

Social Accountability in Education

Shared or participatory governance is the new mantra of the social scientists demanding and working for provision of quality public service deliveries in Pakistan. The demand for such governance models is based on an exposure to the success stories of the world where after public's participation, provision of health, education, water and sanitation has not only been ensured at all levels, but its quality has also improved.

Importance of participatory governance, which is also referred to as inclusive governance in Pakistan's education system is twofold. First, because all those who can afford are opting for private schools for their children and those who cannot afford to pay hefty fees of private schools for their children, are not influential enough to demand for quality education for their children at public schools. Secondly, amid centralized school governance, education public officials do not deem parents of the children important enough to feel answerable towards them.

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), in partnership with ILM Ideas, in order to promote participatory school governance and thereby to introduce the concept of social accountability for better quality of education delivery is running one of its education projects in district Khanewal and Vehari of Punjab province in Pakistan. The purpose of this project is to realize the parents about importance of educating their children, both girls and boys, and to stand and demand for quality public education in their areas.

In both the targeted districts, education infrastructure is perhaps most dilapidated in the country. A great majority of the schools lack even basic facilities including clean drinking water, boundary walls, toilets, and class furniture. On top of it, in rural areas, teacher to student ratio is perhaps highest in the country with only one or two teachers running entire primary schools of 150-200 children. Moreover, more than teaching the students, these already less than adequate number of teachers are burdened with free labor work including conducting surveys, running polio campaigns, working as social mobilizers for various campaigns so on and so forth.

All these extra duties of the teachers have a huge bearing on their ability to impart education to the children, let alone imparting quality education. Besides that, there are series of reporting assignments that they have to conduct on daily basis, and this entire exercise leaves little time for them to prepare their lessons or to take time out for their own families. With this kind of environment, the irony is that helm of affairs is with those who love to centralize everything, so that their answerability to the people can be minimized.

In such situation, the solution is to promote social accountability in the education sector. The idea is to realize the gravity of the situation to the parents, and to mobilize them to take up the issues with their local political leadership. These days, the SDPI is conducting Citizen Report Card (CRC) in district Khanewal and Vehari to assess the access, availability and quality of education in the area. On the basis of the results of the CRC survey, local political leadership will be approached to take the necessary measures for betterment of the public schools. Also, on the basis of the results compiled with the help of these surveys, provincial education policy makers will be approached with policy suggestions and inputs.

Through a two-way pressure on the policy makers – demand from the respective communities and policy input from the civil society through rigorous advocacy campaign, it is believed that we will be able to not only highlight the menaces affecting education system in the targeted areas, but also to address them to a great extent.

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