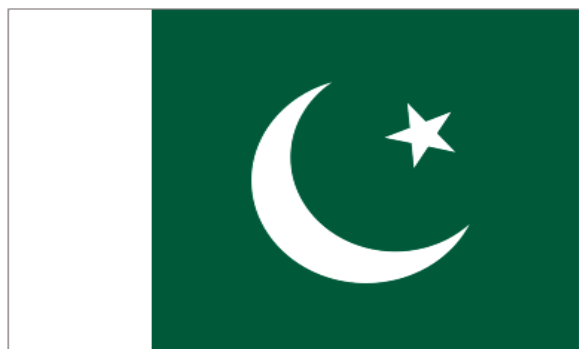


Pakistan: Punjab Education

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Bringing the little girls of Pakistan to school: Punjab province leads the way

In Pakistan there are about 20 million children between five and nine years of age, the school-going age. But only about half of them are currently enrolled in primary school. And little girls make up much less than half of that number.

One outcome of this is that illiteracy in this nation of 152 million people is among the highest in the world - half the adult population is not literate, while more than two thirds of Pakistani women cannot read or write.

In Pakistan's largest province, Punjab, a combination of political leadership, reform vision and support from institutions like the World Bank is seeing early success in driving these numbers in a positive direction.

Punjab is in its third year of an education reform program assisted by credits totaling \$300 million from the World Bank's concessional International Development Association.

"It's really exciting to see what has been achievable in a short time with the will, a plan, and sustained commitment," says task manager for the World Bank Tahseen Sayed. The program is showing significant early gains. A stipend program for girls in grades 6 to 8 targets the 15 districts of Punjab where literacy is below 40 percent. Free textbooks are being delivered on time to approximately 9 million elementary school students and a monitoring system captures data on the public education system that is regularly validated by third parties.

Among the early measures is that within one year of the program's inception, enrolment in government primary schools increased by 13 percent compared to the previous trend of less than 2 percent a year. And girls' enrolment in grades 6 to 8 in the low-literacy districts receiving the stipends, increased by 23 percent. Recent household survey data show that net primary enrolment rates increased from 45 percent in 2001 to 58 percent in 2004/05. This translates into one million more children enrolled in Punjab schools since the launch of

the reform program.

The program builds on Pakistan's devolution process. The provincial government signs annual performance agreements with the 34 district governments of Punjab. The agreements lay down district and provincial responsibilities in education service delivery. The program has been championed at the highest political levels including not just the line education ministry but the finance ministry and state leadership.

There are three key pillars to the Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP). One, **public finance reforms** ensure increased public spending for education (and other services that reach the poor in particular) and ensure fiscal sustainability. Secondly, the reforms are designed to **strengthen devolution and improve the fiduciary environment and governance**. Lastly, reforms to the **education sector** itself ensure improved quality, access, governance, and public/private partnerships.

"When we agreed on the first credit," says Sayed, "we were hopeful that good education outcomes in Punjab could have a country-wide impact and that success could inspire other provinces to follow a similar path of sector-wide reform. This is now happening and other provinces have also embarked upon education reform programs."

The overarching goal of the Government of Pakistan over the past five years has been to drive education reforms aimed at universal primary enrollment by 2015, and to bridge the gender gap at primary level by increasing girls' participation from the existing 42 percent of total enrolment to 50 percent by 2007. Just as data out of Punjab has shown the gains made in that province, preliminary results of a recent national household survey show some encouraging improvement at the national level with net primary enrolment rates rising to 52 percent (up from 42 percent years ago).

Government goals include increasing education expenditures from the existing Rs.98b/US\$1.6b (1.8 percent of GDP) to Rs.166 b/US\$2.8 b (2.2 percent of GDP) by 2007. The sector reforms of both the national and provincial governments are increasingly aligned to the country's national devolution reform which has brought service delivery closer to the people. But while Punjab has shown a promising lead, it appears unlikely that the whole country will achieve the Millennium Development Goals of full primary completion by 2015. With sustained effort, however, it may be possible to eliminate gender disparities in primary enrolments by 2007. Either way, improving quality of education remains a major challenge.

Besides World Bank support to education reforms in Punjab, education reforms were supported in FY03 and FY04 under provincial adjustment credits in the provinces of North West Frontier and Sindh. Further, a Development Policy Credit for the NWFP is being prepared with a focus on the education sector. At the national level, a Bank-supported project is assisting government to establish a national education assessment system which helps measure student learning achievements. A project for improving access and quality of primary education in Pakistan's smallest province, Balochistan, is also on the way.

The education policy package the Bank is supporting at the provincial and local level focuses on free tuition and books, upgrading school facilities, contract teacher recruitment to fill vacancies, stipends for girls in backward areas and public funding of non-government - independent, low-cost private - education, eventually through grade ten.

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