The International Commission on Financing Global Education (Education Commission) was announced in July 2015 and established in September 2015 to address the lack of financing for education, as a barrier to achieving the 2030 education goal and targets. ITA reaffirms the vision of the Education Commission that seeks commitments from the world leaders to provide education as a human right and to maximize learning and efficiency for progressive and sustained increase of domestic financing.

THE CHALLENGE

The world today faces the grave danger of failing to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 4 with respect to education and increase in the ever widening gap between developed and developing countries, between the rich and poor. If efforts to deliver quality education are not improved considerably, inaction will lead to more than 124 million children and youth being denied access to schools, and more than 250 million not learning.

Sadly, despite an increase in the need for education funding, there have been budget cuts in a number of countries not only by the governments but also international bodies in recent years. Moreover, the finances present are inefficiently allocated across and within countries. Pakistan, a country marred by education crisis has allocated a meager budget - only 2% of its GDP - to education, recently promised 4% by 2018 by the Prime Minister. Pakistan remained off track in achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of Universal Primary Education and Gender Equality (MDGs 2 and 3), but it has boldly endorsed the more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) inclusive of SDG 4 and its 7 targets and 3 means for implementation. In order to make quality education a reality for all children, urgent action must thus be taken to increase the effectiveness and scale of investments in education. It is imperative to focus on the most disadvantaged groups and devise innovative mechanisms to finance education in a manner so as to ensure inequalities in education are not perpetuated in the future.
Civil Society groups have remained active from community mobilization to service delivery to, evidence collection for citizen led accountability to policy influence at local, national and global level. Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) or the Centre for Education and Consciousness has been one such organization in operation since 2000. Inspired by the land with 9000 years of heritage and renowned civilizations of Mehrgarh, Mohenjadro, Harrapa and Gandhara, acutely aware of challenges of a fractured education sector and possibilities for regeneration, it has pioneered many innovations across Pakistan and beyond. Known for its work on Whole School Improvement, Early Childhood Development (ECD), citizen led annual learning assessments or ASER Pakistan, Children’s Literature Fests (CLF), School based TVET, Ending Child Marriages, and tech-enabled and accelerated learning catch up programs, it is humbled to have its leadership represented as a Commissioner for the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity or the Education Commission in short. ITA is now seen as a technical intermediary across government, private sector and communities.

Pakistan has made modest progress in education over the years with enrolment rates increasing in all provinces. In the federation, provinces continue to earmark higher amounts to education of their total budgets (18-26%), but both utilization and performance remain low. The quality of education is faced with multiple challenges, illustrated by low learning levels. Pakistan adopted the right to free and compulsory education for all the children of 5-16 years of age in April 2010. Even after the passage of six year after the insertion of Article 25-A in the constitution of Pakistan and sector reforms agenda committed to by all the provinces of Pakistan, key fundamentals with respect to access, quality and equity remain to be accomplished. Many children of school-going age are still out of school in Pakistan (6 million of primary age group and 25 million 5-16 years) and even those who are studying in schools do not get quality education. According to ASER National Rural 2015 results, only 49% children of class 5 can read sentences in English and only 55% can read stories in their local language (Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto). In Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa where 26% of provincial budgets were allocated to education in 2014-
16, it is characterized by grave gender disparities in education. ASER statistics show that 64% boys (5-16 years) can read words in English while only 53% girls (5-16 years) can do the same. They are also lagging behind in basic arithmetic where only 49% girls and 61% boys (5-16 years) can do simple subtraction.

While the global community has adopted SDG 4 2030 the provision of universal primary and secondary 'quality' education to all the children is fraught with huge challenges faced by low and low middle income countries to ensure sustainable access through quality learning conditions. It goes without saying that lack of public education finance and ensuring its effectiveness remains a big hurdle in achieving the targets like gender parity and universal primary and secondary education in Pakistan.

It is imperative for governments to invest in basic education and to ensure that both aid and national budgets are effectively used to achieve concrete results for disadvantage children.

ITA – established as a response to the profound crisis of education across Pakistan – aim to remove the barriers causing this education challenge and create a vibrant learning environment where each individual is given equal rights and opportunities throughout their learning years. ITA through its multiple programs and partnerships promotes education as a human right, and mobilizes public to put pressure on governments and the international community to fulfill their commitment to quality education as a right without discrimination at all levels.

Ever since its inception in 2000, ITA has engaged in rigorous evidence based planning for designing its programs and policy and advocacy. From community, household and school based assessments to country wide assessments, survey management, PPPs, advocacy and policy influence, ITA has been a strong education champion of reforms, innovations and accountability across all provinces and areas of the country.

Steeped in the challenges of education in Pakistan, ITA held the first round of the Consultations on behalf of The Education Commission in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad¹. The goal of the consultations was to generate dialogues and ideas on what is needed to improve education in developing countries and to build the case for increased funding for global education. These discussions took place at the University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhunkhwa; Federal College of Education, Islamabad; and Punjab University, Lahore. The aim of these consultations was to start a

1 See full report here: http://educationcommission.org/news/asked-answered-education-commission-consultation-findings/
discourse about innovative means of financing education to fulfill Pakistan’s national and international commitments to education and inspire and persuade stakeholders at all levels to take necessary action.

For each of these consultations, ITA laid out the framework by presenting in detail the current status of education in Pakistan and its shortcomings in providing quality education. It further highlighted the gaps in education financing in Pakistan and potential innovative methods to fill this gap. The presentation was followed by breakout group discussions and recommendations for the way forward by each of the students and youth groups.

The students and Education Youth Ambassadors (EYAs) inspired and supported by the Global Youth Ambassadors program of A World At School, participated actively in the consultations. They presented some insightful recommendations for innovative financing for education. They pushed for the need to:

- Explore funds from the country’s vast natural resources and extractive industry, for example the Reko Diq and Saindak gold and copper mines, as potential sources for education financing.
- Promote Public-Private Partnerships and their institutionalization as a means, not only to bridge the funding gap, but also as a viable option to help create better management partners, third-party monitors and evaluators for public education service delivery programs across the sector and to effectively tackle the crisis of education in Pakistan.
- Explore actively debt-for-education swaps for education, i.e. a bilateral agreement to cancel debt in exchange for better use of resources for measurable education outcomes offset against debts owed by Pakistan.
- Create special Education Fund in Special Economic /Infrastructure Zones such as CPEC industry clusters.
- Implement innovative taxation programs on items deemed harmful for society such as tobacco and caffeine
- Explore actively new focused schemes with industry champions, the Security Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and Chambers of Commerce & Industry as serious partners.

The recommendations pointed towards progressive revenue collection, which could be used to fund innovations in education that work; technologies to leapfrog learning for the most disadvantaged groups and merit-based scholarship programs aimed specifically at women and teachers as part of gender-responsive budgeting in Pakistan.

The SDG’s are a set of ambitious yet attainable goals for all of us to work towards by 2030, but we will get nowhere in achieving it unless we mobilize greater, and more equitably allocated education financing.

**ITA RECOMMENDS 4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATING FINANCING AGENDA TO BE ADOPTED**

1. **Start early to develop basic cognitive skills of a child to enable him/her to move forward**
2. **Make education free and equitable as this is the right of every child**
3. **Ensure transparency and accountability through public participation**
4. **Search actively for innovative financing opportunities on the domestic front that can in turn leverage international financing from both old and new funders and foundations.**
KEY MESSAGES ON DOMESTIC FINANCING IN EDUCATION

Pakistan is currently spending 2.14% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education which is the lowest in South Asia.

The Government of Pakistan has increased its overall domestic allocation on education in recent years. However, resource allocations to education as a proportion of GDP are far below the government's target of 4%. To achieve this target, there is an urgent need to increase overall tax revenues in the country.

Provinces show a strong commitment to education, allocating at least 20% of their budget to the sector. There is a need to strengthen the capacity and efficiency of spending within provinces targeting the most vulnerable, there are some signs of improvement recently.

Within provinces, more needs to be done to ensure resources are better distributed in order to overcome inequalities in education. This requires planning and budgeting that is sensitive to diverse needs across districts and schools, paying particular attention to overcoming disadvantage.

There is an urgency to ensure, explore constructive buffers and creative strategies during political/election cycles when serious gains in education are sacrificed for short term political gains and vote banks, often at high irreversible costs, such as compromises on merit based recruitment, scholarships and accountability.

ACTION PLAN TO MEET THE COMMITMENTS

• In order to address the problems, there needs to be a focus on transparency, accountability and monitoring systems. There also is a need to engage the general public in the budget-making processes so that the demands of the community and civil society reach policymakers. The government cannot work in silos and it is essential that linkages with the relevant departments are established to initiate greater policy change.

• As a nation, we have not prioritized education as a catalyst for growth; instead it has often been sidelined by other national priorities. Implementation of the right to education across Pakistan is the need of the hour.

• Government must increase the education budget to 4 percent of GDP and education reforms must be aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

• Equity in education must be ensured by making provincial and national governments accountable for providing minimum standards in public schools for disadvantaged groups.

• Education should be linked with other development sectors such as health, population, climate change, poverty reduction and economic growth for a holistic approach to social justice, sustainable growth and development in Pakistan.

• In terms of framing post-2015 goals, ITA is calling for an explicit integration of social justice and human rights frameworks. Using the right to education on as a starting point will ensure that inclusion, quality, access, and equity are treated as inextricable — a key demand that has been evident throughout our consultations and reflects concerns about unacceptable “trade-offs” made in the past.

• The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report released recently shows that the world is set to achieve its key global education commitment of universal primary and secondary education half a century late, having huge consequences for many development outcomes. If we are to achieve SDG 4 by 2030, we must vigilantly monitor and prioritize at national, regional and global levels to ensure progress is being made. For substantive progress, GEM proposes capacity building at national level, supporting peer learning at regional level and fostering consensus and coordination at the global level.
KEY WEBSITES

The Education Commission
http://educationcommission.org/
GEM Report
http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/
UNESCO
http://en.unesco.org/
UNESCO Institute for Statistic (UIS) Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML)
http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/gaml-meeting-may-2016.aspx
UNICEF ECE
http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/
PAL Network
http://palnetwork.org/
UN Sustainable Development Solutions (UN SDS)
http://unsdsn.org/
UNFPA
http://www.un.org.pk/unfpa/
REAL Centre
http://readcenter.org/index.php/about-us/
RISE
http://www.rise.edu.pk/
ILM Ideas II
http://www.ilmideas2.pk/
DFID
https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/dfid-pakistan
USAID
https://www.usaid.gov/pakistan
EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL
https://www.ei-ie.org/
Global Campaign for Education
http://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/
AEPAM
https://www.google.com.pk/search?q=AEPAM M&aqi=AEPAM&q=chrome..69i57j69i60l4j 0.1693j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
ASER Pakistan
http://aserpakistan.org/index.php

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA)

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