

Review

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Malik, R., & Naveed, A. (2015). Financing Education in Pakistan: The Impact of Public Expenditure and Aid on Educational Outcomes. RECOUP WP, no. 42.

The paper on “Financing education in Pakistan: The impact of public expenditure and aid on educational outcomes” authored by Rabea Malik and Arif Naveed has attempted to focus on financing allocations and its outcome situation in an interesting manner. In so doing, the authors, appear to provide a vivid picture of two decades of data to justify how successive governments in Pakistan have been insensitive towards their promises and commitments to improving state of education in the country. Presenting an alarming situation based on the findings of the study using a quantitative approach the authors appear to suggest future researchers to adopt a comprehensive and complex form of data analysis techniques to get more insights from the situation of education.

Perhaps, in so doing the findings could open up new windows to see how can the country improve access to education and retention rates especially at primary level as it is given more priority area within education sector. It could be more interesting if



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the authors present a comparative view of the proportion of financial assistance in overall social sector investment with neighboring countries. Rabea Malik, the first author is a research fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS). She, with a background in policy analysis, has interests in the areas of sociology of education and political economy of education reform in low-income country contexts including Pakistan. The authors organized this paper in: Section 1- Public Financing of Education in Pakistan; Section 2- Aid to Education in Pakistan; Section 3- Impact of Public Financing; and Section 4- Conclusions.

They came up with sub themes such as allocations of budget at national level, tight fiscal space and reliance on donor funding, gaps in commitments and actual expenditures, intra-sectoral priorities, recurrent and development expenditure, priorities within the education budget in section one; *Aid to education in Pakistan-trends in aid to education in Pakistan, influence of aid* – two eras of donor involvement, sub-sectoral breakdown of aid to education, aid to education and development vs. recurrent expenditure in section two; The impact of public financing - literacy rates, student teacher ratios, the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE), gender parity in enrolments, increasing role of the private sector, retention rates in section three have superficially discussed which appears to be one of the weak areas the authors show in this paper. Concluding the whole situation of country with reference to public and private (donor funded) sources of financing and its overall scenario of education in the country is presented in an engaging manner.

This review is employing a critical theory lens that highly emphasize to reflect critically on practices, perspectives and/or situations in order to improve. In so doing, critical theory not only provide multiple perspectives including creative, innovative and unconventional ways of looking at problems for their context

specific solutions, but also encourage to work as a change agent.

Some of the interesting areas of this working paper, which the authors have successfully highlighted, are Pakistan's tight fiscal space and its reliance on donor funding on one hand and gaps in commitments and actual expenditures, intra-sectoral priorities, recurrent and development expenditure, priorities within the education on the other hand. Probably, these issues could explain cause and effect situation in terms of low level of educational outcome, education for all and UPE (UN Millennium Project, 2005). This paper interestingly identifies the country's 'tight budgetary allocation' to education, in addition to its priorities to sub sectors like UPE (based on donor's interest) and radically dependent on donor agencies that shows how education sector in the country is given the least priority.

Secondly, the authors skillfully captured the situation how a major chunk of money out of the allocated budget (from both sources- donor agency and public financing) has been spending up to 20% of Pakistan's GDP on recurring expenses and 5% on development with prioritizing sub sectors in education. For example priority to UPE (top priority) based on donor attraction, the primary, secondary, and teacher training (as least priority) etc., does not show government seriousness towards improving state of education in the country. However, insufficient details of such division of budgetary allocations in terms of international, national and provincial priorities in education were shared that they could help readers to get more insights..... For example, saying "Pakistan spends 3.3 percentage points of GDP more on defense than other countries of its income level, an amount roughly equal to Pakistan's under spending on the social sectors compared to other countries" (Malik & Naveed, 2015, p. 24), could not provide a clear picture why Pakistan is spending more on defense rather than education.

The paper further highlights that Pakistan is one of the worlds' donor attracted countries with specific reference to its "geo-political and geo-strategic importance" on one hand, with high level of poverty and low level of outcomes on investment in all sectors especially in education on the other..... This could be one of the strong basis for donors to take more interest in the affairs of education to improve. On the other hand, it clearly shows successive government's failure to improve state of education. It would be better if the authors come with more nuances on national priorities and challenges on way to frame polices which focus on self-reliance and less dependent on donor agencies in areas like education for all, UPE, secondary and tertiary levels to address the issues of poverty and countries strategic importance.

However, having a *soft-critical* lens the level of engagement of authors seems to provide still a strong basis for their arguments that 'Pakistan is still a very long way from achieving the narrow Millennium Development Goal target of primary school completion, let alone the more ambitious post-2015 target of providing every child with 12 years of quality education by 2030' (Rose & Malik, 2015, p.4). For example, the 'target of 4% of GDP was set in 1992, then again in 1998 and in 2006' that is still not achieved (Malik & Naved, 2015, p.7) appear to show low level of country's commitment towards education sector.

The authors further appear to reflect on the state of 'planning and financing for achieving the target will need to focus on the most disadvantaged to ensure wide inequalities are not perpetuated in the future' (*Ibid*, p.4). Moreover, they have identified some of the weak areas such as gender parity enrollment, increasing role of private sector in the country and factors that affect the low level of outcomes etc.

However, there are multiple factors that might have influenced the educational outcomes during this time period such as poor capacity of implementing the policy, “policy shifts... changing political regimes with varying levels of commitments to implement reforms, natural disasters, a volatile security situation, and so on” (*Ibid.*, p. 24). Perhaps, such kind of complex and non/predictable situations in developing countries like Pakistan could lead to poor outcomes in UPE (Colclough & Lewin, 1993).

However, a country with a resource constrained economy, where allocation to education has historically been very low, levels of financing have a great potential to affect the educational outcomes. The paper highlights that despite many challenges Pakistan has shown some improvement in areas such as literacy, UPE and specifically significant increases in GERs, the overall figures and trends disguise persistent gender disparities is observed in terms of net enrolments (Aslam, 2007). The authors have rightly assessed the whole situation by commenting at the lack of sustainability of these trends because of the existing situation in the country especially varying commitment of the state, poor allocation of resources to the education sector and security threats.

In this article the authors tried to present a broad picture of the state of financing for education financing in Pakistan. They focused two phases of donor involvement in the country by tracing the trends in two sources of public financing – state and donor funding – and analyses what these trends a) reveal about relationship between the country and donors; b) imply as regards the trajectory of trends in observed educational outcomes (*Ibid.*). *In reality*, “Pakistan is relatively less aid dependent (1.5 % of GDP) comparative to most of the countries in South Asia” (*Ibid.*, p. 17). This appears that development funding from donors has been a historically important source of public finance for social sectors. At

the same time this dependency is now becoming a permanent source of financing which is an unhealthy sign for development in many ways.

However, linking to the current situation in Pakistan that has observed a declining trend in development expenditures which demands to allocate more budget and ensure effective financing of education that can bring a big change. In so doing, government can bridge the gaps between commitment and expenditure, reduce recurring expenditure and increase more funding on developmental sectors and keep a balance within subsectors to ensure a balanced way of development in the field of education at all levels. Moreover, it has been identified that the donors have had limited success in influencing the country for its budgetary priorities instead of having constitutional guidelines and a clear view of why the state has to invest in education.

The world famous conferences on education 1) Jomtien Conference 1990, and 2) Dakar Education Conference 2000 have made the global community realize that education must be right to every individual especially living in developing countries. To achieve this noble objective first conference set the outcomes and financing targets for the education sectors and the second conference where the international community revised targets to extend necessary financial assistance to countries with viable plans for achieving education for all. Pakistan is one of those countries which receives aids to this end. However, it could not achieve the desired level of success in this regard for many reasons, yet there are few improvements in areas where the donors have focused, either through direct intervention, or have put pressure on the government to address national and provincial policies. This paper calls future researchers to embrace more sophisticated yet innovative ways of analyzing the situations to get more insights about failures to achieve

desired target in education for all. However, it is one of the obvious facts that 'Pakistan continues to spend less than the regional average on education' (Malik & Naveed, 2015, p.33) that highly demands to reflect critically for improving the state of education.

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