

Education Reform In Pakistan: This Time It's Going To Be Different

Sir Michael Barber
Co-chair, Pakistan Education Task Force
4 November 2010, Brookings Institution

Two possible futures

Imagine Pakistan in mid-21st century. Currently, its population is 180 million; by then it will be 340 million and, unlike India and China, its population will still be rising. It will be a young population at a time when most of the rest of the world will be ageing.

In one possible future the opportunity this offers will be seized. It is possible to imagine Pakistan as an economic powerhouse, helping to fuel sustainable, global economic growth. A thriving Islamic republic could exemplify what the future holds for Muslims everywhere: a country developing its wealth to foster the spirit of community and the generosity to the poor that have always been at the heart of Islam. In this scenario, Pakistan could have established good relations with its neighbours and have played a significant part in solving both regional and global problems. It will, after all, in population terms be the fourth largest in the world. Confident in its identity, it would be open to ideas from around the globe.

Of course, there is another possible future for Pakistan in which the size and youth of its population become a burden rather than an asset – a threat not an opportunity. I do not need to spell out what the implications of this might be, except to say that there is an association throughout history between countries with a large proportion of unemployed young men in the population and violent revolution. This second future, it goes without saying, would be devastating for Pakistan and deeply problematic for the global community.

What will determine which of these futures for Pakistan will unfold? A number of factors will play a part, including regional and global geopolitics, but what has struck me so forcibly in conversations I have had with business, community and political leaders in Pakistan over the last year is that, with one voice, they say the single most important factor will be education. Shortly after founding Pakistan in 1947, Mohammed Ali Jinnah said prophetically, "Education is a matter of life and death for Pakistan. The world is progressing so rapidly that without the requisite advance in education, not only shall we be left behind others but we may be wiped out altogether." (24 Sept 1947). The recent devastating floods, needless to say, heavily preoccupied Pakistan's leaders, but before then and now, as the waters recede, they acknowledge that Jinnah was right. To seize the opportunity at mid-century, those 340 million will need to be well-educated, able to imagine and

innovate, construct and create. It is plainly the case that without a good education system, this will not be possible. Pakistan's leaders will need not just to acknowledge Jinnah's words but act on them if, this time, it is going to be different.

Problems and possibilities

At present, Pakistan is without a good education system. Indeed, if we are to speak plainly – as the times require – we must admit that the current education system is very poor indeed. Consider the following facts:

- One-third of primary age children, a larger proportion of girls than boys, are not in school at all.
- Around 35 per cent of those children who do attend school and make it to grade 3 cannot do single digit subtraction.
- Each day around a quarter of the country's teachers do not turn up to school; each day, many thousands of schools that could be open are not – "ghost schools" they are called.
- Government school facilities are very poor – 60 per cent have no electricity and 34 per cent no drinking water.
- The low-cost private sector delivers better performance than the government schools at around a quarter of the unit cost.
- Karachi, a city of around 16 million people and four million children of school education age, has just 600,000 children enrolled in public schools and up to two million more in low-cost private schools. This suggests perhaps a million children unaccounted for; Karachi, it seems likely, can lay claim to the unenviable title of the worst educated megacity on the planet.

Of course, even against this desolate background, there are isolated examples of wonderful public schools such as the one I saw in the dusty, litter-strewn Karachi suburb, Gadap, where a principal of 17 years was sustaining high standards through sheer force of personality. But we have known for years the individual hero head, while wonderful, can never be, by definition, the solution to a system's problems. And the system, according to global rankings, is far behind the developed world. It ranks 163rd (out of 177 countries) on the UN's index of education systems. It is also behind its own regional neighbours, some of which, at independence, shared a similar starting point. While the floods have been devastating socially and economically, it should be pointed out that the economic impact of Pakistan's educational failure far exceeds that of the floods – indeed, it is the equivalent of a flood like that several times every year. As Andrew Mitchell,

the British International Development Secretary, has said Pakistan faces “an education emergency.” Clearly, therefore, at this moment Pakistan is far from ready to seize the opportunity that lies ahead.

Before turning to examine why Pakistan’s education system is in such a parlous state, it is worth pointing out that however poor it may be now, it would be perfectly possible to successfully transform it over a generation. If the right steps were taken, we could see evidence of progress within a year and substantial progress – life-changing for millions of children – within two to five years. Either way, it is vital to start now. To put it simply, Pakistan’s education system does not need to be this way. The problem looks huge – it is. And intractable – it is not.

The fatalism that grips too many of Pakistan’s leaders when they consider the education system needs to be swept away. Recent history provides an ever-increasing number of success stories; stories of invigorated education systems where sustained reform has liberated and empowered millions of people and transformed economies.

Singapore’s remarkable story is too easily dismissed as that of a small city-state but the equally remarkable stories of Korea, Estonia, Poland, Minas Gerais in Brazil, and the progress over the last decade in India – particularly in some very large states such as Rajasthan – cannot be dismissed. In short, there is an evidence base.

We know not just that it can be done but also how it can be done. I will explain how in a moment but first we need to explain why Pakistan’s education system is currently so poor. Before we come to the brutal facts, we should first deal with a plausible-sounding explanation which is sometimes advanced: that parents in Pakistan don’t think education is important. This I reject entirely. Islam is a religion that values education highly. The Quran tells us that the first word revealed to the Prophet was, “Read”. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that parents in Pakistan are any less keen on seeing their children succeed in life than parents anywhere else. Even in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), when parents are asked what they want most for their children, education is their first priority and employment their second. In addition, we know that the moment parents in Pakistan see the possibility of a good education for their child, they seize it. The extraordinary growth of the low-cost private sector in the last decade reveals incontrovertibly that as soon as parents in Pakistan have the marginal extra income to afford these low-fee schools, that is what they choose to do. Nowhere else in the world have I seen so many streets where the most commonly advertised product is education.

Make no mistake; parents want their children, girls as well as boys, educated. As the LEAPS (Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools) study argues persuasively, “Contrary to popular belief, parents know a lot about how

their children are performing...and how good the schools in their villages are...the results do not depend on whether the parents are literate...when parents say a school is good, it usually is...mothers know best.”

The reason so many children are not in school is not lack of will on the part of parents; it is a failure of provision by the state:

- Poor school facilities – of course, if a school has no toilet, parents will be reluctant to send their children, especially girls, there;
- Poor location – of course, if children, especially girls, have to walk far, parents will be anxious;
- Poor experience – of course, if when the children do get to school, there is no teacher present, why would we expect parents to keep sending their children there? And, if there is a teacher there but the quality of the teaching is very poor, again why should we be surprised if parents’ (and children’s) enthusiasm wanes?

People in poverty whether in urban or rural areas, have hard choices to make all day, every day. The LEAPS study suggests that, “Households with children enrolled in public schools spend Rs 155 every month [per child] and households with children enrolled in private schools spend Rs 231 every month. These are large sums given that the median monthly income is Rs 4700, with, by definition, many families on incomes far below the median.” Overwhelmingly then it is clear that families will make major sacrifices to enable their children to get ahead – but there is no sense in making that sacrifice if the school system is profoundly dysfunctional and provides no opportunity for advancement.

So, if the poor track record is not the fault of parents, where does responsibility lie? Once the complexities are untangled, the central explanation seems to be, simply, that for most of the decades since Pakistan became independent, providing good education for every child has not been a priority. A sympathetic observer might point out that Pakistan has faced many challenges, some truly existential, over those decades. The recent floods are by no means the only devastating crisis this beleaguered country has had to face.

A less sympathetic observer might reply that other countries facing similar challenges (including, for example, South Korea and Taiwan) have not neglected education and suggest that, perhaps for much of that time, some of those who have ruled Pakistan have not wished to see the mass of the population educated. As Mehnaz Aziz points out, “the problem is feudalism. People [in the elite] think that if we educate the people, they will revolt.” (TES, 2 April 2010). Reinforcing the point, the Minister of Education said recently, “In the past, we saw our population as our greatest liability, not our greatest asset.” As a result of the floods in northern Sindh

and southern Punjab, many bonded labourers and their families have fled to the cities. Their plight may be desperate there, but for many this is a first opportunity for their children to get an education and they will not wish to return to the impoverished circumstances in which they found themselves before the waters rose. These people know from their own experience what the minister meant.

It is certainly striking that Pakistan has devoted a much smaller proportion of GDP to education than many comparable countries. While the government's recent commitment to increasing that proportion to 4 per cent is welcome, the current level remains, unacceptably, below 2 per cent and has not risen since the commitment was made. The pitiful truth is that the state fails to collect even a fraction of the tax revenue it should and then spends too little of the meagre amount it does raise on educating its people. In short, the reality in over 60 years since independence falls far short of Jinnah's aspiration.

Given then that the education system is very poor and that a major part of the explanation for that is a lack of political will over several decades, what grounds are there for believing that there is a genuine prospect of successful education reform now? Why would anyone argue, as I continue to do even after the floods, that this time it's going to be different?

The opportunity

While inevitably the floods and the security situation have dominated Pakistan's attention in the last year, it has also become widely recognised over the same period that unless progress on security is matched by improvements in the basic services the state provides to the people, sustained development – economic, social and political – will not be possible. Moreover, the global economic crisis has sharpened the recognition among Pakistan's leaders that the country's economic prospects depend more than ever on vastly improving the school system. The case is further strengthened by the fact that the government of Pakistan and the international community, including the major donors such as the World Bank, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and UK Department for International Development (DfID), share this understanding. As Prime Minister Gilani said in May; "The current...government is determined to promote education, to materialise it in letter and spirit." (27 May 2010). The government needs to redouble its commitment to this sentiment in the aftermath of the floods; indeed, there is an unparalleled opportunity right now to seize the moment, as the state of Louisiana did after the trauma of Hurricane Katrina.

Less often stated (but in some ways even more important) as a reason for seizing the opportunity for reform now, is the widespread and growing evidence that there are people, schools and organisations within Pakistan demonstrating daily what can be

done. It is simply not true to say that successful education in Pakistan is not possible; there is evidence to the contrary in every corner of the country.

The Citizens' Foundation, for example, runs 600 schools, free-at-the-point of use, in areas of rural and urban poverty, serving over 80,000 students. In the US that would be the equivalent of a large school district. The schools are well-run and the children are learning. The Citizens' Foundation does not depend on government; it raises its funds from concerned citizens and businesses and has been able to expand steadily.

The Punjab Education Foundation, another success story, receives public funds from the government of Punjab. It uses these funds to provide places in low-cost private schools that again are free-at-the-point-use, again for poor students. In effect, the Foundation buys all the places in the schools that join the network. In return, the schools agree not to take any fee-paying students and to demonstrate that the students are making progress in regular tests organised by the Foundation. These schools are the Pakistani equivalent of charter schools. Currently, over 800,000 students, in both urban and rural settings, across the Punjab are benefitting. This is successful impact at scale. There are plans for continued rapid expansion.

The charitable organisation CARE, by contrast to the other two examples, does not provide alternatives to the public schools; instead, it supports them – extra staff, materials and professional development. Its model too is working well, helping to improve hundreds of schools in and around Lahore. Meanwhile, the Children's Global Network helps to train thousands of teachers in effective, interactive pedagogy so that they can move away from the mind-numbing rote learning that is the norm in so many of Pakistan's schools.

These are just four examples of successful programmes in Pakistan. There are also glimmers, in places, of improved governance and administration, admittedly from a low base. For example, with the support of the World Bank, the Punjab government has developed its Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit. Indeed, the Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, has begun to develop a two-pronged strategy which funds low-cost private schools through the Punjab Education Foundation whilst simultaneously strengthening the public sector as a whole. Along with the enhanced regularity and reliability of its monitoring, this strategy has brought progress, until 2007 but seems to have stalled since then.

Moreover, in August 2009 the national government, with the support of all provinces, published a new National Education Policy which is disarmingly honest about the terrible problems facing the country's public education system and sets out a long list of proposals for addressing them. It was in this context that the Pakistan Education Task Force, which Shahnaz Wazir Ali and I have the honour to co-chair, was established jointly by the Pakistan and British governments. Its work is supported and given high priority by the UK Department for International Development. The Task Force represents a concerted effort to bring together

eminent leaders of Pakistan's education system with major business and civil society representatives, donors and global experts to enhance the chance of success. The challenge of education reform in Pakistan is not a lack of ideas or experiments; it is one of scale, capacity to deliver and political will to tackle some longstanding binding constraints. The Task Force has no intention of writing yet another report; it is working boldly and persistently to assist provinces with the task of implementation and of ensuring that intent at system level translates into results at classroom level.

Rising to the challenge

Across a country as large and diverse as Pakistan – from teeming cities to remote villages, from arid deserts to snow-capped peaks – successful, universal education reform is an immense challenge. It requires sustained political will and courage, a clear narrative of reform, a coherent strategy and greatly enhanced capacity to implement reform at scale. I will touch on each of these in turn.

Universal education reform is never easy anywhere in the world. While, as I have mentioned before, there are impressive success stories, the history of education reform is littered with failed attempts. It is not just the challenge of scale, though this is daunting enough (if the education secretary in Punjab visited 10 schools every day it would be 40 years before he had visited every school in the province); it is also that around any existing system, however poor, there are entrenched interests benefiting from the status quo which can be expected to resist change actively or passively. Experience tells us, not just in education, that it is much easier to block change than make it happen, much easier to identify the risks of change than the risks of doing nothing, much easier to destroy than create.

Sustained Political Will

It is these circumstances that make courageous political leadership essential for sustained education reform. Transforming Pakistan's education system will, for example, require effective performance management of teachers and principals. The best teachers and principals will no doubt welcome it; however, the teachers who collect a salary but rarely go to school will inevitably resist – and in some cases they will be well-connected. Similarly, public school teachers, who often earn more than twice their private sector equivalents, are likely to oppose government funding for low-cost private education precisely because of the threat it poses. Moreover, habitual political practices that stand in the way of progress, such as the appointment of education administrators on grounds of politics rather than merit, will have to be swept aside. Indeed, the sheer turnover of senior administrators prevents progress. In the year I have been involved in Pakistan's education, there have been three different secretaries of education in each of Sindh and Balochistan.

The phrase is easy to use but what does “sustained political will” look like in practice? For a start it is never a question of just one person; the demands of education reform require what I have called, taking a phrase from John Kotter, “a guiding coalition” – seven to ten people in key positions (for example, President, Prime Minister, Education Minister, Finance Minister, plus top officials) who share a commitment to reform and an understanding of what it will require including facing up to home truths such as the need to move to appointment of administrators strictly on merit and to tackle endemic corruption. Such leaders also need to be willing to take risks to overcome the deadweight of decades of failure. Moreover, sustained effort will be needed in each province as well as at federal level because of the extent of devolution, which was further enhanced in 2010 by the 18th amendment to the Constitution.

Above all, national and provincial leaders need to persist because, if education reform in Pakistan is to make the required difference, it will take a decade at a minimum. For this reason the guiding coalition needs to build ever-widening circles of leadership; more and more people inside the system who share the sense of mission and the understanding of what it requires; and more and more people outside the system – business leaders, for example – willing to provide the necessary public support, particularly when the going gets tough. It is therefore important that the leaders of reform not only take the necessary decisions and provide the necessary funds but also keep explaining publicly why reform is necessary, what it could mean for the country, what progress has been made and what lies ahead. They also need to take the risk of unlocking citizen pressure for reform. Success will only be possible if reform is not just from the top down but also from the bottom up. Demand must be unleashed as supply is strengthened. In short, a key factor in the differential progress of different countries over recent decades lies in the presence, or absence, of outstanding leadership. Unless, soon, Pakistan summons leadership of this kind from among its political and business elite, progress will not be possible.

A Narrative of Reform

The second requirement is a narrative: what is the mission; why does it matter; and how will it be accomplished? In Pakistan’s case, the mission is clear – ensure universal access in line with the Millennium Development Goals, ensure quality, and increase equity. Put another way, the mission is to take a very poor education system and enable it to succeed. But why does it matter? The case needs to be made over and over again. As I argued at the beginning of this paper, at stake is the success of Pakistan economically, socially and politically; its place in the 21st century world. But the case for education reform goes much deeper than this. It raises the question of identity both for individuals and for a society as a whole and I venture to suggest this needs to become part of the narrative.

Pakistan is a relatively young country – the very idea of Pakistan is no more than 80 years old and the country just 63 years old – with a chequered history in an

uncertain part of the world. In these circumstances, survival alone can all too easily become a goal but it is surely not enough. Britain's Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks – whom I take the liberty of quoting here – says, “Identity is...being part of a continuing narrative ...We are the story we tell ourselves.” (*The Home We Build Together*, 116).

What is *the story we tell ourselves* for people in Pakistan? Needless to say, as an outsider, I am hardly qualified to answer this profound question, but let me cautiously advance an observation or two. Of course, there is the important story of the political entity, Pakistan, created in 1947 with all its accomplishments and challenges. There is also the story of the remarkable civilisations which have risen and fallen in the lands now called Pakistan, the Mughal Empire among them. Often associated with the Indus, a tremendous river with, as we have seen this year, the power to destroy as well as create, these civilisations have left their imprint on the landscape and a rich heritage for the country's current inhabitants. The British Lieutenant, John Wood, who explored the Indus in 1836, called it “a foul and perplexing river,” and in 2010 many may be tempted to agree but others, much earlier, knew better. Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai may have used poetic licence but he recognised a deep truth, not changed by the floods, when he said of the Indus that “every wave is filled with rubies” (*Empires of the Indus*, 26, 79). Either way in these civilisations and this river, the potential for narrative is immense.

There is another story too. Pakistan's story has been bound up from its conception with the story of one of the world's great religions, Islam, a religion that has brought to the world great art, spectacular scientific advancement and remarkable literature and history. To its adherents, it has also bought profound insight into how life should be lived.

Let me assert, while admitting the limits of my knowledge, that it should surely be possible to weave for Pakistan, from these three strands, an inspiring narrative of Pakistan's future and place in the world. A successful education system – one which enabled students to learn the language and mathematical skills requisite for the 21st century, the richness of their history, and the Islamic values of tolerance, generosity and community – would not just assist in building a sense of identity but, eventually, would itself become a crucial part of the story.

This is the mission – and the case for this or something like it is surely powerful – but what about the capacity to deliver this mission? The will and narrative might come into place but, without a strategy, success would still be impossible. As one official in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa told us, “Iraddaha hai, Magar Plan nahee.” (“The intention is there but not the plan.”)

Strategy

The Pakistan Education Taskforce, at its meeting in February 2010, identified seven key strands in the 2009 National Education Policy. As a result, the plan can be

explained simply and easily both to those who work in the education system and to the citizens who depend upon it for their future learning. Our work at national and provincial level is guided rigorously by these seven strands. Drawing from the global literature on education reform, the Task Force's account combines accountability and capacity-building or, in simpler terms, pressure and support. This combination, if put in place and sustained, will work.

The **pressure** for change will come from three sources. First, there should be clear standards for all students in Urdu or the mother tongue, in English, and in Maths and Science. Similarly there should be clear definitions of "good" for schools, districts and provinces. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa school report card, on which work started before the floods, was a bold attempt to do just this for that province. Its development now needs to be completed. Second, simple, clear processes for monitoring performance should be put in place at every level. With USAID and the World Bank's leadership, the National Education Assessment System (NEAS) needs to be reinvigorated and become routine. Regular student assessments (as Punjab has already embarked upon) as well as school reviews and district reviews are essential. The outcomes of these should be public.

Third, a major national public advocacy campaign is needed so that every community and, indeed, every parent, becomes aware of what they should expect of the schools in their local area. They have a right to a school which is open on a minimum of 180 school days per year, has effective teachers who are present every day, has the necessary basic facilities and has textbooks for every child. Moreover, it should be easy for parents and communities to complain when these conditions are not met, perhaps, for example, via a free-phone line to an independent national agency which would have both the power to act on those complaints and the responsibility to publish an annual report. The Sindh Education Foundation, for example, has signboards outside the schools it funds and, according to Anita Ghulam Ali, the remarkable veteran educator who leads it, parents use the mobile phone number on the sign to call her, sometimes even in the middle of the night! In short, the pressure for change should come as much, preferably more, from the citizens as it does from the government.

The **support** for change should have four aspects. First, drawing on models such as the Punjab Education Foundation, the state should seek to expand rapidly the number of school places in the low-cost non-government sector, whether private or not-for-profit. Where non-government schools accept state funding certain obligations should apply, including quality assurance arrangements. In this way, provinces could rapidly provide many more good school places. For example, given the dire state of affairs in Karachi and the other cities in Sindh, it is clear that there is no solution without something along these lines; the moribund state sector has neither the quality nor the scale the crisis demands. Of course, this would require government and donors to move beyond the fruitless argument between advocates of public schools, on the one hand, and those of private schools, on the other.

Rather, the central challenge is surely to ensure the right relationship between the two sectors. Encouragingly, I find that the trend in thinking, both within Pakistan and among the donors, is in precisely this direction. The idea of a major fund – The Urban Sindh Fund – has, for example, won enthusiastic support in principle from business leaders in the province and major donors, such as DfID.

The second aspect of support focuses on ensuring that teachers have the skills necessary to teach the curriculum. This requires high quality professional development and the curriculum materials, especially good textbooks and teacher guides, to enable each teacher to teach each lesson well. Here again there are models that work all over Pakistan, even while the vast majority of the provision is ineffective. The keys to success, therefore, are to ensure that professional development and text books are aligned with standards and assessments and that the system learns from known successes. For example, good practical teacher guides would really help teachers achieve basic standards of performance. Meanwhile, successful professional development involves coaching and modelling by effective practitioners working in classrooms alongside teachers – not sending individuals to dreary courses unrelated to daily reality. The Children’s Global Network has shown this can be done, including in its support for education in the immediate aftermath of the floods.

The third aspect of support recognises that, however much the non-government sector may expand, the vast majority of school places across Pakistan will remain in the traditional public schools for the foreseeable future. This makes it essential to improve the quality of management and administration at every level from the school, through districts and provinces, to the federal government. In the jargon, this is a challenge of capacity-building – the capacity of head teachers to improve school performance, of district administrators to manage quality and of federal and provincial administrators to translate policy into practice and strategy into delivery. Unannounced visits to government schools, even in well-reputed districts, reveal starkly massive inefficiencies such as absent headteachers, absent teachers and poorly managed facilities, for example.

The definitions of “what good looks like” mentioned earlier, should inform well-designed capacity-building at each level in the system. Equally importantly, political leaders need to ensure all key appointments are based not on patronage but on performance. The recent shift in some provinces to the selection of teachers based on merit alone, needs to extend to teacher transfers and, indeed, to district administrators. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for example, the system of 27,000 schools has 1900 cluster leaders, 300 district officers and 24 district education officers. To deliver effectively, each level in this delivery chain requires people of quality. No one should underestimate the scale of transformation this requires in culture as well as practice.

The fourth and final aspect of support is the obvious but essential provision of good basic facilities – buildings with water, electricity, toilets, boundary walls, desks and chairs and good text books, universally available. The absence of such basic provision across large swathes of Pakistan in the early 21st century is frankly scandalous. Too often this failure is attributed solely to the absence of resources; in reality it should also be attributed to the absence of effective administration. For instance, among low-cost private schools in Karachi, over 95 per cent have electricity whereas, among the government schools, only 50 per cent do, even though the capital investment in the latter is many times greater than the former.

If these seven strands of reform were advanced in combination, the performance of Pakistan's education system would improve steadily and significantly. Needless to say, setting them out on paper is the easy part; the real challenge is getting it done. The first step is for the government of Pakistan to make a highly visible commitment to its people – constantly reiterated – that this is what it intends to do. A major speech by the Prime Minister, perhaps at a major international event, committing to prioritising and funding education, would be a good way to start. Provincial chief ministers are equally significant.

The second step should be for the entire international community, especially the major donors, to get behind the strategy and to integrate their support. Too often around the world, including in Pakistan, the major donors – no doubt each with the best of intentions – have offered such a bewildering array of uncoordinated programmes and projects to support an education system that it often seems as if, to adapt a phrase of Michael Fullan's, "The helping hand strikes again and again and again." The result is confusion and fragmentation rather than whole system reform. If, by contrast, the government of Pakistan embarked on delivering the strategy described here and all the major donors integrated their support behind it, the prospects for success would be vastly enhanced. The emerging close collaboration in support of this strategy among USAID, DfID and the World Bank is a significant step forward, which needs to be deepened and sustained.

Only with what Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart call the "Double Compact" – a simultaneous compact between government and people on the one hand and government and the international community on the other – can the clarity of direction be established to make the long hard slog of delivery possible. The Task Force is assisting government and donors to put this double compact in place at both national and provincial level.

Implementation

The entire system should then turn its attention to the biggest challenge of all which – to hammer home the point – is implementation, implementation, implementation. As Michael Fullan and I say to governments around the world, getting the strategy right is difficult but only 10 per cent of the task; the remaining 90 per cent is getting it done. At the Federal level and in each of the provinces the basic ingredients of

driving delivery need to be put in place – clear goals and priorities, delivery plans, trajectories, routines for monitoring performance and problem-solving capacity. The Task Force has just begun this capacity-building task but there is so much more to do. In addition the Federal and Provincial governments need regularly to give an account to the public of what progress with implementation has been made and what remains to be done. The Task Force has begun to play this role too by developing its implementation scorecard, which enables it, in dialogue with each of the provinces and areas, to assess progress on implementation of the seven strands of policy listed earlier. For the first time in Pakistan’s history, there is therefore a census of implementation across the entire country. Provincial leaders are finding this process of accountability both challenging and helpful in equal measure. Crucially, because there is a common scheme now, a common language of implementation is beginning to emerge. As a result, the provinces are starting to learn from each other in a way which was not possible before. This may not be exciting but it will be decisive. Plans and routines to drive their implementation are the essence of delivering tangible outcomes.

The Task Force has also developed one further idea which will become a reality in early 2011 – an Innovation Fund. Its purpose will be to invest in proposals which might become the next generation of education reform in Pakistan. After all, even if the strategy outlined above is completely successful, the quality of the education system in Pakistan will still fall far short of those in many developed countries for many years. But suppose it found ways to leap ahead? Suppose, for example, that Pakistan could realise the potential of modern technology to bring education, out-of-school, to Karachi’s slums; suppose it could find much more effective ways, again through technology, of providing excellent materials, guidance and development to teachers, especially those in remote, rural areas, as the British Open University has done in Africa. All over the world, as described vividly in Charles Leadbeater’s and Annika Wong’s recent report *Learning from the Extremes*, there are experiments, some of which may ultimately have implications for system transformation. It is in these kinds of innovation that the proposed Innovation Fund will hope to invest. It will also be innovative in the way it works. Its processes will be transparent, including its meetings which will not just be open to the public but recorded on video and posted on a website. In this way, it can become an innovation in administration and a forum for debate, as well as an investor.

Conclusion

All of this – the aspiration, the narrative, the strategy and the approach to implementation – will create the conditions for change. But there is one further barrier to overcome: the barrier in people’s heads. The story of education reform in Pakistan is an unhappy one. Let me give just three examples. The first five year plan in 1956 set a target of universal primary enrolment in five years. It did not happen. In 1979 another target of 68 per cent enrolment by 1982 was set. It did not happen.

In 1988 yet another target was set, this time for universal enrolment by 1992-93. Again, it did not happen. And, as we have seen, universal primary education has still not happened. With this track record, no wonder Pakistan's education leaders are sceptical that this new venture will succeed. They need to suspend disbelief, to have the courage to start and to develop confidence as early progress becomes visible. Nothing succeeds like success.

By drawing on success within Pakistan (and in other countries) the Task Force can help instil this belief. It has been established to assist the country's leaders in the creation of the successful education system to which the people of Pakistan aspire. The hard work, of course, will be done by teachers and principals, administrators and politicians at all the different levels in the system. By shaping government thinking, by influencing the international community, by building the capacity to implement throughout the system and, above all, by creating the belief that, this time, it really can be done, the Task Force can make a major contribution. Now the flood waters have gone, a monumental national effort to create an education system in which the country can take pride is required. This time it really is going to be different.

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