

Special Section

Impact Analysis of Punjab Education Sector Reforms

Introduction

It is generally believed that a good quality education plays a key role in the economic and social development of a country by improving the quality of human capital. Unfortunately, Pakistan's educational indicators do not portray a satisfactory picture.¹ The illiteracy rate is high; gross and net enrolment rates, at all level of education, are low; there are wide gender and regional disparities in opportunities to acquire education; dropout rates from schools are high; and quality of educational services is poor.²

As discussed in detail in the SBP Annual Report for FY04, the poor state of the education sector and, in particular, the low primary and secondary enrolment rates, are mainly attributed to: (1) the high cost of education - both direct and opportunity costs; (2) parental disapproval, especially in case of females, due to social and cultural norms; (3) the low quality of education, which incorporates shortages of trained and qualified teachers, and lack of proper physical infrastructure.

This said, during the last two years, efforts have been made by the government to address these areas. An interesting feature of this recent approach towards the education sector is the increasing role of provincial governments. Specifically, Punjab has initiated a Punjab Education Sector Reforms Program (PESRP) since 2003, which was followed by a similar reform process by Sindh governments. The thrust of these measures is to achieve universal primary education and adult literacy by addressing the major issues impeding the progress in education sector.

An attempt is made here to undertake an impact analysis of the educational reforms in Punjab. The recent data available from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey for the period 2004-05 provide an excellent opportunity to contrast the performance of Punjab in the area of education during the reform period with respect to pre-reform period, as well as to the trends in the remaining three provinces of the country. The analysis suggests that the educational reform process at the provincial level has been successful in bringing a significantly larger improvement in the Punjab.

¹ In the year 2000, the Gross Primary Enrolment Rate (GPER) was above 100 percent in all the SAARC members, except Pakistan. Even the current GPER at 86 percent is well below the 100 percent mark.

² For details see SBP Annual Reports for FY04 and FY05.

Salient Features of Punjab Education Sector Reforms

The Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP), which began in 2003, has three strategic pillars: (1) public finance reforms to ensure increased public spending for education; (2) devolution of public sector management reform; and, (3) improvement in access, quality and governance of education.

As in other provinces, issues pertaining to education in the Punjab included the high cost of education; lack of proper infrastructure facilities; high gender and regional gap; lack of trained teachers; and poor quality of education. The Punjab government has taken various steps to solve these issues and for the improvement of access to education in the province. Some of the initiatives taken are as follows.

- To boost enrolment and bring children into schools, the Punjab government has not only waived the fee at the public sector schools but has also provided free textbooks. In 2004, the Punjab government provided free textbooks to all the students (7.25 million students) from grade one to five on a timely basis. This facility will extend up to grade eight in 2005 while by the next academic year, the PESRP will be extended to all the students up to grade ten (the matriculation level).
- Basic infrastructure is one reason for low attendance at schools. Missing infrastructure facilities mainly include the shelter less schools, buildings and schools without boundary walls and drinking water etc. The PESRP has moved to incrementally provide the missing infrastructure facilities to schools in Punjab. Total number of missing facilities given in the district profile of all 34 districts was 118,274. Total missing facilities prioritized by the districts for the first year were 36,911 which are nearing completion. In this regard in FY04, Rs 150 million have been given to each of the 34 districts for the provision of basic facilities in primary schools.
- In order to promote female participation, Punjab government introduced a monthly stipend of Rs 200 for female students in 15 low literacy districts across the province. About 200,000 girl students of grade 6-8 with 80 percent and above school attendance have been regularly receiving stipend in targeted districts.
- To improve the quality of education, authorities in Punjab have also been taking steps to ensure the availability of teachers and to improve the quality of existing teaching staff. In this regard, 13,000 new teachers (on contract) have been recruited on school specific assignments. As a result, fifty percent

of closed or non functional schools (due to unavailability of teachers) reopened in 2004. To improve the quality of teaching staff, the provincial government has launched refresher courses for 90,000 teachers against the target of 150,000 teachers in 2004.

Impact analysis of Punjab Education Sector Reforms

In order to do an unbiased impact analysis of the reforms and to draw meaningful conclusion it is important to consider two important dimensions. First, did the target group (Punjab in our case) see a significantly greater improvement in the reform period compared with the pre-reform period; and second, did the target group perform relatively better than the non-target group (the remaining three provinces)? Combining the two dimensions involve a difference and difference (D-D) approach; which process is generally being recommended in doing such impact analysis. Mathematically this can be written as:

$$D-D \text{ indicator} = (Punjab \text{ Progress} - other \text{ province progress})_{reform \text{ period}} - (Punjab \text{ Progress} - other \text{ province progress})_{pre-reform \text{ period}}$$

As shown in **Table 1**, Punjab saw a significantly larger improvement in gross as well as net primary enrolment rates during the reform period compared with the other provinces, which was not the case in the pre-reform period. This can also be seen by the positive values of D-D indicator for all the three provinces. The better progress by Punjab in the reform period was true for both male and female groups and also shared by the rural and urban regions (see **Table 2**).

Table 1: Indicators of Education Performance						
percent						
	1998-99	2001-02	2004-05	Change during		D-D indicator
				Pre-reform period	Reform period	
Gross Primary Enrolment Rate						
Punjab	75	76	95	1	19	-
Sindh	64	63	75	-1	12	5
NWFP	70	77	80	7	3	22
Balochistan	64	62	67	-2	5	11
Net Primary Enrolment Rate						
Punjab	44	45	58	1	13	-
Sindh	41	40	48	-1	8	3
NWFP	39	41	47	2	6	8
Balochistan	36	32	37	-4	5	3

Source: PSLM Survey 2004-05

Table 2.2 Change in Gross Primary Enrolment Rate
percentage points

	Male		Female		Urban		Rural	
	Pre-reform	During reform	Pre-reform	During reform	Pre-reform	During reform	Pre-reform	During reform
Punjab	2	16	1	20	0	16	1	19
Sindh	1	8	-3	14	-10	15	6	5
NWFP	13	-4	2	9	3	-1	8	4
Balochistan	-2	6	-2	5	0	6	-4	4

Source: PSLM Survey 2004-05

Conclusion

The analysis based on PSLM data suggest that Punjab Education Sector Reform Program has contributed significantly in improving the gross and net enrolment rates in the province, which was a major and immediate focus of these reforms. The lessons learnt from this program indicate that if the financial constraints can be eased, appropriate physical infrastructure facilities can be provided, and committed quality teachers are employed then progress can be accelerated towards substantially improving the educational access and outcomes in Pakistan.