the root causes of inequalities in the education sector. Oxfam is working with communities and local government to strengthen links between the two in addressing school management issues. It is also focusing on issues relating to the numbers of teachers and teacher absenteeism by actively engaging with SMCs and working closely with District Education Department officials.

Oxfam aims to involve other stakeholders, especially the government, holding them accountable for a lack of essential services. Recently, Oxfam worked closely with the Pakistan Coalition for Education to prevent the National Education Policy from

¹² Earlier Oxfam projects (2006-8) using a similar approach have resulted in building up the complete infrastructure of 13 girls primary schools, (12 government schools and 1 community run school). Community ownership can be said to be an achievement in the case of the community run school. More than a year after its construction, community school is still functional with 75 students, and 2 teachers whose salaries are paid by the community (Based on interview with staff from Help Foundation, Rajanpur).

¹³ For instance the PLSM 2004/5 notes that in Jhang, Rajanpur and Muzaffargarh, the literacy rates for rural women was 14 per cent, 15 per cent and 11 per cent. These are mainly agrarian economies where women form a significant section of the informal agricultural labour force and home based enterprises.

being approved by the Cabinet without discussions with the civil society on the issue of the teaching of religion and Arabic, the hiring of religious instructors and *Madrassa* management under the Ministry of Interior. Oxfam will continue to work with coalitions and various networks and hope to bring about lasting solutions to help end poverty.

Oxfam is in the process of initiating a Girls Education Campaign, which is likely to focus on issues relating to education budgeting and governance. These two areas came up as key issues in assessments and consultations with civil society organisations.

Empowerment: Individual and Collective

It is argued that approaches to designing development programmes have involved 'outsiders'. Ideally, programmes should be designed in consultation and participation with beneficiaries, and so identification of the "real needs" therefore becomes crucial (Lucas, 2000). Participation has been identified as a process where beneficiary 'involvement', 'contribution' and 'responsibility' can be witnessed (Awa cited in Lucas, 2000).

Rowlands (1995) argues: "empowerment must be about bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it". Oxfam has therefore built the participation of its beneficiaries, and their role in decision making directly into its approach through social mobilisation and raising awareness. Oxfam's field-based project staff, who are a part of the local communities, take on the role of surveyors of schools, meeting village leaders, building and forging working relationships, undertaking situation analysis and collecting baseline data about the issues that result in dropout or the low enrolment rates of girls.

An important element in this approach is learning about existing social relations and using them to change and address problems associated with girls' education. An example of this could be seen in a recent School Management meeting with rural women and school teachers from Rajanpur, South Punjab, where young women told us, "Our girls can't get married. Even male cousins don't want an uneducated wife. The men are educated and they want someone like themselves. But our uncles, fathers and grandfathers don't understand this". Women from rural remote areas of Pakistan are easily able to identify their powerlessness¹⁴. However at the same time, they were able to identify the societal contradictions with the acquisition of education: "If I do or say something wrong, they say 'it's because she is educated'".

In practical terms, male community mobilisers or activists also focus on raising awareness and increasing the understanding of men and boys about the importance and benefits of educating communities' girls. Sensitisation to issues such as the importance of girls' education, and problems including absent teachers, girls staying at home to help their mothers, and lack of toilets and of boundary walls is an incremental process of getting the men and women from the villages to agree that education for both girls and boys is important and the schools need to be improved.

¹⁴ See Skeggs (1995) for analysis on Bourdieu's theoretical framework on 'capital'.

This process also involves conflict resolution between community members and teachers. Once SMCs become functional, meetings are held more regularly, and teacher attendance is monitored by the SMCs. Changes take place at the community level too: at a recent SMC meeting in Rajanpur, female SMC members felt confident in discussing the schools problems with male SMC members. "We had never met men we were not related to before this. We had never sat down to discuss issues about the community in a meeting before", Amina Bibi told us. Mobilisation, a process where the results are visible after some time, is also aimed at involving the most marginalised communities. The change, at times, is phenomenal and unexpected. In Rahim Yar Khan, South Punjab one young mother's decision to enrol her daughter in the local school and join the School Management Committee has resulted in attracting 22 more children from her community.

Communities are generally happy to send their daughters to schools once they understand and see the tangible and qualitative improvements in their schools and villages. As SMC members meet more often, they prioritise education as their local development need. The provision of functional toilets for girls, boundary walls so that they are safe from the unfamiliar males, more teachers, and the improvement in quality of the local government primary schools also has a positive impact on girls' attendance.

Active participation of the beneficiaries can be seen in the project activities as they contribute time, land, and money for renovating schools.

During the 2009 'Global Week of Action', 2,800 people from 40 hamlets signed a petition requesting the upgrading of government primary schools and the provision of teachers. This active participation has resulted in 15 government primary schools being considered for upgrading to the middle level by the five district governments. For Oxfam and its partner, this was no small achievement, considering that school upgrading in Pakistan tends to be a very "constituency-focused" exercise and such initiatives usually benefit the constituencies of powerful landlords or elected representatives. The community's active participation allowed marginalised groups to have their say and be listened to.

Helping ensure that local government's deliver under the current scenario

Oxfam's partners work mainly with government girls' primary schools at the local level. Our partners consult with the District Governments in the identification of schools while implementing the 'school improvement planning' process. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed between Oxfam's partners and the local authorities. Where the government may not be responsive on an issue, communities can find solutions through other means. In Rajanpur, Oxfam's partners ensured that the demands of community members and school children were met by inviting a local government official to a community meeting at a school during the Global Week of Action. The women handed in an application requesting that a doctor and a full-time teacher be provided. A few days later, a junior doctor appeared at the school on a fixed rota, and the local elected representative agreed to provide the salary for an additional teacher.

These examples show that there needs to be close cooperation with District Education departments. Oxfam's experience of working with local governments has shown that in order for District Education Departments (DEDS) to become effective, a number of issues need to be addressed. These include the following:

- The management cadre needs to be separated from the teaching cadre and their capacities need to be built. The three-year tenure based system under which the District Education Department officials are recruited needs to be reviewed. Knowing that they will return to the same cadre after three years, senior head-teachers who become head of the department (as District Officer Education) rarely attempt to shake up the teaching methodology or teachers' performance.
- The capacity of DEDs to undertake district level budgeting, something that is mainly carried out by the District Government's Finance and Planning Wing, needs to be increased.

Engaging with civil society networks

Oxfam's strategy in Pakistan is not one of undertaking service delivery for the government; it focuses on working with communities to demand better and more essential services. This requires building the capacities of grassroots partners, especially with regard to advocacy and financial understanding. Girl's education is an area where there has been relatively little focus or sustained campaigning by civil society (Sayeed, 2009).

Oxfam and its partners plan to monitor government allocation and use of funds at local, provincial, and national levels. Simultaneously, Oxfam and its partners have also kept a close watch on the national policy development process. Advocacy issues that have been taken up by a local partner include campaigning against the destruction of girls' schools in Swat, and initiating the debate within civil society on the teaching of religion and the mainstreaming *madrassa* schools in Pakistan.

However, there are challenges for the Oxfam education team in Pakistan. One of these is deciding how strongly to define its advocacy priorities (for example a strong focus on the right and importance of girls' education and the financing of education) or whether it should let its civil society partners choose their own priorities.

An example of this dilemma was observed during the debate on the Draft Education Policy (2009). The Pakistan Coalition on Education objected to the teaching of religion, the absence of a rights based approach towards education, the hiring of *qaris* for teacher training institutes and *madrassa* mainstreaming under the Ministry of Education and took a stand on the issue by hosting a press briefing immediately after the release of the Draft Policy by the government.

Whilst Oxfam felt that its support to the coalition on this matter was clearly in line with its existing advocacy on girls' education, there were also some difficult questions regarding the impact that this public stand against government proposals for religious education might have on projects at the local level, and more importantly, the local communities' own opinions on the issue.

Oxfam has also linked the agenda for girls' education with local, provincial and national budgets.

Research on education budgets in Pakistan has been initiated and campaigning on this issue will begin in due course.

Conclusion

Reviewing the issues relating to the education sector and girls' education, it is apparent that many challenges exist in delivering education to girls in rural Pakistan. These are compounded by the country's complex political and social contexts and the low priority given to the education sector and girls' education by the government.

Pakistan's education sector suffers from major issues regarding quality, enrolment, retention, and employability of its young people, along with massive gender disparities. While the gender divide in education has essentially disappeared in urban areas, it still persists in rural areas, as seen in the case of rural South Punjab. The positive economic effects of a young population (40 per cent of which is under 15 years of age) can only be realised if there is greater investment in education, particularly for girls.

There is strong evidence to suggest that both men and women in rural areas want education for all their children. However, at present one major issue relating to girls' education has been that of access and the lack of state-funded free schools and of teachers trained to deliver quality education. Oxfam's recommendations to the government include the following:

- Grls' education in Pakistan must be addressed as a matter of priority, particularly in underserved districts.
- There is a need to address both the demand and supply side of the equation. Non-state actors and the private sector cannot deliver or match the financial investments needed for the system. They may be able to fill the gaps temporarily but they cannot take on the role or responsibility of the state. More importantly, the private sector may not be able to deliver basic services such as education to the neediest and the most vulnerable rural girls.
- The ability to deliver at the local level is directly linked with the capacity of the local government to administer and get the management cadre in place. There is an urgent need to have stronger and more efficient systems particularly at local government level cognizant of the actual needs and the resources required to deliver them.
- Finally the government needs to commit more resources to the sector in line with UNESCO's recommendations. The resources must be utilised to broaden the base of the education sector.

The future for Oxfam's programme and its engagement with civil society partners will be:

- To articulate the needs and demands at the grassroots level. Civil society needs to collate needs, learning, and experiences from the grassroots for advocacy at

the local, provincial, and national levels, as well as at the international level, with external donors.

- Oxfam believes that the civil society focus should be on advocacy and lobbying for effective delivery of services by the government. This would be in-line with Oxfam's niche and strategic focus. There is considerable scope for Oxfam and civil society to campaign and monitor critical issues such as government efficiency and mechanisms for delivery of basic services, thereby ensuring that strong and efficient systems and increased budgets are in place.
- Broad-based campaigning will mobilise popular demand that will ensure that the political will is harnessed to address issues related to access and quality of girls' education.

Oxfam's objectives for its education programme in Pakistan are simple: it will continue to work closely with communities, raising awareness on girls' education and simultaneously engaging with other stakeholders to strengthen the capacity and build opportunities for communities to demand their rights. It will continue to work closely with the government and will engage on budget tracking work that will also entail capacity building at various levels.

The 200 schools that Oxfam currently supports will continue to serve as models for individual and collective empowerment. Oxfam will need to continue weighing the benefits and drawbacks of maintaining direct operational support for school rehabilitation and infrastructure, versus shifting to an exclusive focus on campaigning for the rights of girls in terms of education. Oxfam will continue to increase the impact of its programme through alliance building, networking, and partnerships with local organisations, coalitions, teachers and parents. It will continue to work for grassroots level leadership, which can sustain effective local campaigning. The Girls' Education programme will need to keep its district-level campaigning flexible and simultaneously try and push the agenda through for girls' education at the national level.

Finally, Oxfam will exert the maximum possible influence on the government and donors to help Pakistan meet the target of seven per cent of GDP for education by 2015 as envisaged in the policies and the Vision 2030. In this regard, Oxfam will lobby donors and the Government of Pakistan to respond to and meet the needs of communities and their local contexts.

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