

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT'S ROLE IN REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Since the last quarter of 2001 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has significantly increased its role in reforming higher education in Pakistan. This paper examines USAID's work in the development of Higher Education. Moreover, the paper discusses recent and on-going USAID efforts and contributions in reforming higher education in the country. The set of policies related to institutional development, reforms at the policy level and faculty development programs are also discussed. Additionally, the paper discusses parts of 2009 Kerry-Lugar bill that has been developed into a strategic partnership development document between Pakistan and the United States. The data collection process included document reviews and analysis; field visits to USAID funded projects, and consultations and discussions with the project leadership teams that are working with the USAID to bring about reform in higher education in Pakistan. Through an in-depth analysis of USAID's role in education in Pakistan, this research help develop well in-formed policy making and implementation process while taking into account the complexities of all the forces that shape higher education development in Pakistan.

JEL: A2, K12, I23, I25

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Literacy, Pakistan, Teacher Education, Donor Agency

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan as a country is going through tough and challenging economic, social, religious and political situations. On the economic front, Pakistan's economy is in serious trouble and country has approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance. Poverty is on the rise and prices of daily commodities including food and fuel are significantly high. And, on the social and political front, Pakistan is facing a very serious threat of terrorism, particularly in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where the country is facing an ongoing war with the militants.

A sustainable and visionary policy to tackle the above-mentioned daunting challenges calls for well-educated and skilled manpower that could be a catalyst in reform-oriented change badly needed by the country. In order to succeed in the process and to provide opportunities of higher learning to the youth, there is a need to reform higher education system in such a way that is sustainable and offers better and improved access and quality higher education which should help students in becoming capable and resourceful manpower. However, in these increasingly difficult times, the overburdened public exchequer finds it hard to spare a big chunk of resources for higher education. This is the setting in which the USAID has stepped forward to work with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to launch projects and offer funding for qualitative improvements in the Higher Education sector. This research sheds light and reviews the role of the USAID projects for promotion of higher education in Pakistan. USAID through its funding opportunities in social and economic development has played very important role in education reform. The paper critically examines the role of USAID in reforming higher education in

Pakistan and discusses the opportunities and challenges that the 21st century has presented to Pakistan. With this brief introduction rest of the paper is organized into four sections a) Literature Review b) USAID's role in higher education reform c) discussion on USAID funded Pre-STEP program and d) conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001 that took place in both New York City and Washington D.C changed the United States and the World. Since then, significant changes have taken place and there were a number of policy shifts that followed. The important change that is relevant to the paper was the renewed interest of the United States in the Islamic World. Ever-since, Pakistan an important Muslim country located in South Asia and neighbor to Afghanistan became an important part of US foreign policy agenda. The United States declared war against terror and Pakistan became the front line ally in the war against terrorism. This alliance between the two countries and renewed interest of both the United States and the western world in Pakistan resulted into a number of changes that started to take place inside the country. The changes impacted the domestic as well as the foreign policy of Pakistan.

In domestic area one sector that got the particular focus and interest is the education sector of Pakistan. The importance of educated citizens that play a necessary and crucial role in the social, economic and political development of a society was revisited by Pakistani government. It was again realized by Pakistani government that education plays a vital role in producing conscientious, tolerant, accepting and accommodating citizens in addition to producing much-needed skilled labor force that Pakistan needs for its economic uplift. The argumentation led to a renewed and strong interest from both US and Pakistani educators and policy makers in promoting education for an overall development of the society and the country.

Public higher education system, meaning not only the Pakistani universities but also the colleges that offer bachelors and master level degree programs are implementing reforms set forward by the Higher education commission since 2002. Pakistan's higher education system serves many very important functions. These are the institutions and places that offer training and education to its young population and prepare them for future challenges. Furthermore, the higher education institutions help the country in creating a skilled and knowledgeable human capital. Educated human resources are very crucial for Pakistan in not only developing its institutions and increasing its productivity but to compete with other nations in the region as well as globally.

Bloom (2001), asserts that higher education provides countries with people that are equipped with a higher level of capabilities that cannot be attained just through primary and secondary schooling. Let us place this argument in the context of Pakistan. The country with a population of approximately 170 million people is the sixth largest in the world. Pakistan has limited natural resources and its economy is struggling. Moreover, the country is facing a serious terrorist threat. Poverty is increasing and with it social instability. However, Pakistan has the potential to address these challenges successfully. One possible way of addressing these problems is by investing in education and particularly higher education. Investment in higher education institutions and increasing access to higher education should help Pakistan in developing a pool of talented, skilled and knowledgeable young people. And, these educated and productive people can thrive in their professions. One way is by establishing a strong link between Pakistan's domestic policies and needs with its foreign policy. And, in the process redefine Pakistan's history and focus on indigenous cultures that help place the county in South Asian region.

Furthermore, higher education helps to produce people that possess leadership skills to lead the society and participate in the development process. Additionally, higher education institutions also provide support with the development of primary, middle and secondary education. This takes place when higher

education institutions help in developing policy framework, building institutions, and creating necessary structures to support a) Recruitment and selection processes of teachers b) Providing training to primary, middle and secondary level teachers c) Curriculum development d) Conduct research studies to understand and implement what educational practices work best in a particular contexts.

The institutions of higher education play a vital role in shaping and improving the social, economic, political and cultural life of different communities. Also, these institutions help in promoting a culture of dialogue that contributes in peace and development. The issues of community development, democratic participation and social responsibilities are discussed and enhanced at the higher education institutions. Therefore, for democracy to take root, social justice to prevail and human rights to be respected in a country like Pakistan. In this regard, the increased access to the higher education institutions is very crucial and significant (Hoodbhoy, 2005). However, higher education in Pakistan, as mentioned by Clark (2005), is facing a number of daunting challenges such as a) Only 2.9% has access to higher education which is very limited b) Insufficient education and training of faculty, only 1700 with PhDs c) Most Universities are ill-equipped to teach, laboratories and libraries are limited and resources are scarce d) Education and Research is not linked with issues such as economic and social development of Pakistan (Clark, 2005, pp. 55-56). Facing these challenges the international crisis group (2005) report has made a number of suggestions to improve the education and access to education for example a) Raising public expenditure on education to at least 4 percent of GDP b) Raising public expenditure on social sector development to make public schools more accessible to teachers and students c) Donors should condition aid on the Pakistani government on meeting benchmarks for increased expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, and monitor the use of government funds in the education sector (ICG, 2005, p.169).

The importance of higher education, challenges faced, and recommendation made by experts to overcome the problem, as mentioned in preceding paragraphs, attracted the attention of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) USAID and Pakistan. Their interest and mutual cooperation played an important role in replacing University Grants Commission (UGC) of Pakistan by a vibrant and resourceful Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan in September 2002. The total public budget allocated for higher education between 2002 and 2007, witnessed a remarkable increase from 3.2 billion rupees to 33.7 billion rupees (Hoodbhoy, 2008, p. 13). Naqvi (2008), in his support for the HEC asserts that since 2002 the institution has performed well. He argues that to see the results there is a need for continuation of HEC policies that were started seven years ago. He further suggests that Pakistan is going through a demographic transition and this is causing changes in country's age structure. The post-secondary population that falls between ages 18-23 is going to rise until 2050; whereas, the percentage of pre-secondary will continue to decline (Naqvi, 2008, pp. 8-10). This suggests that there is going to be more demand for higher education and by focusing on expanding the system, by increasing access and planning ahead, universities should be in a reasonable position to meet the growing demand.

Similarly, Hoodbhoy (2008) asserts that in last six years the HEC has sent about 3000 Pakistani students abroad for graduate studies and increased the salaries of university teachers. Both of these steps are taken to attract better candidates to teaching profession and improve the quality of teaching. Since the establishment of the commission, the higher education sector in Pakistan has experienced significant changes and reforms. The HEC developed its goals and under the medium term development framework started working on faculty development, access to higher education and promotion of excellence in learning and research (HEC, 2005). Rehman (2008), the retired chairman of the HEC asserts that since the establishment of the commission 47 new universities had been established. Furthermore, 18 new campuses of existing universities have also been started in all four provinces and regions of Pakistan. With regards to access, the university enrolment has almost tripled from 135,123 in 2002 to 363,700 in 2008 (Rehman, 2008, p. 11).

USAID in Pakistan

Keeping in view the challenges faced by higher education sector in Pakistan and the suggestions extended by experts, USAID is playing a critical role in helping Pakistan overcome the problems and furtherance of higher education in the country.

The USAID (2005), discusses that in August 2002, the United States Government, through USAID, signed a five-year \$100 million agreement with the Government of Pakistan to support education sector reform. The USAID asserts that the education allocation would be around \$300 million from the year 2008 to the year 2011(USAID, 2009). Hathway (2005) reports the main features of the education support reform include a) Sector-wide approach from primary to higher education to eliminate gender and access gaps and ensure optimum use of facilities b) Macro-level reforms in planning and procedures c) Institutional reforms in all tiers of government engaged in educational planning and service delivery d) Commencement of vocational and technical education streams at the secondary level e) Quality assurance f) Increased public-private partnerships g) Implementation of a poverty reduction program (Hathaway, 2005, p.127)

The Fulbright scholarship program is another effective initiative, working in association with the higher education commission, for promotion of higher education. The program is offering students scholarships to get higher education in the United States. The Fulbright program is contributing to build human capital and capacity of the existing colleges and universities in Pakistan. Through similar cooperation with other programs and by developing its own resources the HEC (2006), notes that during 2003-2009, the commission plans to send around fifteen thousand Pakistani students abroad for higher education.

Discussing the role of USAID in the development of higher education in Pakistan, Burki (2005), notes that a total of \$ 1.4 billion will be spent in education over a period of seven years. Part of the money will also come from the World Bank and the Asian development bank. Pakistan is likely to spend \$ 2 billion on education, with 20 percent provided by the donor community (Daily Dawn, 2005, April 16, p.10). The USAIDs' work in reforming higher education in Pakistan got further strengthened with the Kerry-Lugar bill that paved the way for the development of "Enhanced partnership act with Pakistan 2009". The following section presents the main features of the bill.

Enhanced Partnership Act 2009 (Kerry- Lugar Bill)

The enhanced partnership act 2009 between the USA and Pakistan is rooted in the development and reform of social sector in Pakistan, of which education is of primary focus. The five year Kerry-Lugar bill promises Pakistan a social sector development aid of \$7.5 billion dollars. The bill named as enhanced partnership with Pakistan (EPP) Act of 2009 asserts continuing support to strengthen democratic institutions and principles, and promoting social and economic development with financial assistance to its strategic partner Pakistan.

The examination of the EPP Act informs us about the significance of the achievement of political objectives that the U.S. has attached with the aid money that it promises to share with Pakistan. The mechanisms through which the money will be spent have not been explained, however, the EPP (2009) asserts that through partnership it would like to achieve following three key objectives: i) improve GOPs capacity to address its critical infrastructure needs ii) help GOP in providing improved economic opportunities in areas most vulnerable to extremism iii) Strengthen GOPs capacity to pursue economic and political reforms that reinforce stability (EPP, 2009, pp.2-4). Additionally the program plans to focus on a) High impact, high visibility infrastructure programs b) Focused humanitarian and social services c) Government capacity development. The EPP (2009) shares that out of total \$7.5 billion, about \$1.5 billion have been allocated for increased access and improved quality of education and health services. This means a significant amount of money has been promised for education. However, who is going to spend

the money, how the money will be spent and what will be its short and long term impact is yet to be analyzed and seen.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of economic assistance that will be provided to Pakistan through U.S. EPP 2009 act. The table shows that bulk of the money will be spent on agriculture and energy sector. Followed by, assistance to improve security mechanisms, improved governance and increasing access to girls' primary education. The higher education sector shall benefit from \$1.5 billion that has been allocated for both health and education sectors.

Table 1: Economic Assistance That Will Be Provided to Pakistan through U.S. EPP 2009 Act

Summary of Projected U.S. Assistance to Pakistan FY 2010-FY 2014 (\$ Millions)		
Activities	FY 2010-FY 2014	Criteria Addressed
Investment in high impact, high visibility programs	3,500 Sector wise breakdown Agriculture (2,000) Support for Pakistan's energy crisis(1,000) Other (500)	Political rates, girls primary education completion rates, government effectiveness, rule of law, control of corruption
Government Capacity Improvement	2,000 Sector wise breakdown Improved national and local governance (1,000) Improved security and legal institutions (1,000)	Civil liberties, political rights, Accountability, rule of law and control of corruption
Focused humanitarian and social services	2,000 Sector wise breakdown Immediate post crisis and other humanitarian assistance (500) Increased access to and quality of education and health services (1,500)	Civil Liberties, government effectiveness, girls primary education completion rate, public expenditure on health, primary education, and immunization rates

Source: (EPP, 2009, p.18) Note: The table demonstrate activities in different area and planned assistance in US million dollars with sector wise break down and assessment criteria

In subsequent section one of the major USAID funded project, the Pre-STEP, part of the Kerry-Lugar bill which aims at reforming teacher education in Pakistan is discussed to evaluate the role of USAID in education reform through its economic assistance.

DISCUSSION

The USAID (2008) asserts that the Pre-Service Teacher Education is a \$75 million funded program. The program was started in September 2008 and shall end in September 2013. The program was earlier implemented through the international contractor, the Academy for Education Development, however, now Education Development Center is the leading implementing organization.

The Pre-STEP is one major USAID funded program in the higher education sector that talks about bringing qualitative improvement in teacher education in Pakistan by introducing 4 years B.Ed program in education faculties of universities and affiliated colleges throughout the country. In Pre-STEP program, it is planned to select and send 60 Pakistani candidates to the U.S universities for PhD studies and 45 for Masters' level studies. The program discusses about introducing reforms both at the policy and the implementation level. The Pre-STEP program has lots of resources at its disposal. The question is how successfully the program is going to spend such a significant amount so that it could achieve some of the results that it plans to achieve: i) that all degree awarding institutions should offer 4 years B.Ed degree program only. ii) build education institutions' capacity (infrastructure and human resources) so that they

could offer 4 years B.Ed degree program. iii) and create conditions so that by 2018 all teachers that will be hired throughout the country should have at-least 4 years B.Ed degree.

The study shows that the Pre-STEP has lots of resources, both organizational and financial, and its goals can be achieved. The study suggests that program results will be achieved if funds are efficiently and effectively utilized. Thus far the project has gone through few tough and rough times. In September 2008, the Academy for Education Development (AED) was the lead program implementing contractor, but the auditor general of the USAID found AED with bad accounting practices that led to the black listing of the AED (USAID, 2010). In March 2011, the project was suspended for couple of months, however, within a short period the project was awarded to Education Development Center. The study shows that both the blacklisting of AED and the suspension of project activities for a brief period of time has had somewhat negative impact on programs' workings with 15 public sector partner universities, federal and provincial government departments and teacher education colleges that are spread all over Pakistan

The study shows that the Education Development Center is working closely with the local partner institutions in implementing the Pre-STEP program. The Pre-STEP under the leadership of Education Development Center, through various set of linked activities is working to improve the quality of teacher education by strengthening the education institutions that provide pre-service teacher education in Pakistan. The program is directly impacting the newly inducted and practicing teachers by helping them gain revised and upgraded teacher qualifications (USAID, 2010).

The Pre-STEP (2009) asserts that the program works with the Government of Pakistan, Higher Education Commission, provincial government education departments, universities and government elementary colleges to institutionalize specific reforms in pre-service education as desired by the Government of Pakistan through its National Education Policy. Furthermore, the Pre-STEP adds the primary objective is to help the Government of Pakistan develop, introduce, and implement effective curricula for a new four-year Bachelors' degree in education and a two-year associate degree in education. In the process and to achieve that goal, the Pre-STEP also helps provincial governments' in creating systems, policies and standards that ensure the effective execution of these degree programs.

Moreover, the Pre-STEP (2009) claims that the program assistance is tailored to support pre-service education priorities as determined by each province, and to enhance capacity and strengthen systems that will remain once Pre-STEP ends. Additionally, the program asserts that the end results shall include teachers graduating from colleges and universities with the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to be effective instructors and to meet Pakistan's National Standards for Teachers. The review undertaken suggests several areas for increasing the effectiveness of the USAID program relating to education given below i) there is a need to give importance to the fact that Pakistan is a large, diverse, underdeveloped country and education needs of different regions are contextual ii) it is suggested that Pakistani educators and higher education commission of Pakistan who understand the needs and the situation in the country should be effectively engaged at all levels of policy and decision making related to promotion of higher education. The local institutions have the experience, capacity, and are best suited to perform and deliver under the set of local context and challenges iii) there is a need to support local partners, i.e. Pakistani universities, local policy institutes and qualified NGO's that want to bring about sustained and meaningful reform in higher education in Pakistan.

The engagement of the local organization/professionals with the execution of USAID funded projects will result in the following benefits to the local people, the economy and the institutions in Pakistan: i) it will prove as capacity building initiative for improvement in technical skills, performance, efficiency and organizational development skills of the local project partners ii) it will help enhance interaction between local and international staff that will lead to better understanding of local culture, values, and systems iii) monetary benefits accrued by the local partner organizations will cause circulation of money in the local

economy iv) it will help increase monitoring and evaluation skills of the local partner organizations v) participation of local organizations and the local people will also help achieving the project objectives and making it successful

CONCLUSION

There is a realization among the policy makers and the government in Pakistan that promoting higher education is one of the means to tackling the economic as well as the social challenges – poverty, extremism and terrorism- faced by the country. Professionals and experts extend a number of suggestions in order to bring about a positive change (i) a considerable increase in percentage of GDP allocated for education (ii) generous foreign help in the form of donations from friends of Pakistan. It is, however, a big challenge for the over-burdened government exchequer to increase spending on education sector. In this difficult situation, the US government extended a helping hand and agreed to support the education sector reform in 2002, through the United States International Development Agency (USAID). This resulted in creation of a proactive and vibrant organization named the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan that replaced the University Grants Commission in the year 2002. After inception of HEC, an impressive growth in number of new universities and considerable increase in enrollment has been witnessed. The enhanced Partnership Act 2009, also known as ‘Kery-Luger Bill’ is another landmark agreement for cooperation between Pakistan and the US. It is meant for strengthening the social service sector in Pakistan including health and higher education. Pre- Service Teacher Education Program (Pre-STEP) is one the flagship projects that is being funded under the ‘Enhanced partnership Act 2009’. This project aims at enhancing and sharpening the teaching skills of the teachers in Pakistan. This project has considerable resources on its disposal. International consultants have also been engaged with the execution of the project.

The current paper critically evaluate the role of USAID in bringing higher education reforms in Pakistan. In the paper few of the projects in education sector funded by USAID were analyzed and their impact on reform of higher education was discussed. Overall, the USAID is playing an impressive and meaningful role in promotion of higher education that will lead to economic and social uplift of the people and help overcome the challenges of poverty, ignorance, and extremism. The youth of the country equipped with quality education and enlightenment will bring about peace, prosperity and tolerance not only in the country, but also in the region. However, to get more benefits from financial assistance local universities and community must be involved in ongoing projects in higher education reform. In future, quantitative research is needed to be done to assess the overall impact of USAID funded projects in bringing about reforms in the education sector.

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