Education for Inclusive and Quality Learning; Strengths and Weaknesses of the Punjab Education Budget 2016-17

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Context

The Right to Education Act Article 25- A stipulates that the government should provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages 5-16 years. The devolution of powers through the 18th amendment shifted the entitlement, decision making and responsibility to make rules of law and implement the article to each province. Since 2013 there has been an aggressive education policy undertaken by the Punjab province in the name of Punjab Education Sector Reforms program and Chief Minister’s School Reforms Road Map. The School Reforms road map has been strategized to achieve the following broad targets;

- 100% enrolment of all children of school going age
- 100% retention of all enrolled students up to 16 years
- Free, compulsory and internationally competitive education for all
- Merit based recruitment and transfers of HR
- Targets for officers and rankings of districts on targets
- Transparent selection of officers and their retention linked with targets
- Incentives for good performance.
If we are to achieve the target of attaining 100% enrolment and retention of all children of school going age, it is imperative to not only allocate budgets where pockets of marginalization are the highest but also to utilize them efficiently by the end of the year. 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 Punjab has set out holistic and comprehensive plans for both formal and non-formal streams. It is the duty and responsibility of the Punjab government to ensure fulfilment of these rules which include tackling issues of inclusion, access, equity and quality. Under the Right to Education Act, the government is responsible for providing access with teachers through resolving issues such as school proximity, closed schools, chronic missing facilities, school upgradation for transition, teacher’s presence, community engagement, disaster preparedness/management, and offering free transport especially to girls and teachers where needed for post primary education. The principles of the Right to Education Act point out the ideological framework of what should happen with regards to educational development whereas ASER 2015 and other relevant data sources respond by pointing out key constraints in the Education sector. Given these prerequisites, the question now needs to be addressed whether the Punjab Education Budgets suffices to respond to these urgencies and in supporting the government obligations to its citizenry?
The Provincial Budget 2016-17 of the Punjab Government is a balanced budget with the total outlay of Rs.1,681 billion. The budget includes the current expenditure of Rs. 849.947 billion and the development expenditure of Rs. 550.000 billion. Thus, the Annual Development Program is 32.7% of the total outlay as compared to the year 2015-16 and the growth in Annual Development Program is 37.5% higher than the last financial year. Total allocation for Education is of Rs. 312.8 billion of both district and provincial governments (Government of Punjab, 2016).

- Expenditure on the Education Sector has been estimated at Rs. 62 Billion in the year 2016-17 against Budget Estimates of Rs. 57 Billion in the year 2015-16 showing an increase of 9% (Government of Punjab, 2016).
- It was in the year 2013- 2014 when the Punjab education Budget was about 26% of the total provincial budget line. In this year 2016 – 2017, it is just and only 18.6% of the total provincial budget line (I-SAPS, 2014). The gap between total provincial budget line and the education budgets seems to widen by the day, also shown by the graph above.
- In case of Punjab educational department a total of Rs. 32.8 Billion of investments were outlaid in the previous year only Rs. 14 Billion have been spent up to now. (Punjab Education Budget White Paper)

**Allocation and Expenditure**

**Salary vs. Non Salary**

While the major chunk of the education budget is allocated to the salary component, there is an improvement in this year’s allocation as we see an increase non salary budget proportion as well. The non-salary component is an essential category of the education budget as it deals with maintaining and ensuring effective service delivery of public goods. For the education sector, this
includes Non-salary School Based Budgets (utilities, stationary, travel, communications, repairs), School Consolidation and SMCs. **Figure 3: Salary and Non Salary Budget Proportion**

However, a substantial chunk of the recurrent budget amounting approximately to 73.7% is absorbed within the Salary component for the year 2016-17. Salary component over the past year has been given due importance with an aim of achieving results based on human capital development i.e. Better teachers and administrators shall better perform given the right financial and non-financial incentives. However, despite such reforms, learning levels data does not correspond with this planned multiplier.

ASER data findings set the yardstick on English literacy by setting standards of gauging Grade 2 literacy standards on children aged 5-16. Indicators are then mapped for a child of grade 1 to be able to at least read small letters, grade 3 to be able to at least read words and grade 5 to be able to at least read sentences. Findings suggest that in an aggregate pool of children from these 3 categories only 5% have cut the threshold in ASER 2015 report. ASER 2015 data for in school children shows a disparity in learning levels of Urdu between boys and girls aged 5 to 16 years. Boys are 7% more likely to learn a language well than girls. The disparities become even grave for out of school boys and girls.

![Learning levels by school type](image)

**Key Observations Regarding the Punjab Education Budget 2016-17**

- Within the education sector, the government is primarily focusing on school education sector (nursery to grade 12) as it is a major pillar of education system. The development budget of School Education has been increased from Rs.33.0 billion in the financial year 2015-16 to Rs. 47.7 billion in financial year 2016-17.
- An allocation of Rs. 4.0 billion has been made for Punjab Education Endowment Fund (PEEF) during the year 2016-17 for providing scholarships to the intelligent but deserving students. Another initiative of Government for facilitating the people to educate their children in low cost private schools is through PEF. An allocation of Rs. 12.0 billion has been made for financial year 2016-17 for this purpose.
• The government of Punjab has also pledged to increase direct beneficiaries by 2.2 million for the year 2016-17 through the Punjab Education Foundation; 1,467,461 children through the Foundation Assisted Schools Program, 310,918 students through the New Education Voucher Scheme and 150,004 through the New Schools Program (Citizens Education Budget).

• An allocation of Rs. 8 billion has been kept in ADP 2016-17 for rehabilitation / reconstruction of 4,063 dilapidated school buildings (ADP budget statement 2016-17), compared with the Rs. 2.75 billion budget allocated for the purpose in the previous year (Government of Punjab, 2016).

** Disconnect between Budget Allocation and Policy Focus **

ASER 2015 data shows that there is a disparate percentage of out of school children across the region and the percentage varies from 11 upto 30% in 36 districts across all provinces. However, it must be noted that out of school children have a higher percentage of around 20 to 30% in Southern Punjab districts especially in Bahawalpur, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Vehari etc. Overall the out of school children constitute an average of 15% out of which 8% are girls and 7% are boys. (ASER National Report 2015) The ratio has been more or less stagnant since 2013. Given more than half of out-of-school children in Punjab are girls, there had been several strategies by the Punjab government especially 'Stipend for girls' which dealt with women mobility and empowerment in 15 districts as it intersected deeply with educational development. However in the budget of 2016-17 for this policy now been shifted and upgraded under the Social Protection Authority (SPA). The budget under Social Protection Authority is Rs.1000 Million for development purposes. (Government of Punjab, 2016). Although upgradation is the next step in dealing with the problem at hand, it is however, imperative that both the School Education Department and Social Protection Authority (SPA) collaborate to jointly implement this policy. Collaborated efforts on monitoring and data collection by School Education Department and resultant timely dispersing by Social Protection Unit will require coordination in order to maximize utilization. It is essential to understand its implications on long terms educational objectives before shifting budgets across departments.
Furthermore, ASER Data points us a major policy area of Non Formal and Early Schooling. Findings suggest that at Age 3, 83% of the children have not joined school however this percentage decreases to 18% at Age 5 of a child. Despite the fact that these statistics point towards a major policy focus, the Punjab budgets 2016-17 resonates only 2.62% of its ADP component to Literacy and Non Formal Education Programs. Non Formal education programs, especially those dealing with early childhood development have set precedents of concrete conceptual learning of children from the very beginning. There are recently various ongoing schemes under Punjab NFE policy such as Punjab Non Formal Education project, 'Taleem Sab k Liye' and Non Formal Human Resource Development Institute, however budget allocations seem to be having a declining trend compared to Rs. 2400 Million in 2014-15. (Government of Punjab, 2016)

In 2013-14, under the Punjab Education Sector Reforms Program (PMIU-PERSP), the government piloted 9 districts for Non-Salary School Based Budgets with an aim of facilitating an increase in the non-salary component of the budget. Upgradation of the project has been under way however allocations of to school have been irregular and discretionary. The project has utilized a financing formula for the allocation of budgets to schools based on performance management of short term goals (cleanliness, missing facilities, teacher attendance, repairs) and long term goals (20% increase in student retention after 3 years of NSB). Policy makers must cautiously upgrade their financing formula in light of the changing circumstances following the end of 3 years, in 2017, of NSB’s attainment of its long term goal. The irregularity and discretionary nature of the NSB budgets also reflects within the budget books as there is no insight over specifically how much was allocated and dispersed to each of these schools by the end of the year; rather they show an aggregate total of all schools in Non-Development Volume 1.
Challenges and Way Forward

While there is a substantial amount of funding for education, they are inefficiently allocated across districts and sectors. In order to implement article 25-A effectively and make quality education a reality for all children, the government needs to take urgent action to increase both volume and effectiveness of investment in education— to make a business case for RTE Punjab.

- An important initiative is the Rs. 270 Million allocated the out of school children census in Punjab for the year 2017. It is imperative that all government functionaries take due part in this process. Efficient data collection shall be a stepping stone towards identifying loopholes in the system and then moving towards sustainable solutions for RTE.

- Besides government's own budget there are solid funds that the education sector receives in term of foreign aid. For instance, DFID's contribution in the shape of construction of 6,000 new class rooms in schools with an estimated cost of Rs. 9.0 billion in the financial year 2016-17, would accumulavely amount to an increase of 71% over budget estimates of the financial year 2015-16, however this does not reflect under a separate heading within the development budget. It is key to utilize such opportunities to the fullest with transparent monitoring mechanisms from the grass roots.

- In light of the Sustainable Development Goals, budget planning should be carried out in a way as to achieve multiple cross sectional goals. It is important to realize the multifaceted aspects of education which include gender, ethnicity, mobility, security etc. Where SDG Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable education for all, subsequent goals such as SDG Goal 3 on good health and wellbeing, SDG Goal 5 on gender equality and SDG Goal 10 on reduced inequalities, intersect with education development and vice versa. Policy makers should realize while planning budgets about areas where this cross section is the most complex and then allocate budgets accordingly.

- Budget tracking is one of the key aspects in promoting evidence based policy making in all levels of public life. There are three processes involved in the budgeting process; allocation with data evidence and priorities, release of funds and utilization. It is imperative to strengthen this chain in a timely and efficient manner.

- Lastly, given the collective nature of educational development, the government should identify and realize the role of key partners in this movement. For this to happen, the government should involve civil society organizations through information sharing, technical planning and responsibility sharing. Article 19-A states that “Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance.” It is through this collaboration that the realization of RTE could evolve from within the society at large. Precedent for this has already been set by the Sindh Education Department through formation of Local Education group which aims to bridge the information and knowledge gap through regular dialogue.
References


