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EDUCATION REFORM IN PAKISTAN: PARTNERSHIPS FOR MANAGEMENT AS *THE WAY FORWARD* IN EDUCATION

[POLICY NOTE]

In the absence of express and concrete targets, neither the State nor the private partner has a proper understanding of or plan for what to accomplish, how best to accomplish it, and the timeframe within which to accomplish it. The lack of any consideration or articulation of targets and outcomes reflects a paucity of shared understandings and consensus on the policy rationale for public education provision.

Education Reform in Pakistan: Partnerships for Management (“PfMs”) as the Way Forward

Pakistan faces major challenges in the areas of access, quality, and governance in education. Public private partnerships (“PPPs”) in education offer a set of powerful tools for improving both delivery and financing of Basic Education. A variety of partnerships are being fielded / piloted in Pakistan, including vouchers for private schools, state subsidization of low fee private schools, and private management of state schools. The latter, Partnerships for Management (PfMs), are a model of partnership that involves the participation, input and contribution of private actors and organizations toward the infrastructural enhancement and upkeep, human resource development, and management of public schools. In Punjab and Sindh the mechanism is referred to as the ‘Adopt-a-School’ model. The arrangement involves private actors voluntarily taking on both capital and human resource intensive responsibilities for the improvement of public schools. Beyond bearing operating costs of the schools, the State’s contribution is limited to granting access to the school premises.

The growth of PfMs has happened despite minimal support, and arguably negative incentives, offered by the State in terms of its interest in and willingness to work with motivated and qualified private actors in the education sector. Nevertheless, various policymakers and development practitioners have advocated in recent years in favor of strengthening the PPP model – in particular

PfMs – for more effective state-driven provision of elementary and secondary education.

IDEAS has been involved in a year-long, mixed-methods study on Partnerships for Management, funded by Ilm Ideas. The objective of the study is to generate evidence on the subject, assess the contribution of the mechanism to education reform, and engage with questions of policy effectiveness and sustainability. This study – a seminal evidence-based research study on the subject – lends credence to the policy position that PfMs are a viable, even necessary, solution for the crisis of public provision of education in Pakistan.

This Policy Note is based on the findings of the study, and sets out the main issues relating to the prevailing policy deficit on the subject of the PPPs, specifically PfMs. It also underscores the urgent need for deepening the dialogue on the PfMs and their potential role in developing the capacity of the State for meaningful, widely accessible, and scalable education provision. Finally, it seeks to provide a broad policy framework for the institutional reform of PfMs. The objectives of this framework are two-fold: to bring the State back into the processes of education reform and provision on the one hand, and to create demand and generate positive incentives for civil society actors to invest their capacities, know-how and resources, and to expand their involvement, in public schools on the other.

Why do we need State-Civil Society Partnerships for Education in Pakistan?

The State has a Constitutional Obligation to Provide Education

Particularly in view of the recently introduced right to education under the Pakistani Constitution (Article 25-A), the State must formulate policies and take active measures to provide “free and compulsory” elementary and secondary education. The legal and constitutional duty lies squarely on the State to make the right to education effective and meaningful. This means that the State must directly commit to and invest in education through the best possible means that enable wide access to education, ensure sustainability and scalability of the methods for education provision, and are based on concrete target-based goals. Because of the historical and persisting lack of prioritization and development of capacity for public education provision, the State needs to partner with private actors in order to pool capacities and resources. The objective of this PPP model of education provision is long-term, sustainable institutional reform. It is only by playing a direct institutional role in the development of education – with a capacity and resource enhancing contribution from civil society actors – that the State can own and hence fulfill its constitutional obligations to educate each and every child in the country.

The State sector continues to be the largest provider of education services; and is catering to the poorest and the poor. The potential of the State to scale up and sustain good practices remains unparalleled. Whatever the public-private mix in education service delivery, the State sector needs reform. The question is not whether the private sector should be part of the education

system, but how. PPPs provide a policy tool for the state to channel private sector efficiencies and capacities towards State sector reform. PfMs, in particular, offer a way to involve the private sector in reforming quality and governance constraints in the State service delivery mechanisms.

Evidence Demonstrates the Superior Outcomes in PPPs

Findings from the study undertaken by IDEAS indicate that PfMs have the potential to provide solutions for some of the most long-standing challenges faced by State run schools, including access, quality of provision and governance. Education provision through such partnerships is significantly superior along a number of parameters, including enrollments, provision of basic facilities, learning outcomes, and capacity support for head teachers and teachers. In addition to investments for infrastructural enhancements and human resource development, PfMs are serving two purposes in State sector schools: amplifying the voice of the school within the overall structure of the bureaucracy; and monitoring the school and building operations capacity at the school level. In doing so, PfMs are addressing two failures in governance and service delivery in the State sector: the low capacity for governance at the school level; and a failure of coordination between the school and local education departments.

Lack of political consensus and ownership of the partnership agenda is inhibiting the operation of this mechanism at scale. This study provides systematic evidence for the first time about the potential of the partnership mechanism to contribute to education reform. This evidence can be used to challenge resistance to PfM mechanisms, and simultaneously strengthen the case for initiatives that are taking PfMs forward.

What is the Prevailing Structure of PfMs?

Existing PfMs are Fundamentally One-Sided Arrangements Based on the Altruism and Philanthropy of Civil Society Actors

The State only provides access to existing premises of public schools on terms and conditions which are virtually all to the benefit of the State. Essentially, the State engages a private party on a purely voluntary basis to provide public education without investing any resources except for a certain number of government school teachers. The memorandums of understanding (“MoUs”) – which appear to be the only written legal documents that undergird the PfM arrangement – are pre-contractual, have limited legal value, and are at best in the nature of a narrow usufructuary agreement. The MoUs allow the private partners access to public school premises based on requirements of infrastructural development and human resource investments. The private partners are left to make capital inputs and provision of services purely “voluntarily” and without any legal consideration. In essence, there is neither a legal or policy framework supporting this arrangement, nor any transparent or proper incentives for PfMs to invest in the development of public schools at a larger level.

This has two implications for the sustainability of the improvements produced by PfMs in State schools: a) entirely philanthropy-based financing limits the scale of operations of the model as the ability of organizations to raise funds will be varied, but also limited; b) interlinked with the above, teachers contracted and supported by private partners in schools will have to be let

go unless the State develops a realistic and legally grounded exit strategy.

Existing PfMs operate within a bureaucracy-heavy and patronage-based informal framework that lacks institutionalized mechanisms for facilitating access of civil society actors to the State, particularly in the Punjab

Lack of a clear policy position by the provincial government has meant that no operational guidelines have been established for PfMs. In the absence of clear and transparent operating procedures, PfMs function on the basis of patronage and political access. The (MoUs) signed between individual district coordination officers (“DCOs”) and the private partner organizations serve as documents granting permission to private actors to work in schools, often without the knowledge and consent of district education officers (“EDOs”). There is no dedicated post at the provincial level to coordinate between the partner organizations, finance and education departments; to ensure the development of operational guidelines necessary for effective functioning; and to monitor the partner organizations. Partners deal with EDOs and DCOs in an individual capacity. The MoUs, identification of new schools, renewal of contracts, etc., all happen on a very *ad hoc* basis. This is true for Punjab in particular. An open and transparent mechanism for soliciting participation in PfMs is missing. Sindh, on the other hand, has historically solicited participation through newspaper advertisements and instituted a steering committee for vetting private partners.

Furthermore, existing PfMs are severely impeded in their effort to collaborate with the State because of the absence of institutional memory of the private partners' contribution to the public school machinery, human resources and educational development.

IDEAS's study on PfMs also identifies the absence of an identification mechanism for schools that can benefit most from the PfM model. Currently, PfM locations are heavily contingent on prior logistical presence of adopting organizations, which means that, often, the most challenged schools and districts fall outside the PfM net. There is a need for – and it is indeed possible for – the provincial education departments to put in place a systematic mechanism for identification of schools grounded in, linked with, and informed by the education management information systems.

Primary Emphasis in Existing PfMs is on Brick and Mortar Investments with little or no acknowledgment of Private Partners' Much Wider Contributions

Over the years, all partners have expanded their interventions in State schools beyond building rooms to providing capacity building support for teachers and head teachers, providing schools with syllabus-enhancing materials and introducing pedagogical innovations in school. Furthermore, the presence of private partners in schools as non-State stakeholders is serving to address two major shortcomings of governance: a) lack of the voice of the school within the education bureaucracy; b) failure to monitor schools and build operational capacity at the school level.

The existing policy framework, in Punjab and until recently in Sindh as well, does not envisage a well-defined role for private partners in the broader educational

development or target-oriented involvement for building capacity of State agents and improving educational attainment in public schools. Limiting the partnership to provision of infrastructure only, as is currently the case, compromises the realization of the full potential of PfMs.

Existing PfMs Lack Decision-Making Authority and Control over Public School Teaching Staff

A key objective for involving private actors in State schools is to build capacity for management and improve governance and decision-making at the school level. In some ways, PfM operations have the potential to push State schools sideways out of the hierarchy of bureaucratic control by enabling decentralized decision-making and school-based management. However, realization of the gains from school-based management requires effective autonomy. Currently, private partners have the power to report teachers to the District Education Officers; same as the authority granted to a head-teacher. In both cases, it proves to be a relatively blunt mechanism for accountability, with political patronage severely limiting effective enforcement. Without autonomy to engage effectively with the teaching force in a way to influence their incentives will amount to going around the problem, compromising possibilities of sustainable reform in State schools.

Existing PfMs do not envisage an Exit Strategy

State schools are being handed over for management by private organizations with the intent of improving governance and operations to the level where State systems can start running them successfully again. Management contracts in both Punjab and Sindh specify 5 years as the term of adoption.

Yet, after 15 years of operations, very few, if any, of the schools have been handed back to the education departments.

Current PfM partners are reluctant to leave schools in the absence of credible commitment from education departments that interventions will be sustained. This commitment is a non-trivial task. It requires involvement of the district coordination and finance offices (in respect of the contract teaching force), the public works offices (for infrastructural developments), and the district education office (for all of the above, and additionally for ensuring that capacity building of the local community in question is

achieved by the expiration of the term of adoption).

Presently, the existing monitoring machinery in both Punjab and Sindh does not track progress of interventions in PfM operated schools. Initiating a monitoring of PfM outcomes is a crucial requirement. This is not only for effective public policy operations but also for designing a step-wise evaluation mechanism that can facilitate a smooth and systematic exit in a way that ensures gains from the intervention are sustained.

What would a Real State-Civil Society Partnership for Education look like?

Engaging in Political and Structural Reform

There must be a significant evolution in the way that the State views the role of and interfaces with civil society actors. State representatives must formally articulate a policy framework that establishes the State's primary responsibility for education provision while also recognizing the capacity-building potential of private partners. Further, the State must provide the right incentives to and share optimal resources with private partners in order for them to meaningfully collaborate with the State.

Policy and Legal Framework that positively endorses and fully supports PfMs

To begin with, there must be a broad and unqualified political buy-in for PfMs as well as for restructuring them through a well-defined, balanced and consensus-based policy and legal framework. Such a framework would enable the State and private actors to pool abilities, capacities and resources into the public provision of education as equal partners who have a mutual recognition of their respective roles and strengths and are committed to supporting educational development through realistic goals.

Institutionalized Access to the State for Expanding the Role of PfMs

Access to the State for entering into PfMs must be institutionalized for a more expedient, but also a wider and more diverse engagement with civil society actors. This entails the establishment of a publicly-open, transparent and merit-based process in line with the broader policy framework for both

the State and interested private actors to match their know-how and resources. It also entails bureaucratic reform for ensuring continuity in PfMs as well as enabling all concerned State actors to provide assistance to and facilitate the work of the private partners.

Redefining the Terms and Conditions in Support of PfMs

Legal Recognition & Protection of Private Partners

Private partners in PfMs do not appear to have any legal standing or rights as public education providers. Neither do they have any legal protection in relation to the investments and contributions they make to public schools – whether capital, infrastructural or human resource-based. Their role is structured as purely voluntary and philanthropic, and they may be denied access to or evicted from the school premises without notice or compensation for their enhancement of the premises or their services. If PfMs are to survive, let alone expand and move toward a sustainable and replicable model for public education provision, private partners must have a formally recognized role with well-defined legal rights, liabilities and targets.

Shift from Voluntarism to Shared Responsibility

A purely voluntary or altruistic engagement on the part of private partners is not only a disincentive for many civil society actors in collaborating with the State, but is also an impediment to setting and maintaining quality standards in public education

provision. While voluntarism may have its advantages – for the State because it essentially outsources education provision to a private actor, and for the private partner because of the autonomy in managing the public school and introducing programmatic innovations without any formal evaluation – what ultimately suffers is education quality and access. PfMs, therefore, must shift from a structure based on voluntarism and informal public-private relations to a formally defined framework of shared responsibility between the State and private partners. Amongst other things, this necessitates that the State invest financial resources in public schools being managed by private partners to supplement the limited resources of private partners and make PfMs sustainable. To be effective, the financial resources contributed by the State in PfMs must be of a realistic amount to match the monetary as well as non-monetary contributions of the private partners.

Sindh has recently spearheaded a new policy and legislative framework that seeks to both legalize and incentivize transfer of State resources to private actors and organizations through a “management fee” that will supplement the private partners’ own financial and human resource contributions. While this initiative is currently limited to Sindh and is yet to be properly implemented and subjected to public scrutiny, it indicates a growing political consensus for the State’s ownership of education provision as well as the State’s recognition of PPPs. This is a highly important opportunity for Punjab to learn from Sindh’s example.

Greater Decision-Making Authority

A meaningful structure for PfMs must additionally grant decision-making authority to the private partners to correspond to the improvements and contributions expected of them. Particularly in the realm of teaching

staff, PfMs must enable private partners to exert some control over frequent transfers of government teachers and their role allocations.

Engaging in Substantive Reform

Finally, the reform of PfMs must be geared ultimately toward providing quality education. This requires an articulation of realistic and concrete targets and outcomes, as well as institutionalization of evaluation and monitoring mechanisms and appropriate exit strategies.

PfMs Must Operate on the Basis of Concrete Targets & Outcomes

In the absence of express and concrete targets, neither the State nor the private partner has a proper understanding of or plan for what to accomplish, how best to accomplish it, and the timeframe within which to accomplish it. The lack of any consideration or articulation of targets and outcomes reflects a paucity of shared understandings and consensus on the policy rationale for public education provision. It also creates negative incentives for private partners to perform better and for the State to abdicate its constitutional obligation.

Need for Formal Mechanisms of Evaluation & Monitoring

Along with concrete targets, PfMs must be restructured to include formal mechanisms of evaluation and monitoring of their performance and outcomes. These need not be State-led or State-heavy mechanisms, but could, once again, involve different kinds of public-private partnerships for education provision monitoring.

Agreement on Exit Strategy

PfMs are not intended as indefinite arrangements. They need to be re-visualized as short-term partnerships that build the capacity of the State during a stipulated period of time to develop and manage specific public schools and to bring them to a defined level of operating quality. An exit strategy that is part of the PfM arrangement is an incentive-enhancing policy that assures private partners that their contributions will be taken seriously and efforts will be made by the State to sustain those contributions over time.



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19 A, F.CC, Gulberg IV

Lahore, Pakistan

TEL: +92 423 5778 178-79

EMAIL: admin@ideaspak.org