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**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN:  
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper provides a critical examination of the inter-linkages between youth education, development, empowerment, and engagement in Pakistan. Currently, the majority of the population falls within the youth age bracket of 15-24 years. The country stands at a critical juncture, where it can capitalize on this demographic dividend for transformational and sustainable socioeconomic growth. However, this paper argues that there is inadequate intersection and convergence between Pakistan's national and provincial Education and Youth policy frameworks. An in-depth overview of current trends in terms of quality of education and access to and participation in various forms of education programmes indicates that the current provision of educational services is deplorably inadequate in terms of quality and quantity. In order to address the challenges of educational and economic development, this paper asserts that education should be the lynchpin for broader and more inclusive socioeconomic development, and function as the interface between Youth and Education Policies. The failures of effective policy implementation and of fully integrating the interrelated issues relevant to the youth population produce unfavourable educational outcomes in terms of economic, political, and social engagement. Therefore, this paper proposes the use of the Capability Approach to inform education and youth policies, so that the country can harness the energy and potential of a burgeoning youth population that currently constitutes about two-thirds of the Pakistani population.

**KEY WORDS**

Pakistan; Youth; Social integration; Education policy.



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# Youth Development and Education in Pakistan: Exploring the Relationship

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## INTRODUCTION

Pakistan defines “youth” as people between the ages of 15 and 29 (National Youth Policy, 2009). According to this definition, approximately two-thirds of Pakistan’s population of 180 million is categorized as youth. The rate of youth population entering the workforce is increasing 3% annually (Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, 2011). As argued by Barber (2010), Pakistan, with a populational majority of youth that is constantly expanding, stands at a critical juncture in terms of education, development, empowerment and engagement as far as socio-economic development is concerned. This valuable national resource, a demographic dividend, could be harnessed and converted into a tremendous force for sustainable social change; and the energies and talents of the youth could be channelled into achieving sustainable, grassroots-level socio-economic development.

Pakistan may choose to equip its youth with the proper knowledge, skills, attitude, social awareness, and enthusiasm for much needed socioeconomic development. This option will not only bring prosperity, social cohesion, harmony, and peace to society but also help overcome the multifarious challenges that contemporary Pakistani society is facing.

Youth education, development, empowerment and engagement are inter-related and interdependent fields, influenced by the socio-cultural context in

which policies and practices unfold. They also determine resulting outcomes. This paper will examine the opportunities Pakistan's National Education Policy provides for youth education, development, empowerment, and engagement. In addition, it will discuss how the National Education Policy intersects with the National Youth Policy of 2009 and the constituent provincial Youth Policies.

First, this paper will analyse the efficacy of educational service delivery to the citizenry of Pakistan, examining both the quality of education and demographic trends in terms of access to and participation in the various educational programmes that currently exist, including standard educational, technical and vocational programmes. The paper will then discuss the National Education Policy, its implementation failures, and how the National Education Policy intersects with the National and Provincial Youth Policies. Though educational development is a critical component of the national and provincial youth policies, analyses of policy and practices suggest a lack of intersection between the two policy frameworks. This paper argues that education should be the lynchpin for broader socioeconomic change and function as the interface between Youth and Education policies.

Second, this study will also examine the repercussions of insufficiently integrating all components of youth education in terms of outcomes for economic, political and social engagement, which is a result of ineffective educational service delivery. Lastly, we propose the use of the Capability Approach to inform education and youth policy in order to fully capture the dynamism of this burgeoning population and harness it for the social and economic development of the country. The Capability Approach puts due emphasis on educational services that allow individuals to develop the critical, analytical ability to undertake challenges and improve their own well-being. Furthermore, the Capability Approach provides a conceptual framework that underscores the need for diverse forms of educational programming that caters to the particular needs and experiences of a highly heterogeneous youth population.

## ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

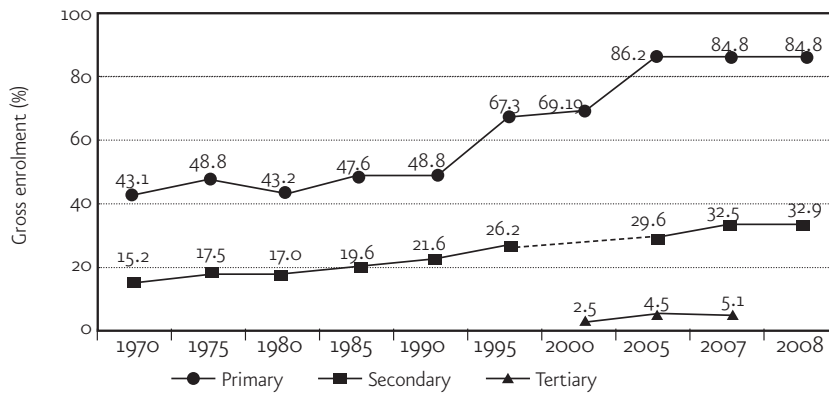
This section will discuss the quality of the educational services provided to the citizenry of Pakistan. Currently, most Pakistani children have either no access or limited access to quality education. This failure to provide educational services will be exacerbated as the population of school-age children



increases every year. This, in turn, will require a quantitative expansion in services to satisfy the increased demand. An analysis of why the existing provision of services is direly failing to meet the current demand will help us assess the extent to which current trends in policies and practices are responding and/or adapting to changing demographic conditions.

Pakistan has been a signatory to the World Declaration on Education For All (EFA). Considerable time has passed since the EFA commitment (in 2000) was made, but Pakistan is still far from achieving the universal literacy targets expressed in this international commitment (Government of Pakistan, 2009). According to 2011 estimates, the adult literacy rate (54%) is shockingly low when compared to other developing countries in the South Asian region. Participation at primary (92%), secondary (35%) and tertiary (8%) levels, compared with other South Asian countries, is deplorably low (UNESCO, 2012). There are wide disparities in access and quality across provinces and rural and urban areas.

CHANGE IN GER BY LEVEL, 1970-2008



Source: Unesco Institute for Statistics, 2010.

Access and equity are two important measures in determining the effectiveness of an educational system. An analysis of the trends over the years indicates slow but gradual improvement in access and equal participation in education across the various levels of education. According to the AEPAM (2013) annual report on educational statistics for 2011-2012, in Pakistan, only 63% of all primary school-aged children (5-9 years) are actually enrolled. It is further reported that at the middle stage of education, there has been an



increase of 6%. Only a mere 2% increase in boys' enrolment at this stage of education has been noted whereas, owing to significant equity related reforms, a significant increase of 11.7% has been observed in girls' enrolment all over the country. The status of boys' and girls' participation in education and ever-present gender disparities across various levels call for a critical analysis of opportunities and challenges facing youth in Pakistan.

A very significant increase of 34.78% in the higher secondary stage has been observed all over the country. In the census year of 2006-07, approximately 0.13 million students were enrolled at the higher secondary education level all over the country. Six years later, in 2011-12, the public education sector was providing services to about 0.20 million students aiming to complete their higher secondary education. A story of differentiated gender-based access to education across various levels of education is revealed in the country's overall statistics.

OVERALL PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION (GENDER-BASED ENROLMENT) 2011-2012		
LEVEL	MALE	FEMALE
Primary	57%	43%
Middle	57%	43%
High School	57%	43%
Higher Secondary School	72%	28%
Tertiary Education	58%	42%
OVERALL EDUCATION SYSTEM	58%	42%

Source: Academy of Education Planning and Management, 2013.

A critical view of the statistics reported in the above table shows the dismal status of education across the different levels. A plethora of educational reforms over the years has apparently led to improvements at the micro level, but the impact of these reforms remains invisible at the national level. Overall participation rates, as stated above, also indicate that appreciable numbers of young people do not have an opportunity to receive any education.

Country-wide, the total number of out-of-school children at the primary level is 8.3 million (AEPAM, 2013). Out of the 11.8 million boys in Pakistan, 3.8 million are out of school. Similarly, a total of 4.5 million girls out of the 10.9 million females in the primary age group are out of school. This reality contradicts the commitment to compulsory education made in the constitution, which provides for compulsory, basic, free education. The constitution states its commitment, “The state shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period” (Government of Pakistan, 1973). This was further reinforced by the Federal Government’s inclusion of Article 5-A in the constitution, making the provision of basic education (Grades 1-10) an obligation of the State and guaranteeing the fundamental right to education for each and every child in Pakistan.

However, as Sathar and Lloyd (1994) asserted almost two decades ago, primary schooling (as well as secondary education) is far from being compulsory, as not all children are guaranteed access to school. Decisions about schooling may be affected, not only by family resources and household work requirements, but also by school availability and quality. Analyses of school participation rates from a gender standpoint further highlight how deplorable the situation is. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary level education indicates parity in two regions, with varying levels of disparity in different regions. The situation, however, is more alarming at the secondary level where boys patently outnumber girls. With the country’s overall GPI score at 0.78, gender disparity at the secondary level reveals gender inequities, prevalent across the country. Regional differences, which harbour rigid socio-cultural norms, restrict female mobility outside the home, preventing women from attending school, and resulting in the variance of GPI scores. The lowest GPI is 0.16 for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the highest is 0.98 for Islamabad, the country’s capital.

A study by Ashraf, Ali, Ali, Schultz and Ali (2013) targeting the schools of two provinces revealed that far fewer students attend school than the actual enrolment shown in the school records. It was apparent that many parents enrol their children but allow them to attend school only intermittently, or withdraw them prior to the completion of their primary level of schooling. However, such withdrawals are not recorded formally, as many children come back to school only to appear at the annual examinations. Their appearance,



not their performance, in annual exams qualifies them for promotion to the next grade level. Discussions with a grade four female student and her mother in one of the schools during the study revealed that after a few days, the girl stopped attending in order to work with her widowed mother as domestic help throughout the remainder of the year. The situation above reiterates the lack of educational opportunity reported by Sathar and Lloyd (1994). According to the two authors (2009), most households in Pakistan face financial constraints that affect the affordability of schooling; low incomes and the non-negligible, out-of-pocket costs of even public schooling, otherwise free, at the primary level prevent parents from sending their children to school. Financial constraints are compounded when there are many children to educate within one family. Therefore, parents do not have a choice in terms of sending all of their children to school: they are often forced to choose how many and which children they can afford to educate.

## POLICY, QUALITY AND CURRICULUM

Pakistan's Education Policy (2009) recognizes the critical demographic transitions that the country is facing: the working age population was 48.8% in 1981, 46.9% in 1998, surged to 57.3% in 2004, and is expected to reach 61.7% by 2015. These quantitative indicators suggest that demographic transition rates have been continuously increasing (Government of Pakistan, 2009). The provision of education to facilitate this transition is a critical concern. To respond to this concern, one must further analyse the linkages between the various forms of education i.e. mainstream secondary and higher secondary education, technical, vocational, and professional education.

The Pakistani government is the largest provider of school education in the country. It contributed 2.2 of the GDP in 2012 (World Bank, 2013). Essentially three types of school systems exist in Pakistan. First is the public sector education system, which is organized into five levels: pre-primary, primary, middle, high school and higher secondary schooling, which then lead to higher education. The first three levels include science, mathematics, languages, social studies and Islamic studies. In their secondary and higher secondary schooling students select a specialized field of study that they wish to pursue. Some schools also offer vocational education at the second-



ary level. All public schools follow the national curriculum and use books developed by the official textbook boards. Students take public examinations, which are organized by official examination boards, during secondary and higher secondary education. Their performance in these examinations determines whether they are admitted to institutions of higher and professional education. Performance in these public exams also enables students to enrol in technical and vocational education programmes.

Though the government is the main provider of education, there has nonetheless been a mushrooming of private schools that form a second, parallel education system. These private schools generally use English as a medium of instruction, making such schools the most preferable option for parents (Ashraf, 2012). However, the quality of these private, English-language schools varies significantly according to the socioeconomic status of the clientele of these institutions. These schools can choose either the National Curriculum for secondary and higher secondary certificates or the Cambridge curriculum with O and A level qualifications. There is also the option to select a private examination board or assessment system that can contribute to the quality of teaching and learning processes.

Presently, *Deeni Madaris* (Arabic expression for religious seminaries) constitute yet another parallel system of education. *Deeni Madaris*, according to an official report, play a significant role in adult education in Pakistan. The main emphasis of these schools is to impart Islamic education; however, examples of *Deeni Madaris* offering formal secular education have also been cited (AEPAM, 2013). These institutions, 70% of which are privately owned, have their own management system and no interference from the government education portfolio. Enrolment in the *Deeni Madaris* is around 68% male as compared to 32% of female. This form of education, now established throughout the country, predominantly serves the poorest of the poor and children belonging to religious families. Most provide room and board and cover other costs. These and other operational expenses are paid for through public donations and government grants from the Zakat Fund (alms). However, since 1979, it has been reported that the real fuel stoking the *Deeni Madaris* has come from external sources, particularly Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states, and other Middle Eastern countries who aim to propagate their own version of Islam (Nayyar & Ahmed, 2005). These schools are said to be promoting religious fundamentalism amongst young people, which in turn contributes to the violence and rampant terrorism inside and outside the country (e.g. ICG, 2004).



Contradicting these assertions, Husain (2005) insists that relatively few students, approximately 5% of the entire enrolled population, attend these *Deeni Madaris*. He considers government-run schools' inability to produce an educated citizenry responsible for the disorientation of the country's youth. Even today, according to AEPAM data (2013), a large majority of the student population (69%) is enrolled in government-run schools. In recent years, attempts to bring these institutions into the mainstream education system have been made to ensure the employability their graduates (Ministry of Education, 2008). While these *Deeni Madaris* have become highly controversial because of their alleged promotion of Islamic fundamentalism, Burki (2005) argues that the passions that surround these schools have frequently served to skew the discussion of Pakistan's education sector. Similar views have been presented by McClure (2009) who argues for a shift from exclusive focus on the *Deeni Madaris* to overall educational reforms.

Nonetheless, the presence of multiple education providers and systems complicates the educational scenario when it comes to the delivery and quality outcomes one desires for Pakistan's growing youth population. A critical review of policy and curriculum reveals some of the complexities.

A cursory reading of the National Education Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2009) shows that it is focused on developing self-reliant individuals, who are capable of analytical, original thinking, responsible members of society and global citizens. Nurturing the total personality of the individual to instil in him/her dynamism, creativity, and capability of rational thinking is stated as the chief concern of the National Education Policy 2009 (Government of Pakistan, 2009). Curriculum reforms have been at the centre of the educational change agenda and have led to the rigorous development of a curriculum with clearly articulated standards, benchmarks and learning outcomes with the potential to fulfil policy commitments for youth development (Majeed, 2009 as cited in Jamil, 2009).

The National Curriculum 2006 was approved for implementation in 2010/2011. Evidence shows that the curriculum has not been fully implemented due to the unavailability of textbooks. According to the Pakistan Education Panel (2013) report, some provinces have developed textbooks up to Grade 7 based on the national curriculum but other provinces are lagging behind, which has negatively affected timely implementation of the national curriculum. An analysis of the curriculum currently in place and its delivery reveals that the nature of teaching and learning processes across different

levels of education is mechanical and transmissional (Ashraf, 2009; Ashraf et al., 2013). There is a heavy reliance on rote learning and memorization of textbook material, which does not lead to the desired learning outcomes as articulated in the national curriculum.

Assessment of students' learning outcomes reveals that the education system is of appallingly poor quality. The National Assessment findings of 2007 report Pakistani students of Grade 8 scoring well below the scaled mean of 495 in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) assessment in such subjects as Mathematics and Language. Pakistani students performed poorly compared with their counterparts in countries such as Iran, the Philippines, Morocco and Tunisia (Government of Pakistan, 2007). Similar results reported by recent assessments of primary education reveal that students lack the required competencies in numeracy and literacy, since more than 50% of the children in grade 5 were unable to deal with basic grade 2 skills (ASER, 2013).

A baseline study carried out by Aga Khan University – Institute for Educational Development to assess grade 4 and 5 students in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces showed that there was a larger performance gap for the constructed response (CR) questions than for the questions requiring a multiple choice response. Of the students who took the CR test, 23% of grade 4 and 47% of grade 5 students received a total score of zero. One explanation is that the students have a lower level of the literacy required to comprehend a question and construct a meaningful response (Ali, 2012).

This level of student performance also raises questions about the teachers' capacity and the quality of teaching and learning. For instance, the study (Ali, 2012) on students' learning outcomes found that teachers in selected schools of districts in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces spent an average 15 classroom minutes out of 35 on actual teaching, while the rest was squandered either by the teachers' tardiness or in disciplining the students. A closer examination of daily experiences of selected students from primary and lower secondary schools reveals an absence of active student engagement in learning due to the poor quality of teaching (Ashraf, 2009, 2012). These glimpses of the students' everyday experiences, their learning outcomes and associated challenges necessitate further investigation into the nature of curriculum reforms, their translation into textbooks, and the acceptance and implementation of the reforms at the school level (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

The study (Ashraf et al., 2013) on educational governance reveals that a negative image of public schooling is spreading because of the subjective



decision-making processes and structures that exist across the various levels of educational governance. Matters such as teacher deployment and transfer, allocation of resources, community engagement, delivery of curriculum, enrolment and retention of students and teaching learning processes are found to be dealt with in such a cursory fashion that it has compromised the accountability mechanism and added to the complexity of educational issues. In effect, educational governance that displays an ad hoc approach to important decisions has hugely compromised the quality of teaching and learning in state-run schools. In particular, the study found that teacher deployment, appointments and transfers are politically driven and determined by individual interests.

As such, it has been widely recognized that the educational system in Pakistan, with its different curricula and delivery mechanisms, reinforces the existing, inequitable social structures (Rahman, 2004). Absence of opportunities for students to develop critical, rational thinking throughout their education further reinforces these inequities in society (Dean, 2007; Rahman, 2004). Currently, the public sector system and some private schools follow the national curriculum, while many elite private schools follow the Cambridge curriculum. *Deeni Madaris*, with a different curriculum, offer religious education. These different curricula produce different outcomes due to their disparate levels of human and resource investment, parental interest, teaching quality and overall school governance (Pakistan Education Panel, 2013). This prevents a great majority of youngsters in the public sector educational institutions and the *Deeni Madaris* from moving up the ladder of social mobility (Aly, 2007).

Weak governance structures and unfulfilled promises of educational policy jeopardize any expectation that the curriculum, through its implementation, would underscore the value of “fundamental rights guaranteed to the citizens of Pakistan, so that each individual develops himself/herself and the society at large, a civic culture strong enough to withstand any extra constitutional interference which threatens those rights” (Government of Pakistan, 2009, p. 45). Furthermore, insufficient financial input, low levels of efficiency for implementation of programs, and poor quality of management, monitoring, supervision and teaching add to the ailing education system (Memon, 2007). The three-pronged education system, as acknowledged in the context of Punjab, is producing three different classes within the province and causing even greater disparity. Moreover, undue emphasis has been on literacy [rates] and enrolment instead of on student development

(Government of Punjab, 2012). As discussed earlier, this polarization also reflects the dichotomy facing youth in other parts of the country.

To meet EFA and MDG targets and to meet parity goals, various reform initiatives have been undertaken with the support of national stakeholders and international development agencies. Since the education system of the country has regularly been cited as one of the most serious impediments to the country's achieving its potential, the international donor community has been active on this front for decades, contributing to reform initiatives (Hathaway, 2005).

Persistent effort has gone into reforming education in Pakistan with the aim of improving educational governance and thereby improving equal access to quality education. Education sector reforms, the move to devolution for better governance and community engagement in education, and improving teacher competencies by reforming teacher education have all been part of the attempt to tackle the problem of education quality from multiple angles. Reforms driven by an equity agenda with a focus on Education For All, Universal Primary Education [e.g. girls' stipend programs] have attempted to improve gender disparities across various levels of education (Ali & Tahir, 2009). Recently, the reform efforts supported by the Canadian International Development Agency and USAID have focussed on improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes and models to improve the quality of education across primary and higher secondary.

In line with Clark's (2005) view on the relationship between reform of Pakistan's system of higher education and reform at the primary and secondary levels, higher education in Pakistan witnessed a complete change in 2002 with the establishment of the Higher Education Commission (HEC). This commission aimed to facilitate the transformation of Pakistan into a knowledge economy by improving both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of higher/tertiary education. Preparing youth for a knowledge society and the global economy, as Rahman (2007) recognized, would require young people to be equipped with the mastery of subject matter, and the ability to think critically, while striving to be innovative, communicative, and to work effectively in teams, and develop entrepreneurship opportunities. This vision of education has been reiterated in the National Education Policy of 2009. The HEC has undertaken an agenda for reform, which addresses challenges posed by quality and relevance.



To face these challenges, the HEC has developed a comprehensive, strategic framework that identifies the core aims for reform, including: (1) faculty development, (2) improving access; (3) excellence in learning and research; (4) and relevance to national priorities (Rahman, 2007). The HEC has also initiated a robust indigenous Ph.D. programme, which aspired to produce 1200-1500 Ph.Ds. annually. A large number of scholarships have been provided for educated youth aspiring to pursue Ph.D. studies and advance their technological and educational goals and training inside and outside Pakistan.

The initiatives, particularly the 'robust' Ph.D. program launched by the HEC were well received, yet they are not exempt from criticism. The critics are of the view that a science and technology-oriented and economics-driven educational system may not necessarily usher in comprehensive, broad based, social reconstruction. Alternatively, they suggest creating an environment in the institutions of higher learning that promotes a culture of independent thinking, inquiry, research, and meaningful intellectual discussion of important historical, contemporary social, economic, cultural and political issues. The efforts are aimed at building institutions that create knowledge and help students to become informed, critical, and active citizens.

## TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Owing to the huge demographic transition, the current work force is the largest in Pakistan's history. With quality, access, equity and the relevance of its current practices acting as major challenges, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector's capacity to deliver much-needed training services to enhance the professional skills of Pakistan's growing workforce is insufficient. As such, different certificate courses, and diploma programs of varying duration have been offered by the provinces. Except for the three year-long diploma program, all the other options for technical and vocational education have proved to be inadequate. Integration of technical education into mainstream high school education did not work either (UNESCO, 2009). Different provincial institutions are involved in developing curriculum for TVET programs, while the National Institute of Science and Technical Education (NISTE) is the approving authority for DAE curricula and vocational subjects at the secondary school level. A study by UNESCO in 2009 found that there had been few revisions in the TVET curriculum.



With the development of the National Skill Strategy, reforms are underway to improve access, quality and delivery of technical and vocational education under the auspices of the TVET Reform Support Programme. According to this programme, there are about 315,000 places available in the formal TVET sector for some 950,000 new labour market entrants each year. The private sector has a significant share in technical and vocational education with 70 % of total TVET institutions, while the public sector has a share of 30%. Gender disparity is another visible feature of existing TVET enrolment, with female participants making up 38% of the total youth entering these institutions (AEPAM, 2013). Less than 6% of young people have acquired technical skills through the TVET system, and only 2.5% of them have received on-the-job training (TVET Reform Support Programmes, 2012). This means that the competence level of the Pakistani workforce is too low to make any significant contribution to corporate productivity and competitiveness. It also means that Pakistan is not fully tapping into its potential youth dividend.

## POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND FAILURES

A critical analysis of the structural causes that result in poor governance and administration is outside the scope of this paper. We do maintain, however, that the quantitative and qualitative indicators of quality and access to educational services, discussed in the previous section, are the strongest evidence of policy implementation failure in Pakistan. Efforts to improve youth education and educational development, which are responsive to changing socio-cultural realities, either have been inadequate or have remained at the policy level. This section will briefly discuss the discrepancies between education policy and practice, and the failure of educational policy implementation in Pakistan.

Analyses of policy implementation tend to evaluate the formulation of policy and the actual implementation of policy as an integrated, singular process or as two, distinct processes, with the latter proceeding from the former. A critical review of current education policies and practices suggests that there are significant discrepancies between policy formulation and policy implementation. In the context of Pakistan, Ali (2006) presents several reasons for policy failures in Pakistan: unclear or ambitious policy





goals; lack of political commitment; faulty governance structures; centralization; lack of resources; and dependency on foreign aid. Other research studies have suggested that “premature loadbearing” and “isomorphic mimicry” account for the failure of policy implementation in developing countries. “Premature loadbearing” occurs when a policy that has the potential for success is undertaken in a context where the implementing partners are unable to effectively execute the necessary tasks (Pritchett, Woolcock & Andrews, 2010).

In Pakistan, successive National Educational Policies, and nine Five-Year Plans (1955-60; 1960-1965; 1965-70; 1970-75; 1978-1983; 1983-88; 1988-93; 1993-98) have been produced and passed, with minimal impact in terms of literacy, enrolment, and the levels of education achieved. An additional five-year plan was initially scheduled to be launched in 1998, but was discarded due to political and economic security conditions. In addition to these Five Year Plans, there has been a parallel series of National Education Policies, each introduced by the government in power: the 1979 New Education Policy; the 1972-80 Education Policy; the 1979 National Education Policy and Implementation Programme; the 1992 National Education Policy; the 1998-2010 National Education Policy: Iqra,; and the 2009 National Education Policy. Lastly, there have been a series of reform efforts such as the Education Sector Reforms: the 2001-2004 Action Plan; the 2001-2015 National Plan of Action on Education for All; and the Report of the Task Force on Higher Education in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities (Ali, 2006; Bengali, 1999).

The promises made in the successive National Educational Policies and Five Year Plans have largely remained unfulfilled. Not a single policy was followed by serious efforts to implement the plans and reform measures envisaged in the successive National Education Policies. One of the reasons behind the failure of educational reform efforts is believed to be the discontinuity in policies attributable largely to unstable or short-lived democratically elected governments. For over three decades, Pakistan remained under military rule (1958-1971, 1977-1988, 1999-2008), which disrupted any schemes for continuous policy implementation. Policies disappear with the governments that enact them. Consequently, the agenda of youth development envisaged in the national policies has become a phenomenon that is frozen in time.

Another reason is thought to be because the reforms and developments proposed in the policies and plans have not been harmonized with the resources that are actually available. Expansion and structural improvement



of the education system has inevitably required more resources, which are not made readily available to implement policy measures. As revealed by government reports, the shortage of resources has not been the only obstacle to achieving the targets laid down in education policies and five-year plans. Under- utilization or inappropriate use of available resources has also contributed to the failures in implementing policy measures (Bengali, 1999).

In conclusion, a close look at the policy implementation challenges reveals some of the weaknesses that have permeated national educational and youth education and development policies. These include: a narrow vision of youth education and development mainly based on mechanical processes; ambiguous and overly ambitious policy targets; an 'ad-hoc' and 'outside-in' approach to policy formulation; a lack of clarity about the role and responsibilities of government institutions concerned with youth education and development; and gaps between policy and practice.

The results of inadequate implementation of educational policies have been abysmally low levels of literacy and scholastic achievement, and the failure of the educational system to provide students with skills and training that they can translate into concrete employment opportunities.

## INTERSECTION OF YOUTH AND EDUCATION POLICIES

As an inherently integrative approach towards social and economic development, the National and Provincial Youth Policies seeks to synchronize all issues relating to youth policy rather than viewing them as disparate concerns; and herein lies these policies' main potential. Poverty, health, child labour, education, citizenship participation, and other concerns relevant to youth are undoubtedly interconnected. Yet educational policies are failing to adequately recognize and address such multi-faceted challenges, which often exacerbate each other, producing unfavourable educational outcomes.

The National Youth Policy of 2009, with a constituent action plan, was recognized as an important strategic move towards public policy on youth development in Pakistan (Government of Sindh, 2012). However, with the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment of 2010, which devolved the subject of youth affairs to the provincial level, the provinces assumed the responsibility for youth-related issues. As a result, the newly developed National



Youth Policy has lost some of its legitimacy. Presently, the four provinces and the regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir are at different stages of developing Youth Policies. The participatory approach is a ubiquitous feature of the policy development process throughout the country. Youth and other stakeholders have been consulted in order to foster a sense of ownership of the policies.

The Youth Policies – National and Provincial – given their integrative approach, provide an opportunity for greater synchronization and coordination between pertinent youth concerns such as education, child labour, and post-graduation employment opportunities. Yet the National Youth Policy does not make any explicit or implicit reference to existing education policy or how these policies will complement or enhance each other. Rather, it offers vapid generalizations, such as aiming to enhance “the availability of scholarships to carry out studies at higher secondary, under graduate and graduate levels within the country and abroad” (Government of Pakistan, 2008, p. 20) without discussing how the policy will strengthen the education system at the primary and secondary levels to ensure students’ preparedness for receiving and effectively utilizing scholarship opportunities. Moreover, the National Youth Policy offers overly ambitious and impractical suggestions, such as working towards “arranging interaction with Nobel Laureates” (Government of Pakistan, 2008, p. 13). Yet, there is no mention of how it will strengthen or complement the current educational system, and existing services and institutions (Government of Pakistan, 2008).

On the other hand, the Provincial Youth Policies delineate structures, policies, strategies and a vision with somewhat greater precision. Each province has issued its respective Youth Policy, issuing statements calling for multi-pronged approaches that are comprehensive, incorporate integrated vision and planning, and call for coordination between all key stakeholders, institutions, and governmental bodies. A review of the available provincial policy documents shows that there is a focus on motivating and inspiring youth for social issues by building their capacity to participate in the social and political arena; political empowerment; enabling their employability, and promoting entrepreneurship through financial resources. The policy documents also recognize the complexity of the youth development agenda and hence propose inter-sectoral collaboration (Government of Punjab, 2012; Government of Sindh, 2012). For example, the Province of Punjab’s Youth

Policy 2012 states that it “recognizes the emerging need to combine youth development work spread over various sectors (i.e. youth, labour, health, education, population, sports, culture, finance, etc.) within the framework of a comprehensive youth policy that integrates efforts of multiple stakeholders and turns youth into a dividend for the nation” (Government of Punjab, 2012, p. 4). In a similar vein, the Sindh Youth Policy states that it strives to empower youth at all three empowerment levels: economic, social, and political, stating that it “aims at building a youth who are economically active, socially hopeful and politically engaged in the Sindh province, and who possess useful competencies and tolerant values of good citizens of Pakistan” (Government of Sindh, 2012, p. 5).

Sufficient time has not yet elapsed to evaluate the efficacy of the provincial governments’ youth initiatives. However, we will note here that the Youth Policies’ integrative vision and implementation plans have been proposed without explicitly mentioning how and in what capacity the Youth Policy will interact with existing strategies, programmes, and policies pertaining to educational development. The references to education are cursory, which indicate the narrow scope of educational policy and processes for youth development that are envisaged by the policy makers. Revamping educational processes by introducing competency and comprehensive skill-based education, developing teaching and assessment areas for learning outcomes and assessment, curriculum review along with introduction of service learning and career counselling have been identified as key strategic interventions. However, the mechanism for implementing these interventions have been left unaddressed.

Overall, the Youth Policy documents fall short in identifying the human and material resources, governance, and timeline for implementation that are required. As such, policy making in Pakistan has not extended beyond the formulation stage, and this may explain many of the implementation problems (Ali, 2006) that have been encountered. Insufficient financial input, low levels of efficiency for implementation of programs, and poor quality of management and monitoring have historically proved major impediments (Memon, 2007). As far as the desired interface between youth development policy and educational policy are concerned, the perfunctory approach towards policy formulation and the corresponding action plans have also ignored early youth even though early education is a building block for later growth and development.



The analysis presented in Section One highlighted the enormous challenges facing youth when it comes to access to quality education. Persistent disparities on the basis of gender and rural or urban location within and between the provinces warrant a thorough and rigorous analysis of youth's access to universal, compulsory education to determine how likely they are to benefit from verbose policy assertions when they finally reach the "youth bulge." Once the provinces recognize education as a lynchpin for broader social change and as the interface and intersection between youth and education policies, they will also be driven to give due importance to the linguistic, ethnic, class, gender and religious diversity, which characterize the young people living within their varied geographical contexts.

Presently, available provincial youth policies seem to gloss over the diverse voices of youth, which may have emerged owing to the consultative process undertaken for policy formulation. Achievements in youth development are reported as a list of completed activities such as distribution of IT equipment, monthly financial assistance and skill training, organization of exchange programs and special quality schools. Yet describing successful activities only promotes a fragmented view and does not focus on the underlying principles of youth development as the development of human beings with a set of capabilities. Education aimed at developing the individuals' capabilities in order to expand his or her choices (Sen, 1999) would certainly lead to sustained human development.

The Capability Approach, discussed later, takes this view a step further. It views human development as a process of enhancing the real freedoms people enjoy by expanding their capabilities to do so (Sen, 1999, as cited in Hoffmann, *n.d.*).

## UNFAVOURABLE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES: ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Educational policy intersects with three critical domains of youth development and empowerment that include economic political and social engagement. This section of the paper will discuss how ineffective educational service delivery and the repercussions of insufficiently integrating all the components of youth education have impacted outcomes of economic, political and social engagement. Because of changing demographic trends, youth

education, development, empowerment and engagement must be institutionally mechanized within the political, economic and social domains. As the Capability Approach has extensively highlighted, the provision of educational services is an indisputable pre-requisite for nurturing empowered and capable citizens (Nussbaum, 2006).

#### ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT: CHILD LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Pakistan currently faces two critical forms of employment challenges that correspond and intersect with the ineffective delivery of educational services. The first challenge is its pervasively entrenched system of child labour and the second is the country's high rates of youth unemployment, even among those who have received a complete education. The result is a distorted employment process: children are deprived of education due to forced or compulsory employment at an early age, and those with educational qualifications cannot translate their skills and training into employment outcomes.

#### CHILD LABOUR

Recent studies suggest that approximately 25 million school-aged children are not attending school. According to UNICEF estimates, as quoted in a report by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, 7.3 million children of school going age, at the primary level, do not attend school (SPARC, 2013, p. 33). The reasons for absenteeism, school-leaving, and poor retention are multifaceted and include poverty, health issues, and the absence of transportation infrastructure. Yet child labour is also a deeply entrenched reason that results from high levels of poverty; and it is a significant impediment to increasing enrolment rates. Currently, the Pakistani government does not generate statistics on child labour. However, estimates from the ILO indicate that in 2012, there were over 12 million child labourers in the country. Similar studies from UNICEF estimate that there were around 10 million underage labourers. Child labour accounts for over 50% (4.21 of the 7.3 million) children not attending school at the primary level (SPARC, 2012).



## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Currently, youth unemployment rates exceed adult unemployment rates. “The causes of this high youth unemployment are manifold: lack of education, lack of skills, structural mismatch, divergence between the demographics of urban and rural areas, lack of experience, regional or province wise discrimination in the provision of job opportunities, sector imbalance” (Qayyum, 2007, p. 612). In the 15-24 year age bracket, the employment-to-population ratio was reported as 39.6 from 2010-2011, a 1.5 decrease from 2009-2010 levels.

Disaggregating this data reveals large gender disparities. Whereas the male employment-to-population ratio is 59.5 for the 15-24 age group, female employment-to-population for the same group is a mere 18.8. The relatively high employment-to-population ratio for men at all age groups is more indicative of the high number of low quality jobs than it is of full employment. Within the cultural and social context of Pakistan, men are predominantly the income-earners in a household, and thus must seek employment regardless of the quality of employment offered. Regardless of the contextual variables surrounding these quantitative indicators, all employment-to-population ratio levels are substantially less than those for South Asia, as a total region which is listed as 79.1 for males, 38.0 for females, and 59.1 for both sexes.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators of vulnerable employment provide a more contextually-specific and precise understanding of general employment trends in Pakistan. The Pakistani government uses the ILO definition for vulnerable employment. As quoted in the Government of Pakistan (2012), a vulnerable person is “one who is vulnerable to working under inadequate conditions because of weak institutional employment arrangements, and therefore is under risk of lacking decent work” (p. 20). In the age group of 15-24 years, 61% of the population is considered to have “vulnerable” employment (56.1 for males, 77.1 for females). In the age group of 15 years and above, the vulnerable employment rate is 61.6% (57.0% for males, and 78.3% for females) (ibid, 2012).

The high unemployment trends are a result of limited opportunities in the marketplace and educational programming that is not sufficiently tailored to the needs and experiences of both the youth and the contexts in which they live. According to UNDP estimates (as cited in Murtaza, 2013), approximately 71% of youth do not receive career counselling at school; 28%



of youth find their curricula to be irrelevant to the job market; and 88% of youth want to learn occupational skills. The provision of institutional mechanisms to translate acquired skills and learning into employment and the provision of counselling and orientation to lead students toward certain professional goals could mitigate the challenges of unemployment.

#### POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Educational policy and youth engagement in mainstream politics, civic engagement, and democratic citizenship are mutually interdependent concerns. Quality education equips young people to actively and critically engage in democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2006). Currently, research suggests, “the content and quality of civic education does not prepare (youth) to play an active and responsible role in a democratic society” (Dean, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, the current political party system in Pakistan does not provide an adequate basis for youth engagement in the political processes of democratic citizenship.

A recent research report (Jinnah Institute, 2013) indicates that the political parties are not taking concrete measures to reintegrate or re-engage the youth in mainstream politics. Rather, political parties operate through patronage-based policy approaches, through which they make commitments to the youth, but do not create opportunities for youth representation or inclusion within the political structure. As a result, the youth are politically marginalized and disinterested in political engagement. Also lacking critical thinking, social consciences, and the energy and power to vote, a substantial majority of youth is being exploited by the political parties to further their own agendas. Political parties have been accused of maintaining militant wings within their structure made up primarily of young people.

A survey of 1130 participants between the ages of 18 and 30 showed that 82% do not take an active part in politics. A 2013 survey conducted by the British Council revealed that “only 14% of the youth viewed the government and national assembly in a favourable light, and only 11% felt the same way about political parties”. Though these surveys and recent opinion reports suggest that the youth take a dim view of political institutions, they express enthusiasm for democracy and greater civic engagement for development. Without mechanisms for political inclusion, which are currently



lacking, political parties will continue to be incapable of responding to the requirements of the burgeoning youth population and will continue to be unaccountable when they fail to deliver on their commitments. Therefore, educational programming that produces students who engage in critical thinking will first require a type of education that prepares students for active, democratic citizenship. However, this will also require more concrete, inclusive initiatives generated by political parties that are willing to recognize and integrate relevant youth issues into the political process. Though the political inclusion of the youth population may compel parties to take the fulfilment of their promises more seriously, the feasibility of this initial step is questionable, given the poor state of education and high levels of illiteracy.

#### SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Successive periods of military rule and political repression of social activism and civic engagement have stunted the institutionalization and expansion of avenues for non-political, social engagement. Research studies suggest that Pakistan's history of volatile and tumultuous political systems renders political approaches unappealing and unproductive. Therefore, civic engagement in economic and social development offers a preferable alternative that has the potential of producing more tangible results. As stated by Etra (2010), "What is needed is a mechanism to tap into and capitalize on the inherent civic spirit that young people and their communities feel by raising awareness about how young people can be engaged and the advantages (both for the young people themselves and the community at large) of doing so in a more formal and organized way" (p. 37). In this regard, the National Youth Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2008) does stipulate the creation of a "National Youth Volunteer Corps", though the policy prescriptions for implementation remain inadequate.

Research (e.g. Etra, 2010) has identified areas for further enhancing youth engagement, and suggests there is considerable opportunity, with sufficient coordination of all stakeholders, to capitalize on this potential. Therefore, there is a need for further synchronization between educational programmes and opportunities for youth engagement.





## THE WAY FORWARD

Lastly, this paper argues that the Capability Approach can inform education and youth policy in order to fully capture the dynamism of this burgeoning population and harness it for the country's social and economic development. As we discussed earlier, scant and weak linkages between Youth and Education policies are producing unfavourable educational outcomes in terms of employment opportunities, political participation, social and civic engagement, and the general well-being of the country's young citizens. The paper has argued that the National or Provincial Education Policy should overlay and converge with youth policy and youth development.

The Capability Approach facilitates integration of youth and educational policy, placing due emphasis on educational services that allow individuals to develop the critical analytical capacity to undertake challenges and improve their own well-being. Furthermore, the Capability Approach provides a conceptual framework that underscores the need for diverse forms of educational programming that cater to the needs and experiences of a highly heterogeneous youth population.

The two key concepts of the Capability Approach are “functioning” and “capabilities”. Functionings are defined as the “the various things a person may value doing or being”, whereas capabilities “refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve. Capability is thus a kind of freedom” (Sen, 1999). Within the Capability Approach, education involves both intrinsic and instrumental values (Saito, 2003) by expanding and increasing an individual's set of capabilities. Education is critical for fostering healthy democratic citizenship.

The Capability Approach toward education emphasizes three components for the development of capabilities. First is the capacity “for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions”; that is, continuous questioning of traditions and prevailing social systems. The second is the capacity of the individual to see herself as a human being “bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition”, rather than to any one particular group. The third capacity is the “narrative imagination” – the ability to understand from another's perspective (Nussbaum, 2006). Altogether, these three capacities are considered critical for a healthy democracy and an active citizenry.

Pakistan is a diverse country with a multitude of languages, religions, ethnic groups, and other social groupings. Qualitative research (Ashraf et



al., 2012) has revealed the country's extraordinary heterogeneity when it comes to the specific needs and requirements of students, teachers, and schools. Moreover, recent reports suggest that Pakistan's public schools are not promoting religious tolerance (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, HRCP, 2009) and the country has been facing rising waves of intolerance and violence towards religious minorities (Human Rights Commission Pakistan, 2013; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2013).

It is necessary for policy-making to acknowledge and respond to the highly heterogeneous socioeconomic contexts of the country in order to promote social inclusivity and tolerance. In this regard, "the Capability Approach does not explain the causes of educational inequality; it provides a tool with which to conceptualize and evaluate them" (Unterhalter, Vaughan & Walker, 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, adopting the Capability Approach toward education and youth policy will ensure a robust and continuous re-evaluation of the merits of "youth" as an explanatory category in policy-making. The rural-urban, gender, ethnic, and religious disparities in the population in terms of access to education, attainment of education levels, and most importantly, achievements of desired "functionings" necessitate a policy orientation that recognizes the heterogeneity within the youth population.

Secondly, this paper has argued that for education policy to fully enhance real freedoms, the quality of education should correspond to and produce outcomes that are relevant to both the needs of the marketplace and of the citizenry. "In other words, for education to fully enhance freedom and development, it is required that the learning needs of all are met through equitable access to an education of such quality that it leads to learning outcomes that ultimately enhance individual freedom" (Radja, Hoffmann & Bakhshi, 2004, p. 2).

However, in the context of Pakistan, there are considerable discrepancies between the forms of educational programming and resulting outcomes and opportunities for growth and development. The high rate of unemployment, the inability of youth to find meaningful and gainful employment, and the general socioeconomic stagnation of the economy result from inaccessible education that is not tailored to either the current or projected future needs of the youth population.

In conclusion, the Capability Approach does not constitute a framework for policy prescription, but rather informs policy-making at every stage of

its development and implementation, and encourages the integration and convergence of youth and educational policies, which will ultimately harness the potential of both policy areas.

Currently, youth and education policies do not adequately intersect to form streamlined policy-making and practice. This results in the marginalization and disenfranchisement of particular peoples, rather than the integration of the diverse ethnicities that make up the country. It is this integration that will shape Pakistan's citizenry into a collectively-conscious body with an engrained understanding of civic values and democratic citizenship.

The results obtained so far have evidenced wide disparities in educational achievement, a lack of real freedoms accorded to individuals, and general socioeconomic stagnation throughout the country. This paper argues that the Capability Approach can provide a visionary thrust for otherwise directionless and unsystematic policy-making practices. The youth population, who already constitute the majority of the population, and whose share is increasing rapidly, must be the focal point of examination, to ensure that their respective capabilities are enhanced and that the freedoms to which they are entitled are guaranteed.

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