

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN:  
PARAMETERS FOR USAID'S INVOLVEMENT

THE PROBLEM

Pakistan has the lowest literacy rate in Asia at 24 percent, which ranks among the lowest of all developing countries! The rate ranges from only six percent for rural females to 52 percent for urban males. This indicates such an extremely poor human resource base that the country's future economic growth and its ability to come to terms with high population growth and sustain a budding democracy are at risk. To be competitive in international markets, Pakistan needs a growing skilled labor force which increasingly can draw in women. The average family size of a literate Pakistani woman is 25 percent smaller than an illiterate one. Education is vital to reducing the population growth rate. It is also essential to the growth of democracy in Pakistan.

Pakistan's literacy levels are the result of decades of overall inattention on the part of Pakistan's elite and chronic underfunding. Mahbubul Haq, current Minister of Planning, wrote in his 1976 book, The Poverty Curtain, "Nothing ever discouraged me so much during my thirteen years as an economic planner in Pakistan as the callous neglect of the education sector in the actual implementation of the development plans. Whenever the financial resource situation was tight--which was often the case--the allocations for education were the first ones to be slashed." The results of this neglect clearly have had the most dramatic impact on the rural population, which includes 70 percent of the people, and on primary education: only 15 percent of the rural population are literate and only 40 percent are enrolled in schools.

Underfunding has created a great shortage of primary school facilities and it is estimated that 30 percent of classes are held in the open air with only chalkboards to work with. Where school buildings exist, 70 percent are run down, unsanitary, and ill equipped. There is a shortage of teachers, particularly female, and a high percentage of teachers hired (25 percent females) are underqualified. So called qualified teachers are poorly trained, ill prepared, and largely unsupervised. Teaching material, when available, is insufficient or inappropriate with no relevance to the environment or the culture of the students. Pakistan only spends about \$24 per student annually compared to \$59 by other low income countries; over \$22 goes for teacher salaries and only 20 cents for learning materials, compared to a norm of 10 percent or \$2.40. Naturally, primary school enrollment suffers. Parents do not allow their children to attend school because they believe it is not useful. Those that go do not learn very much and drop out. As a result, the completion rate is only about 50 percent. In rural areas, a generous estimate for enrollment is 20 percent for girls and 60 percent for boys, and the country overall has an estimated 48 percent enrollment level. This compares with Pakistan's Asian neighbors who have 70-90 percent enrollment levels.

## THE ISSUES

For Pakistan: To increase literacy Pakistan must tackle problems in primary education with low enrollment and completion rates. To do this, Pakistan must address two fundamental issues: funding and management.

Pakistan has never invested more than two percent of its gross national product in education, compared to five to seven percent for its neighbors. This has created a huge backlog of needs at the primary school level which affects quality and breadth of educational services. Just to maintain an existing 50 percent enrollment rate Pakistan must spend \$800 million annually (in 1984/85 dollars), and to increase the overall rate to 75 percent by 1992/93, the World Bank estimates another \$400 million annually (in 1984/85 dollars) will be needed. To begin to address the inequities in the primary school system funding is needed to construct 8,000 new school buildings annually and to rehabilitate thousands more of the existing 75,000. Further, salaries of over 100,000 new teachers will be needed for staffing of these schools while expanded in-service training is needed for the existing 214,000 teachers; equally important are funds to develop, produce, and distribute on a massive scale relevant education teaching/learning materials. All of these expenses imply a more than doubling in constant prices of the recurrent cost budget for primary education.

Under the current 1983-88 Development Plan, implementation has lagged with less than 40 percent of the targets met after three years. The Prime Minister, in his December 25, 1985 inaugural speech for the first civilian government since 1977, clearly identified the literacy problem for attention under a special Five-Point Program. Reflecting this commitment, 2.5 percent of the GNP has been budgeted this year and progress made on its actual disbursement. Within education, primary's allocation jumped from 29 to 38 percent in the FY 86/87 budget. Nevertheless a gap is still there and the requirements grow annually with a 3.1 percent population growth rate. Further, it is increasingly difficult to fund these obligations since 80 percent of the Government's nondevelopment budget is required for defense and debt service.

The second issue is the management of the primary education system: there are significant systemic problems to be dealt with. During the Bhutto era schools came under more centralized control moving from district level responsibility to the provincial and federal levels with shared responsibilities. This change forced new funding channels to be established with federal subsidies. This has not functioned well since it is difficult to ensure federal support is actually spent for the intended educational purposes at the provincial level. Without a decentralized management system reaching down to local levels, there is no way for people's complaints to be heard and acted upon. Presently, there is no effective check on the services provided by the system and local

communities are powerless in trying to improve the system. Supervisors have become overburdened with 100 or more schools to monitor; therefore, the primary system is ignored and secondary schools receive more attention. There is no adequate management information system to inform senior administrators and planners what is happening and where problems are developing so corrective means can be taken. For example, teacher absenteeism is high because of low salaries, no local feedback and insufficient local supervision. The centralized system produces materials that are uniform, and therefore in many cases irrelevant, to rural areas and local, cultural, and social needs. The timing of classes is uniform and may not be consistent with family or community needs. Pre-service and in-service training are inadequate.

For USAID: Given this need for both massive resources and systemic improvements, what should be the role of USAID? The basic financial problem facing Pakistan in primary education is domestic resources and recurrent costs which ultimately only Pakistan and its people can solve. One must always question the use of scarce donor foreign exchange to buy local currency. To the extent USAID finances local costs, the pressure on the GOP to change its policies to mobilize domestic resources can be abated or postponed. Thus, priorities become skewed again in the wrong fashion. Further, reforms aimed at decentralization of authority are a potential political minefield. Thus, one can mount strong arguments for staying out of the sector, or at the very least for considering entry with great care as the U. S. Ambassador suggested in his cover letter for the FY 1988-93 CDSS. It seems clear that USAID should not become deeply involved in this sector until and unless the commitment of the Government of Pakistan is unequivocal and is represented by both appropriate funding and policy changes, and unless AID funding could be brought to bear in a positive manner on resource mobilization.

#### PARAMETERS

The Mission fundamentally agrees with these concerns yet believes education is critical to the country's long-term development and stability. Certain parameters must be established to guide our potential involvement in the sector. First, it seems clear the Pakistan Government has started to move and needs support and encouragement. Second, any actions taken by USAID should not relieve pressure on the Government to address the fundamental problem of mobilizing Pakistan's resources. Third, if an AID action maintains these pressures, and if the Government demonstrates its long-term increased commitment, there are bound to be very substantial unmet needs which might be appropriate for USAID to support at the margin. Fourth, any investment must be geared toward fostering greater decentralization from both a management and possible cost-sharing perspective. These four parameters will guide the Mission's exploration and potential involvement in primary education. They are issues in which we must undertake greater in-depth analysis before arriving at decisions.

## THE PARAMETERS OF A POTENTIAL PROGRAM

What urgent needs in primary education could be addressed without releasing pressure on the government to address the funding issue? Clearly, many quality improvement of the system fall into this area. Assistance appropriately structured through pilot or limited area impact projects could demonstrate significant improvements in quality if more resources are provided such as: greater and better supervision, greater local-level participation, and improved training of teachers.

The highest priority--with the least financial impact--is teacher training. Current primary teaching certificate holders do not have supervised practical teaching yet teachers colleges are working far below capacity. Initiating a program in this area would not be expensive and would better utilize existing resources. Further, provincial MOE's find it so difficult to locate teachers that they will hire anyone who will accept a rural assignment and will provide nine-month in-service training if the teacher completes one year of service. Developing and implementing improvements in this follow-on training, and possibly expanding a successful pilot experiment with learning coordinators (supervisor assistants) could also greatly improve teaching quality without costing large sums of money.

A second area critical to primary education quality is effective teaching/learning materials. Developing and testing new textbooks, teacher guides, learning kits, maps, and other educational support material could be critical to making the school a more effective environment in which to learn. By establishing the impact on a selected group of students of new material, the Government would be more disposed to procuring and distributing it.

A third area for immediate investment is in research and planning. Pakistan's education sector needs more accurate, reliable data in the standard areas--including baseline data not available in any form at present. And it needs to make scientific inquiry into the root causes of its more serious problems. Some research areas relevant to today's needs include: means of promoting female attendance; causes of high drop-out rate, causes of nonattendance (both pupils and teachers); evaluation of the mosque school experiment; the development and dissemination of computer-based models to facilitate the work of planners in projecting educational demand and resource requirements; identification and selection of the most appropriate strategies for resource utilization. Examples of studies that need to be done include: implications of teacher training on recurrent costs; implications of increased enrollment on capital and recurrent costs for primary, middle, and high school education; options for making in-service training more effective and efficient.

The longer-term position for USAID will be determined by continued assessment of the Government's efforts to raise and direct greater resources for primary education. While this is being documented, the Mission proposes to work through existing projects on developing model primary education facilities for rural girls. Larger investments by the Mission would only be forthcoming if and when we are convinced that these would not reduce pressures on the Government to change its current course of increasing domestic financing.

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