

PAKISTAN:
REFORMING THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	i
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BACKGROUND	3
A. BUREAUCRATIC PRIORITIES	3
B. CIVILIAN CONCERNS.....	4
C. MILITARY RULE AND THE ISLAMIC JIHAD	4
D. THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION	5
III. MUSHARRAF'S EDUCATION REFORMS	6
A. GOALS	6
B. ACHIEVING TARGETS	7
C. THE STATE OF EDUCATION	7
IV. REFORMING THE EDUCATION SECTOR	8
A. ECONOMIC FACTORS: THE WORKING CHILD	8
B. CENTRALISED CONTROL OF TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM	11
V. DEPOLITICISING EDUCATION	13
A. LANGUAGE POLICY: ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF POWER	13
B. ETHNIC AND SECTARIAN DIVISIONS	15
C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION	16
D. POLITICAL ISLAM AND EDUCATION REFORM	19
E. BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES TO REFORM	21
1. Political appointees	21
2. Electoral politics	22
F. BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES FOR REFORM	23
VI. OVERCOMING THE RESOURCE CRUNCH	26
A. THE PRIVATE SECTOR.....	26
B. DONORS.....	28
VII. CONCLUSION	29
APPENDICES	
A. MAP OF PAKISTAN	31
B. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS	32



PAKISTAN: REFORMING THE EDUCATION SECTOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pakistan's deteriorating education system has radicalised many young people while failing to equip them with the skills necessary for a modern economy. The public, government-run schools, which educate the vast majority of children poorly rather than the madrasas (religious seminaries) or the elite private schools are where significant reforms and an increase in resources are most needed to reverse the influence of jihadi groups, reduce risks of internal conflict and diminish the widening fissures in Pakistani society. Both the government and donors urgently need to need give this greater priority.

Recent attempts at reform have made little headway, and spending as a share of national output has fallen in the past five years. Pakistan is now one of just twelve countries that spend less than 2 per cent of GDP on education. Moreover, an inflexible curriculum and political interference have created schools that have barely lifted very low literacy rates.

In January 2002, President Pervez Musharraf's government presented its Education Sector Reform (ESR) plan, aimed at modernising the education system. A major objective was to develop a more secular system in order to offset mounting international scrutiny and pressure to curb religious extremism in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks. But Pakistani governments, particularly those controlled by the military, have a long history of failing to follow through on announced reforms.

The state is falling significantly short of its constitutional obligation to provide universal primary education. And while the demand for education remains high, poorer families will only send their children to a school system that is relevant to their everyday lives and economic necessities. The failure of the public school system to deliver such education

is contributing to the madrasa boom as it is to school dropout rates, child labour, delinquency and crime.

In the absence of state support, powerful Islamist groups are undermining the reform initiatives of civil society to create a sustainable, equitable and modernised public education system that educates girls as well as boys. Despite its stated commitments, the Musharraf government appears unwilling to confront a religious lobby that is determined to prevent public education from adopting a more secular outlook. Public school students are confined to an outdated syllabus and are unable to compete in an increasingly competitive job market against the products of elite private schools that teach in English, follow a different curriculum and have a fee structure that is unaffordable to most families.

Political appointments in the education sector, a major source of state employment, further damage public education. Many educators, once ensconced as full time civil servants, rise through the system despite having little if any interest and experience in teaching. The widespread phenomenon of non-functional, even non-existent "ghost" schools and teachers that exist only on paper but eat into a limited budget is an indication of the level of corruption in this sector. Provincial education departments have insufficient resources and personnel to monitor effectively and clamp down on rampant bribery and manipulation at the local level. Reforms such as the Devolution of Power Plan have done little to decentralise authority over the public education sector. Instead, it has created greater confusion and overlap of roles, so that district education officials are unable to perform even the nominal functions delegated to them.

The centre still determines the public school system's educational content, requiring instructors

and students alike to operate under rigid direction. As a result, the syllabus cannot be adapted to combine national academic guidelines with a reflection of the different needs of Pakistan's diverse ethnic, social and economic groups. Worse, the state distorts the educational content of the public school curriculum, encouraging intolerance along regional, ethnic and sectarian lines, to advance its own domestic and external agendas.

The public school system's deteriorating infrastructure, falling educational standards and distorted educational content impact mostly, if not entirely, on Pakistan's poor, thus widening linguistic, social and economic divisions between the privileged and underprivileged and increasing ethnic and religious alienation that has led to violent protests. Far from curtailing extremism, the public school system risks provoking an upsurge of violence if its problems are not quickly and comprehensively addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Pakistan:

1. Demonstrate a commitment to improving the public school system by:
 - (a) raising public expenditure on education to at least 4 per cent of GDP, as recommended by UNESCO, with particular emphasis on upgrading public school infrastructure, including water, electricity and other facilities, buildings and boundary walls; and
 - (b) raising public expenditure on social sector development to make public schools more accessible to teachers and students, especially in rural areas and urban slums.
2. Take immediate political, police and legal action against extremist organisations and others seeking to prevent or disrupt development, social mobilisation and education reform initiatives, especially related to girls and women.
3. Suspend any initiatives to coordinate the madrasa curriculum with the public school curriculum until the Curriculum Wing completes a comprehensive review and reform of the national syllabus, and ensure that the Curriculum Wing:
 - (a) identifies and deletes historical inaccuracies and any material encouraging religious hatred or sectarian or ethnic bias in the national curriculum; and
 - (b) limits Islamic references to courses linked to the study of Islam, so as to respect the religious rights of non-Muslim students.
4. Decentralise decisions on educational content, and allow material not currently addressed in the national curriculum by:
 - (a) abolishing the National Syllabus and Provincial Textbook Boards that have monopolies over textbook production;
 - (b) requiring each provincial education ministry to advertise competitive contracts and call for draft submissions for public school textbooks, pursuant to general guidelines from the Curriculum Wing;
 - (c) forming committees in each province, comprised of provincial education ministers, secretaries and established academics, to review submissions based on the recommended guidelines, and to award contracts to three selected private producers; and
 - (d) empowering all public schools to choose between the three textbooks selected for their province.
5. Improve the monitoring capacity of provincial education departments by:
 - (a) increasing education department staff at the provincial level;
 - (b) providing adequate transport for provincial education staff required to monitor and report on remote districts; and
 - (c) linking funding to education performance indicators, including enrolment rates, pass rates, and student and teacher attendance levels.
6. Take steps to devolve authority over education to the district level by:
 - (a) directing public schools to establish Boards of Governors, elected by parents and teachers and with representation from directly elected district government officials, teachers, parents, and the community; and
 - (b) giving these Boards greater power to hire and fire public school teachers and administrators on performance standards

- and to recommend infrastructure development projects.
7. Hire public school teachers and administrators on short-term, institution-specific contracts that are renewable based on performance, to be reviewed annually by the Board of Governors, rather than as tenured civil servants.
 8. Facilitate and encourage formation of active parent-teacher associations (PTAs) by providing technical and financial support for their activities, conducting public meetings highlighting the importance of parent involvement in education, and scheduling regular PTA meetings and activities both within schools and between PTAs of multiple district schools.
 9. Give school heads flexibility to run their schools, including to adjust schedules to accommodate working children and to encourage teachers both to use educational material that supplements the curriculum and to organise field trips that better acquaint students with the social dynamics and everyday necessities of their districts.
 10. Facilitate access to public schools by:
 - (a) ensuring that any new public schools, especially girls schools, are established close to communities, especially in less developed rural areas; and
 - (b) providing transport to students and teachers commuting from remote areas of the district.
 11. Ensure there are enough middle schools to accommodate outgoing primary school students.
 12. Follow through on the language policy announced in December 2003 that makes English compulsory from Class 1 by providing all schools with adequate English-language teaching materials and English-trained teachers.
- To Donors:**
13. Condition aid on the Pakistan government on meeting benchmarks for increased expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, and monitor the use of government funds in the education sector.
 14. Urge the government to redress factual inaccuracies and intolerant views in the national curriculum.
 15. Conclude Memorandums of Understanding with the government that no teacher trained under specific donor-funded programs will be transferred for at least three years.
 16. Provide low-priced, quality English texts and technical and financial support to local producers of such texts and other materials that give public school students broader exposure to the language.
 17. Form flexible partnerships with locally funded organisations that employ effective, tested models, such as The Citizens' Foundations.

Islamabad/Brussels, 7 October 2004



PAKISTAN: REFORMING THE EDUCATION SECTOR

I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2002 U.S. State Department Spokesperson Richard Boucher said:

It is our desire to support the changes and reforms that President [Pervez] Musharraf has announced in terms of his moving Pakistan toward a more modern and moderate course where education plays a very key role. A lot of U.S. aid money that's going to Pakistan will be used to help with the education system...¹

This statement, coming just six months after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, reflected international concerns about the spread of religious extremism in Pakistan. The link between international terrorist organisations and the country's religious education system has come under intense scrutiny.² The failure of the public schools to absorb the millions of children who are forced to join the madrasas for lack of a better alternative is acknowledged both domestically and internationally. Upgrading the secular education sector is the most realistic way of resisting the unchecked and rapid expansion of Pakistan's religious seminaries.

Education reform is a focal point of the Musharraf government's stated commitment to modernisation and curbing extremism, a strategy that has won numerous international supporters. In January 2002, the Musharraf government presented its Education Sector Reforms (ESR) program 2001-2004, aimed at

revamping and modernising the education system and mobilising the private sector to help. Two years later, at a time when political and social frictions have assumed dangerous proportions, threatening the state's stability, it is critical to examine how far those efforts are in fact addressing the systemic weaknesses of Pakistan's education system, which are indeed contributing to the spread of violence and extremism.

Traditionally, Pakistan's education sector has been classified broadly into three parallel systems -- public or government-run schools, private schools, and madrasas -- each of which follows its own curriculum, teaching methods and examination processes. The state-run school system's inability to respond to the country's educational needs has benefited the madrasas and private schools alike. Madrasas offer free education, boarding and lodging, providing incentives to the homeless and less privileged sectors of society, whose demand for education is weighed down by economic restraints.³

The private school sector has similarly benefited from the failure of the public school system, with the number of its institutions mushrooming to above 36,000 over the past two decades. Many of these institutions are driven by profit and cater to the more privileged segments of society, with tuition fees that are unaffordable to a majority of Pakistanis. The standards of education in the most privileged of them, including their use of English for instruction, is far superior to those of the public schools, which teach in a vernacular language (Urdu or Sindhi). In effect, the private school system has created a system

¹ "Zubaida, Powell discuss reforms", *Dawn*, 10 March 2002; see also Boucher's statement at <http://www.newsindia-times.com/2002/03/22/asia-us.html>.

² See ICG Asia Report N°73: *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*, 16 January 2004; and ICG Asia Report N°36: *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, 29 July 2002.

³ There are 155,686 public schools, 36,460 schools in the private sector, and more than 10,000 madrasas. Given the lack of governmental oversight, it is nearly impossible to ascertain the exact number of madrasas. See presentation by then Education Minister Zobaida Jalal to the Pakistan Development Forum, March 2004 and ICG Report, *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, op. cit.

of educational and linguistic division. The products of the public school sector often are uncompetitive in the job market. One study observes:

The present education scenario is full of contradictions. On the one hand, there are dynamic, fast moving educational institutions charging exorbitant fees, while on the other there are almost free or very affordable government schools as well as religious seminaries, which are entirely free. The students of these institutions live in different worlds and operate in different languages.⁴

The only way to address this increasing segregation is through a radical reform of the public school system. The majority of Pakistanis do not have the means to access quality private school education, and the private school system has neither the resources nor the incentive to expand to the extent that it could accommodate all Pakistani families. Moreover, it is the state's constitutional obligation to provide education to its citizens. This report, therefore, focuses on the public school system, identifying ways of reversing Pakistani society's growing stratification and of curbing the extremism promoted by the madrasa. It makes reference to the private and madrasa sectors only where necessary to help identify the economic, social and political factors impeding the public school system from meeting the country's educational needs.

Effective education reform in Pakistan will, admittedly, be complex, difficult, and unlikely to achieve immediate milestones. It requires a level of political will and commitment that has been lacking. Although successive governments have publicly identified education as their top priority, rhetoric has seldom been followed by effective policy and implementation. In March 2002 then Education Minister Zobeida Jalal visited the U.S. to win support for her government's efforts to secularise education and address the problems posed by a booming and unreformed madrasa sector. This was acknowledged as vital to maintaining Pakistan's stability.

However, despite an influx of donor funding, and repeated government pledges to address educational needs and enact madrasa reform, most fundamental priorities remain neglected. Pakistan's education sector is still highly politicised, tailored more to the

interests of various state and political actors than to an objective assessment of educational requirements. Far from curtailing an upsurge of intolerance and extremism, it has widened class and ideological divisions.

In the past, as now, the government and donors have initiated large-scale programs to upgrade the public education sector and achieve an equitable education delivery system. Many of these initiatives have focused on increasing access to education, especially for female students. Others have focused on the quality of instruction, through teacher training. While such schemes are important, they have failed to redress some of the most significant failures of Pakistan's education system: policies at the national level that cater to political rather than development interests; bureaucratic obstacles to policy changes; a carefully controlled, highly centralised syllabus that plays on political, religious and sectarian divisions; and a culture of corruption and manipulation that has impeded any significant change to public schools.

In 2004, 57 years after independence, Pakistan lacks an equitable education system, and the literacy rate is one of the lowest in the world. Despite an assortment of declared strategies for providing education and removing inequalities, Pakistan's education indicators remain deplorable, including low public spending, literacy and enrolment levels, high dropout levels, acute regional and gender inequalities, and budgetary inequities.⁵ Government policies and reform efforts have clearly failed to address the economic, social and political dimensions of the problems facing the education system.

⁴ Tariq Rahman, *Education in Pakistan: A Survey*, Strengthening Participatory Organisation, Islamabad, 2003.

⁵ "Social Development in Pakistan 2002-03: The State of Education", Social Planning and Development Centre, Karachi, 2003. p. 2.

II. BACKGROUND

A. BUREAUCRATIC PRIORITIES

At independence in 1947, Pakistan inherited an under-developed educational infrastructure from the British. Education was unevenly distributed, with rural areas almost deprived of access. The objective of the British system in colonial India was not mass education but to breed a class of civil servants, through mostly urban schools, who would serve as intermediaries between ruler and subject.⁶ The current makeup of Pakistan's education sector is fundamentally derived from that colonial system, with elitist English-language institutions such as military cadet and Christian mission schools catering to the privileged classes and vernacular, Urdu and Sindhi-language, schools, including madrasas, catering to the poorer classes.

The country's founding father and first governor general, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, sought to reorient the education system from colonial administrative objectives to the new nation's social, economic and technical needs.⁷ This proved difficult. In 1947-1948, Pakistan had a literacy rate of around 16 per cent. Its entire education system comprised around 10,000 primary and middle schools, out of which only 1,700 were for girls, and 408 secondary schools (64 for girls). According to official statistics, total enrolment was 1 million in primary and middle classes, including 130,000 girls, and 58,000 in secondary schools, including 7,000 girls.⁸

The state inherited another major challenge. The country was divided into two geographic entities separated by almost 1,000 miles of Indian territory, with a population divided along overlapping regional ethnic, cultural and linguistic lines.⁹ Although the Bengalis of East Pakistan were a majority (55.6 per cent), Punjabis and mohajirs¹⁰ in West Pakistan dominated the state's institutions, including its

military and civil service. Since the leaders of the Muslim League, the ruling party, were mainly Urdu-speaking migrants from India with urban backgrounds, they were unfamiliar with the political and developmental, including educational, needs of the largely non-Urdu speaking and rural population they now ruled.

In 1947, Jinnah declared Urdu the national language, and the 1947 All Pakistan National Education Conference made it compulsory in schools. Insistent on forcing its own notions of modernisation on Pakistan's multi-ethnic and multi-regional population, the Muslim League leadership's education and language policies soon became arenas of contention. The first political protests in East Bengal were against imposition of Urdu as the national language on a population whose Urdu speakers were a small minority.¹¹

During the National Conference, the government also outlined its three major objectives of education: free and compulsory education for the first five years to redress the imbalances left behind by the colonial rulers; a reorganisation of technical education to build the country's future economic life, and a focus on Islamic ideology, with the objective of developing a national identity for the new state. These objectives notwithstanding, the Muslim League was not willing to risk its hold on power in a country where its leaders had little domestic support, opting instead to use the inherited civil and military bureaucracies to maintain control over restive subjects.

As Muslim League governments became increasingly dependent on the bureaucracy, the state's priorities changed, from developing infrastructure, including the educational system, to diverting scarce economic resources for military and other non-productive purposes. In the absence of democracy, and taking advantage of the political leadership's dependence, the state apparatus became politically dominant. Education particularly suffered as the civil and military bureaucracies impeded the growth of a pluralistic political system and social development in general.

⁶ "The State of Pakistan's Children 1997", Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Islamabad. 1998, p. 78.

⁷ Nasir Jalil, "Pakistan's Education: the First Decade", in Pervez Hoodbhoy, ed., *Education and the State: Fifty Years of Pakistan*, (Oxford, 1998) p. 35.

⁸ "Economic Survey of Pakistan 1986-87", Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan.

⁹ The ethno-regional groups in West Pakistan included Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baluch.

¹⁰ Mohajirs are Urdu-speaking migrants from India.

¹¹ The Bengali language movement in the 1950s, part of a larger movement for democratic rights, was at first ignored and then suppressed by the state, sowing the seeds of ethnic discord and separatism, culminating in 1971 in Pakistan's dismemberment and the establishment of Bangladesh.

With the military taking over direct control of the state in 1958 and ruling absolutely until Pakistan's dismemberment in 1971, it is not surprising that the focus on education was merely rhetorical. Ambitious plans and policies were announced but with little or no follow-up. Stated objectives were never complemented by the financial outlays required to revamp a substandard, mostly urban-based, education infrastructure. Between 1955 and 1960, for instance, the government allocated only 4 per cent of the budget to education, while military expenditure reached 60 per cent.¹² Education deteriorated further in the aftermath of the 1965 war with India, when the Ayub Khan government's single-minded focus on defence reduced spending for education significantly. Given the meagre funding, Pakistan not surprisingly failed to meet the target for universal primary education in 1974.¹³ Instead, disparities between the elite private and government-run public school systems created and sustained an educational apartheid, in which the products of the latter could not possibly compete in the job market.

B. CIVILIAN CONCERNS

Taking over power from the military following East Pakistan's secession and forming Pakistan's first popularly elected government, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) pledged to reform the education system. The shift from military to civilian priorities was evident in the emergence of a national consensus on the importance of universal education. As a result, the right to education was included in the 1973 constitution, the first that was adopted through a transparent political process. In Article 37-(2) a-b, the state took upon itself the responsibility to remove illiteracy and to provide free and compulsory secondary education as soon as possible.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when political bargaining, competition and conflict took place along ethnic and regional grounds, political Islam had remained a peripheral force. After 1971, a mainstream secular civilian government, with the support of other mainstream moderate political leaders and seeking ways of rebuilding a shattered national consensus in the truncated state, attempted to appeal to all

segments of political opinion, including religious sentiments. The 1973 constitution, therefore, contained articles regarding Islamisation of education. This policy was short sighted in more ways than one. It made Islam politically contentious and, in the specific context of education, gave future military rulers and the religious right the opportunity of using Article 37 to Islamise the public school curricula.¹⁴

Bhutto's education policy, announced in 1972, shifted the goal of universal primary education to a more realistic target: 1979 for males and 1984 for females. To ensure that these targets were met, given an inadequate public educational infrastructure, the government nationalised more than 19,000 private educational institutions, including elite English-language institutions such as those run by the Catholic Church. This gave new and attractive opportunities to the less economically privileged, particularly in urban areas. Yet, in the absence of adequate state financing, the standards of education in the newly nationalised schools soon deteriorated.

Money for education remained woefully inadequate, as Prime Minister Bhutto, also hoping to assuage military unrest and retain the army's support, shifted focus from the social sector to military development. Scarce resources were diverted to strengthening and restructuring the army. Targets for primary education and adult literacy once again fell by the way side.

C. MILITARY RULE AND THE ISLAMIC JIHAD

In 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq overthrew the Bhutto government, with the support of religious and rightwing parties, who then became key allies of the new military order. As the military government concentrated on consolidating its rule, the pace of social development, including education, slowed down considerably. For example, General Zia's initial development plan, announced in 1978 and referred to as the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1978-1983), focused on adult literacy with the objective of educating 8.5 million adults over five years, but ultimately reached only 40,000 adults.

¹² See Hassan Askari Rizvi, *The Military and Politics 1947-1997* (Lahore, 2000), pp. 57-58.

¹³ The original target, set in 1947, to achieve universal primary education was 1967. In 1959, General Ayub Khan's Commission for National Education reset the target to 1974.

¹⁴ Article 31 (a) and (b) of the 1973 Constitution requires the state: "to make the teaching of the Holy Quran and Islamiat compulsory, to encourage and facilitate the learning of Arabic language...[and] to promote unity and observance of the Islamic moral standards". Makhdoom Ali Khan, ed., *The Constitution of Pakistan* (Karachi, 1989), p. 21.

As the military government joined with the U.S. in supporting the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, it also consolidated its ties with the religious right, a major source of recruits for that campaign and an equally valuable ally against General Zia's secular domestic opponents. The education sector experienced a dramatic shift in emphasis to Islamic education, through both a revised national curriculum and governmental financial support to madrasas.¹⁵

Although the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1983-1988) envisaged an aggressive push on primary education, with an Rs.7 billion (roughly \$18 million at today's exchange rates) allocation, a five-fold increase from the previous plan,¹⁶ none of its targets were met during Zia-ul-Haq's eleven-year rule. Public education languished, private schools increased, and there was massive growth in the madrasa sector.

D. THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Having won the general elections in 1988 on a platform of social and economic change, Benazir Bhutto's PPP government committed itself to raising the 30 per cent literacy rate to 90.5 per cent within five years and expanding the infrastructure of vocational, scientific and higher technical and university education. It signed the Education for All (EFA) Framework agreed upon by 155 countries in 1990 at Jometien in Thailand but was dismissed by the military in 1990 before it could formulate a full education policy.

In accordance with Pakistan's international commitment to the EFA goal, the new government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif adopted an education policy in 1992, which set the target of universal primary education for 2002. It pledged to provide free and compulsory primary education, to eliminate dropouts, to fulfil basic learning needs, and to raise the adult literacy rate to 70 per cent by 2002. In addition, the new policy identified measures to improve the quality of public instruction through changes in curricula, textbooks, teaching methods and evaluation techniques.

Most importantly, a gradual increase of the education budget was envisaged from less than 1 to 3 per cent of GNP. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1993-98) also emphasised the need to remove gender and rural-urban imbalances and had provisions for enactment and enforcement of legislation for compulsory and universal primary schooling.¹⁷ The plan, moreover, supported private sector participation in education development.

The Sharif government also launched a World Bank-funded Social Action Program (SAP) for social sector development. To be implemented jointly by provincial governments, with community-based involvement, and the participation of NGOs and the private sector, a primary goal was promotion of primary education. It aimed at establishing 55,000 primary schools, mainly for girls, in five years and an increase in female enrolment from 53 per cent to 82 per cent by 1998. SAP also envisaged creation of 6.46 million new places for primary school-age children, alongside improvements in the quality of primary education through measures including: an enhanced non-salary education budget; improved school facilities; adequate classroom materials; better quality textbooks; and improved teaching techniques.

To reduce gender disparities, the plan also sought to introduce co-education at the primary level, with schools staffed by female teachers as an incentive to parents to send their daughters to school. Finally, the government strongly supported partnerships between the public and private educational sectors. These ambitious goals were left unrealised when the Sharif government was forced out by the military less than half way through its term.

The PPP returned to power in the general elections of 1993. Although the government continued its predecessor's education policy, little was achieved as Prime Minister Bhutto was again dismissed less than half way through her term by the president, acting at the military's behest. In February 1997, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League returned with a new Education Policy 1998-2010, which emphasised: "Education is a basic human right. It is the commitment of the government to provide free secondary education to citizens".¹⁸

¹⁵ See ICG Report, *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, op. cit., and ICG Report, *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*, op. cit.

¹⁶ The Fifth Five-Year Plan had allocated Rs. 1.41 billion (\$24,7368.42) for primary education. Figures in this report denominated in dollars (\$) refer to U.S. dollars.

¹⁷ This legislation was to be enforced in areas where educational facilities were available at a reachable distance.

¹⁸ "National Education Policy (1998-2010)", Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 1997.

With 5.5 million children out of school and a 39 per cent literacy rate, the government had a massive task at hand. Reviewing the state's failures, the new education policy provided time-bound targets for the promotion of education at the elementary, secondary and higher levels. It also contained clear-cut recommendations for teacher training, expansion of infrastructure, involvement of the private and NGO sectors, and engagement with multilateral and bilateral donors.

Concerned about mounting sectarian violence and the spread of religious intolerance, the government also included in its education policy a step-by-step plan to mainstream the madrasa sector with other systems of education.¹⁹ The new policy, however, faced numerous hurdles, including fiscal constraints, especially after bilateral and multilateral economic sanctions were imposed on Pakistan following its May 1998 nuclear tests. Unable and unwilling to reduce defence expenditure, which would have alienated the powerful military establishment, the government instead curtailed spending on the social sectors, including education. In any event, this government was as short-lived as its predecessors. In October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf ousted Prime Minister Sharif and imposed military rule.

III. MUSHARRAF'S EDUCATION REFORMS

A. GOALS

Although the Musharraf government has generally rejected the policies of its civilian predecessors, those of the second Sharif government have essentially guided its education plans. One of the main goals of the Ten-Year Perspective Development Plan (2001-2011) adopted in June 2001 is universal primary education by 2010 and 78 per cent literacy by 2011.²⁰ The Education Sector Reforms (ESR) program 2001-2004, announced in January 2002, is the government's chosen vehicle to implement this. It contains a number of measures to revamp and modernise the system and focuses on elementary, technical and higher education as well as on mobilising the private sector in education delivery through restructured Education Foundations, joint ventures, leasing and other initiatives.

Although the ESR addresses the urgent need to reduce the qualitative gap between public and private sector education, it stops short of offering a workable mechanism to achieve this. For instance, it does not provide for standardisation of private and public education curricula and fee structures. Instead, it promises institutional incentives and safeguards to the private sector, without including any regulatory mechanism.

As a part of the Local Government Plan 2002, district rather than provincial governments have officially become the operational tier of governance, and the ESR relies heavily on them.²¹ The Devolution of Power Plan gives district governments lead responsibility in deciding on the location of new schools and arranging funding for their construction. Additionally, district governments are to monitor schools and carry out annual evaluations of teachers. The Executive District Officer (EDO) Education, the senior bureaucrat overseeing the education sector at the district level, has the power to decide on allocations of all educational resources.²²

¹⁹ For details of the policy's proposed madrasa reforms, see <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/education-division/policies/NEP-islamic-edu.jsp>.

²⁰ Cited at <http://www.unescobkk.org/EFA/EFAcountry/Pakistan.pdf>.

²¹ For a detailed critique of the devolution plan see ICG Report N°77, *Devolution in Pakistan, Reform or Regression?*, 22 March 2004.

²² Cited at <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/education-division/publications/study.pdf>.

B. ACHIEVING TARGETS

To meet Pakistan's commitments to the EFA, the government will need \$7.9 billion: \$3.5 billion for primary education, \$3.15 billion for adult literacy and the remainder for early childhood education. However, its reluctance to allocate the resources to ensure success is evident in its seeking well over half -- \$4.4 billion -- from international donors and bilateral and multilateral arrangements.²³

Despite this reluctance to allocate adequate resources, the Musharraf government's education reform goals are overly ambitious. The ESR's major target for 2004 includes an increase in the literacy rate from 49 to 60 per cent; gross primary enrolment from 89 to 100 per cent; net primary enrolment from 66 to 76 per cent; middle school enrolment from 47.5 to 55 per cent; secondary school enrolment from 29.5 to 40 per cent; and higher education enrolment from 2.6 to 5 per cent.

It is unlikely that these targets will be achieved. In August 2003, the then Federal Education Minister, Zobaida Jalal, told the National Assembly that the government was on track, that the overall literacy rate was 51.6 per cent (64 per cent male and 39.2 per cent female literacy).²⁴ But this represents only an increase of 1.1 per cent over the literacy rate of 50.5 per cent officially cited in 2002, and an increase of 6.6 per cent over the 45 per cent literacy rate reported in 1999.²⁵

Moreover, international organisations question the official literacy statistics. The UN places the literacy rate at 44 per cent.²⁶ According to the Strategic Framework of Action Guidelines for the United Nations Literacy Decade, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are the only three Asian countries with literacy rates between 40 to 45 per cent.²⁷ Questioning official data, UNESCO's country representative in Pakistan says the country's average illiteracy rate is over 50 per

cent (70 per cent of women are illiterate and about 45 per cent of men).²⁸ This tendency of the government to fudge data on education (as in other sectors of social development) will only hinder its ability to plan effectively to meet actual requirements.

C. THE STATE OF EDUCATION

An examination of data is helpful in assessing the state of education.

- *Low enrolment.* There has been little change since 1993 in gross enrolment rates (GER),²⁹ which increased by less than one percentage point annually between 1993 (69 per cent) and 2000 (74 per cent).³⁰ The government maintains that GER increased to 71 per cent from 40 per cent between 1970 and 1999; gross enrolment at the primary school level has increased from 0.77 million in 1947 to about 20 million in 2002;³¹ and 38.6 per cent of the total population is out of school and illiterate (7,785,000 primary-school-age children are out of school, and 46,702,000 adults are illiterate). UNICEF, however, maintains that there are 27 million children in the primary school age bracket (five to nine), of whom 13 million -- 7 million girls -- are not enrolled.³²
- *High dropout rate.* Approximately 50 per cent of enrolled children drop out before completing primary education. Of 19.5 million children currently attending primary school, only 3.9 million will reach the middle level (class VI).³³ The dropout rate is steadily increasing, from 40 per cent in 1996-1997 to 54 per cent in 1999-2000,³⁴ and is generally both higher and faster among girls. Currently, 51 per cent of boys and 59 per cent of girls leave school before reaching

²³ "National Plan of Action on Education For All (2000-1015)", Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2001.

²⁴ "Rs 176 bn Spent on Education, NA Told", *Dawn*, 24 August 2003.

²⁵ "Education, Pakistan Economic Survey 2002-03", Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2003.

²⁶ "Adult Literacy Low Priority in Pakistan: Report", *Dawn*, 5 September 2003.

²⁷ "Draft Guidelines for the Strategic Framework of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade in Pakistan", Ministry of Education, UNESCO and Japan Investment Cooperation Agency, 2003.

²⁸ Ingeborg Breines, "Literacy For All: A Voice for All, Learning for All", *The News*, 8 September 2003.

²⁹ The Gross Enrolment Ratio is widely used to show the general level of participation in a given level of education. It indicates the capacity of the education system to enrol students of a particular age group. It is used as a substitute indicator to net enrolment ratio (NER) when data on enrolment by single years of age are not available.

³⁰ "Social Development in Pakistan 2002-03", op. cit. p. 8.

³¹ "Pakistan Economic Survey 2002-2003", op.cit.

³² "Primary Education Priorities: Fact Sheet", UNICEF, Islamabad, 2003.

³³ Zubeida Mustafa, "Where Do the Dropouts Go?" *Dawn*, 17 September 2003.

³⁴ The dropout rate is the percentage of students who leave school before reaching the fifth grade.

grade five. The only exception is Balochistan, where the male dropout rate has declined from 52 per cent to 49 per cent.³⁵

- *Adult Illiteracy.*³⁶ According to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002, Pakistan's share of the world's total adult illiterate population of 862 million in 2000 was five per cent. Its projected share of the total adult illiterate population of 799 million in 2015 is seven per cent.³⁷ Its literacy rates are only higher than Nepal and Bangladesh in South Asia, and it has the lowest net primary enrolment (46 per cent) rate in the region.³⁸
- *Urban/rural disparities.* According to the Social Policy and Development Centre, Pakistan's urban and rural literacy rates are 63 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively.³⁹
- *Male/female disparities.* According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002, Pakistan is not on track to achieve the Dakar goal of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015 "unless highly focused strategies in favour of girls are implemented".⁴⁰

IV. REFORMING THE EDUCATION SECTOR

A. ECONOMIC FACTORS: THE WORKING CHILD

There is a popular misperception in Pakistan that social traditions, especially in rural areas, oppose female education. In fact, the country's low enrolment rates, both male and female, reflect economic and security concerns rather than social constraints. The demand for education is so closely linked with overall economic conditions that any attempt to address low enrolment and high dropout rates requires an examination of levels of and responses to poverty. With the majority of Pakistan's population being rural, the general underdevelopment of the rural sector imposes severe limitations on the education system. The absence of a viable and responsive public school system, combined with government neglect of rural sector infrastructure and development, provides few incentives for parents to invest in education for their children, especially girls.

As a result of widespread poverty and unemployment, families often view education more as an economic investment than a basic need. The decision to send a child to school has to do primarily with short- and long-term financial feasibility and the available alternatives. The public school sector competes against the child labour market, a deeply entrenched phenomenon that has a direct impact on education in both poor rural and urban populations.⁴¹

Rural families are heavily dependent on the agricultural economy, and children are a large part of the labour-intensive workforce. Sending a child to work produces tangible benefits, including increased agricultural output and income; the rewards of education are less immediate or apparent. Aggravating the situation are the unfavourable conditions of rural government-run schools and their surrounding environments, the poor quality and irrelevance of the education offered, widespread teacher absenteeism, and insufficient facilities. Since the rural public school system is understandably perceived as incapable of providing education that would translate into access to a highly competitive job market, it fails to absorb the millions of children who turn instead toward labour.

³⁵ "Social Development in Pakistan 2002-03", op. cit. p. 11.

³⁶ With a population growth rate of 2.3 per cent and an average increase in literacy of 1.4 per cent over the last ten years, the number of adults (over fifteen years of age) who cannot read, write or do simple calculations has steadily increased, from 28 million in 1972 to 46 million in 2003. "Social Development in Pakistan 2002-03", op. cit. p. 5.

³⁷ Aileen Qaiser, "Education For All: Dream or Reality?" *Dawn*, 24 June 2003.

³⁸ "Social Development in Pakistan 2002-03", op. cit. p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁴⁰ Qaiser, op. cit.

⁴¹ ICG countrywide interviews in rural and urban areas with residents, teachers, and social activists, April-June 2004.

Says Ibrash Pasha, an NGO worker and education activist based in the tribal district of Dir in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP):

Here, a person who has been through [public] schooling is actually at a disadvantage. He is competing for jobs against people who have developed technical skills from working all their lives. Meanwhile the person who went to school has nothing to show for the education he has acquired; he was attending class while his peers were developing skills as technicians and farmers and electricians.⁴²

Many rural schools that ICG visited were in remote areas where poor roads and nonexistent public transportation require students to walk long distances to attend. Most of these have inadequate water, electricity and other facilities. A recent study conducted by the Sindh Department of Education, for example, found that out of roughly 40,000 primary schools in the province, over 11,000 had no electricity, over 8,500 no water supply, over 11,000 no toilet facilities and boundary walls.⁴³ Most of these are in rural areas or urban slums. One urban school building ICG visited in NWFP's Abbottabad district was still used though declared "unsafe" by provincial authorities. In another Abbottabad school, the Kokal Barsin School for Boys, teacher/student ratios were as high as 1/80, and there was an acute shortage of classroom space.

The demand for education remains high across rural Pakistan, but specifically education relevant to the job market, and in schools that are accessible, adequately equipped, and sensitive to societal needs. Provincial governments have, however, done little to accommodate this demand. According to Aurangzeb Tanoli, a social activist in Abbottabad:

Families want to send their children to school. But they are not going to send them to school, especially girls, if it means the child has to walk for 40 minutes up and down a rocky hill. Or if it means that in the schools they're thrown into one room like goats or sheep, with over 60 students in a single classroom.⁴⁴

The result is that families grow increasingly reluctant to send their children to school, especially females, and turn more and more to child employment. In rural Balochistan, the problem is particularly acute. The province is the largest in Pakistan in terms of area but has the lowest population. Its public school system, therefore, has to cater to very scattered communities. The lack of proper roads and communication effectively enlarge the distances to residents: "In the rural areas here it takes an hour to cross ten kilometres", says Irfan Ahmed Awan, Managing Director for the Quetta-based Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan.⁴⁵ For girls to traverse these distances in areas where their physical safety could be threatened is a common disincentive to families. An effective upgrade of the school system requires long-term investments in the province's rural infrastructure to make schools accessible to students, especially in remote areas, and to situate them as close to the communities as possible.

A significant discrepancy between the number of primary and middle schools also forces high dropout rates and increasing levels of child labour. In Sindh, for example, there are an estimated 40,000 public primary schools but only 3000-4000 middle schools. The problem becomes more noticeable at local levels. For example, in the Dir Payan district of Balochistan, there are 1142 primary schools but only 110 secondary schools and 13 high schools. In Chagai, another Balochistan district, there are 335 primary, 51 secondary and 31 high schools. Furthermore, most schools cater only to male students. A 1992 census in Balochistan found only 746 girls schools in the province compared to 6500 boys schools, with clusters of villages without a single girls school.⁴⁶

Gender discrepancies could be misinterpreted as a manifestation of low demand for rural female education. But while it is more common in rural areas for girls to work at home or as hired help for other households, this gender imbalance in enrolment is far more a consequence of the rural public school system's inability to meet the requirements for girls' education. In fact, the demand is demonstrated in the attendance of female students in boys' schools.⁴⁷ Community and civil society efforts are trying to narrow the gender

⁴² ICG interview, Dir, NWFP, May 2004.

⁴³ Information provided by Sindh Department of Education to ICG, Karachi, April 2004.

⁴⁴ ICG interview, Abbottabad, April 2004.

⁴⁵ ICG interview, Quetta, May 2004.

⁴⁶ Statistics provided by Society for Community Support for Primary Education in Balochistan, May 2004.

⁴⁷ ICG countrywide interviews and observations, focusing on rural schools. April-May 2004.

gap. Since 1992, for example, with support from organisations like Society for Community Support, Seher and the Balochistan Education Foundation, an estimated 2,600 girls schools have been established in Balochistan, one of the most socially conservative of Pakistan's four provinces.

Urban slums present a similar predicament. A deteriorating public school infrastructure has triggered a high dropout rate and increasing levels of child labour and delinquency. As in rural villages, clean drinking water, electricity and other basic facilities are limited. However, urban slums also face unique challenges. Crime levels, including narco-trafficking, are generally higher than in rural areas, as is politically motivated sectarian and ethnic violence, and the children are often targeted and used. High urban population growth rates have strained the overall economic development of these settlements, and crowded, polluted urban slum environments are more prone to disease. In Machar Colony, one of the poorest slums of Karachi, roughly 50 per cent of the population, according to local residents, has limited access to even food and clothing. The colony lacks a government hospital, post office and police station.⁴⁸ The local economy is heavily dependent on nearby fisheries, and child labour is rampant in the local fishing industry.

Since child labour in the fisheries is a major source of income for most families in the settlement, there is significant dropout between primary and secondary school, when most children acquire what families deem the appropriate working age. There is, therefore, an urgent need to provide incentives to students and their families at the secondary school level to offset the demand for labour and to upgrade the quality of education and infrastructure in public schools. One private school teacher in the area said:

Parents are willing to send their children to school. But they say, "okay, we won't put our children through labour, but then what do we do?" The schools need to respond. How can a school with only one classroom, no boundary gate, no facilities?⁴⁹

In the fiscal year 2003-2004 the Punjab Education Department started a fund to provide a monthly stipend of Rs.200 (about \$3.50) to female students in fifteen of the province's districts. Similar programs

have focused on providing household items, such as edible oils, for each child the family sends to school. While it is early for a detailed assessment of the long-term impact of such projects, some preliminary observations can be made. For instance, fiscal incentives would be more effective if they targeted groups most likely to benefit, such as districts and areas with the highest levels of child labour. However, there is a risk that such programs would tempt families to shift their children to recipient schools, thereby imposing a significant burden on these institutions and on the scheme as a whole. Furthermore, the scope of such an initiative will always be limited, impacting only the targeted schools and communities.

A more holistic approach to the child labour problem requires that the public school system make itself more accessible to poor families, and more meaningful in terms of the quality of education. Incentives work best if they are structural rather than provisional, such as building schools close to the communities, providing transport to students commuting from remote areas, heavy investments to improve school infrastructure and hence environment, trained teachers, and a qualitative improvement in curricula.

One organisation active in Machar Colony, Concern For Children (CFC), focuses primarily on providing health services, including first-aid kits, awareness campaigns and events, health screening, and teacher training. It tries to make schools centres not just of education but also of extracurricular activities that engage children, such as games, speech contests, prizes, and "cleanest school" awards.⁵⁰ Similarly schools in urban slums run by The Citizens' Foundation (TCF) encourage artwork and gardening and enter students in national and international competitions. A private school principal in Karachi's Mohammadi Colony said:

Many families and children see education as a possible means to escape the miserable conditions and high crime levels they face here. If the schools can instil confidence in the parents, then they will send their children. But you have to build that confidence so that the parents can entrust their children to the schools and the teachers, and not send them to work.⁵¹

⁴⁸ ICG interviews and observations, Machar colony, Karachi, April 2004.

⁴⁹ ICG interview, Machar Colony, Karachi, April 2004.

⁵⁰ ICG interview with Suroor Lotia, CFC manager, Karachi, April 2004.

⁵¹ ICG interview with A. Afzal, Mohammadi Colony, Karachi, April 2004.

At the same time, the government needs to be much more proactive in curtailing child labour. Participants at a recent meeting of a parliamentary commission on human rights concluded that it has neglected the extent of child labour. The 1992 Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act makes it illegal for employers to "bond" labourers or for parents and other relatives to take a loan in exchange for sending a child to work. It also calls for establishment of district "vigilance committees" to support enforcement and help rehabilitate child labourers. In 2002 the U.S. Department of Labour gave \$5 million for a program providing access to basic education to working children and children vulnerable to child labour markets. This was implemented in three districts of Punjab. However, despite these and other initiatives, child labour continues to rise. Official figures show an increase in from 3.3 million in 1999 to 3.6 million in 2003. Unofficial statistics place the figure as high as eight million. Half the children are younger than ten.⁵²

In the short term the school system needs to recognise how deeply entrenched child employment is. Only a flexible approach can establish a balance between the often conflicting educational and economic needs of low-income families. For example, some TCF schools have modified schedules, including special afternoon and evening shifts, to accommodate children who work mornings in fisheries and elsewhere. Similarly, in rural Sindh, schools run by the semi-autonomous Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) schedule vacations to coincide with the harvest, when the demand for child labour in the fields peaks. Says Anita Ghulam Ali, SEF's managing director: "It is important not to punish children for working, but instead encourage them to meet their economic demands while staying in school".⁵³ SEF also provides education to working and street children in its Child Development Center initiative.

Adapting to the economic compulsions that lead to high levels of child labour may be one of the public education sector's most important challenges. Its response must ultimately focus on providing relevant education that increases public school students' economic opportunities so low-income Pakistani families will invest in the public school system before investing in child labour.

B. CENTRALISED CONTROL OF TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM

Pakistan's public school system faces the challenge of preparing students for a productive life in a country where sharp disparities in income levels, economies and rural-urban development and equally sharp differences in ethnicity and cultures have produced extreme discrepancies in educational needs and employment opportunities. The solutions proposed above require flexible teaching mechanisms and cannot be implemented under Pakistan's highly centralised processes of determining public school educational content.

The public school system compels instructors and students to adapt to very rigid teaching methods. The school textbook is the main element. Since the early 1960s, production of textbooks has been the responsibility of Provincial Textbook Boards (PTBs). They determine content according to the policies, guidelines and national curriculum framework of the Federal Ministry of Education's Curriculum Wing. The corresponding provincial education department controls each Textbook Board. A team of authors prepares a manuscript that, after a review process and editing, is submitted to a national review committee of the federal Curriculum Wing. Once approved, the "sole textbook" for each class is published and distributed by the provincial government in all the province's public schools. Some textbooks contain warnings that students must not use any additional texts.⁵⁴

The provincial textbook boards, with their established list of authors, have a monopoly over the textual content of the province's public schools. By centralising the production of textbooks, the government has imposed severe limitations on the diversity of information imparted to schoolchildren. A former provincial education minister describes a "publishing mafia" that controls the educational material of the public school system.⁵⁵ The crippling impact of these provincial monopolies was recently illustrated when differences within the Sindh provincial government between the ministry of finance and the Sindh Textbook Board (STB) delayed publication of the province's textbooks.⁵⁶ As a result,

⁵² "Incidence of child labour on the rise", *Dawn*, 13 June 2004.

⁵³ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

⁵⁴ K.K. Aziz, *The Murder of History* (Lahore, 1993), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ ICG interview with Anita Ghulam Ali, Karachi, April 2004.

⁵⁶ For details, see Massoud Ansari, "Books of Contention", *Newsline*, May 2004.

its three million public school students were without textbooks at least four months into the academic year, a "clear indication", according to one editorial, that the authorities lack the capacity "to take primary education more seriously". The editorial continued:

Many of [the] children [affected], particularly those in rural areas, have been put in schools by parents who have very limited means of livelihood. If studies are interrupted for long periods, their families will naturally put many of these children to work.⁵⁷

Centralised syllabus and textbook production makes the education system more rigid and unable to adapt to the diverse needs of students. Says Daman Ali Rozdar of the SEF: "A centralised curriculum cannot address the needs of local communities and local economies. Rural communities require education in agriculture....Other communities require education on specific health care issues, like Hepatitis B and contaminated water issues. Since local economies are so dependent on surroundings, students need to be taught about their particular physical environments".⁵⁸ Compounding the problem is that the national curriculum is devised at the federal level and, as discussed below, reflects the agenda of some of the country's powerbrokers rather than addressing educational needs.

Thus, the "sole textbook" risks becoming an organ for spreading state ideology, at the cost of an objective assessment of citizens' distinct educational requirements. Opening up the production of textbooks to competition is necessary to diversify the public school syllabus and decentralise authority over educational content. One formula suggested to ICG is for provincial education departments to advertise a contract for producing schoolbooks and call for submissions from private organisations or individuals. A review committee could then select three or four drafts based on set criteria and award separate contracts for each, while exam boards would need to be careful not to advantage any one textbook over the other.⁵⁹ Involving multiple, non-government actors in the production of public school textbooks would facilitate introduction of innovative ideas and more engaging texts in place of the PTBs' repetitive formulas. Teachers should be encouraged to use

additional materials, such as newspapers or field trips, to acquaint students better with the history, economy and priorities of their districts and environments.

⁵⁷ "Textbook delays", *Dawn*, 20 April 2004.

⁵⁸ ICG interview, Islamabad, July 2004.

⁵⁹ ICG interviews with members of the Sindh Education Foundation, April 2004.

V. DEPOLITICISING EDUCATION

Centralised control of public education has historically served the ruling elite and is unlikely to be addressed appropriately without resistance from traditional powerbrokers. The public education system is deeply politicised. Instead of comprehending and then addressing the challenges posed by the country's diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic mix, policies tend to widen and exacerbate divisions.

A. LANGUAGE POLICY: ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF POWER

Language policy still echoes the elitist and divisive paradigms of the colonial era. In fact, state institutions have manipulated it to exploit social divisions to their benefit. Historically, local languages and cultures have been symbols of ethnicity, challenges to centralised control and the state's attempts to enforce a monolithic national identity. Powerful state actors have used the education system to marginalise these languages.

Like its colonial predecessor, the Pakistani state continues to pursue policies that produce an elite class of army officials and civil servants. State institutions, most notably the army, have wrested an important space for themselves in the education sector. "Elitist educational institutions in Pakistan are more influenced by the armed forces than any other body", says Dr. Tariq Rahman, a professor at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad.⁶⁰ The extent of army involvement varies according to the type of institution. Military cadet schools and colleges are controlled entirely by the army or army-backed provincial governors. Some are run through the military's various foundations, including the army's Fauji Foundation, the air force's Shaheen Foundation, and the navy's Bahria Foundation. Army officials appoint principals directly, often retired officers. In elitist private schools, such as Beaconhouse and Head Start, the links with the military are more difficult to identify. Nevertheless, such schools are sometimes given large plots of land by the armed services and in return charge reduced fees for army families.⁶¹

⁶⁰ ICG interview, August 2004, Islamabad.

⁶¹ ICG interview with former Beaconhouse principal, Islamabad, March 2004; ICG interview with Tariq Rahman, Islamabad, August 2004.

Elitist schools' textbooks are produced independently of the PTBs and do not follow the government-prescribed curriculum. However, the most basic, and indeed most significant, difference is the language of instruction. Despite official policy, English has always been the language of power and a virtual class marker in Pakistani society. The terms "Urdu-medium" and "English-medium" are used commonly to identify an individual's social and educational status. Interviews for high-paying jobs are usually conducted in English. Similarly, its international primacy makes proficiency in English arguably the most fundamental advantage for Pakistani youth seeking attractive employment abroad and in Pakistan. English proficiency also helps an individual rise in the armed forces and civil service.⁶²

Pakistan's education system, with elitist English-medium private schools on one side and vernacular, Urdu-medium public and private schools catering to the poor on the other, reflects and magnifies class divisions. With tuition and additional charges in some cases as high as \$80 a month, elitist schools are inaccessible to most families in a country where almost half the population lives under the poverty line. Taught primarily in English, their graduates are hardly ever challenged on the job market by their Urdu-medium peers. The largely urban-based private school boom since the 1980s, after the Zia regime reversed the Zulfikar Bhutto government's nationalisation drive, has fuelled social, economic and urban/rural disparities.⁶³ According to Mashood Rizvi, Director of Programs for the Sindh Education Foundation:

There are schools for the elite, and there are schools for the poor. The products of elite schools go back to elite circles, and the products of public schools go back to the underprivileged classes. There is no possibility of traversing these [boundaries].⁶⁴

There have been various efforts to strengthen the role of regional languages, both within and outside parliament. "Students will be far better off learning in their mother tongue", says Ahmed Parekh of the

⁶² ICG interview with official of the National Defence College, August 2004, Islamabad.

⁶³ By 2000, only about 14,000 out of roughly 36,000 private schools were in rural areas. See "Pakistan Education and School Atlas", Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, 2002.

⁶⁴ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), one of the MMA's largest constituent parties.⁶⁵ "Instead the public school system has crushed the local languages and this has a tremendous impact on students who speak one language at home, and are forced to absorb information in schools in another. The mother tongue is also the marker of one's identity....It should be made compulsory that schools teach students in their mother tongues".⁶⁶ Others advocate inserting a clause related to the promotion of the major local and regional languages, including Balochi, Brahvi, Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi and Seraiki into a new cultural policy being formulated with support from UNESCO and UNDP.⁶⁷

However, in planning and implementing a new language policy, it is important to highlight the link between languages taught at schools and the dominant languages of public discourse and commerce. Any efforts to replace English or Urdu in public school education will be self-defeating without a corresponding language shift in the job market. "Even if we made Punjabi or Balochi compulsory in schools, there would still be no jobs available in those languages", says Tariq Rahman.⁶⁸ Hence, the public school system faces a considerable challenge. An effective language policy must reconcile the need to satisfy the cultural necessities of the country's various linguistic groups with the need to qualify public school students in a competitive job market. Given market needs, Pakistan's public school system must place the necessary emphasis on English. So long as fluent English-speakers are the products solely of elitist private education, social, linguistic and economic apartheid will endure.

Inculcating English verbal and written skills in public school students requires more than just a top-down change in language policy. Teachers must be well trained to teach English effectively -- admittedly a long-term process requiring significant investment. Teachers should be encouraged to use as much extracurricular material as possible, such as transcripts of speeches, video clips, audio exercises,

and debating contests, to instil versatility in the knowledge and use of the language.

Efforts to introduce English into the public school system have often been haphazard and poorly conceived. For example, in 2000 the NWFP education ministry notified schools in several districts that instruction was to be changed from Urdu to English after class six. This sudden change has had an impact on both students and teachers. In the NWFP schools ICG visited, no additional staff had been provided for the new English-medium classes nor was any English training provided to teachers who had taught in Urdu. Class six students meanwhile face a new script, alphabet, and vocabulary without any significant prior instruction. A teacher said:

If you're going to decide to introduce English as the medium of instruction, by all means do so, but at least start it from class one, so that it is realistic for the students to learn the language. Then come to schools and establish how feasible it is, and what the school needs to adapt. Does it need new books? Do the teachers need training? Nobody from the government came to any of the schools that were affected by this decision.⁶⁹

To adopt English as the language of instruction, schools require supporting resources, including English-trained teachers and books and other reading material. These texts must be affordable and accessible to the majority of Pakistanis. Sabiha Mansoor draws attention to the dearth of quality English-language publications produced within Pakistan, compared to large supplies of imported and highly priced books.⁷⁰ The education ministry can play an important role in encouraging and, indeed, spearheading the production of good quality, low-priced English-language texts. Despite then Education Minister Zobaida Jalal's announcement on 2 December 2003 that English would be made compulsory in public primary education across the country starting from Class one,⁷¹ public schools ICG visited across the country had yet to be provided with

⁶⁵ Of the six parties in the politically powerful Islamist umbrella organisation, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), the largest and most prominent are the JI and the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (led by Fazlur Rehman).

⁶⁶ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

⁶⁷ See Mahmood Zaman, "Redefining Pakistani culture", *Dawn*, 7 July 2004.

⁶⁸ ICG interview, Islamabad, August 2004.

⁶⁹ ICG interview, Abbottabad, April 2004.

⁷⁰ With approximately 3,000 titles published a year during the 1990s, Pakistan ranked as one of the region's lowest producers of books. Sabiha Mansoor, "The Medium of Instruction Dilemma: Implications for Language Planning in Higher Education", in Sabiha Mansoor, Shaheen Meraj, Aliya Tahir, eds, *Language Policy Planning & Practice* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷¹ "English made compulsory, says minister", *Dawn*, 3 December 2003.

any English educational material, or with additional English-speaking teachers, as late as mid-2004.

B. ETHNIC AND SECTARIAN DIVISIONS

Pakistan's language policy and centralised curriculum process also exacerbates divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines. The political use of Urdu in a country where the great majority of its multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic population are not native Urdu-speakers has had devastating consequences and, as noted, contributed significantly to Pakistan's traumatic dismemberment in 1971. The secession of East Pakistan, however, did not end language-related discord among ethnic groups.

The country's major languages include Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, Siraiki, Hindko and Brahvi.⁷² While English remains the dominant language in spheres of influence and wealth, Urdu, the mother tongue of the mohajirs, some 10 per cent of the population, prevails in the state's lower administrative levels, the national media, state-run schools, and other public domains, especially in the major cities. This is largely due to the official policy of promoting Urdu as the national language and intentionally limiting the scope for regional and local languages.

The overwhelming influence of mohajirs, who dominated the Muslim League leadership and the bureaucracy at Pakistan's independence, led to the adoption of Urdu as the national language at the cost of the languages of the peoples who primarily compose Pakistan. This resulted in acute ethnic rifts that still resonate -- most significantly the Sindhi-mohajir conflict, whose violent confrontations paralysed Sindh's urban centres, including Karachi and Hyderabad, during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and continues to threaten provincial stability.

The rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an ethnic Sindhi, to the country's highest office, and of his Pakistan People's Party in the Sindh provincial assembly, gave a moral and political boost to the Sindhi language movement.⁷³ In 1972, the Sindh Assembly presented the Sindh (Teaching, Promotion and Use of Sindhi

Language) Bill that called for Sindhi to become a compulsory subject in secondary schools and sought the "progressive use of Sindhi language in offices and departments of Government including Courts and Assemblies".⁷⁴ Fearing that the bill's passage would undermine the official standing of Urdu and hence their access to employment within and outside the public sector, mohajir groups launched violent language riots that led to loss of life, heavy damage to public and private property, and eventually curfews in Karachi and Hyderabad.

Like the Bengali language riots in the 1950s, the Sindhi-mohajir riots sowed the seeds of intense ethnic conflict that have produced lasting geographic and political fault lines within the province. In the 1980s, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a mohajir political party, exploited mohajir resentment against the state's efforts to grant Sindhi language an equal status to Urdu in the province. Fearing that this could loosen the mohajir grip over Sindh's urban centres, the MQM pursued aggressive confrontation and street power, drawing on urban mohajir youth in cities. The MQM was used, in turn, by the military to counter its Sindhi opponents. The MQM's popular base and its capacity for disruption in urban Sindh forced successive national and provincial governments to attempt to include it within coalition alliances, from Benazir Bhutto's in 1989 to President Musharraf's.⁷⁵

The overwhelming political influence of mohajirs in Sindh has prevented the effective establishment of the Sindhi language in the education, government and commercial sectors. The Sindh Language Bill of 1972 was never successfully implemented. For example, according to figures obtained from the Sindh Education Foundation, today there are only three Sindhi-medium schools in Karachi, the provincial capital. While public school students in the province's urban centres are still required to study Sindhi as a language up to class ten, this has been widely interpreted as mere lip service. Sindhi-medium schools are the majority of public primary rural schools. However, after the primary level, public schools students are generally taught in Urdu. Says Anita Ghulam Ali: "People are very aware of what

⁷² See Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi, 1996), p. 1.

⁷³ Led by G.M. Syed, the Sindhi nationalists opposed Urdu-linguistic domination in the province, advocating for Sindhi to become the national language of an independent Sindhi state. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷⁵ In the October 2002 elections, the MQM won the second highest number of seats in the Sindh Assembly, after the PPP, and became a coalition partner in the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam) (PML-Q)-led provincial government. Currently, the MQM is the dominant partner in the Sindh government led by the pro-Musharraf PML-Q.

the market demands are. The Language Bill did little to increase the opportunities for Sindhi speakers in government or any office. So it would be foolish to pursue a Sindhi language policy in schools".⁷⁶

Similar initiatives in other provinces have produced the same result. For example, the Balochistan Mother Tongue Use Bill, No. 6 of 1990 provided that three indigenous languages -- Balochi, Brahvi and Pashto -- would be compulsory mediums of instruction in rural primary schools.⁷⁷ Targeted at the province's underprivileged segments, the bill in fact risked increasing the socio-economic divisions between the elite and the poorer classes, who would have few economic opportunities in these languages. It was repealed in 1992.

The imposition of Urdu on a multi-ethnic, largely non-Urdu speaking population continues to fuel ethnic alienation and, particularly in the case of Sindh, raises the constant risk of violent ethnic conflict. According to Tariq Rahman: "As mohajir ethnicity has in fact divided Sindh, there is always the possibility of an ethnic civil war, one of the potentially dangerous legacies of the language riots [of the 1970s]".⁷⁸

Complementing the virtual eclipse of regional and local languages in public discourse and intensifying its impact on Pakistan's minorities is the limited attention to ethnic and sectarian identities in the national syllabus. Pakistan studies courses often neglect regional histories and roles in national development. Said Mahtab Rashti:

The curriculum negates historical facts for the sake of political expediency. There is a danger in tampering with history. For example, there is no mention of the role of Sindh in the Pakistan Movement, no examination of the role of revered Sindhi figures like G.M. Syed. Or, when they are mentioned, they are demonised. So the impact on the Sindhi student is: "What place do I have in this country?"⁷⁹

Echoing these sentiments an educator in NWFP said: "Our local heroes like Badshah Khan [Pashtun nationalist leader] are either ignored or denigrated. Malakand's place in the Independence Movement is

never taught".⁸⁰ In Balochistan, a senior official of the provincial education department said: "Balochistan has the oldest and richest history of any province in Pakistan. Unfortunately our students are never told about it".⁸¹

Biases in the curriculum have also fuelled sectarian conflict, most recently in some parts of the Northern Areas, when Gilgit's Shia leaders called on their community to protest against a perceived Sunni bias in textbooks, especially in Islamiyat (Islamic studies) courses. In response to the protests, the government imposed a curfew on the city. Defying the curfew, Shia leaders organised large rallies that resulted in clashes with security forces. Government buildings were attacked, including the Northern Areas Legislative Council Hall, the deputy commissioner's office and police stations, and the Karakoram Highway, the all-weather road to China, was blocked. Heavy contingents of the army and Frontier Constabulary were deployed to maintain law and order and resist the campaign. Banks and private and government offices were shut, and tourists were forced to leave the area. The curfew was finally lifted on 15 June 2004, after twelve days of rioting but only after the local administration and Shia leaders reached an acceptable compromise on the religious content of the textbooks.⁸²

C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION

The centralised curriculum has also propelled the ascent of political Islam in Pakistan's public education system. While the role of political Islam in Pakistani madrasas has received considerable international attention, the implications of its penetration of the mainstream public education sector syllabus has largely been neglected. An analyst observes:

The United States and the European Union are both focusing on madrasa reform in Pakistan....But Pakistan's allies in the war against terrorism have not focused on what Pakistan does in its regular mainstream schools. Bringing the madrasa into the mainstream would in some measure mean bringing the

⁷⁶ ICG interview, August 2004.

⁷⁷ Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, op. cit., p. 268.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷⁹ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

⁸⁰ ICG interview, Dir, NWFP, May 2004.

⁸¹ ICG interview, Quetta, May 2004.

⁸² See Safdar Khan, "Curfew in Gilgit; protester killed", *Dawn*, 4 June 2004; Khan, "Curfew lifted in Gilgit", *Dawn*, 16 June 2004.

regular curriculum into the seminary. Is this curriculum any different from the twisted view of life taught to the boys who are then fed into jihad?⁸³

An overemphasis on Islamic interpretations in the government-prescribed syllabus has distorted historical data, nurtured intolerance for other religions, and confined the scope of the physical and social sciences. Efforts to calibrate madrasa and public school syllabi, therefore, seem premature without comprehensive review and reorganisation of the latter.

Although the 1973 Constitution emphasised Islamic education, religion did not permeate the educational system in any systematic way until the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq joined hands with the mullahs to consolidate its rule. As part of its Islamisation process, the Zia regime reordered the education sector according to Islamic doctrines, and gave political and fiscal patronage to the madrasa sector, which expanded rapidly. A parallel phenomenon occurred in public education. Following the 1977 coup, Zia convened a national conference to reassess the basic aims of the education sector. In his inaugural address, he emphasised: "[Our children] must imbibe the lofty ideals and principles of Islam".⁸⁴ As part of the educational policy, Islamiyat and Arabic were introduced as compulsory subjects up to university level, and political Islam became an integral component of the nationally prescribed curriculum.

Despite General Musharraf's pledges to take Pakistan back to its moderate political moorings, the military government's dependence on the religious right translates into a reluctance to modify General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation of the public education system. As a result, the public schools have assumed a key role in shaping and promoting the ideology of an increasingly Islamised state. According to Kaiser Bengali, managing director of the Karachi-based Social Policy and Development Centre, "the purpose of Pakistan's education system is not pedagogy but indoctrination".⁸⁵

The content of the national syllabus, prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education's Curriculum Wing, is highly politicised, mainly reiterating the military's domestic and external agendas. Religion and history are examined through the prism of their contemporary political uses. The study of Islam is linked to the Kashmir insurgency, where resistance to Indian rule is portrayed as a religious undertaking and duty. The Kashmir dispute is thus portrayed as the most recent chapter in an historic Islamic struggle, and the army's importance is described as fundamental to the nation's survival. Students are expected to "identify the role of armed forces for national security"; to "recognise the importance of Jihad in every sphere of life"; and to "discuss the role of [the] present Government in re-establishing the sound position of Pakistan and freedom fighters before the international community".⁸⁶ They are also required "to make speeches on Jihad".⁸⁷

The role of Hindus in Pakistan's pre-independence history is ignored, and Hindus are demonised in the context of pre- and post-independence developments. For example, the syllabus is designed to "create familiarisation [about the] role of the resistance put forward by the *Muslims* against British occupation" (emphasis added). Hence lessons on the struggle against British colonial rule focus on key Muslim leaders, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Syed Ahmed Khan and Allama Iqbal, while leaving out major Hindu nationalists such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Pakistan's creation is described as "the result of political struggle against English and Hindu Raj in the Subcontinent".⁸⁸ There are repeated references to the "ill attitude of Hindus towards the Muslims of the Subcontinent".⁸⁹ Says Bengali: "Our students are completely discredited in any international forums or debates on history. They just cannot compete because they're given a half-baked education".⁹⁰

⁸³ Khaled Ahmed, "The poison in the books we teach", *The Friday Times*, 19-25 March 2004.

⁸⁴ Quoted in A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, eds., *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (Islamabad, March 2003), p. 3.

⁸⁵ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

⁸⁶ "National Curriculum for Social Studies Classes I-V", Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education (Curriculum Wing), Islamabad, March 2002, p. 33.

⁸⁷ On a more contemporary note, the curriculum policy for social studies for classes I-V requires students to "describe in simple words the significance of [the military government's] Devolution of Power Plan with respect to solution of daily problems of the people". Ibid. p. 34.

⁸⁸ "National Curriculum for Social Studies Classes VI-VIII", Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education (Curriculum Wing), Islamabad, March 2002, p. 27.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

In 1999 the federal ministry of education, in consultation with the National Committee on Education and the four provincial education departments, produced a document entitled, "National Curriculum 2000 -- A Conceptual Framework", which provided an outline to steer the education sector "away from ideological demagoguery" and towards modern education.⁹¹ However, it was never implemented. The Musharraf government backtracked on commitments to update and secularise the public education curriculum, especially as it tried to win the support of the religious parties within parliament for its Legal Framework Order (LFO), a set of constitutional provisions meant to consolidate the army's role in politics. Thus, in December 2003, just as the government and the MMA were finalising agreement on the LFO, and responding to rumours that the government planned to reform the Islamiyat syllabus and delete references to jihad, then Education Minister Zobaida Jalal declared: "I am a Muslim and a fundamentalist and cannot think of deleting Islamic concepts from the textbooks".⁹²

Two recent experiences reveal the extent of the education ministry's unwillingness to contest the influence of the religious right in public education. The first was sparked by the release of a report entitled "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan", by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), an Islamabad-based think tank. The report documented the religious, sectarian and gender biases of the national syllabus and maintained: "The educational material[s] in the government-run schools do much more than [that of] madrasas. The textbooks tell lies, create hate [and] incite [espousal of] jihad and *shahadat* [sacrifice]".⁹³ It proposed a review of the national curriculum, and makes the following recommendations:

- ❑ establishing a National Education Advisory Board (NEAB) made up of academics and educators from the private and public sectors to exercise independent oversight over education policy and planning;

- ❑ abolishing the Curriculum Wing and vesting authority over curriculum formulation with the NEAB;
- ❑ abolishing Provincial Textbook Boards; and
- ❑ reviewing the curriculum with a view to correcting historical falsehoods, inaccuracies and omissions; removing discriminatory content against women, religious and ethnic minorities, and other nations.⁹⁴

The federal education ministry convened a committee, which included independent academics as well as education officials, to review the recommendations. It presented its findings to the head of the Curriculum Wing on 13 March 2004. Education Minister Jalal told the National Assembly that a majority of committee members had rejected the recommendations. This, however, is contested. According to some, the ministry initially said the recommendations would be implemented but recanted under pressure from religious lobbies within the National Assembly. The committee members' decisions were never made public. However, some of the academics on committee claim that only six of fifteen members raised objections to the recommendations.⁹⁵

In a second related incident, rumours about a Curriculum Wing decision to delete Quranic verses from science books, as well as references to jihad in other parts of the curricula, became the centre of a political storm. The religious right, spearheaded by the MMA, protested this proposed "secularisation" of education, within and outside parliament.⁹⁶ Even the Punjab teachers union threatened to protest exclusion of these religious references from textbooks.⁹⁷

Once again, the education ministry convened a national committee to review the curriculum, comprising the ministers of education, information and religious affairs, PTB chairpersons, officials from the education and information departments, parliamentarians, and religious scholars. Some observers raised concerns that the religious lobby was "over represented", signifying

⁹¹ Sami Mustafa, "Analysing failure of government initiatives in education", *Dawn*, 3 April 2004.

⁹² "No change in Islamiyat syllabus: Zobaida", *Dawn*, 18 December 2003.

⁹³ According to the report, the public schools syllabus "clearly teaches young non-Muslim students that they are excluded from the national identity", Nayyar and Salim, op.cit., pp. 1-2; p. 9.

⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. ix-x.

⁹⁵ ICG interviews with A.H. Nayyar, Islamabad, March 2004; Tariq Rahman, Islamabad, August 2004; Ahmed Salim, Islamabad August 2004. See also A.H. Nayyar, "The fight to revamp our textbooks", *Dawn*, 3 April 2004.

⁹⁶ "PML-N joins MMA protest over issue of curriculum", *Dawn*, 8 April 2004.

⁹⁷ See Zubeida Mustafa, "A curriculum of hatred", *Dawn*, 31 March 2004.

government capitulation to the religious right. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the MMA's political rival in Sindh, which had supported changes to the syllabus in the National Assembly, criticised the government for appointing MMA representatives while excluding its own party members and other secular parliamentarians.⁹⁸ A MQM leader, Kanwar Khalid Younus, said: "On the one hand, the government is taking steps to modernise [the] syllabus and education system at madrasas and on the other hand, schools and colleges are being converted into madrasas".

The committee decided against the proposed changes.⁹⁹ One observer wrote: "Unfortunately, the government's caving in only seems to have emboldened the zealots".¹⁰⁰ The subsequent replacement of Jalal as education minister in Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's cabinet by Lt. General (retired) Javid Qazi, a former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) with no experience in education, has been widely interpreted as a move to placate the religious right, angered by the government's public pledges to reform the curriculum and delete references to jihad from the textbooks.¹⁰¹

The very fact that curriculum changes have become the subject of a heated debate in the national parliament, when normally they would be the concern of education departments, educators and parents, reveals the extent to which education has become an instrument of influence for the state's political factions. It is, therefore, crucial that the government remove the curriculum reform issue from political lobbies that want to hold the process hostage to their own partisan aims and itself refrain from using education for political ends. Even if the government is intent on retaining a centralised syllabus formulation at the national level, it must at least ensure that the education department's decisions are not jeopardised by political expediency. In any case, educational content should be entrusted to academics and scholars, not politicians and bureaucrats.

In the long term, given Pakistan's regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, the education ministry should decentralise and broaden the process, allowing elected provincial and local officials, as well as a cross section of academics and educators, to participate in the determination of educational content.

D. POLITICAL ISLAM AND EDUCATION REFORM

Idiosyncratic interpretations of Islam have also adversely affected other areas of Pakistan's public education system, frequently aggravating gender disparities, especially in regions where the religious right has political clout, and hampering reform initiatives aimed at adapting education to changing social needs. The introduction of important but sensitive content into the classroom often conflicts with socio-cultural norms based on religious interpretations. According to Suroor Lotia, a former administrator at Concern for Children, schools and parents are wary of new content that addresses intimate areas of family and personal behaviour, such as contraception and other forms of sex-education.¹⁰² In the late 1990s, Aahung, a Karachi-based organisation specialising in sexual and reproductive health, began sex education programs in Machar Colony. It and the schools became the target of protests and physical threats.¹⁰³ In Balochistan, religious lobbies pressured the provincial education ministry to remove diagrams of parts of the female anatomy from science books because they perceived them as obscene.¹⁰⁴

Religious groups have exploited social and traditional mores to resist co-education, with greater success in the economically backward, more socially conservative tribal and semi-tribal areas of Balochistan and the NWFP. They are impeding efforts to establish a gender-equitable school system in the Pashtun-majority areas of the two provinces. This pressure is not exerted from within families, but rather from local political forces, which are, more often than not, the central government's chosen powerbrokers.

⁹⁸ "MQM criticizes Zobaida: National Committee on Curriculum", *Dawn*, 21 April 2004.

⁹⁹ Nasir Iqbal, "Committee told verses not removed from curriculum", *Dawn*, 21 April 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Omar R. Quraishy, "The textbook controversy and the official response", *Dawn*, 18 April 2004.

¹⁰¹ See editorial "Bleak Outlook", *The Friday Times*, 10-16 September 2004. General Qazi, who had, as ISI chief, played a key role in supporting and expanding the madrasa sector, has proposed employing retired army officers as teachers as a means of reforming the education sector.

¹⁰² ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

¹⁰³ ICG interviews with public and private school principals and NGO workers, Karachi, April 2004.

¹⁰⁴ The ministry was eventually able to resist this pressure. ICG interviews with senior officials of Balochistan Education Ministry, Quetta, May 2004.

Dir district in the NWFP is illustrative. It was initially part of the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) under the NWFP government, ruled by a *nawab* (princely chief) and only nominally regulated by the provincial government. Perceiving education as a potential threat to his authority, the *nawab*, Shah Jehan, forbade improvements or expansion of the school system. By 1962 Dir had only one school for boys. In 1965, the first girls school was established. Many children were forced to commute to nearby districts such as Swat or Peshawar. In 1990 the federal government removed Dir from the PATA, making it officially a NWFP district. However, with provincial and federal support, tribal leaders (*maliks*) were allowed to keep power. Until 1994, a jirga council still made important local decisions, exercising political and social control by manipulating local customs superimposed on regional interpretations of Islam.¹⁰⁵

The federal and provincial governments continue to allow *maliks* to exercise de facto local authority on their behalf in tribal and semi-tribal Pashtun-majority areas of the NWFP and Balochistan. These traditional power holders remain a deterrent to development and modernisation, using emotive religious justifications to gain local support for their actions, particularly against women, the most vulnerable segment of the population.

"They hold up cars and force people to recite the *Kalama* [Quranic verse] to prove they are Muslims", says Maryam Bibi, managing director of Khwendo Kor (KK), a Peshawar-based NGO that runs female education programs. "Even the colour of the clothes women wear makes a difference. If we wear too many bright colours, they think we're from outside, or too liberal. *Everything* is observed".¹⁰⁶

In the Malakand division of the NWFP, of which Lower and Upper Dir are two of seven administrative units, the tribal and religious leadership continue to hold sway in the absence of effective and accountable government. As a result, the region is prone to high levels of insecurity and extremism, demonstrated during the 1990s by the political ascendancy of the Tanzim Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TSNM), an extremist organisation that spearheaded a campaign to establish Shariat law in Malakand and by 1994 gained almost complete control of the area.¹⁰⁷ "The

government was powerless to act against the TNSM", says Ibrash Pasha, a Dir resident currently working with KK. Claiming to defend the region against alien threats to traditional values, the TNSM opposed foreign-funded projects in general, and women mobilisation efforts in particular. Female education programs run by organisations like KK came under attack. "We were accused of spreading Christianity, of being funded by Jews", says Pasha. "We came under threat and even physical attacks". The federal government banned the TNSM only after it sent thousands of volunteers to fight alongside the Taliban in late 2001.

The MMA's rise, following its formation of the provincial NWFP government and participation in the pro-Musharraf PMQ-led coalition government in Balochistan, has ensured that religious conservatism will continue to hamper education, particularly for females, in both provinces.¹⁰⁸ "A lot now depends on the vision of the provincial education minister, who is a MMA figure", says a Balochistan education official, adding "This vision is difficult to digest".¹⁰⁹

In Banu, a southern district in NWFP that borders on South Waziristan Tribal Agency, education workers have been physically attacked.¹¹⁰ More encouraging, parents successfully resisted a campaign spearheaded by the district nazim (mayor), a member of the Jamaat-i-Islami, to close an Overseas Pakistanis Foundation school in Chuckdara that employs female teachers.¹¹¹

Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) are still governed under the Frontiers Crime Regulations, a set of laws framed by the British in 1901. They deny any political or civil rights to residents, giving absolute powers to the Political Agent, the representative of the federal government, who exercises his writ through the *maliks*. As a result, people live in fear of crossing either their tribal chiefs or the government's representatives, and conservatism rules. "Our strategy is a survival strategy", says KK's Maryam Bibi, who comes from North Waziristan, and whose organisation is active in

¹⁰⁵ ICG interviews, Dir, May 2004.

¹⁰⁶ ICG interview, Peshawar, May 2004.

¹⁰⁷ For more on TSNM's impact, see Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1997), p. 561.

¹⁰⁸ One resident of the Khuzdar district of Balochistan said, "I still remember when religion was a private matter in this district. Now it's full of madrasas and mullahs and huge mosques. The government thinks it can solve the problem by giving madrasas computers".¹⁰⁸ ICG interview.

¹⁰⁹ ICG interview, Quetta, May 2004.

¹¹⁰ See "Attack on worker: NGOs hold demo outside NWFP assembly", *Dawn*, 25 June 2004.

¹¹¹ ICG interviews, Dir, May 2004.

FATA. "It is one of cooperation. We can't afford to be confrontational. It's too unpredictable. We came under heavy pressure not to work in a couple of villages. We resisted but had to eventually give in".¹¹²

While the demand for education in these areas and other rural regions in the NWFP is high, pressures from provincial authorities or locally based politico-religious extremists deter families from sending their children to school, especially girls. They also hamper private and non-profit sector organisations. In Dir, for instance, there are clusters of eight to fourteen villages without a single girls school.¹¹³ Government and international donor financing for rural and female education is unlikely to bear fruit until Islamabad prevents religious extremists from disrupting education reform and withdraws its patronage from traditional power-holders such as the tribal *maliks*.

E. BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES TO REFORM

1. Political appointees

Pakistan's public school teachers are tenured civil servants with pension rights and related benefits. There is, therefore, a significantly greater level of job security in public than in private schools, a major motivation for teachers since jobs in both types of schools are equally poorly paid. As the single largest class of civil servants, public school teachers have an important, and little understood, role in Pakistan's polity.¹¹⁴

Due to its size the education department is one of the most accessible departments in the government sector. Many employees seek to exploit official and unofficial benefits of government service, rather than teach in a deteriorating public school system. It is often not the official benefits such as job security, but rather the unofficial rewards that explain the public school sector's wide appeal. Educational qualification remains a principal determinant of salary and opportunity in both the public and private sectors. This has given the

education department a strategic position in social, economic and political life. High school and university degrees are sold for profit or are granted to win favour.¹¹⁵ In a public education sector with little if any oversight, the positions of examiner, grader and degree-granting officer can be highly lucrative.

There is also generally a strong culture of nepotism and favouritism in the public sector, with transfers and postings often made to oblige powerbrokers at the various tiers of government.¹¹⁶ Political appointments in the public school system are common, and civil service bureaucracy often makes it difficult to hold appointees accountable. Says Mahtab Rashti, a former Sindh education secretary and currently Sindh information secretary:

It is practically impossible to transfer a politically appointed teacher because they are backed by someone in power. They have no interest in education but you can't punish them for their performance. And instead of promoting teachers based on their achievements as teachers, we promote them according to the length of government service and who their political support comes from.¹¹⁷

Another Sindh government official says: "In the culture of Pakistan's bureaucracy, the most severe punishment you can give someone is to transfer him somewhere else".¹¹⁸ This lack of accountability and objectivity has allowed teachers with little qualification or commitment to reach the highest levels of the public school system.

An even more ominous symptom of this ethos is the mushrooming of "ghost" schools and teachers that consume government resources despite being non-functional or nonexistent. In what international observers have described as "one of the country's worst corruption scandals", local officials obtain government funds for institutions and teachers that exist only on paper.¹¹⁹ There are also instances of

¹¹² ICG interview.

¹¹³ ICG interview with Executive District Officer (Education) Lower Dir district, NWFP, May 2004.

¹¹⁴ According to the Federal Bureau of Statistics, in 2000-2001 over 600,000 public school teachers were employed, the largest share of government employees in any one sector. See Government of Pakistan, Federal Bureau of Statistics of Pakistan, *Pakistan Statistical Yearbook 2003* (Islamabad, 2004), section 14.2.

¹¹⁵ ICG interviews with senior education officials in Sindh and Balochistan, April-May 2004.

¹¹⁶ ICG countrywide interviews with senior education officials, April-May 2004.

¹¹⁷ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

¹¹⁸ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004. These views were echoed to ICG in a series of countrywide interviews with national and provincial government education officials, April-June 2004.

¹¹⁹ "Pakistan army seeks out phantom schools", BBC News, 23 March 1998.

public school administrators subletting school premises to private interests. In 1998 the Punjab government identified 4,500 ghost schools in the province and estimated that 40 per cent of the province's teachers only went to school to collect their salaries.¹²⁰ In a three-month period in 1999, the Sindh education department identified over 7,000 absentee teachers who remained on the department's payroll.¹²¹ The absence of effective oversight enables these teachers and institutions to eat into already limited provincial education funds.

Adding to the problem are the low wages for public school teachers. Mohammad Nawaz, a rural schoolteacher in NWFP, said:

There has been such a mushrooming of public schools that teacher salaries over the years have gone down even further. The education sector has become an industry, not a sector for learning. We are treated like labourers in this industry, not as people who must impart education to the people.¹²²

The poor school conditions described above have a similar impact on teachers as on students. Unsurprisingly, many seek other jobs while keeping their official posts as teachers and drawing the salaries; those who can will inevitably exploit political connections and bureaucratic loopholes. It is as important, therefore, to provide incentives to teachers as to students.

The education ministry recently raised teacher salary packages. While this is positive, it is important to challenge here another myth about Pakistan's education sector: that low public school teacher salaries, compared to the private school sector, are the cause of the poor teaching standards and discipline in state-run schools. By and large pay levels in the two sectors are competitive, and in many cases that ICG studied, public school salaries were higher than those in private schools. TCF, for example, pays its teachers less than the average public school. However, the organisation conducts regular appraisals of performance and yearly refresher training to maintain its teaching standards. As Rashti argues: "The possibility of losing one's job itself encourages better performance".¹²³

Pakistan's highly centralised public school system complicates efforts to monitor and maintain performance. Insufficient resource allocations and personnel at the top levels of provincial education ministries also make it difficult to detect abuse. For example, Sindh's education department has 250,000 out of a total 450,000 provincial government employees, making it responsible for more than half the province's civil service. A provincial secretary, four additional secretaries, and sixteen section officers manage this one department.¹²⁴ "It is physically impossible for any additional secretary to deal with the 100-150 files we receive everyday", says Iqbal Durrani, an additional secretary in Sindh's education ministry. "We need to radically restructure the education department if we are going to meet the educational challenges in the province. Some of the additional secretaries in this department do not even have vehicles".¹²⁵

Such resource limitations prevent the department from playing an effective monitoring and supervisory role. As a result, remote districts often go unobserved, and their educational requirements underreported. A former education official in Sindh admitted in an ICG interview to sending fictitious reports to the provincial ministry.

This limited capacity and outreach has allowed local officials and teachers across Pakistan to manipulate funds and functions of district education departments for personal profit. A long-term solution to bureaucratic corruption will have to include greater mobility, more personnel in provincial education departments, and more authority for locally elected representatives and other stakeholders to hire, fire and transfer teachers and administrators. The possible parameters of such a solution, and its potential to limit political and bureaucratic interference, is discussed below.

2. Electoral politics

When the Musharraf government set the requirement of a bachelor's degree for anyone seeking elected office in local or general elections, it invited a new wave of political pressure and corruption in the national and

¹²⁰ "Blight of ghost schools", *Dawn*, 23 January 2004.

¹²¹ ICG interview with Mahtab Rashti, Karachi, April 2004.

¹²² ICG interview, Abbottabad, NWFP, April 2004.

¹²³ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

¹²⁴ In comparison, the province's finance ministry has 1,000 employees, managed by one secretary, two special secretaries, five additional secretaries, twelve deputy secretaries and 40 section officers. Figures obtained from the Ministry of Education, Government of Sindh.

¹²⁵ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

provincial education departments. The sudden importance of educational experience had potential candidates scrambling for official certificates. "We were churning out graduates and degrees at such a rapid pace so that politicians could run for elections", said a high-level education official.¹²⁶

But the education sector has an even more direct role in electoral politics. During elections, polling agents are usually assigned from a pool of teachers and educators, since they form the largest contingent of civil servants and, ostensibly, are the learned and moral voices in society.¹²⁷ Historically, however, the polling agent has played a critical role in manipulating the ballot to produce favourable electoral results. Musharraf's presidential referendum in April 2002 provides a useful illustration of the political misuse of the education sector. Professor Anita Ghulam Ali, then Sindh's minister of education, described for ICG the military government's interference in the education department to ensure a positive outcome:

I received on my desk a row of names of teachers who needed to be transferred. I was asked to sign the transfers. However, there were no reasons given, which is unusual. When I inquired about why these individuals were being transferred, I wasn't given a direct answer....Eventually I discovered that these teachers were being transferred to positions where they would serve as polling agents so they could stuff the ballot for [Musharraf's] referendum.¹²⁸

She refused to sign the transfer orders after authorities at the highest level of government confirmed these rumours and eventually resigned her post.

Politically motivated transfers displace incumbents who are often not given acceptable reasons for their reassignment and are fitted into available positions that can be far from their home districts. Until the teaching profession escapes this bureaucratic culture, it will remain highly politicised and vulnerable. There appears to be some recognition of this.

Under its Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP) in 2004, the Punjab education department has introduced new hiring practices in the public

system, employing teachers on an institution-specific contract basis. But this will neither produce a merit-based system nor curb corruption without greater district and school control over their teachers, within an effective provincial monitoring system, as described below. The government should, furthermore, reconsider the policy of appointing polling agents from the education sector, as this links the sector too closely to politics.

At the same time, any solution must also avoid the pitfalls of poor private schools, where low teacher salaries often lead to high turnover and more burden on students, who repeatedly must build relationships with new instructors. As part of its teacher-training program, the Children's Resources International signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education preventing the transfer of any teachers trained under the program for at least three years. Similar initiatives could limit bureaucratic and political influence on public school teachers and its impact on the internal structures of schools.

F. BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES FOR REFORM

The Musharraf government's Devolution of Power Plan transferred responsibility for delivering education to local governments. In theory this devolution was to increase people's accessibility to the levers of power but the scheme has done little to decentralise real power or to establish effective grassroots constituencies for reform.

The senior education official at the district level is the Executive District Officer (EDO) Education who, among other functions, is nominally responsible for appointments, transfers, annual budgets, and establishing primary and middle schools in the district.¹²⁹ However, the EDO (Education)'s authority extends only to staff at the BS-15 level or below.¹³⁰ Transfers and appointments for more senior staff remain the responsibility of the provincial government, which also still has responsibility over inter-district transfers, textbooks, budget, and, in the

¹²⁶ ICG interview, April 2004.

¹²⁷ ICG interview with Professor Anita Ghulam Ali, Karachi, April 2004.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ For a full list of EDO (Education) responsibilities, see "Social Development in Pakistan: The State of Education", Social Policy and Development Centre, Annual Review 2002-2003, p. 125.

¹³⁰ There are 22 grades within the civil service, each defined by a Basic Scale (BS) of salary. Senior grades, BS-16 and above, do not fall under the authority of local government.

Punjab, approval of schemes beyond Rs.20 million (\$350,000). District departments have staffing authority only with respect to recruitment of secondary school teachers and non-teaching staff from BS-5 to BS-15. Elected district representatives have no influence over the district government's budget, and unspent funds are returned to the province.

The education sector's strategic and political significance has made it difficult for district representatives and officials to wrest control from powerbrokers at the national and provincial levels. "No parliamentarian likes the idea of a nazim [mayor] sitting in a district to be responsible for education", says Malik Asad, nazim of Kohat district in NWFP. "The education sector is still the main employer and one of the main areas of political influence....The education sector means a lot in a politician's life".

Despite the nominal mandate of the EDO (Education), real power continues to be exercised by the district's senior bureaucrat, the District Coordinating Officer (DCO), who represents the centre at the district level.¹³¹ Says Sardar Khan Afser, EDO (Education and Literacy) of Abbottabad district in NWFP: "The DCO has all the power. The EDO has responsibility without authority. We have no way of resisting the political interference that has ruined our institutions and prevented us from doing our jobs".¹³² "Without the DCO, nothing gets approved. The education department has no discretion over the budget, and no way to develop funds", says Zarawar Khan, EDO (Schools and Literacy) in Lower Dir.¹³³ Afser's and Khan's concerns were echoed in ICG interviews across the country with nazims, EDOs and other district officials.

The devolution scheme has increased the number of players on the political chessboard, resulting in greater overlap and confusion of responsibility. Clashes within district departments, as well as between local and provincial governments, have further politicised education at the district level. According to Mashood Rizvi, the resulting uncertainty and competition over roles and ownership in education policies and processes often hampers any meaningful change. "For example, in Khairpur [a district in Sindh], there are bitter inner rivalries

between the nazim and the EDO (Education)", he says. "As a result funding for education stops, and the society suffers more".

In Kohat, in the NWFP, friction between the nazim and the EDO (Education) became so pronounced that the education department took initiatives without consulting or even informing the nazim, including a decision to lower the district schools' pass grade from 33 per cent to 15 per cent.¹³⁴ In Balochistan's Chaghai district, intense conflict between the nazim and the DCO was a major factor leading to the division of the district into two separate districts, Noushki and Chagai.

Recently in Kohat, the district nazim and education department identified eighteen public school teachers whose performance was lacking, each of whom had been transferred from other districts. The district government ordered their transfer and appointed new teachers in their place. The NWFP government, however, requested the district to stop the process. Says Malik Asad: "We faced political interference from MNAs [Members of the National Assembly] and MPAs [Members of the Provincial Assembly] whose voters and supporters were being affected by the transfers. Then suddenly, the provincial government placed a ban on recruitment, so we were left high and dry, with many vacancies".

The jurisdiction of district governments is especially limited in city centres. For example, only 26 per cent of Karachi falls within the purview of the city district government. The remaining 74 per cent comes under cantonment and defence authorities and the Karachi Port Trust (KPT). Says a teacher in the city's Mohammadi colony, officially under KPT control:

Whenever we try to approach the nazim or the government of Sindh to discuss the problems we're facing in our schools and in our daily lives, we're told, "This is not our problem, this is KPT territory". Who are we supposed to approach in the KPT?¹³⁵

Says Ahmed Parekh, the tehsil nazim of Jamshed town, Karachi:

When the sewers overflow and destroy the *katchi abadis* [shanty towns] in cantonment

¹³¹ ICG interviews with EDOs (Education), nazims and government officials countrywide.

¹³² ICG interview with Sardar Khan Afser, Abbottabad, March 2004.

¹³³ ICG interview, Lower Dir, May 2004.

¹³⁴ ICG interviews with district education officials, Kohat, May 2004.

¹³⁵ ICG interview, April 2004.

areas, we can't do anything because it's not within our jurisdiction. If we aren't allowed a presence on the ground, how can we deal with any of the problems?¹³⁶

Without an effective demarcation of roles of the different branches of government, political clashes are likely to continue to halt local development projects. Furthermore, without greater discretion over education budgets and district school staffing, and operative as well as nominal jurisdiction over development projects, local stakeholders are unlikely to be able to respond to the particular educational needs of their communities.

ICG has argued that implementation of the current devolution scheme has in fact extended the central government's influence to the local level, bypassing and thereby marginalising the role of provincial governments.¹³⁷ While effective devolution of power would ultimately depend on submitting bureaucratic processes at the district and sub-district levels to the authority of elected local representatives, the role of provincial education departments should also be underlined. Any effective transfer of responsibility to local government must be accompanied by provincial oversight mechanisms. As suggested earlier, provincial education departments need to be expanded and restructured to achieve greater mobility and monitoring capacity. Moreover, fiscal transfers to district governments for education should be linked to performance indicators, such as enrolment rates, pass levels, student as well as teacher attendance levels, and gender balance.

However, even these changes will not be effective without fundamental structural changes at the district level. A main burden on the public school system has been lack of accountability in the bureaucratic process, a gap any viable reform program must address. Major decisions impacting schools must lend themselves to accountability and, therefore, be the mandate of public servants who draw their authority from and are responsible to voters. As key education stakeholders, parents of schoolchildren must assume a greater role in the policy process, serving in an electorate with other stakeholders, such as teachers and community civil society actors, to select the education department's top officeholder for a three- or four-year term.

Currently EDOs have little stake in the system, assuming temporary posts and having few if any links to the communities they serve. The new office, however, should depend not on official patronage, as the EDO's does, but on community assessments, thus further separating education decisions from the bureaucracy and holding education department executives accountable to local electorates.

Communities also need greater say in the important functions of their schools. The potential influence of parents is apparent in the example of successful resistance to the Dir government's attempts to shut down an Overseas Pakistani Foundation school. There are numerous active Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in all four provinces, 5,000 alone in Balochistan.¹³⁸ PTAs can be effective in stimulating greater parent involvement and should receive more technical and financial support from local education departments.

Local Government Ordinance 2001 provides for the establishment of Citizen Community Boards (CCBs) to institutionalise community participation in the delivery of services. CCBs should form and support service-specific associations such as PTAs. Some community mobilisation has occurred at the district level. In Sindh, School/College Management Committees have been reorganised and established at the village level, comprising members of Union Councils, teachers in the village, parents and other community members. In NWFP, PTAs have been restructured to include Union Councillors, thereby facilitating direct involvement of elected representatives.¹³⁹ In 2003 in Punjab, school councils consisting of parents, teachers and civil society members were earmarked for funds and support from local governments in six districts. However, in order to receive project-based funding for CCBs, communities have to raise 20 per cent before receiving the remainder from the government. In the face of economic hardship, many communities cannot do this.¹⁴⁰

More importantly, such groups have no official input in major decisions of individual schools. To enable such authority, each public school should constitute

¹³⁶ ICG interview, Jamshed Town, Karachi, April 2004.

¹³⁷ See ICG Report, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* op. cit.

¹³⁸ Statistics received from the Balochistan Education Foundation, June 2004.

¹³⁹ See "Devolution and Decentralisation: Identification of Progress in Implementation in Education", Multi-Donor Support Unit, January 2002.

¹⁴⁰ See ICG Report, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?*, op. cit.

a Board of Governors, as in private schools, elected by its key stakeholders, including parents and teachers, and with one or more representatives of the following: directly elected district officials, parents, teachers and civil society. Its duties would include establishing policy guidelines for the school's ethical and educational standards, screening and approving school administrator candidates and holding them accountable once appointed, and deciding on other matters deemed beyond the mandate of the head principal. Such boards could also serve as electors for the district education department's executive, thereby exercising considerable political leverage and constituting potentially effective constituencies for reform. The boards should also have greater powers to hire and fire public school teachers and to recommend infrastructure development projects. So far the centre has paid only lip service to the devolution of authority. Significant political will is needed if effective reform is to be instituted and implemented.

VI. OVERCOMING THE RESOURCE CRUNCH

Pakistan's public school system suffers from a lack of political will to implement necessary reforms that would loosen the government's grip over a politically strategic sector. However, even with effective decentralisation, as recommended above, it would have to overcome severe resource constraints to meet the country's educational needs. The government's ESR plan relies heavily on the participation of the private sector and the international donor community to fill this gap.

A. THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector's potential as a driving force in education for the poor is perhaps most manifest in the example of The Citizens' Foundation (TCF). A civil society initiative, TCF was started in 1995 by five industrialists and philanthropists. In 1996 it established its first five schools, financed entirely from the founders' own funds. They subsequently opened TCF funding to the private sector. Today TCF schools are funded by individuals, groups, industrialists and corporations, who can choose between options, including: building a primary or secondary school or a classroom; providing financial support to a primary or secondary school; educating a child; and contributing to the organisation's education funds. TCF partners include such major companies and corporations as Engro, Hubco, Unilever, Indus Motors and the Crescent Group. After the initial investment from the private partner, funds to run TCF schools are raised through the organisation's fundraising activities, and charity, including *zakat* (Islamic tithe) donations.

The organisation has 180 schools in seventeen cities, focusing primarily on rural areas and urban slums, with over 22,000 students enrolled at the primary and secondary level. It now averages between 40 and 50 new schools a year. TCF schools ICG visited in Karachi's urban slums were equipped with functioning science laboratories, art rooms and libraries. This is an indication of the private sector's potential as a driving force in improving education quality and delivery to the country's poorer segments. Says TCF Donor Coordinator Neelam Habib: "For [the business elite] this is an investment. An educated population is good for business, and they get more mileage out of a trained labour market than if they

had to train the workers themselves". Another major factor, she says, is the changed environment after the 11 September attacks: "Since the attacks, Pakistanis living abroad have understood the need to strengthen the country's secular education in relation to the madrasa sector".¹⁴¹

The opening of a TCF school in the NWFP is planned for April 2005, with the assistance of the Ghulam Farooq Group, a commercial and industrial conglomerate. It is being built in Shedu village of Nowshera district, home to the Group's founders. Says Saeed Khan, head of the organisation's corporate office in Islamabad, who is closely involved in the project:

We want to do something for the people of our area, and education and health are the top priorities. This is not a business venture, but an effort to provide quality education to the people of the area...We cannot sit back and leave it to the government to do everything. The government has its own limitations, and education has never been a top priority. So everybody has a certain amount of responsibility here. And TCF has a good track record to be an effective channel.¹⁴²

A key factor in TCF's success and appeal is institutional flexibility. While it follows the national syllabus, TCF uses its own books, produced by the Oxford University Press, and encourages teachers to use additional materials from easily available sources such as the print media to fill gaps in the state-prescribed curriculum. The material addresses issues such as gender equality and population planning that are often taboo in state-run schools. The organisation is sensitive to the concerns of non-Muslim students in its approach to religion.¹⁴³ TCF also places emphasis on extracurricular activities, notably various forms of art. Recently a TCF student won a Unilever-funded art competition against students from Pakistan's top private schools, including Karachi Grammar School and Aitchison, and was sent to the UK to compete internationally.

Most importantly, the medium of instruction in TCF schools is English, which serves as a link language for a diverse student population and gives those who

come from the poorest segments of Pakistani society more equality in a competitive job market with graduates of elite private schools. As a result, parents are more than willing to keep their children in school.¹⁴⁴ A similarly successful model is the Orangi Pilot Project, which has engaged the private sector to upgrade the physical conditions and education quality of public schools in Orangi, Karachi's largest squatter settlement.

There have been significant government-backed efforts since the 1990s to link the private and public sectors for improved education. The establishment of provincial Education Foundations was the primary mechanism for encouraging greater private sector involvement in education by founding and upgrading public and private schools in deprived areas. From 1990 to 1994 five Education Foundations were set up, one in each province and in Islamabad. The chairman of the board for each is the province's chief executive and, for the National Education Foundation (NEF), the president of Pakistan. Vice chairpersons are the provincial ministers of education and, in the case of the NEF, the federal minister. Initial funding has come as seed money or a provincial government grant. Other funding has come from such donors as USAID and the World Bank.

In its ESR Action Plan 2001-2004, the Federal Ministry of Education allocated almost one billion rupees (\$17 million) to building private-public partnerships, making this a major focus of its reform strategy.¹⁴⁵ The Adopt-a-School Program is among the more prominent public-private partnership initiatives. Originally launched in Punjab, it seeks private sector involvement to revitalise failing government schools. After identifying potential "adopters" and the public school to be "adopted", the relevant Foundation conducts a screening and approval process involving the school's key stakeholders, including parents, teaching staff and community members.

Once approved and registered, the adopter, in conjunction with the relevant provincial education department, Education Foundation and stakeholders, undertakes programs and activities to improve the institution's standards, such as infrastructure repairs, teacher performance monitoring, activation of parent-teacher associations, and teacher training. The

¹⁴¹ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

¹⁴² ICG interview, Islamabad, July 2004.

¹⁴³ ICG interviews with Habib, and teachers of TCF schools in Bhittaiabad, Karachi, April 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ "Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2004", Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, 1 January 2002.

program has had significant impact. In Sindh, for example, it has benefited almost 30,000 students, 75 per cent of them girls.¹⁴⁶

Alternative approaches to stimulating private sector involvement have also been taken. For example, the major task of the Balochistan Education Foundation (BEF) is to support the expansion and improvement of private schools in the province's deprived areas, with a specific focus on the education of girls in rural areas. Stimulating greater private sector involvement in education in Balochistan is an exceptional challenge. There are only roughly 500 private schools in the province, just 152 in the interior, the remainder in the provincial capital, Quetta. The scattered population, large distances, and poor transport and communication links have contributed to low enrolment rates and proved disincentives to private investment in education.¹⁴⁷ BEF established over 40 of the private schools and provides financial and technical support to an additional 300.

While it is worthwhile for the federal and provincial education ministries to pursue the current public-private framework, the government must reduce its heavy reliance on the private sector and allocate more funds to restructuring the management and institutional mechanisms of education departments, public school infrastructure, and general social sector development of rural areas and urban slums. Involving the private sector inevitably has its limits, as Balochistan's example shows, whether due to restraints imposed by infrastructure or by the private sector's limited interest in providing education to the poor. The government needs to appreciate that private-public partnerships are effective means of complementing, not substituting for greater state investment in education.

B. DONORS

The government's ESR plan relies heavily on donors. The aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, when Pakistan became a key ally in the U.S.-led "war on terrorism", has seen a heavy influx of international funds to the education sector. Major donors include USAID, the government of Japan, UNICEF, the

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank. Dependence on such outside help for more than 50 per cent of the funds needed to implement the ESR plan is an indication of how low education reform figures on the government's list of priorities.

Meaningful reform to the education system by necessity requires considerable government investment in the infrastructure and long-term commitment. It will also be gradual and prolonged, a reality not necessarily consistent with donors' proclivity for short-term projects and targets. Says a Quetta-based education adviser: "Donors often fail to apply [their] theories to the practical constraints in the country. For example, they want enrolment rates to go up without taking into consideration some of the key factors impeding enrolment: transport problems and rural infrastructure. This is a very long-term process".¹⁴⁸ Donors should also address popular perceptions that their projects are primarily expenditure rather than results-oriented, and their conditions impose a rigid framework on implementing institutions that require flexibility.

Donors also need to frame specific selection criteria for recipient districts that relate largely, though not exclusively, to their level of education development and to the number of projects already active in those districts. Without such a framework, there is a likelihood of overlap, which would slow rather than advance reform. Major donors have tended to focus on the same districts, often those that enjoy relatively high levels of development. For example, Khairpur, a district identified by the USAID-funded Education Sector Reform Assistance in Sindh, has the highest development indicators in the province. Similarly, fourteen donors are operating in Sindh's Thatta district.¹⁴⁹ Says Anita Ghulam Ali: "Everybody in Thatta is stepping on each other's toes. The EDO (Education) has to cater to so many conflicting demands and conditions".

Iqbal Durrani, additional secretary for education in Sindh, says: "EDOs and district governments do not have the capacity to meet all these conditions".¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Balochistan's Musakhil district, one of the most backward in the country, is without a single

¹⁴⁶ For more details, see Tehseena Rafi, "The SEF Decade: Recreating Educational Support", Data Processing and Research Cell Publication, 2002.

¹⁴⁷ ICG interview with Amanullah Mengal, managing director of Balochistan Education Foundation, Quetta, May 2004.

¹⁴⁸ ICG interview with Sanaullah Panizai, Quetta, May 2004.

¹⁴⁹ Statistics obtained by ICG from SEF, April 2004.

¹⁵⁰ ICG interview, Karachi, April 2004.

major donor. The focus of multiple donors on the same districts only exacerbates education disparities.

Like the private sector, the donor community can nevertheless play an effective supporting role in education reform. However, donors must adopt more flexible mechanisms and avoid burdening implementing partners with too many short-term conditions. They should also consider awarding grants to tested models such as TCF.

The government's dependence on donors for Rs.253 billion (almost \$4.4 billion) of the Rs.450 billion (\$7.9 billion) required for ESR's implementation is a disheartening sign. Despite claims that education is its top priority, public spending on it 2002-2003 declined to 1.8 per cent of GDP from 2.6 per cent in 1990.¹⁵¹ Only eleven other countries spend less than 2 per cent of GDP on education.¹⁵² The government recently committed itself to raising education spending to 3 per cent. Even if this commitment is met, it will still fall short of the UNESCO recommendation of 4 per cent for developing countries.¹⁵³ Other governments and donors can help by pressing Pakistan to assume greater responsibility for delivering quality education, linking aid money to benchmarks on its expenditures as a percentage of GDP. Indeed, donors must recognise that education reform needs to be primarily government-driven.

VII. CONCLUSION

Despite its stated commitment to modernising education, the Musharraf government has failed to respond to the weaknesses of the public school system, which perpetuates deep economic and educational divisions. Public school graduates have few opportunities in an increasingly competitive job market that favours the English-speaking products of elite private schools.

The ESR plan identifies important areas for reform. However, in its current form, it relies heavily on international donors and engagement with the private sector. Although the government has pledged to raise public spending on education, over-dependence on external funding indicates half-hearted desire to assume responsibility for reform.

Centralised control remains a major obstacle to meaningful development of the public education system. Given the education sector's strategic place in commerce and politics, national and provincial powerbrokers have been hesitant to ease their grip on it. And the Musharraf government's Devolution of Power Plan has done little to decentralise authority. Public education continues to be extremely politicised, with the vested interests of state and other political actors often prevailing over national and local educational needs. Moreover, the continued monopoly of the National Curriculum Wing and the Provincial Textbook Boards over educational content confines the curriculum and deprives the public school system of the flexibility to adapt to students' diverse needs.

The government is also far less willing to tackle those areas of the public school system, such as the curriculum, that reflect strong political interests. The existing curriculum is tailored to the domestic and external agendas of influential state and political actors, most notably the military and religious lobbies. The federal education ministry has proved unwilling to challenge the religious right or to limit interference from religious groups in reform initiatives aimed at updating and improving the curriculum. Public school students, therefore, continue to use a narrow and extremely flawed national syllabus. The result is continued sectarian, regional and ethnic tensions that have at times translated into violent protests and continue to pose a risk for internal stability.

¹⁵¹ Sartaj Aziz, "Role of Education in Development", *Dawn*, 6 January 2004.

¹⁵² "Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World", United Nations Development Programme, 2004, pp. 172-175.

¹⁵³ See "Education Key to Eradicating Child Labour: Experts", *Dawn*, 13 June 2003.

There appear to be few differences between public school and madrasa syllabi with regard to the levels of intolerance that are assuming dangerous proportions. In fact, the need to address these aspects of the curriculum is even more urgent in the public school system because it applies to a far larger segment of the population than the madrasas.

Steering Pakistan towards tolerance and modernisation will depend in large part on the public

school system's ability to respond to citizens' educational needs, bridging gaps between the privileged and underprivileged and between ethnic and regional communities. If it does not meet this challenge, the Musharraf government will continue to lead the country away from the secular and egalitarian track to which it has often committed itself.

Islamabad/Brussels, 7 October 2004

APPENDIX A

MAP OF PAKISTAN



APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

BEF	Balochistan Education Foundation	PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
BS	Basic Scale	PML-Q	Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam)
CCB	Citizen Community Board	PPP	Pakistan People's Party
CFC	Concern For Children	PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
DCO	District Coordinating Officer	PTB	Provincial Textbook Board
EDO	Executive District Officer	SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
EFA	Education for All	SEF	Sindh Education Foundation
ESR	Education Sector Reform	TCF	The Citizens' Foundation
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Agencies	TSNM	Tanzim Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi
GER	Gross Enrolment Rates		
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate		
JI	Jamaat-i-Islami		
JUI-F	Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (led by Fazlur Rehman)		
KK	Khwendo Kor		
KPT	Karachi Port Trust		
LFO	Legal Framework Order		
MMA	Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal		
MNA	Member National Assembly		
MPA	Member Provincial Assembly		
MQM	Muttahida Quami Movement		
NEAB	National Education Advisory Board		
NEF	National Education Foundation		
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation		
NWFP	Northwest Frontier Province		
PATA	Provincially Administered Tribal Area		
PESRP	Punjab Education Sector Reform Program		