A Promise to Deliver-
Sindh Government's Role in
Upholding Every Child's
Right to Education

Context
The Right to Education Act - Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan stipulates that the
government should provide free and compulsory education to all children between the
ages of 5-16 years. The 18th amendment led to the devolution of power and shifted
entitlement, decision making, and responsibility to make rules of law and implement the
article to each province. Sindh was the first province to pass the Sindh Free & Compulsory
Education Act 2013 and its rules are being finalized; however, after a passage of four
years, key fundamentals with respect to access, quality, inclusion, and equity remain
unmet. Sindh has the poorest learning scores despite its Rs. 158 billion Budget.

Sindh shows its strong commitment and continues to earmark higher amounts to
education of its total budget (28% in FY 2016-17)\(^1\). There has been a consistent increase in
the resources allocated for education by the province as the total budget increased by 49
billion - a 45% increase in the education budget in the last 5 years\(^2\). This is a substantial
amount, but is not reflected in the indicators as both utilization and performance remain
low, continuing to deprive millions of children in the province. While allocations have
increased, it is evident that budget expenditure has not been increasing at the same rate,
and indicators have not been following a similar trajectory. PSLM 2014-15 reports that in
Sindh 39% of children are out of school at the primary level. The problem is heightened by
a huge volume of missing facilities in schools, workforce/teacher quality, quantity and
presence, low enrolment and high student absenteeism rates, and low learning levels.
ASER 2015\(^3\) reveals that Sindh has the lowest learning levels across Pakistan in
Mathematics and English- with only 35% of children in class 5 who can perform class 2

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1 Salient features of Budget 2016-17
2 I-SAPs data
3 http://aserpakistan.org/presentations

Figure 1: Sindh Education Budget over the years

Sindh has the
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level division and 24% who can read sentences. Moreover, ASER 2015 WIDE (world inequality database in education) metrics reveals that in Pakistan 48% of the poorest girls go to school in comparison to 84% of the richest boys and even amongst the poorest quintile girls lag behind their male counterparts (68%) by 20% (48%). The findings highlights that for each income quartile, the inequality is exacerbated for the poorest and within them - especially girls; and therefore, gender equity remains a significant challenge influenced by socio economic background. If we are to achieve the target that every child goes to school, we need to improve the budget volume or allocation, disbursal, and utilization to ensure that these gaps do not continue to multiply.

Realizing the educational challenge of such magnitude, it is important to shift the agenda from an access only lens to an access and learning one, the government of Sindh has set out comprehensive and holistic rules of the RTE Act for both formal and non-formal streams. It is the duty and responsibility of the Sindh government to ensure fulfilment of these rules which include tackling issues of access, quality, inclusion, and equity. Under the Sindh’s RTE Act 2013, the government is responsible for providing access with teachers through resolving issues such as school proximity, closed schools, chronic missing facilities, school up-gradation for transition, teachers’ presence, community engagement, disaster preparedness /management, and offering free transport especially to girls and teachers where needed for post primary education. The government of Sindh has proactively also taken up the responsibility to extend this law to include children from the ages of 3-5 years and incorporate ECE which is backed by the Sindh ECCE 2015 Policy⁴, for learning readiness and transition to primary /elementary schooling. In addition, it is the government’s academic responsibility to ensure that the education provided is quality education and is inclusive. The rules of the Sindh RTE Act 2013 highlight the government’s obligations framed around the challenges that prevail in the education sector, and the willingness to overcome them— but do they resonate and reflect in the government allocations and expenditure?

Understanding the Budget FY 2016-17

Disconnect between Access, Learning, and the Education budget

70% of the total budget is absorbed in salaries. The salary budget increases each year and is logically the best utilized component. Sindh is spending 42% more on salaries than it did in 2012 but there is a need to see if a commensurate impact on education levels can be associated with it. ASER 2015 findings show that enrolment has increased by 8% which is on the positive side, but learning levels are stagnant as evident not just by ASER, also by the government SAT test results⁵.

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Figure 2: Breakdown of the Sindh Education Budget FY 2016-17 under the E&LD

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Figure 3 Access and Learning VS Salary budget - Sindh

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5  Note: SAT-I scores are of Grade 6 while and SAT-III are for Grade 5 and ASER Enrolment is for 6-16 years. http://www.satsindh.net.pk
While the majority of the education budget is allocated to the salary component which is best utilized, there is an improvement in this year's budget allocation as we see an increased proportion reserved for non-salary budget. The Non Salary Component improves the learning environment and is important to maintain a good quality of service provision. It includes allocation for daily operations, School Specific Budgets (utility, stationary, travel, communication, repair), School Consolidation, and SMCs.

Sindh has been a leader in forging ties with both of these through School Managing Committees (SMCs) called PTAs in the ‘90s. Sadly, each year the three school based transactions remain under or un-utilized, viz.

a) SMCs grants to SMC accounts when SMCs accounts are not functional as per rules
b) a head teacher changes
c) is simply inertia ridden without supervision.

The annual School Specific Budget (SSB) with almost Rs. 5 billion allocation in different budget heads/activities is needed desperately at the school site for its active functioning that is almost unspent and not disbursed. This is imperative because it is the children, parents and teachers who suffer the most.

The trends for allocation and expenditure of the non-salary budget show that almost half of this component remains unspent each year. The need to improve allocation and utilization of this component is important as resources are more effectively utilized when the community is involved and Schools and SMCs are empowered and given financial autonomy.

The education budget is underspent especially for development purposes. Most allocations have improved but with poorly planned utilization. 42% of the ADP and 57% of the non-salary recurrent expenditure remained unspent in 2014-15. Moreover, the historic allocation in FY 2016-17 for “Innovative Initiatives” in recurrent grant in aid budget of Rs. 500 million needs an active strategy for utilization in a province which can boast of such initiatives.

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*figures are as per SAMS data*
In order to bring the out of school children into schools, there is a dire need of more schools. Out of 46,039 schools in Sindh, 91% are at primary level and the problem of low transition rate into secondary schools is evident and logical. It is promising to see that this year 37% of the ADP is allocated to upgrading and establishing secondary schools to bridge the gap at the post primary level. However, with the ECCE 2015 Policy notified, implementing the government’s plans for ECE will be very difficult with an allocation of only 1.7% and to date with no focal section or official managing this sub-sector.

Challenges and way forward

While there is a substantial amount of money allocated by the government each year for education funding, they are inefficiently allocated across districts and sectors- even after taking account of teachers who are present or absent through a robust biometrics and now monthly monitoring for action in 15 districts by the Directorate General of Monitoring & Evaluation (DG M&E) teams in Sindh. In order to implement Article 25-A effectively and to make quality education a reality for all children, the government needs to take urgent action to increase both the volume and effectiveness of investment in education- to make the business case for RTE in Sindh.

- There is an urgent need for an out of school children census to provide an accurate number of OOSC, actual enrollment- not just on paper, and the areas (districts) that need immediate attention. The census will help understand the challenge that Education in Sindh is facing and help in implementation of the Sindh Free & Compulsory Education Act 2013 and its various policies.

- Besides the Government’s own budget, there are a number of solid funds that the government receives from bilateral /multi-lateral agencies through grants and loans viz., USAID, World Bank, European Union, CIDA, JICA, UNICEF that are being mobilized and which should be tracked.

- The budget itself needs to be more inclusive. It is imperative to focus on the most disadvantaged groups; including the poorest, children with mild disabilities and devise targeted budgets to ensure that inequalities in education are not perpetuated in the future. While there is a separate allocation for special education, there is a need of active dialogue on mainstreaming, and an imperative need to increase Gender Responsive budgeting to improve gender equality.

- With changing times, there is a need to include technology enabled learning in the budget.

- Cross sectoral planning and utilization is essential. The education department must coordinate with other departments like the health, infrastructure, and agriculture sectors for holistic growth and sustainable development through lifelong learning.

- Education data analysis and budget tracking is the key to identifying and resolving issues in the education system and to promote data-based decision making at all levels. There are three processes involved in the budgeting process; allocations with data evidence and priorities, release of funds, and utilization. There are weaknesses in all three of the processes which we need to identify and find solutions for. It is important to carry out these tasks in a timely manner and make information about government revenue sources, public budgets and expenditures widely available to use such information constructively for future policy design and help other actors utilize it optimally as well; this is aligned to Article 19-A of the Constitution on right to information as a fundamental right.

- Technology can play a key role in making the budget process transparent – For example, Nigeria’s Budget Tracking technology. Here, the education budget tracker is a web-based tool that has been built for stakeholders to be informed on the different funds; both national funds, budgetary funds or international donor aid going to the education sector. It is an example of how if people can access, share and create information, they are empowered to make a positive difference.

The end goal is to ensure inclusive equitable access to a quality education system by improving the implementation and monitoring framework and optimizing education budget in Pakistan