

“Dr Ishrat for implementation of reforms suggested by NCGR”

*Business Recorder* (Pakistan)

Chairman National Commission on Government Reforms (NCGR) and former governor State Bank of Pakistan, Dr Ishrat Hussain has underlined the need to implement the reforms suggested by NCGR. "According to these suggestions, there should be merit-based indications of teachers," he added.

His comments came following a report released by the World Bank on Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools prepared in collaboration with the researchers from the Harvard University and the Pomona College here at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (Lums) on Thursday.

He said there should be decentralisation of powers at the grass root level and the commission has proposed the establishment of district education boards to be headed by a nominee of district Nazim selected through a search committee.

There should be a separation of teaching and management cadres, he said and stressed on the need for empowerment of educational managers, giving administrative powers to head teachers and principals.

Dr Ishrat Hussain said that according to the suggestions there should be increase in the female enrolment ratio in the rural and backward areas in the country and female teachers should be given preference in employment at primary school level.

There should be school management committees and parent-teacher associations. "According to the suggestions the other provincial governments should adopt the same steps adopted by the Punjab government for infrastructure development," he added.

He also said testing and examination system should be improved. He also appreciated the private sector for playing an important role in providing education at all levels.

NCGR chairman appreciated the programmes by the Punjab Education Foundation to fund private schools, catering to less affluent households by providing such institutions Rs 300 per month to very child and it is linked with the performance of child in monthly tests.

PML-N leader and former finance minister Sartaj Aziz said education should be given a priority and it is the right time for giving proposals about the education sector as the new government has just sworn in and it would consider the output in preparation of new education policy.

He said enhancing enrolment is a major issue, besides providing training to teachers. "We need to increase the allocations for education sector in the budget, in addition to

improve the infrastructure," he added. Pro-Vice Chancellor Lums Syed Babar Ali said emphasised the need to give priority to education sector.

The Leaps report released here by World Bank calls for a reevaluation of education policies in the context of a dramatic increase in private schools for primary education in Pakistan. The report presents facts and findings from a survey of all public and private primary schools in 112 villages in Punjab province, and lays out important policy options based on detailed data to facilitate evidence-based policymaking.

The report says private schools have a widespread presence in both urban and rural areas, providing parents another option for investing in their children's education. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of private schools increased from 32,000 to 47,000, and by the end of 2005, one-third of enrolled children at the primary level were studying in a private school.

"This survey provides critical information on every aspect of the educational marketplace, including performance of all types of schools in Punjab, " said Dr Tara Vishwanath representative of Yusupha Crookes, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan.

"It documents the dramatic changes in the educational landscape that have taken place in Pakistan in recent years. This report provides an excellent starting point for guiding educational policies which needs to take into account the relative strengths and weaknesses of private and government schooling," he added.

The report says a large fraction of rural Pakistani households no longer lives in a village with one or two government schools. Half the population of rural Punjab lives in villages where parents can choose from 7 to 8 schools.

"Public schools, despite being staffed with better-educated and better-paid teachers, are now competing for the same segment of students, even in rural areas, " said Tahir Andrabi, Associate Professor Pomona College and an author of the report.

" While overall enrolments increased by 10 percent between 2001 and 2005, the report says quality of education is lagging and children perform significantly below curricular standards for common subjects and concepts at their grade-level.

Children in private schools score significantly higher than those in government schools, even when they are from the same village. In fact, it will take children in government schools 1.5 - 2.5 years of additional schooling to catch up to where private school children are in Class 3, the report said.

Better learning results in private schools do not arise from higher costs - it costs half as much to educate a child in a private school (Rs 1000 per year) as compared to a government school (Rs 2000 per year). "Nevertheless, private schooling alone cannot be the solution, " said Tara Vishwanath, WB lead economist and an author of the report.

"Access to private schools is not universal. Private schools choose to locate in richer villages and richer settlements within villages, limiting access for poor households. In contrast, a laudable feature of the government school system is that it ensures equal geographical access to schools for all. The policy imperative is how we ensure inclusion and quality education for all children in Pakistan."

The report advances a modified role of the government for discussion and debate. This modified role of the government would focus on policies complementary to, rather than in competition with, the private sector. One strand of this modified role would be for the government to provide information.

The report suggests, for instance, that information on the quality of every school - public or private - would enable households to make informed decisions and increase beneficial competition between schools. The suggestion is based, in part, on the results of an ongoing Randomised Control Treatment Experiment.

It also proposes that the government corrects the imbalances arising from unequal geographical access to private schools, and ensures that all children acquire a set of basic competencies.

Lastly, it urges the government to become an innovator willing to experiment with and evaluate "out-of-the-box" reforms such as public-private partnerships where financial support is given to children regardless of the school chosen. The report says that improving quality in government schools requires rethinking teacher hiring and compensation in a fundamental manner.

It presents a number of different options for teacher reform from decentralising teacher hiring to districts to decreasing additional duties such as attending workshops and administering polio vaccinations to performance-based pay.

The report clarifies that each option has its own strength and weaknesses and debate and discussion are required to inform the way forward. Finally, the report says educational policies need to recognise that there are weaknesses and strengths in both sectors.

The relative strengths of the government sector are a better educated and trained workforce that is equitably distributed. The relative strengths of the private sector are the ability to cut costs by paying teachers according to local conditions and performance and eliciting higher levels of effort from their teachers. Former Punjab education minister Mian Imran Masood, PPP MPA Uzma Bukhari and NWFP MPA Saqib Chamkani also spoke.

--Details:

Document Title: Dr Ishrat for implementation of reforms suggested by NCGR

Document Source: Business Recorder (Pakistan)