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Policy Failure, Political Constraints and  
Political Resources: Basic Education in  
Pakistan

Haris Gazdar

## **POLICY FAILURE, POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS AND POLITICAL RESOURCES**

### **An Agenda for Research on Basic Education in Pakistan**

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## 1 Introduction

Pakistan's deficit in expanding primary education is now widely acknowledged in the country and abroad as a problem of alarming proportions. Half a century after independence, the literacy ratio remains well below the 50 per cent mark, let alone approaching universal achievement (Table 1). The low level of overall- literacy is compounded by chronic inequalities between men and women, and between urban and rural areas. In 1998, over two-thirds of the female population aged above 10 years was illiterate. The ratio was four-fifths in rural areas. Moreover, the problem is not merely a hangover of past failures. Even in the late 1990s, the proportion of children in primary school (measured in terms of the Net Enrolment Ratio) was 42 per cent for the population as a whole, and only 30 per cent for rural girls. In 1996, seven out of every ten girls in rural areas were out of school.

It is no longer possible, if it ever was, to dismiss Pakistan's educational deficit as a problem related to low levels of income or economic growth alone. Countries with much smaller GNP per capita (Viet Nam, India, Kenya, Sudan, Nigeria, and Tanzania) have significantly higher literacy rates (Table 2). Only two sizable countries -- Bangladesh and Ethiopia -- have lower literacy rates than Pakistan. Both countries have suffered political and natural disasters of tragic proportions over the last three decades, while Pakistan has experienced relatively favourable conditions.

This paper is part of a larger study of the constraints to the expansion and universalisation of basic education in Pakistan. The larger study includes, *inter alia*, surveys of government, private and voluntary sector schools, the analysis of secondary statistical data, and a review of successive education policies going back to 1947.<sup>1</sup>

The main objective of this paper is to outline a research agenda on the basis of existing literature and preliminary fieldwork. Specifically, this paper has two aims. Firstly, it develops a critique of the existing debate on the failure of basic education in Pakistan (section 2). Some of the influential recent contributions to this debate, in particular those that are based on formal analysis of the arguments and the evidence, have come from quarters such as the World Bank, the Multi-Donor Support Unit, and the United Nations Inter-Agency Mission.

These contributions, particularly those emanating from the World Bank, are based upon a large body of empirical work using nationally representative survey data, as well as sectoral and regional

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<sup>1</sup> The study is a collaborative project between researchers at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad and the Asia Research Centre, supported by the Asia Foundation Pakistan.

studies in various parts of the country. These contributions go some distance towards testing, confirming or dispelling commonly held and influential notions about the status of basic education, as well as possible solutions. To the extent that the recent and growing interest in the subject has fuelled serious study, it is extremely valuable that long-held notions that have been based upon guesses and anecdotal evidence are being questioned.

It is argued here that there are many other such myths to be tested, not least some, which find themselves reasserted even in the otherwise careful and thorough studies that have been forthcoming of late. More crucially, however, while these recent studies and situation analyses provide very rich baseline material for further research, and while they have attempted to go beyond received wisdom to a great extent, it is argued here that there is scope for a much greater and more radical rethink of the conceptual approach to basic education in a largely illiterate society. In particular, it will be argued, that it is important to ask whether the commonly adopted framework in the "economics of education" that addresses education as an input might not be too limiting a characterisation of what basic education represents in a country such as Pakistan. Recognition of the limitations of the prevalent economics of education framework opens the possibility of an economic analysis of education which pays greater attention to institutions and societal conditions.

A second aim of this paper is to report the findings of a primary field survey conducted in various parts of the country (section 3). The key questions addressed by this survey relate to the functioning of government schools, the school administration particularly in rural areas, age profile of school participation, the special problems of female schooling, lessons from the experience of private sector, the possibility of compulsory education, and the role of NGOs in overcoming the constraints faced by the government schooling system. The main findings and implications for policy and public discussion on basic education in Pakistan are summarised in section 4.

## **2 A Review of the Policy Framework**

### **2.1 Background**

This study is primarily concerned with the issue of universalising basic education in Pakistan. As such, the review presented here deals with contributions to the debate on educational policy and strategy that are directly related to the question of universalisation. There is now a large and increasing body of published and unpublished material on various aspects of primary or basic education in Pakistan. This literature is partly a reflection of the growing concern, indeed alarm, at the extremely poor progress of basic education in Pakistan.

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These contributions deal with a wide range of issues such as, inter alia, the performance of government schools, the economics of school participation, rates of return to schooling, curriculum development, pedagogy, non-formal education, problems of female schooling, community participation and non-governmental interventions in schooling. The present review does not purport to being a comprehensive literature survey of these publications and reports. Instead, the focus here is on those studies or documents that provide a more strategic overview of the problem of universalisation.

The backdrop of recent strategic thinking about basic education is the range of government initiatives that have been undertaken in the recent years in recognition of Pakistan's serious crisis in raising basic literacy and numeracy. A number of these new initiatives have been undertaken within the framework of a 'Social Action Programme' (SAP) started by the Government of Pakistan in 1992, and with close involvement of a number of bilateral and multilateral lenders and donors. The latest phase of SAP was agreed between the government and donors in late 1997, and is scheduled to run concurrently with the Ninth Five Year Plan from 1998 till 2002.<sup>2</sup>

The Social Action Programmes formalize the government's budgetary commitment to the social sectors as part of its structural adjustment borrowing agreements with the IMF.<sup>3</sup> The 'social' sectors, or sectors covered by SAP include education, health, family planning and rural water supply and sanitation. Of these education received around half of the 'development' budget, and over three-quarters of the recurrent budget. The early phase of SAP (upto 1996) was, to a great extent, focused on raising literacy through raising primary school enrolments. The interventions included the establishment of new primary schools, the upgrading of existing ones, and projects for non-governmental and non-formal initiatives in basic education, and specific interventions for girls' schooling.

It is interesting to note that while a number of sectoral studies of SAP do exist, thus far no comprehensive official assessment of the interventions in basic education has been published<sup>4</sup> This is somewhat surprising, given that SAP has represented the core of the government's basic education

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<sup>2</sup> Government of Pakistan (1996).

<sup>3</sup> As part of IMF conditionality, the government must commit at least 1.8 per cent of the GDP for expenditure on the social sectors under SAP. The total outlay in the first three years was around \$4 billion, of which 75 per cent consisted of GOP resources, while the remainder was made up of soft loans and grants from a consortium of donors. (Government of Pakistan, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Overall SAP performance has also been reviewed by other researchers and organisations, notably the Social Policy Development Centre (see SPDC 1998). Successive rounds of the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (PIHS) carried out by the Federal Bureau of Statistics also provide a statistical basis for evaluating the impact of SAP.

strategy over the recent years, and is likely to continue to do so. There are growing indications, however, that the early phase of SAP has been unable to achieve its key objectives - i.e. the expansion of school participation. School enrolment data from 1991 and 1996-97 indicate that net enrolment ratios might actually have declined during this period.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, yet other policy initiatives relating to education have surfaced. Most notably, in 1998 the government launched a new education policy, including a wide range of proposals for basic education, for the period up to the year 2010. Barely a few months prior to this policy launch, a strategic plan for the achievement of universal elementary education by the year 2006, had been published. While they do convey a clear sense of urgency, there appears to be little coherence in these various initiatives. Furthermore, the conceptual and empirical bases of these policies are far from clear.

The present study starts from the premise that there is a need for informed public debate on the question of education and education policy in Pakistan. A key factor in that debate is a stock-taking of the existing situation, a description of the received wisdom, and critical evaluation of this wisdom in the light of empirical evidence. Existing policies and proposed strategies are based upon some explicit or implicit understanding of the constraints to universal basic education. A review of current influential thinking on the subject is a useful entry point into the debate.

### 2.2 Current Thinking on Universal Basic Education

While official evaluations of SAP are not available, there are recent studies and documents available that do take a strategic view, and that carry influence with policy-makers. The analysis here is structured around three such documents. Two of these emanate from the World Bank, while the third is a report of a United Nations Inter-Agency Mission to Pakistan.

The World Bank documents, entitled, respectively, 'Improving Basic Education in Pakistan: Community Participation, System Accountability, and Efficiency' published in 1996, and 'Pakistan: Towards a Strategy for Elementary Education', prepared in 1997, are based upon overlapping background studies and sources. The UN Inter-Agency Mission on Basic Education visited Pakistan in the middle of 1995, and included representatives from UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA and the World Bank.

All of the organisations that participated in the preparation of these reports, particularly the

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<sup>5</sup> Table 1.



World Bank, have been closely associated with the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Social Action Programme, through their involvement with the Multi-Donor Support Unit'. In the absence of much evidence of strategic analysis and planning in government circles these documents assume an even greater importance. The diagnosis and prescriptions of the institutional authors of these documents represent, arguably, the core of coherent strategic thinking on these issues among policy circles in Pakistan.

The two World Bank documents are based upon the analysis of a large number of background studies using both secondary national level data, as well as case studies, qualitative and quantitative surveys, and controlled pilot interventions in different parts of the country.<sup>6</sup> The studies on which the reports are based are of a high academic standard and use innovative methodologies to gain insights into difficult questions. The Inter-Agency report is based upon consultations by the visiting mission team with a wide range of individuals and organisations, and is a useful representation of analyses and opinions of key and well-informed individuals. While this report is not based on systematic hypothesis testing in order to advance an argument, it does generate many hypotheses that could be tested. All the reports are policy-oriented, though their recommendations are wide-ranging and not always confined to a narrow technical definition of policy.

### **2.3 A Framework for Analysis**

The World Bank documents (World Bank, 1996, 1997) address the issue of universal basic education within an "economics of education" or "economics of human resource development" perspective. The distinguishing feature of this perspective is that outcomes are explained with reference to decision-making behaviour of individuals with respect to their preferences, tastes and values on the one hand, and their constraints on the other. Within the economics of education perspective, the predominant approach, and the one that has informed the existing analytical framework in Pakistan is the "rates of return" approach.

The case for public intervention in education (and particularly basic education) is made on the grounds that the social rates of return on basic education are higher than private rates of return. Left to themselves, privately optimizing individual agents would make socially sub-optimal investments in

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<sup>6</sup> These studies include, inter alia, Alderman, Harold, Shahid Kardar and Peter F. Orazem (1996), Alderman, Harold, Peter F. Ozarem and Elizabeth M. Patemo (1996a, 1996b), Alderman, Kim, Orazem, Spicer, and Thomas (1996), Kardar (1996), Khan and Orazem (1996), and Thomas (1996). For further details see World Bank (1996) and (1997). The background research on which the key World Bank documents on education policy are based will be referred, collectively, here as 'the World Bank studies'.

basic education. The factors that are thought to drive a wedge between social and private rates of return include, inter alia, informational constraints on the benefits of education, credit market imperfections (i.e. people are not able to borrow in order to invest in their children's future earnings), and positive externalities such as induced change in fertility behaviour (i.e. individuals do not properly take into account the second round benefits of their children's education for the community as a whole, and therefore to themselves).

This framework is a useful starting point in the analysis of constraints to universalisation, particularly in a situation such as Pakistan where the problem has not really been addressed within any coherent conceptual framework yet. It is used to good effect in the World Bank studies in order to test some of the commonly held 'received wisdom' about the slow progress of basic education in Pakistan. The limitations of the rates of return framework, particularly questions about its applicability to the transition from low literacy to universal literacy will be discussed in section 2.8 below. For now, some of the important findings reported in the World Bank documents are examined.

### **2.4 Parental Motivation and Demand for Schooling**

Weak demand is often cited as an important factor constraining school participation. A number of factors are thought to put a dampener on demand or parental motivation for primary schooling. Firstly, it is thought that poverty is an important constraint. The cost of schooling can be a deterrent even if the fees in government schools are nominal. There is the opportunity cost of children's time, especially if they could be directly engaged in income-generating activities. Secondly, it might be argued that for girls, parental motivation for schooling is even lower, since remunerative employment opportunities for women are extremely limited, and in any case the benefits of education are likely to accrue to the household into which they are married and not to the household that needs to make the investment in their schooling. Furthermore, social restriction on the mobility of females in public places is likely to be a constraint on the demand for female schooling.

The World Bank (1996) report argues, on the basis of a number of specific studies, that the demand for schooling is high, and that although 'out-of-pocket' expenses of schooling on items such as school uniforms and books can be relatively high (i.e. there are significant cash costs to parents despite low school fees), even poor parents go to considerable lengths to ensure that their children attend school. Furthermore, these surveys indicate that parental motivation for schooling is also quite high for girl children. The evidence for the assertion that parental motivation is high comes from various sources.

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Opinion surveys of parents are one useful source of attitudinal information.<sup>7</sup> The results of opinion polls in the World Bank studies are widely supported by other opinion surveys in various parts of the country in which parents indicate a high degree of willingness to send children to school.

It can be argued that opinion polls are likely to give a biased picture since parents may feel that a negative response to a question about their preferences for their children's schooling might reflect poorly upon themselves. A surer test of attitudes would be revealed behaviour - i.e if parental motivation could somehow be observed in practice. Revealed behaviour can be observed, according to the World Bank studies, in the relatively high participation of even poor households in fee-paying private schools.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of using urban private school participation as a proxy for demand for good quality schooling is innovative and useful. The argument goes that in large urban areas a wide range of schooling services of varying quality and price are located within close geographical proximity. The choice of schooling in urban areas is a clearer reflection of parental motivation since good quality schools are available at a price. The results indicate that there is a strong correlation between parental income and participation in fee-paying private schooling.<sup>9</sup> This is to be expected. It is interesting, however, that even in the poorer half of the households in the survey, private school participation rates were over 50 per cent.

Another strong piece of evidence in favour of high parental demand is the response of parents to 'community' schools in Balochistan, a relatively deprived province. School participation rates for girls in villages where these community schools have been set up have increased phenomenally, approaching 90 per cent, compared to the provincial average of under 20 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, then, there are a number of indications that parental demand for schooling is high, both for boys and for girls. This finding is of critical importance, since it overturns the widely held view that a major factor that constrains the advance of primary education in Pakistan is indifference on the part of parents, particularly those who are themselves illiterate and poor. One significant implication of this finding is that the supply side of schooling, particularly public schooling, needs to bear a much greater

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Kardar (1995), "Demand for Education Among Low and Middle-Income Households in Karachi and Lahore".

<sup>8</sup> Alderman, Kardar and Orazem (1995a), "Parental Willingness to Pay and Costs and Quality of Private and Public Schooling in Lahore".

<sup>9</sup> Table 2.1, p 8, World Bank (1996).

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (1996), p 19.

burden of explanation for low overall participation rates."

While the shift in focus from demand to supply is long overdue and welcome, there is need for some caution in interpreting the evidence from opinion surveys, private school participation, and positive interventions such as the one in Balochistan. In opinion surveys, as argued above, parents are likely to state that they are willing to send their children to school, since to state otherwise might be socially embarrassing. While actual revealed behaviour with respect to private schools in Lahore and Karachi and community schools in Balochistan represents a clearer view of parental demand, it might be argued that these interventions, especially the community schools in Balochistan actually occur in localities and communities where parental motivation is relatively high to begin with."

Another factor that is worth considering in the interpretation of the Balochistan experience is that a fair amount of initial motivational work done amongst parents to convince them to send their daughters to school even before a community school becomes fully operational." Indeed, the role of teachers as motivators is thought to be an important contributor to advancing rural school participation. The issue of motivation might yet be an important one in urban areas of Punjab and Sindh also, where, presumably, private schools are available. Recent survey data indicate, for example, that even in the top income quintile, between 25 to 30 per cent of the boys in the 5-9 age group in these areas were not enrolled.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that for the top income quintile in urban areas neither poverty, nor the physical unavailability of quality schooling can be an adequate explanation for non-participation of this magnitude. The issue of parental motivation and the nature of existing demand, therefore, require further theoretical as well as empirical consideration.

### 2.5 Quality of Supply

If parental motivation or demand for schooling is not as serious a constraint to school participation as had been initially thought, then what accounts for low rates of enrolment and attendance in areas where schools do exist? One line of explanation that has emerged is that the quality of supply of schooling

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<sup>11</sup> This is in line with the findings of surveys of government schools in northern India, also a region of educational backwardness. See, for example, Dreze and Gazdar (1997), and PROBE Team (1999).

<sup>12</sup> A precondition for the setting up of community schools that is strictly adhered to is that 75 per cent of the households in the said village must come together in a community organisation. See Box 5, World Bank (1996).

<sup>13</sup> This is the case not only in the community schools in Balochistan, but also in the case of various NGO interventions all over the country. See case studies in section 3 below.

<sup>14</sup> PIHS 1995-96, Table 2.11.

services is a powerful factor in inducing demand.<sup>15</sup>

The relationship between demand and the quality of supply is fairly straightforward at one level. One of the simplest aspects of 'quality' is that the school should be open. Our own survey of 30 schools in various rural areas in Punjab and Sindh, based on unannounced visits during school hours showed that 12 (or 40 per cent) were closed at the time of visit. Although teacher absenteeism does receive some (though arguably not sufficient) attention in the World Bank studies,<sup>16</sup> there is little systematic data collection or analysis of the issue of schools that remain closed due to teacher absenteeism or some other reason. This issue, as argued in section 3 below, is of critical importance to female schooling in rural areas.

Although schooling quality is the linchpin in the argument that links demand and supply factors, there is little discussion in the existing studies of what matters in schooling quality in Pakistan." The issue of the link between quality and demand has received attention in the study of international experience also (see Hanushek, 1995 and Kremer, 1995, and the literature cited there). Hanushek (1995) argues, for example that the traditional trade-off between investment in quantity and quality may not be straightforward, since better quality schooling might lead to greater utilisation of schools through higher enrolments, and less wastage through lower drop-outs. Hanushek (1995) attempts to identify the aspects of quality that matter most; teachers' qualifications, pupil teacher ratios, use of teaching aids etc. It would be useful to develop a better understanding of which quality issues matter to Pakistani parents in their decision to send their sons and daughters to school along these lines.

In the World Bank studies, the issue of quality has been dealt with mainly with regard to the difference between government and private school performance. A comparison of aptitude tests of pupils in government and private schools showed that after controlling for various factors such as household income and parental education, private school pupils performed better than their government school counterparts." The high prevalence of private schooling indicates that it is not merely restricted

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Dreze and Sen (1995) and Dreze and Gazdar (1997).

<sup>16</sup> One such spot-check in NWFP revealed teacher absenteeism of 20 per cent (Orazem and Patemo 1995, note 8, World Bank, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> There is a rather bland assertion that "parental demand for their children's education is found to be strong, provided that the education satisfies parental perceptions of quality." p 5, World Bank (1996). Further investigation needs to be carried out as to what these quality requirements might be.

<sup>18</sup> Not all factors can be controlled in such estimation. It is possible, for example, that parents who care more about education are the ones who send their children to private school, thus magnifying the perceived advantage of private schooling.

to elite schools, but includes a large number of relatively low cost schools. Although government school teachers are generally better qualified than their private school counterparts, the latter have greater incentive to be present, and to work harder.

### 2.6 Solutions and Prescriptions

The World Bank studies further argue that there is a close correlation between community participation and the quality of schooling. The main evidence cited in support of this contention is the experience of the Community Support Programme in Balochistan, and ethnographic surveys of government schools in the four provinces.

The issue of community participation deserves more careful consideration. Much of the documentation on the record of community participation in Pakistan continues to treat 'the community' as an amorphous and homogenous entity. Sources of difference, inequality, vested interest, conflicts as well as solidarity are widely ignored. In fact, communities are often defined in purely locational terms. Other markers of identity and solidarity such as caste, *biradri*, ethnicity, religious faith and sect, and kinship have been overlooked not only in the World Bank studies but in social policy literature in Pakistan generally. An important weakness of the World Bank studies, for example, is that in their analysis of variation in school performance they do not investigate the factors that enable some communities, and not others, to participate in the monitoring or running of schools.

Another common error is the presumption that positive NGO interventions work mainly because of community participation. Other advantages that NGOs have over the government system, such as small size, dedicated workers, and better management practices are not considered as possible explanatory variables.

Most importantly, there has been little documentation or analysis of the government schooling system itself. Public failure is presumed as being the norm. The underlying assumption is that there are serious managerial constraints in the government system, which are compounded by rent-seeking behaviour on the part of teachers, officials, and political representatives alike. No attempt has been made to develop a clearer understanding of the working of the government schooling system, situations in which it breaks down, and conditions under which it might perform reasonably. The main recommendation for the reform of government schools is the suggestion that parent education committees should be set up for all schools (over 150,000) in Pakistan over a ten-year period. These committees would then perform the task of day-to-day monitoring of the school. It is not clear how, and to what extent, problems of 'political will' that are frequently cited as causes of the failure of the

government schooling system would be overcome in the setting up and the management of these committees. To say that this would occur via the route of community participation is simply to beg the question.

The solutions and policy recommendations of the 1996 World Bank document are based largely upon lessons from positive NGO/private sector achievements in basic education. It is also argued that there is much to be gained from private sector initiatives. In particular, the experience of a girls' urban fellowship programme in Quetta is cited as a possible template for future interventions." The 1997 strategy paper, on the other hand, is more circumspect about the possibility of a dramatic expansion of these experiments.<sup>20</sup>

The 1997 document assesses the feasibility of attaining 'universal elementary education' by the year 2006. Its conclusions are sobering. It finds, on the basis of projections, that the goal of UEE is not attainable by 2006. Furthermore, the goal of universal primary education (UPE) is also likely to be achieved only under the most favourable reform scenario. This would require "improve[ment] in the quality of government schools to meet enrolment targets" p 18. The main constraints, according to the report is not financial, but "institutional capacity, poor governance and the lack of appropriate incentives for management and staff" p 23.

### **2.7 Political Constraints**

The World Bank documents identify political constraints as being the binding ones on a number of occasions. This they do, mostly by default, since neither of the two reports, nor any of the background papers associated with these reports conduct any explicit political economy analysis of the public schooling system in Pakistan. Although the reports make frequent reference to political factors, most of their strategic recommendations view the problems mainly in management or administrative terms.

The absence of any systematic analysis of teacher appointment, school siting, the functioning of the inspection system, the role of the local economic and political elites, and the expedients of provincial and national levels of political management, leaves the issue of political constraint or

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<sup>19</sup> The fellowship scheme which was also extended to certain rural areas of Balochistan involved the distribution of school vouchers to parents in particular localities where no private schools previously existed. These vouchers could be cashed in by private schools in the area. The scheme proved a success, according to a World Bank study, in generating enough effective demand for the creation of new private schools in these areas. NGOs played an important part in the setting up of these schools.

<sup>20</sup> World Bank (1997), p 17.

'political will' to the level of anecdote and assertion. The well-developed and empirically sustained analysis of demand and supply factors, of various models of community participation, and the possibility of private sector initiatives etc. lead to strategic and policy recommendations that are themselves vulnerable to 'political constraints'.

The UN Inter-Agency Mission also identifies political constraints as important ones in expanding educational participation in Pakistan<sup>21</sup>. The understanding of what might be done in order to overcome such constraints is somewhat more developed in the UN report than in the World Bank documents. It is argued here that a bipartisan approach is required which would include political leaders at the national and the provincial levels in order to generate public debate and consensus on this issue. The report goes further still:

"A nationwide campaign be launched with government and political leaders at national and provincial levels taking the lead to expand and improve the quality of formal primary education through mobilizing communities, motivating teachers, improving facilities .... and bringing educational management decision-making to schools/villages and districts." p iv.

The identification of political mobilisation as a key feature in making progress towards universal basic education is an interesting departure from the usual bland assertions that political will is required. The fact that the UN Mission makes the link between local level implementation and the formal political process also indicates the acceptance of the view that mere technical or managerial solutions at the local level are unlikely, by themselves, to have any significant impact.

The arguments in the UN document about questions concerning political constraints, however, like the World Bank reports, are based on an anecdotal understanding of the political economy of the school system at the local and national levels. Once 'political constraints' are identified as key factors in effective policy implementation, it becomes imperative that policy recommendations should explicitly deal with these issues and also attempt to identify the political resources that are required to overcome political constraints.

## **2.8 Limitations of Current Framework**

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<sup>21</sup> For instance: "The Mission heard many anecdotes of primary school buildings constructed away from where most of the pupils lived, the school house being used as a warehouse for the local politician, people who were barely literate appointed as teachers, and teachers receiving salary without ever attending school." p 43, United Nations (1995).



There is another, more fundamental, sense in which the issue of political constraints and political resources might be approached with respect to the problem of universal basic education in Pakistan. It was mentioned in section 2.1 above that the influential framework in economics for dealing with basic education, or any level of education for that matter, is the 'rates of return' paradigm. The rationale for public concern with basic education ought to be the gap between social and private returns to education. In particular, it has been argued that female education may have relatively low private returns, but high social returns. Left to the market, parents are likely to under-invest in their children's education in general, and in that of girl children in particular.

This basic framework of the conventional 'economics of education' is, admittedly, an abstraction. Many other issues are involved in education other than human capital enhancement and economic returns. Likewise, for a government or any other public entity, there might be many reasons for promoting universal literacy other than correcting for market distortion. While the rates of return framework has proven to be a useful way of understanding some issues in resource allocation, there are important limitations which render this framework inadequate for an understanding the issue of literacy expansion in an illiterate society.

### Literacy as social norm

Three sets of inter-related objections stand out in particular. Firstly, it has been observed that the decision to go to school (or to send a child to school) is taken very differently in societies with mass literacy from those without. Among the former, for instance, the decision to send a child to school is not regarded by parents (or children) as a matter of choice or deliberation. Learning basic literacy and numeracy acquires the status of a social norm.<sup>22</sup> In such societies, deliberation, if any, is required for the decision not to go to school. Recent research in various regions of South Asia has indicated that the same might be true of particular groups or communities even in societies that are otherwise largely illiterate.<sup>23</sup>

This broader view of basic education as a societal or community norm, rather than a matter of incremental investment in human capital, allows the consideration of a number of related issues. Social

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<sup>22</sup> The Indian state of Kerala provides an interesting illustration of this phenomenon. When in an opinion survey about the willingness of parents to send children to school, Kerala mothers were asked for their reasons for sending their children to school, many of them simply responded that the child reached school-going age. (Personal communication, Nidhi Medhora).

<sup>23</sup> Caste-based communities in various parts of India, for example, display this trait. On the strength of caste-based historical patterns in school participation of two different parts of India, see Dreze and Gazdar (1997), and Sengputa and Gazdar (1997).

norms might be costly to establish (in terms of financial and political resources) but, being self-enforcing, are maintained at low cost. It is clear in the case of basic education in Pakistan that though the supply side appears to be the main constraint, there would be some initial cost to motivate people to begin with. The issue of monitoring the school and of organising collective or community action to ensure its proper functioning is likely to be much less costly in a community where the expectation that children ought to be educated is universally held.

### Changes in agency and preferences

Secondly, getting educated also involves change in both the agency as well as preferences of individuals. An important feature of the rates of return approach to the economics of education is that it abstracts from these issues and focuses exclusively on economic gains from education. While such abstraction might be quite useful in determining allocative efficiency on the margin, it is ill-equipped for developing an understanding of the transition from illiteracy to literacy. In a largely illiterate society like Pakistan the effects of education on both individuals and society can be quite dramatic. From the point of view of individuals, acquiring education is generally tied up with notions of social mobility, such as being 'cultured'. For a collective it might involve the promotion of 'shared' social values, and the establishment of cohesive social norms, such as the use of a standardized language or script<sup>24</sup> For both individuals and collectives, the importance of education as a way of acquiring agency can also not be ignored.

### Political Economy of Universalisation

Finally, the political economy of universalisation looks quite different when the problem is seen in terms of a societal transition rather than in those of human capital investment. If the issue at stake were mainly that of sub-optimal investment, then the main constituency for primary education would be the benevolent planner. Much of the recent strategic thinking on the issue is, implicitly directed to such a planner.

If the planner or planning authorities, in this case the federal and provincial governments, routinely fail to make the necessary investment of financial and administrative resources, the problem becomes one of government failure. In whose interest is it to correct this failure? It might be argued

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<sup>24</sup> Both the 'cultured' and 'shared' are placed in quotation marks deliberately. Normative notions of what it is to be cultured are not being endorsed here, and neither is it being argued that the social norm promoted by any collective is necessarily democratic or participatory. The main point here is that socialisation is an important, perhaps the important, factor in going from illiteracy to literacy, both for individuals and collectives.

## **Policy Failure, Political Constraints and Political Resources**

that those who are adversely affected by the failure of government schooling have the most at stake. But the sub-optimality of investment on the part of private individuals is where the problem began in the first place - i.e. left to themselves individuals would tend to under-invest financial (as well as political) resources in basic education. The same is likely to be true of other groups, such as the business community' that are likely to benefit proportionately more from efficient levels of investment and the higher economic growth rates that would follow.

If education were regarded as an issue of both social mobility for individuals and societal transition for the collective, the factors that might promote universalisation are likely to be more varied. Historical experience suggests that the issue of societal transition in particular has been a potent source of change in comparable situations elsewhere. The universalisation of basic education has also figured widely as a key component of 'nation-building' in a number of decolonised societies." The very principle of universalisation has been a key instrument for the creation of a 'citizenry' out of otherwise disparate groups and communities. In most of these instances the universalisation of basic education has been pursued as an explicit political objective, and as a way of engendering a polity.

This view of universalisation poses a number of interesting questions for Pakistan. There are, of course, important historical questions about factors that have hindered development towards universalism. A comparison with other countries is likely to provide some insights into this. Another important consideration is the role of the formal political process as well as the role of political mobilisation. In the prescriptive literature on education policy and strategy, the formal political process is seen mostly as a hindrance to good management. Governments lack the 'political will' to make prescribed changes, and 'politics' in general, especially at the local level, are seen as constraints. The view of universalisation as a political objective, and the potentially positive contribution of political mobilisation to the goal of mass literacy has been largely ignored. These issues require serious consideration for a better understanding of the constraints on and the potential for universal basic education.

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<sup>25</sup> Examples from other parts of Asia can be quite instructive. Nearly every country in East, South-east and West Asia underwent this transition in the early years of decolonisation. South Asia, and Pakistan in particular, stands out as the exception.

### 3 Results of a Survey

#### 3.1 Objectives and Method

This section is based largely on field work and consultations with people connected with schools and schooling between March and July 1997. Unannounced visits were made to over 30 government schools in various rural areas (Sargodha, Malir, Thatta and Khairpur). Besides brief inspections of the schooling infrastructure, interviews were conducted with teachers as well as other members of the community. In some cases enrolment and attendance records were checked against actual attendance on the day of the visit. In addition to government schools, information was also collected on private schools in the areas surveyed. Only one village in the sample had a functioning private school. In the towns and cities served by these villages, however, there was a large number of private schools. Information on the activities of these schools was gathered on the basis of visits and interviews with local people. Further, consultations were held with knowledgeable and experienced individuals, including teachers, officials, NGO activists, and educational planners both on a one-to-one basis, as well as in larger 'brainstorming' sessions.

The main aim of these field visits and consultations was fact-finding and to gain a clearer initial idea about questions and hypotheses for subsequent, more detailed and systematic data collection. The investigations revolved around three themes in particular. Firstly, there is now plenty of evidence from secondary data on the poor performance of government schools, particularly in rural areas. Evidence from these secondary sources is widely supported by anecdotal accounts of the abuse of the schooling system, but there are few spot-checks or surveys based upon unannounced visits that provide any clearer ideas about the extent, let alone the anatomy, of failure. One aim of these initial surveys was to identify patterns in the performance of government schools, gain some insights into the existing formal system of monitoring and accountability, and to document, if possible, the nature of other governance-related problems in the running of public schools.

Secondly, although the issue of parental motivation is better documented than that of government school performance, as indicated in section 2.4 above, there are nevertheless some important gaps. It was anticipated that by observing the functioning of schools, both in the government as well as in the non-governmental sector, and also by consultation and interview, clearer hypotheses on the issue of school quality and parental motivation might emerge. The issues concerning female schooling in rural areas were considered to be particularly important in this regard.

Thirdly, non-governmental organisation (NGO) and community-based organisation (CBO)

interventions in education have mushroomed over the last few years.<sup>26</sup> There are notable success stories in this sector. Many of the strategies for education now routinely include a prominent role for NGOs. Despite the growing influence of NGO interventions, particularly in the area of non-formal schooling, analyses of these interventions are few and far between. One aim of the initial surveys was to document selected NGO interventions with a view to developing a framework for more systematic analysis. NGO and non-formal education initiatives were visited in five separate areas (MMBMT in Mianwali, Khwendo Kor in Malakand, SPO in Nowshehra, NGORC in Khairpur, and SGA in Malir).

### **3.2 Surveyed Areas and the Survey**

In all, over thirty government schools were visited in rural areas in one district in Punjab (Sargodha) and three districts in Sindh (Thatta, Malir, and Khairpur). All visits were unannounced and teachers and other functionaries had no prior intimation. In addition to these areas, another district in Punjab (Mianwali), and two districts in NWFP (Malakand and Nowshehra) were also visited. Although no survey of government schools was carried out in these areas, information relating to the government schooling system was collected from local informants.

In Sargodha and in Thatta, the survey was facilitated by knowledgeable local individuals, and in Malir and Khairpur initial contact was made through NGOs working in the respective areas. The sample of schools was not random. In Thatta the strategy adopted was to visit all schools within a 10 kilometre range around Mirpur Sakro town. In Sargodha, schools were selected over a wider area covering a range of some 40 kilometres. The strategy adopted here was to chart a route which included both main roads and smaller link roads, and to visit all schools along that route. In Malir, Khairpur, Mianwali, Malakand and Nowshehra, the main purpose of the visits was to observe NGO/CBO interventions. Government schools were also visited in the localities where such interventions had been made, as well as in some of their neighbouring localities.

It can be seen from the outset, that the data collected are not representative in any statistical sense. The collection of statistical data was not, in any case, an objective of this exercise. As mentioned above, the main purpose was to do some fact-finding that might prove useful in the planning of more detailed surveys. As such the emphasis was more on observing consistent patterns, and on getting qualitative information from a variety of sources. Although some summary statistics are presented in the discussion that follows, they are meant to be more illustrative than representative.

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<sup>26</sup> Both NGOs and CBOs are voluntary sector organisations. A CBO is generally a membership-based developmental organisation at the village or locality level. The term NGO has come to be associated with larger organisations with sector-specific focus and capacity, often with local CBO affiliates.

### Local economy, society and politics

It is useful to begin with a brief description of some of the areas visited, particularly some of the salient features in the economy, politics and society. These factors, it will be argued, have an important influence on the functioning of government schools, and indeed, on community and collective action.

### Sargodha

Sargodha district, and particularly the area visited for the survey, is a relatively prosperous agricultural area. While a large proportion of people do not own agricultural land, the ownership of dwellings is fairly widespread. Nearly all settlements are served by metalled roads, and much of the road building has been carried out in the last 10 to 15 years. In general, it is true that much of the infrastructural development in all of the districts in the survey is of relatively recent origin. The period from the mid-1980s onwards, in particular, has seen a great deal of new infrastructure.

Although landlordism of the type that exists over much of Sindh and southern Punjab is not present in Sargodha, there are, nevertheless, significant inequalities in land ownership. There are also important social inequities along the lines of caste and biradri.<sup>27</sup> While 'canal colony' villages predominate in these areas, and these settlements are usually quite large - i.e. generally with up to 500 households or more<sup>28</sup> - there are also many 'deras' or smaller settlements of under 50 houses that have emerged over the decades. The deras developed as farmers set up homesteads away from the main settlement and close to their fields. Many deras also now have government schools, though these schools are generally smaller, and served by two teachers only.

### Thatta

The Mirpur Sakro area of Thatta is around a 100 km from Karachi. The agrarian economy is strong, and parts of the local economy are well-integrated with the Karachi markets. Among other things, dairy, fish and vegetable farming for the city market are profitable activities. There is growing, but hitherto relatively little, integration in the urban labour market. Access to the produce market is often mediated by middlemen who are also important sources of credit. Despite proximity to Karachi,

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<sup>27</sup> Biradri, literally 'brotherhood', refers to well-knit kinship groups which are usually endogamous.

<sup>28</sup> Canal colonies were established from 1880s onwards in Punjab in order to settle farming communities on newly-irrigated state land in the province.

areas around Mirpur Sakro are undeveloped in terms of infrastructure, and have relatively low private incomes (say compared with Sargodha).<sup>29</sup> Most of the villages have no electricity, and many are located far away (as far as 25-30 km away) from any metalled road. The village furthest from the road in our sample was around 10 kilometres away. Settlements are generally scattered, and the issue of physical access is an important one here.

Many of the settlements are single-caste communities. Although land ownership can be quite skewed (say compared to Sargodha, or example), the area is not dominated by large monopolistic landlords. There are, nevertheless, some settlements where most families are landless, and work as tenants for a single landowner. Due to proximity to Karachi, many of the large holdings are owned by absentee landlords, some of whom maintain landed property as a tax break.<sup>30</sup> In such villages, the population is vulnerable to changing demands of landlords. In one case, for example, enrolments in a government school dropped dramatically after the population of the village halved, as a number of tenant families were evicted and found tenancies elsewhere. Proximity to Karachi, therefore, also has disadvantages to the local economy.

Another feature of Mirpur Sakro's local conditions is worth noting. Unlike most other parts of Sindh and Punjab, due to proximity to the sea, the soil in Mirpur Sakro is not suitable for mud construction. As a result, most of the low-cost construction uses reed and thatch as the basic building materials, which are less robust than the low-cost alternative available in other rural areas. *Pukka* buildings are usually constructed with concrete." The school building (or any other government regulation construction such as a health centre), is often the only *pukka* building in a village, and the value of the building to local residents is an important factor in the siting of schools.

### Malir

While parts of the Malir district can be regarded for all intents and purposes as suburbs of the Karachi metropolis there are also remote rural areas in the district that include villages and agrarian communities. The areas surveyed were, to all intents and purposes (including administrative ones), rural. Although there is now growing reliance on employment in Karachi, agriculture and horticulture continue to be important activities. Some of the other problems associated with more typical rural

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<sup>29</sup> The daily wage rate for casual labourers is around 60 rupees in Mirpur Sakro, compared with around 100 rupees in Sargodha (author's survey).

<sup>30</sup> There is no tax on agricultural incomes in Pakistan.

<sup>31</sup> Buildings made out of more durable materials such as bricks and concrete are known as *pukka* buildings.

communities are also present over large parts of Malir. In particular, parts of the district are still fairly remote with irregular public transport, and at distances of up to 40 kilometres from the main road. One of the most noteworthy features about Malir is that it has been a site of bitter political conflict along ethnic lines over the last ten years or so. This conflict has sharpened the sense of community among the ethnic Sindhi residents, who form the bulk of the rural population.

### Khairpur

Finally, Khairpur is a relatively prosperous agricultural district in upper Sindh. Unlike areas to its west and south, this district has a relatively low concentration of land ownership. Wages are somewhat lower than Sargodha, but are higher than Thatta.<sup>32</sup> The district was formerly a 'native state' ruled by the descendants of Sindh's last pre-colonial rulers, the Talpur Mirs. Many of the early initiatives in schooling and infrastructural development are popularly ascribed to the Mir government. The former rulers retain political as well as religious influence in the region. The long period of the Khairpur State (spanning about a century till it was merged with Sindh province in 1955) has engendered a feeling of distinctiveness and a sense of community in the region.

### **3.3 Spot-Check of Government Schools**

#### 'Ghost' schools and closed schools

In all, some thirty schools were visited in various areas. Most of the schools were primary schools, though some High and Middle schools that had primary sections were also visited. Two of the schools were 'ghost' schools in the sense that school buildings had been constructed but the school had not been taken over by the provincial education department. Both these were girls schools, one in Sargodha and the other in Thatta, and one of them (the former) was being used as a cattle shed.<sup>33</sup> These are schools that never open.

Out of the thirty schools there were twelve in all (including the two 'ghost' schools) that were closed (Table 3). The most common reason for the school not opening on the day of the visit was the absence of the teacher/s. In two of the Thatta villages schools had closed because large numbers of

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<sup>32</sup> Casual daily wage rates were around 80 rupees here compared with around 100 in Sargodha, and around 60 in Thatta.

<sup>33</sup> Any survey of schools in Pakistan (and northern India) appears incomplete unless there is at least one school that is being used as a cattle-shed. See Dreze and Gazdar (1997) for findings of a similar survey in Uttar Pradesh in India.



families had gone to Karachi to welcome home returning local Hajis (pilgrims to Muslim Holy Lands). The issue of teacher absenteeism, particularly in schools where there are just one or two teachers to begin with, has been identified as a key problem in the schooling system. Our survey bears this out.

There were interesting patterns and contrasts in the likelihood of a school being open (Table 3). The most glaring issue is that of girls' schools. Out of the nine girls schools visited, only three were found to have been open. Additionally, it was a common complaint that these schools remained closed as a matter of routine, and that teachers only came once or twice a month as a formality. This issue is discussed in greater detail in section 3.5 below.

Another important pattern that was observed was that schools that were closer to metalled roads were more likely to be open than those in remote locations. Likewise, all the middle and high schools in the sample were actually open. These findings are consistent with popular perceptions about the way different types of schools function. There are three possible explanations. Firstly, remote schools are harder to reach, both for teachers and for inspectors. In fact, inspectors if they do make school visits, tend to stick to the main roads. Secondly, in the government schooling system, primary and secondary teachers have very different qualifications, backgrounds, and recruitment procedures. This difference is hierarchical and might make collusion between teachers from different streams less easy. Thirdly, remote settlements tend to be smaller in size, and are therefore entitled to smaller government schools. The absence of a teacher in a single-teacher school would lead to closure. One factor that was cited by a number of respondents as a determinant of school quality was school size. It was also generally considered that when there was a larger number of teachers, it was more difficult for them all to collude and shirk.

There were also regional variations in the incidence of schools being open. Thatta in particular appeared to do quite badly. Thatta was also the poorest district in terms of private incomes as well as infrastructure. A large number of sample schools in this district were in remote villages. Moreover, although it is not typically a landlord-dominated area, the influence of landlords was stronger here than in Sargodha, Khairpur or Malir. Our survey was too small to provide any reasonable answers to questions about these issues. These are matters for further investigation and consideration.

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure in the survey schools was generally of poor quality. Many of the schools, especially the ones in smaller settlements, consisted of two rooms only. In effect there was a great deal of multi-grade teaching, both because of teacher shortage as well as due to the shortage of space.

Classrooms were completely unfurnished in Sargodha, except for a chair for the teacher, while every school in Sindh had at least some benches and desks for children. There were numerous complaints about the low quality of the construction work. In many instances schools had been wired but no electric supply had been connected. Very few schools had drinking water, and only one had a functioning latrine. The conditions of the girls' schools was particularly bad. In many cases these schools did not have boundary walls, which many respondents considered necessary in order to observe 'modesty'.

There were a number of instances of schools swapping premises or using the premises of other schools. In one village in Thatta, for example, where a girls' school had been built, but remained closed due to the absence of teachers, the boys school which had been housed in a dilapidated building had informally taken over the girls' school building. In another village a 'mosque' school building had been taken over in a similar manner.<sup>34</sup> In Sargodha there was an instance of two boys' schools sharing one premises because, although a new school house had been sanctioned, it had not been finished.

There were sufficient school buildings in most areas in the survey. In some villages, in fact, there are too many buildings. One village in Khairpur, for example, had four different types of school buildings, of which two were in use - this in a village with less than 50 families.<sup>35</sup> In another village in Thatta there were three different new and furnished schools, acquired under various schemes, while the neighbouring village had only one very old school house that was falling apart. In Sargodha also, there was evidence of a massive school building programme, particularly in the last 15 years, with the active support of a local politician.

The main problem with the schooling infrastructure is the quality of the construction and the lack of any regular maintenance. The experience of one exceptional school was quite illustrative. The best school in the survey in terms of infrastructure was a boys' primary school in Malir. Here the old buildings had been kept in good repair, and considerable effort had been undertaken in order to maintain

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<sup>34</sup> The 'mosque' schools present an interesting case of cascading policy failure. These grade 1-3 schools were first introduced as low cost, non-formal schools, to be held in the mosque premises. The local imams (priests) were appointed to run the mosque schools but on a much lower salary scale than qualified and properly appointed teachers. It was thought that the government will save resources on school buildings as well as teachers' salaries, since mosques and imams were thought to be present in any case. It was soon discovered that the imams accepted their low status appointments only grudgingly and refused to take any interest in teaching. This realisation led to the appointment of 'proper' teachers in mosque schools. It was also discovered that many villages did not actually have mosque buildings where classes could be held. In these areas separate mosque-school buildings were constructed, that were little different from ordinary school buildings. In many villages, therefore, mosque schools are exactly like other primary school with the exception that they go up to grade 3 instead of grade 5.

<sup>35</sup> These schools had been built as, respectively, girls' "community model" school, boys' primary, girls' primary, and an Igra school. The latter two were not in use.

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*the facilities* A local CBO was closely involved with this school, and provided material support as well as vigilance over the activities of the teachers.

### Teachers and pupils

Even in the schools that were open, it was found that 30 per cent of the teachers were absent. The total rate of absenteeism, i.e. including the teachers of closed schools who were also absent, would take the rate of absenteeism considerably higher. In most schools that were open, there was active teaching in progress at the time of the visit. There were some schools where the teachers were mainly engaged in keeping an eye on the children, and were either not able to (perhaps because of multi-grade teaching) or not willing to teach. These, however, were in a small minority.

In some of the schools it was possible to check the enrolment and attendance registers against the actual attendance on the day. On this score there was a great deal of variation. In the six schools where this exercise was carried out, the average rate of attendance was slightly above 50 per cent -- i.e. just over half the children enrolled were present on the day of the survey. The ratio varied from just over 10 per cent in a girls' school in Khairpur, to over 80 per cent in a boys' primary school in Thatta.

Overall, the situation in government schools was quite dismal. While there were several instances where teachers were obviously incompetent<sup>36</sup>, the general problem appears to be one of indifference. This problem is discussed further in section 3.4 below. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that during the course of the surveys there were also many teachers who were exceptionally dedicated to their work. This became all the more apparent as the adverse conditions under which these teachers worked became clearer.

One issue of further investigation is that of the quality of schooling, and what differentiates 'good' teachers from the bad' ones. This issue is of prime importance, given the understanding (as explained in section 2.5 above) that the quality of supply is an essential factor in determining demand. These questions will be addressed in more detail in work to follow, but some tentative observations are offered here. It is obvious that one clear difference in Pakistan, between good and bad teachers is that the latter do not turn up for work.

At another level, however, what appeared to stand out as a distinguishing feature of good

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<sup>36</sup> It was shocking, for example, to find at least two teachers, one in Sargodha and one in Thatta, *who* were clearly suffering from mental impairment. These, it might be added, were extreme cases.

teachers was not only that they were present at the school, but that they displayed a level of commitment to their job, to the children, or to the community. Some of them were also motivated by 'higher' ideals such as 'teaching good values' to the pupils<sup>37</sup> If this observation is sustained, there are two interesting implications. Firstly, although teacher training and qualifications are important, the more important prior problem is to select the right individuals. Secondly, better systems of monitoring and accountability are desperately required and are likely to improve the situation a great deal, but might still fall short of what is required if the values of people entering the profession do not match those consistent with the provision of pastoral care.

### School calendar

Much of the field work was carried out in April and May. The school year in most parts of Punjab and Sindh begins in early April, and then schools break for summer holidays between the end of May and the middle of June. In most of these areas the wheat crop is harvested in late April or early May. This is an unusually busy time in the agricultural calendar, and is a time when families of farmers as well as farm labourers withdraw children from school either to work in the harvest, or to take care of younger siblings while the parents work. Some families also migrate during the harvest season in search for work. According to teachers as well as other informants, school attendance is somewhat sparse before the summer vacations. Schools then re-open in August and carry on till March, which is the end of the academic year. It is possible that the timing of the surveys had something to do with the low observed levels of teacher and pupil attendance. The long-running mismatch between the agricultural and the school calendars is somewhat surprising, given that it has the effect of shortening the length of the school year.

### **3.4 Teachers and School Administration**

The issue of teachers' appointments and their monitoring has been identified in a number of studies as a key constraint to the effective functioning of the education system. There is wide agreement among a variety of sources that most, if not all, teacher appointments at the primary level are done not on the basis of merit, but at least partly on the basis of connections, political influence or outright bribery. In

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<sup>37</sup> There is a strong element of pastoral care in the services that a teacher provides. The extent to which this quality can be realistically thought of as a marketable commodity is not clear.

<sup>38</sup> The popularity of private schooling in most urban areas suggests that the issue of quality may not be a complex one. In other words, factors that matter to parents in schooling quality are easy to observe and monitor. Private schools, however, respond to existing demand, and do not see their role as motivators of demand. The role of teachers as motivators may yet be important in public schooling.

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the course of the field work as well as during other consultations, this issue came up time and again. It is useful, therefore, to document what the formal system of recruiting teachers is, and the extent to which this is violated.

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Another issue is that of monitoring. Once teachers are hired, even if the criterion is not merit, their performance might be kept within reasonable bounds if an effective system of monitoring were in place. There is a formal system of monitoring through school inspections. The dismal conditions in government schools in the areas visited are testimony to the fact that the monitoring system does not work. There are cases, however, where it might be working better than others. It is worth asking, for example, why larger schools, middle and high schools, and schools located close to main roads appear to function somewhat better than smaller and more remote primary schools. Perhaps the most important question in this regard is the difference in the functioning of boys' and girls' schools.

Finally, monitoring is not very useful if there is no accountability at the end of the process. Inspectors do have some power to impose penalties, such as docking a teacher's pay if found to have been absent without leave (this penalty is available, at least in Sindh), transferring a teacher to an undesirable location, and in extreme cases, recommending the closure of a school or the de-sanctioning of teaching posts if enrolment criteria are consistently violated. The impression, however, that a teacher's job is secure for life is fairly widespread. Strictly speaking, however, though the process of firing a teacher might be somewhat long-winded, there is nothing in the law that prevents the education department from terminating a primary school teacher's services." Factors that have considerably weakened monitoring and accountability need to be identified.

### The system

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The structure of the provincial education departments is centralized and hierarchical. There are some inter-provincial variations, but broadly speaking the systems in Punjab and Sindh are very similar, with minor differences such as those in the designated job titles of various functionaries. At the top there is the Education Secretary in the provincial capital. At the divisional level the departmental hierarchy is known as 'directorate' in Punjab, and below the directorate, at the district level, there are district education officers (DEOs). These are assisted by assistant education officers (AEOs), and below them are the supervisors and promoters.

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<sup>39</sup> This was confirmed for Sindh by a former Minister of Education, who had personally initiated the sacking of a number of teachers. Many of these were subsequently reinstated when the Minister of Education changed.

There has been steady progress towards specialisation in the functions of various offices both in terms of the level of education they are concerned with, and also according to gender. At the province level, separate secretariats for primary education have been established or are in the process of being established. A further ongoing change is the replacement of 'primary' with 'elementary' education, which includes middle grades -- i.e. up to grade 8. At the division and district levels there are separate offices dealing with boys' and girls' schools.

Decision-making is largely concentrated at the provincial level, and the job of the directorates and the district offices is to implement these directives and policies, and to report back to the top. At an operational level, the main locus of activity is the district.

An extremely important, perhaps the most important, discontinuity in the hierarchy of the educational system is that between primary school teachers and secondary school teachers. This distinction is reflective of similar hierarchical structures elsewhere in the public employment (in the civil service, police, as well as the military). Primary school teachers are appointed at the district level, and the formal qualification for entry is matriculation (secondary school). In addition teachers must undergo a few months further training and obtain a Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC). In many instances the PTC is actually obtained after appointment <sup>40</sup>

The appointment of primary teachers was, formerly, the responsibility of the DEO. Over the years, however, these appointments have become 'politicised' in the sense that local members of National and Provincial Assemblies (MNAs and MPAs) exert a great deal of influence on teacher appointments. The DEOs discretionary power has been replaced in recent years by an appointment committee consisting of officials and 'notables' in a district, but in practice, the DEO and, above him or her, the political representatives remain in control.

Secondary school teachers, on the other hand, are graduates who then have to take further teacher training courses at the university (or college) levels. Their appointments are decided at the provincial level, formally through the public service commissions. Although these teachers might be working shoulder to shoulder with primary teachers in the very same school, their career paths are entirely different. Political considerations and connections are still important in securing appointments at the secondary level -- as they are, indeed, for any level of public sector appointment in Pakistan. There are some important differences, however, from the situation of primary teachers. Firstly, since

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<sup>40</sup> According to a former university head of department responsible for teacher training, over 80 per cent of the department's intake of students consisted of teachers who had been appointed and were getting trained subsequently for confirmation of posts and for salary increments.

hiring and firing decisions are taken at the provincial (rather than the district) level, greater clout is required to influence these decisions. Secondly, the formal pre-requisites are considerably more demanding.

The educational establishment, particularly at the district and the divisional levels is entirely run by people who have entered the system as secondary school teachers. A secondary school teacher with the requisite years of experience, qualifications and the right connections can become a head-teacher and then enter the administrative machinery, as an AEO or DEO, and can progress upwards to the directorate at the division, and even to the department at the provincial level.

Primary school teachers are answerable to people from the secondary teacher cadre at various levels. Firstly, of course, the AEOs and DEOs who, formally speaking, have ultimate responsibility for primary schools and primary school teachers belong to that cadre. Secondly, secondary level teachers at middle schools are placed higher in the professional hierarchy than primary section teachers in the same school. The head-teacher is invariably a qualified secondary teacher. Thirdly, clusters of 8 to 10 primary schools in rural areas are placed under the overall supervision of a local middle or secondary school head-teacher. He or she is supposed to be their first port of call for any matters relating to administration.

The wide gap in terms of the conditions of employment, educational qualifications and career paths, between primary and secondary school teachers is an important feature of the schooling system. It appears strange that teachers who are required to teach and to take care of the most vulnerable children whose participation in school is likely to be quite fragile, are at the bottom of the educational hierarchy.

Another administrative differentiation between teachers that appears to be contrary to the demands of the situation is the salary differential between teachers posted in rural and urban areas. Postings in urban or peri-urban areas, particularly those for female teachers are, generally speaking, more sought after than rural postings. In the case of female teachers there is in fact a serious problem of finding women willing to work in remote villages. In many cases there are no qualified women within these villages who could teach. It is surprising then, that teachers in urban and peri-urban areas receive a 'big city' allowance over and above their salaries.

Village teachers generally complained about a lack of cooperation from the administration. Many of them cited cases of supervisors and other officials demanding bribes for routine functions such as the release of salary payments. Another common complaint was that supervisors often passed on

their duties to the village teacher. In Sargodha, for instance, where the education department had issued orders for an enumeration of children of school-going age, this task was left to the teachers, whereas it fell within the remit of the supervisor's responsibilities. The idea that teachers, particularly primary teachers, get badly treated by the schooling establishment was widespread among teachers.

Finally, a further operational distinction in the school system, and one which has become sharper progressively, is the bifurcation of girls' and boys' school administration. There are now separate directorates and district offices for boys' and girls' schools. The hierarchy between primary and secondary teachers is symmetrical in these gender-based structures. The rationale for this bifurcation is that this would allow greater attention, more specialised expertise and capacity, and a clearer direction of resources towards female education. The results of the survey above confirm the general impression, however, that girls' schools are managed much more poorly than boys' schools. The issues in female schooling and in the running of girls' schools are discussed in greater detail in section 3.5 below. It is argued there that the gender-wise bifurcation might have been counter-productive in some important ways. Before turning to the specific problems of female schooling, however, it is useful to review the way the system in general actually functions in terms of monitoring and accountability.

#### Appointments, monitoring and accountability

There is a close relationship between non-merit appointments and subsequent problems with monitoring and accountability. A teacher who is appointed on the basis of political or personal connections with the DEO or the local NINA or MPA, or indeed, some other influential person, is not only a problem in the sense that he or she may not be the best person for the job. It is quite likely that such teachers who have some political clout are difficult to hold accountable and sanction. Another serious adverse effect of such teachers in the system is that they undermine the morale of other teachers who might have been recruited on the basis of merit. The impact of an arbitrary teacher appointment, goes beyond the performance of that individual teacher, and affects the entire system adversely.

The inspection system is the formal mechanism for monitoring the performance of government schools and for enforcing accountability. The poor state of government schools indicates that as a system of accountability it is clearly failing. For a start, there is a widespread impression that government teachers cannot be sacked. This, as was found, is not due to any legal restrictions as such, but to factors such as the influence of teaching unions and other political considerations <sup>41</sup> Even if the power to sack teachers is not available, the administration can impose other penalties. One sanction that

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<sup>41</sup> The issue of union power is discussed further below.



is available is to transfer of a teacher. Another one is the de-sanctioning of a teaching position, if enrolment rates fall below a certain level.

There is some evidence, in fact, that the inspection system is not entirely toothless. The generally better performance of schools closer to the main roads was commonly ascribed to their higher visibility. Inspectors do turn up from time to time, and might take action if they find teachers absent without leave, or other irregularities. Teachers often complained that inspectors are interested merely in harassing them and extracting bribes on one pretext or the other. Whatever the motivation of these inspectors, however, it is likely that schools that do expect an inspector's visit are better attended.

Despite its glaring problems, the pressure that the inspection system might exert on teachers is further illustrated by another comparison. Girls' schools are rarely inspected. In fact, it is widely believed that in these schools there are clear understandings between teachers and inspectors, often helped along by the payment of bribes, that adverse reports will not be filed. The fact that the plight of these schools is common knowledge also indicates that the administration in general turns a blind eye to them. This was as good as admitted by several officials who appeared to believe that, given the problems of female mobility, it was quite understandable if women teachers drew their salaries while staying at home.

#### Deterioration in standards

There is a consensus of opinion among parents, teachers, educational experts as well as other knowledgeable persons that the quality of the government schooling system has deteriorated over time. Non-merit based appointments, corruption in the award of contracts for construction and supplies, and the decline in the standards of government school performance have been widely commented upon. It can be argued, with some justification, that the decline in the standards of governance in the educational system is merely symptomatic of the general decline of standards in public service and public life across the board. Some thoughts on the possible causes of decline are offered here.

The issue of teacher appointments is key to a range of factors associated with poor school performance. The formal power to appoint primary school teachers has rested with the DEO. This has been the case for many years until recently, when a committee chaired by the DEO has been given the power to appoint teachers.<sup>42</sup> It is worth asking, what might account for the increase in corruption over the years.

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<sup>42</sup> Teaching posts, however, are sanctioned at the provincial level.

A number of informants identified the politicisation of teacher appointments as an important cause of decline in standards. It is possible, that with the entry of MNAs and MPAs as local power brokers in the mid-1980s, the situation changed qualitatively. Although before this period the DEO enjoyed discretionary (and rent-earning) powers, his or her political influence and power was much smaller than that wielded, subsequently, by the local MPA or MNA. There was, therefore, a greater possibility of local checks on the DEO's abuse of discretionary powers. The cause of the deterioration, according to this line of reasoning, then, is not discretionary power as such, but the level at which this power is exercised. If, for example, discretionary power rests at the level of elected local government, there might be greater accountability even within the existing system.

For there to be rents in appointing teachers, there must be excess demand for these teaching posts. One aspect of this excess demand is straightforward to document. Starting salaries of government primary school teachers were in the range of 2,500 rupees per month. Salaries of teachers in private schools in the same areas ranged between 500 to 800 rupees. Government jobs are, clearly, at a premium. There are also reasons to believe that the supply of potential school teachers might have increased over the years. It is quite remarkable, for instance, that the formal pre-requisites for the appointment of primary school teachers have not changed significantly over the last 50 years<sup>43</sup> This is in spite of the fact that whereas then, the pool of people in rural areas who had completed secondary school was relatively small, now that pool has expanded considerably.

Another period that was identified by a number of informants as marking the setting in of decline in standards, is the early 1970s, when teachers' unions started assuming greater power. Unions were criticized by officials in the educational administration as hindering proper accountability by protecting their members, including errant ones. Unions are also widely regarded as a key obstacle to reform in the educational sector. The issue of union power needs to be seen, however, within the wider context of other organised vested interests, including the administration, the political parties and other groupings.

The hierarchical structure of the educational administration is likely to foster resentment and mutual suspicion, rather than harmonious employee relations. Given the arbitrary powers exercised by various other interest groups, the emergence of strong unions is not altogether surprising. It is tempting to posit each of these groupings, particularly the unions as coalitions that are designed to thwart public

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<sup>43</sup> In the 1950s, for instance, primary teachers were required to be matriculates. Middle-pass (grade 8) candidates were admitted in exceptional circumstances in areas of short supply.

accountability. A more nuanced reading of the situation is that these groupings, particularly the unions, are not organised primarily with the aim of protecting their members against public or community sanction, but to redress the power of other vested interests such as the administration. The effective (though not necessarily intended) end-result is the weakening of public accountability due to protection afforded to individual members.

Finally, the deterioration in standards has been blamed, at least partly, on the large expansion in the school building programme, particularly since the mid-1980s. There is some merit in this argument. The growth in the number of schools might have compromised quality by spreading administrative capacity too thinly. In many instances the construction of a new school meant the reduction in the size of another school, as children from formerly school-less villages withdrew from the main school. The reduction in size may have adversely affected quality.

### **3.5 Female Education in Rural Areas**

The slow progress in female education comes up time and again as the most glaring of educational failures in Pakistan. Within the conventional rates of return framework, for example, there is much discussion of the wide gap between private returns and social returns to female schooling. The idea is that there are strong cultural impediments to female mobility and hence to female education. Furthermore, the results of the survey reported above are in line with other work on girls' schools, and with the widespread impression among practitioners (such as NGOs) as well as among rural communities in general that effective public schooling facilities for girls simply do not exist over large areas. In this section a number of observations based on field work and consultation are offered.

The widespread construction of girls' schools is a relatively recent phenomenon in many parts of the country. Many of these schools are barely 10 years old. In effect, then, in many villages the very first explicit intervention for female schooling took place 40 to 50 years after independence. Pakistan, however, is one of the very few countries in the world, and certainly the only part of South Asia where there is a systematic programme of segregated schools for boys and girls. The logic behind separate schooling at the primary level, however, has not been sufficiently scrutinized. Although more work is needed on the subject, preliminary observations suggest that there might be serious flaws in the pursuit of gender-segregated basic education in Pakistan.

Arguments for separate schools for girls relate mostly to the perceived cultural traditions of Pakistani society. Two issues dominate: firstly, it is believed that prevailing social norms would not allow girls and boys to study together; secondly, it is widely held that parents would not send their

daughters to school if the teacher were a man. Both these propositions, though empirically untested (as far as one can tell), appear to be extremely plausible.

Any casual observer of Pakistani society would attest to the prevalence of gender seclusion, segregation, and the obvious lack of female mobility and agency. Rules prohibiting social contact between males and females who are not close relations appeared to be followed widely, and violation of such rules could easily lead to conflict and even violence between men. Furthermore, in places where there is no girls' school, parents are perfectly entitled to send their daughters to the local boys' school. The fact that this opportunity has not, by and large, been taken up is widely thought to be evidence of revealed preference against mixed-gender schooling for girls.

### Implications of segregation

As the findings in section 3.3 above indicate, the implications and consequences of pursuing separate schooling for boys and girls need to be taken seriously. There are four sets of issues that need further investigation. Firstly, in many areas there might be shortages of qualified local women who would be willing to become school teachers. Even if there are some educated women resident in these areas, the very 'cultural' factors that might have proven to have been obstacles to mixed-gender schooling (i.e. female segregation and lack of mobility), are likely to work against their participation in formal employment. If anything, the 'cultural' opposition to an adult woman going out of her home to take up a job might be more severe than that to young girls going to a mixed primary school.

Secondly, if teachers from outside the locality are appointed, as is commonly the case, they are also likely to face special obstacles in reaching the schools to which they are posted. Public transport facilities may not be frequent enough, or safe enough for their families to allow them to commute. Indeed, in the course of field work several instances of women teachers having to rely on male family members for lifts to school were encountered. Such support is not always possible or forthcoming.

Thirdly, since the entire education administration has been bifurcated along gender lines, supervisors, inspectors, AEOs and DEOs for girls schools are all women from the secondary teacher cadre. They face similar problems of access, particularly in remote areas. The system of inspection and monitoring which is fairly ineffective for boys' schools is almost non-existent in girls schools. Officials in the educational administration such as AEOs are entitled to motorcycles from the education department in order to facilitate their official duties such as school visits. This facility, even if available, would be useless for female AEOs. In Malir, for example, it was reported that the female AEO only ever goes out on inspection when accompanied by the DEO (who is entitled to a jeep), or when the DEO

allows her the use of the jeep.

A more serious and fundamental aspect of bifurcation is that the difficulties encountered by female teachers in reaching schools have, to a great extent, been internalised by the administration. Officials, both male and female, believe that the rules of service ought to be interpreted far more leniently for women teachers.

Fourthly, the policy of constructing separate girls' schools has raised the expectations of parents that the supply of separate schooling facilities is financially and administratively feasible for the government to deliver, and that it is the only possibility for their daughters to get educated. In many villages where there are no girls schools the main demand of parents was that a school should be provided. The fact that a neighbouring village has a girls' school adds further fuel to this demand. Other options for female schooling, such as the possibility of mixed schooling, or organisation of transport facilities to a nearby girls school are rarely considered.<sup>44</sup> In many instances, then, communities end up with girls' schools that do not function, and are left with the problem they started out with.

### **Some evidence on mixed schooling**

Given the constraints faced in making girls' schools effective, the option of mixed schooling requires serious consideration. A number of observations are offered in this regard.

Firstly, the issue of a girl's age appears to be a crucial determinant of whether or not her parents would allow her to attend school with boys. In particular, the watershed in a girl's life is the age at which she reaches puberty. Even in otherwise extremely conservative areas (e.g. Malakand) there was willingness on the part of parents to allow their girls to go to school until they reached puberty. In most of the areas surveyed, parents were of the opinion that young girls could study with boys. This issue needs to be probed further; in particular, what is considered the 'right' age in various areas needs some documentation.

Secondly, there was wide evidence of mixed schooling in government boys' schools. In fact, most boys' schools in villages without girls' schools, were currently, or had been in the recent past, enrolling girls. Girls were, admittedly, very few in number compared with the boys, but it was

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<sup>44</sup> There is an interesting case of a participatory consultation exercise where villagers who demanded a girls school in an area where there were other schools in neighbouring villages, finally agreed that what they really required was a transport facility. (Personal communication from Kaiser Bengali who facilitated the exercise for the Sungi Development Foundation in Abbotabad).

significant that many schools were in effect co-educational<sup>45</sup> In most cases, teachers and parents were comfortable with this arrangement. There were some indications, nevertheless, that the nominal presence of a girls' school could act as a fetter to the development of mixed schooling.

In one village, for example, the local head-teacher of the boys' school began to enrol girls in the school. Within a few days, the number of girls in the school nearly matched the number of boys already enrolled. Although this village did have a girls' school the school remained closed due to teacher absenteeism. During this period the school was visited by an inspector who, alarmed at this development, instructed the head-teacher to cancel the enrolment of girls. His reason for opposing girls' enrolment was based partly upon his own prejudice that girls and boys ought to be kept separate, and partly based on his concern that in the presence of a girls' school in the village the boys' school was unlikely to attract more resources from the education department.

It might be argued that the opposition to mixed schooling, particularly for very young children, comes not from rural communities as such, but from the more socially conservative middle classes who run the system in the districts. There are, nevertheless some paradoxes here to resolve. Private schools in the areas surveyed, even in relatively remote and conservative areas, were all co-educational. Furthermore, many of these private schools had male and female teachers working together. The middle classes, therefore, do not appear to be particularly averse to sending their children to mixed schools.

Finally, one issue that came across in many conversations was that mixed schooling might be more acceptable in communities that are socially more homogenous. In single-caste or biradri villages there might be fewer restrictions on female mobility inside the village. Another issue that was raised was that female mobility is vulnerable to the prevailing social atmosphere, particularly the incidence of inter-family or inter-faction conflict. Women and girls are often regarded as symbols of family 'honour' and targets of abuse at the hands of rivals. In situations of conflict, therefore, their mobility can become particularly restricted.

### **3.6 Non-governmental responses**

The government schooling system is not the only source of supply for primary schooling. There is a large and growing private sector, particularly in urban areas. The World Bank educational strategies for Pakistan (discussed in section 2 above) argue for a much greater role for the private sector in achieving

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<sup>45</sup> This, indeed, has been a consistent finding in other parts of the country. In Balochistan, for example, it was estimated that some 28,000 girls were enrolled in boys' schools. For similar observations from Orangi in Karachi see Khan (1999).

## **Policy Failure, Political Constraints and Political Resources**

universal education. The private sector schools and patterns of participation in these schools also provide some insights into the nature of demand for schooling. As the World Bank documents rightly point out, there is a great deal of evidence from these schools of demand for schooling, and of the link between demand and the quality of supply. They also show that the cost of schooling can be considerably lower than what prevails in the government sector. Private schools also demonstrate (as argued in section 3.7 above) that co-education might yet be possible in rural Pakistan.

Although in the towns and cities in the areas of the survey there were many profit-making private schools, only one village had such a school. The survey did include a number of NGO interventions, particularly those associated with 'non-formal' education. NGO interventions and non-formal education have gained a great deal of prestige as well as influence in the policy debate. In this section some salient features are discussed.

Non-formal education, particularly for girls, has been a favoured form of NGO intervention. A popular model of non-formal education (NFE) is based on the experience of BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Commission), and sponsored extensively by UNICEF in Pakistan. BRAC schools are aimed at those children, particularly girls, who for some reason or another have missed the chance of participating in the formal school system. There are a number of important innovations.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, schools are based around teachers. A teacher is responsible for one cohort of pupils from the start till they acquire primary level proficiency. Secondly, the five year curriculum of government primary school is covered in a period of three years. There are no long summer vacations. Thirdly, schools are housed in modest buildings or rooms provided by the community. Fourthly, teachers are local women, often without the formal qualifications that are normally required in government schools, but are trained by the NGO. Their salaries are in line with the going private sector salaries, which are typically between a quarter and a third of the salaries of government school teachers.

The experience of NFE in Pakistan has varied from place to place. There are some significant achievements, as well as some important unresolved problems. Successful NFE initiatives appear to be those where the NGO maintains a high degree of interest, and local residents also get involved in the running of the school. These schools are often over-subscribed compared to the empty government schools because teachers are active and accountable. In many communities these schools also solve the problem of access for girls. While government schools might be located on the periphery of the village, to which parents may not want to send their daughters, NFE schools are often inside villages, in someone's home or in a rented building. In all of the NFE schools visited during the course of the

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<sup>46</sup> These observations are based on consultation with BRAC staff in Dhaka.

survey, attendance rates were high, usually 100 per cent.

Factors that were cited as contributing to the success of NFE were several. Trust in the teacher and the school was a crucial issue. Another important factor was that the teacher and the NGO spend considerable time and effort in motivating and mobilising the community. This provides an interesting insight into the question of parental motivation and demand. While many opinion surveys indicate that parents are willing to send their sons and daughters to school, willingness cannot, in itself, be interpreted as demand. It is more an indication of the fact that the parents would not object to sending their sons and even their daughters to school. As the experience of the successful NGOs demonstrates, the translation of this willingness into actual participation does require mobilisation and motivation.

The successful NFE schools, moreover, appear to undermine some of the rationale for the original NFE model. This is true in three respects. Firstly, in many of these schools, children of all ages are present, including young ones who are clearly not in the category of children who have 'missed the boat' of formal education. Rather than being complimentary to the formal schooling system many NFE schools are actually supplementing it, especially where it has broken down. Secondly, the contention that NFE girls schools are required because girls cannot study with boys is refuted in practice by these very schools, where very often some boys are present alongside the girls. Thirdly, the argument that the model of non-formal education is more appropriate because the formalism of the mainstream system is too remote from the community<sup>47</sup> is supported only partly by NFE experience. While it is true that in some issues of access, particularly with regard to the location of school a 'non-formal' approach has yielded results, other aspects of 'non-formal' school culture appear to be less important. In a number of cases successful NFE schools face demands from parents to formalise their school culture; for instance, by getting a 'proper' building, standardizing school timings (similar to those of government schools), and even instituting school uniforms. In many ways these schools operate as low-price alternatives to formal private-sector schools.

The main problem faced by NFE schools, and many of the NGO initiatives in general is the issue of sustainability. Many of these initiatives need to be, by definition, based on public subsidy. Very often, however, the subsidy is for a fixed period, and not assured beyond that period. An important question for all participants in these initiatives, including teachers, parents and the organisations, is the extent to which the school or other initiative might survive in the next period.

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<sup>47</sup> This argument has been taken much further still. The UN Inter-Agency Mission, for example, calls for the "de-formalization of government schools".



Factors that are frequently cited as contributing to the success of NGO interventions are quite diverse. It has been argued that the NGO interventions fulfil a need that exists in the community. Often this is seen in terms of facilitating collective action. This explanation begs a prior question, namely, what are the factors that help or hinder collective action in various communities in rural Pakistan. Another factor that is often cited as playing a part in the successful initiatives is that these are the ones that adopt a participatory approach to development. While all of these factors are important to some extent, in terms of operational viability, what seems to matter a great deal is the presence of highly motivated and skilled individuals at the community level. What motivates these individuals to undertake mobilisation is an interesting question.

### **3.7 Politics and Political Resources**

In section 2.7 above it was noted that a standard analysis of government failure in Pakistan couches the problem in terms such as 'the absence of political will', 'political interference' and 'political constraints'. Questions were raised at that point about the adequacy of these explanations. This section takes up some themes that emerged in the course of this study on the bearing that political processes and developments have on the advancement of basic education. Being based as they are primarily on the findings of field observations and consultation with individuals who have practical experience in schooling, these themes are concerned with micro-level issues in institutional performance and intervention, rather than on broader political questions concerning macro-economic imperatives, planning priorities or ideological debates.

Much of the received understanding of Pakistan's educational failure, such as that reviewed in section 2 of this report, takes a management-oriented view of political factors. In general, this approach regards any political factors as irritants that come in the way of good management practices. This section takes a somewhat broader view, however, and aims to develop an understanding of both 'political constraints' as well as 'political resources'.

#### **Political process and accountability**

In the account of the deterioration of school quality, monitoring and accountability (section 3.4) two important historical watersheds are, respectively, the stronger unionisation of teachers in the early 1970s, and the involvement of MNAs and MPs in the appointment of teachers in the mid-1980s. In the early 1970s, the strength of the teachers' unions derived to a great extent from their earlier role in supporting the rise of the Pakistan People's Party, which was to form the first popularly elected government in Pakistan. The latter episode was associated with the revival of elected assemblies by the

military government of General Zia-ul-Haque and the formal lifting of Martial Law. It is paradoxical that moves toward representative political government have come to be associated with declining standards of public accountability.

There are several possible explanations that might help to unravel this paradox. Firstly, it is generally argued that rural politics are dominated by a landowning elite. This elite wields influence over the backward masses' through its monopolistic ownership of land or its position within the social hierarchy and hence is able to subvert the accountability that democracy might otherwise engender. An extreme statement of this view is the so-called 'feudal power' thesis.<sup>48</sup> The proposition that public resources and the political processes are routinely captured by the elite in Pakistan to the detriment of the vast majority is one that is implicit in much of the public discussion on governance and institutional performance.

### Local elites

A common caricature of the breakdown of the schooling system is to ascribe this breakdown to wilful acts of powerful landlords, local patrons and tribal chiefs. The idea is that 'feudals patrons' are opposed to the spread of education in their areas for the fear that this would lead to a loosening of their grip on power. Once educated, their clients would no longer be beholden, would begin to demand their rights, and would undermine the position of the patron. The idea that the feudal patrons do not allow any development initiatives to be implemented in 'their areas', is one that finds a great deal of resonance in the public debate.

The extent to which feudal patrons are minded to, or indeed, are able to, stop development in their areas, however, is open to question. The fact that there are private individuals who do exercise considerable coercion and control is beyond dispute. The issue, however, is that this caricature of the feudal might be too simplistic an account of the failure of public schooling (and other public services) in rural Pakistan. While the survey areas in this study did not, admittedly, include some of the regions of notoriously powerful landlords or tribal chiefs, there are indications that the political economy of government failure might actually work rather differently.

There were villages in the sample where powerful landlords dominated economic and political

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<sup>48</sup> The use of the term 'feudal' in the present context does not correspond with the common usage of the term in economic history or Marxian "mode of production" debates. Rather, it is a widely-used label in the contemporary social and political discourse in Pakistan, which implies the successful manipulation of modern institutions of the state at the local as well as national level by powerful landlords and tribal chiefs.

life. The general picture that emerges from the survey as well as from a variety of other sources, is that far from hindering development efforts, feudal patrons are actually vying with one another to have more of such interventions allocated to their areas. The purpose, admittedly is not public service. In the case of the schooling system, for example, the construction of schools is a profitable activity for contractors (who might be connected with the feudal patron), and also provides employment opportunities which can be used as instruments of patronage. In some areas, particularly in parts of Sindh, public works can be quite valuable simply due to the high value of pukka buildings, which might then be put to private use. All of these activities were observed in our survey.

These efforts on the part of feudal patrons (or other vested interest) to get a disproportionate number of public works in the areas of their influence or in areas where they wish to dispense patronage are, of course, quite damaging to the performance of public services. Diversion of public resources implies that other, perhaps more deserving localities or regions are denied their fair shares. The use of government jobs as patronage implies that employees are not selected for their abilities, and are also more difficult to hold accountable. The take-over of finished civil works (i.e. school buildings) for private use implies that public services cannot be delivered. The issue appears, therefore, not to be one of active opposition to schooling, but one of incidental damage due to the loss of accountability and the private appropriation of public resources.

Much of the mis-allocation and misappropriation is tied up to the buying of votes and securing political support. In this regard the relationship between the feudals and their constituencies is not entirely one-sided. In a number of places, for example, people complained about having been bypassed in a development initiative because some power broker was interested in promoting the cause of his constituents elsewhere. Many of the collective efforts of local communities are, indeed, directed towards the powerful persons in their area, such as local MNAs and MPAs, in order to lobby for public services. Given the structure of political and administrative organisation, these representatives are not only agents of capture, but also those of service delivery.

#### Political resources

During the course of the fieldwork and consultation, it became clear that there were significant numbers of people who were trying to hold things together, or indeed, taking positive initiatives. There were individual teachers as well as officials, who were committed to their professions. At the same time there were community-based organisations, NGOs, as well as individual activists who were trying to find solutions to the breakdown of public schooling in their communities. Many of these groups and individuals were putting in considerable effort in order to solve collective action problems, raise

awareness, mobilise members of the community, lobby with local officials and representatives, and to take other initiatives.

What motivates such individuals and groups is not an easy question to answer. There are consistent patterns that do indicate some of the sources of activism. A number of organisations, for example, were led by groups or individuals who had been involved in active politics of some type. Some were interested in taking part in the formal political process in the future.

Others still, had ideological commitment to various forms of nationalism and sub-nationalism. A number of committed school-teachers in Sargodha, for instance, were people who had a clear religious commitment to schooling. Many of them saw their role as inculcating values of Islam and Pakistani nationalism in their pupils. In Sindh, particularly in Malir, a great deal of the energy of local activists derived from their commitment to Sindhi nationalism, and the feeling that they needed to promote development initiatives in order to assist their community to 'catch up'. It might be added that a number of religious political parties have active school programmes in Punjab and NWFP. There are several such chains of private schools run along the lines of other private schools, and offering the formal curriculum, including the option of English-medium instruction.

The role of religious or ethnic and caste-based 'community' organisations in the promotion of basic education is well-known. In Kerala, which is the only Indian state to have achieved universal literacy, religious organisations played an important part in the expansion of the schooling infrastructure. Furthermore, caste-based mobilisation which later developed into broader movements for political and social change ensured a high level of public commitment to education<sup>49</sup>

More generally speaking, public commitment for educational transition has been found in communitarian projects such as the promotion of the values of citizenship, post-colonial nation-building, the standardisation of language and script, and the development of ethnic and religious group identities.<sup>50</sup> While these projects have diverse, and often mutually conflicting aims, they do share at least one important feature. They are all in the business of developing or consolidating communities of different types. The political and social impetus behind universal basic education often rests in

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<sup>49</sup> On the history of Kerala's development achievement see Ramachandran (1997).

<sup>50</sup> In his discussion of the factors that have historically contributed to universal education Myron Weiner (1991) lays great stress on religious reform movements. He ascribes India's failure in this regard to the peculiar features of caste hierarchy. Religious reform, however, is not the only, or even the most prominent source of public commitment to universal education in the post-colonial world. In the experiences of both East and West Asian countries, nationalism has been a potent force in this regard.

communitarian projects and not simply in the calculus of individual advantage. This links well with the critique (in section 2.8 above) of the conventional 'rates of return' approach and the proposition that the literacy transition can be interpreted as the establishment of a new social norm.

The fact that we observe some level of commitment to basic education among 'communitarians' of different hues in Pakistan, therefore, should not be very surprising." In a commentary on research on school efficiency and the question of whether the government should run schools, Kremer postulates that "perhaps the main reason education is so widely under state control is that schools transmit values to children" (Kremer, 1995, 253). What does require explanation is Pakistan's historical failure to pursue with any seriousness an agenda of 'national' communitarianism through the universalization of basic education. The continuing deficit in literacy ratios, and the presence of diverse communitarian efforts is illustrative of this failure. Although language politics have been important throughout Pakistan's history, and indeed in the movement for Pakistan even prior to the foundation of the state (see, for example, Rahman, 1996), these have not given rise to post-colonial nation-building projects of the type observed in other parts of Asia.

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<sup>51</sup> It needs to be reiterated that the purpose of emphasizing the role of communitarianism as a source of public commitment to universalism is to draw attention to a salient feature of the literacy transition. This emphasis should be interpreted as an endorsement for any particular form of communitarianism, or indeed, for communitarianism in general. As has been pointed in a number of studies of school curricula, most recently by Rahman (1998), the educational system can and is used by states to promote reactionary world-views. See also Nayyar (1999) for an overview of religious schools or madrassahs in Pakistan.

### **4 Summary and Conclusions**

#### Existing Debates

This paper begins with the premise that the universalisation of basic education ought to receive undisputed priority for public action in Pakistan. Current policy thinking on the subject is taken as a point of departure for the development of a clearer understanding of the constraints to and potential for universal basic education in the country.

The absence of much clarity, coherence and consistency in successive governments' approaches to basic education (as well as other matters of social policy) has corresponded with the rise in the influence of multilateral organisations in the direction of social policy. Policy thinking emanating from the World Bank on this issue is particularly important, given the strategic position occupied by the Bank in the design and implementation of policies and programmes such as the Social Action Programme. It is also the case that the World Bank has invested considerable intellectual and financial resources on policy analysis.

The policy documents that have emerged from this investment are cogent, well-argued, and based on a rich base of background information and analysis. The background papers and studies are of a generally high academic standard and use innovative approaches in order to test various propositions about constraints to the expansion of basic education in Pakistan. The 'economics of education/human resource development' provides the fundamental disciplinary framework for analysis, and within this discipline, the dominant paradigm can be broadly characterised as the 'rates of return approach'.

#### Rates of Return' Approach

The rates of return approach addresses the question of basic education as one of individual or household decision-making behaviour. Individuals or families invest resources in their own or their children's education in response to the expectation of advantage which can be evaluated in economic terms. Left to themselves, however, these individuals and families would tend to invest sub-optimally due to a variety of market imperfections, distortions and failures. The main justification for public action lies in bridging the gap between perceived private and social returns to education.

The rates of return approach provides a wide range of important insights into the constraints to universalising basic education in Pakistan. From the policy perspective it is convenient to interpret these constraints within the demand-supply dichotomy. Standard constraints on the demand for primary

schooling are thought to be poverty, the opportunity cost of children's time, out of pocket expenses, lack of information on the value of education, cultural attitudes particularly against the schooling of girls, and imperfections and failures of other markets such labour and credit. Supply constraints, of course, are to do the availability of public schooling services.

#### Demand, Supply and Quality

Sound policy intervention is contingent on the correct identification of constraints to the expansion of school participation. If the main limiting factor, for example, was the unavailability of a school, then, obviously, the construction of a school ought to be the priority. If, on the other hand, schools are present and schooling participation is low due to poverty or some other demand-related reason, then the appropriate public intervention would aim to address these particular constraints. The World Bank literature on the subject finds that demand for education is high for both boys and for girls even among the poorest. Opinion surveys of parents, the rise of private schools in urban areas, and successful NGO interventions have been used to establish this proposition.

The poor quality of supply acts as a fetter to the expansion and realisation of already existing demand for education. There is, therefore, interdependence between supply and demand. The supply constraints are not so much the absence of schools altogether (there has been a massive expansion in government schools since the mid 1980s), but that these schools do not function properly. This is confirmed also by our own survey of government schools in rural areas of four districts. The survey indicated that many schools remained closed due to teacher absenteeism, and that this problem was particularly acute for girls' schools.

While the World Bank studies on Pakistan are correct to identify supply and not demand constraints as the limiting ones, it is important, nevertheless, to make a distinction between willingness and motivation. The expression of willingness to educate children or the absence of active opposition to it cannot be equated with active pursuit of schooling. Some level of motivational work is still necessary to convert passive willingness into active demand. Existing documentation of good practice among NGOs, as well as our own observations indicate that successful schooling interventions generally include special efforts in order to motivate parents and children to participate in schooling.

The growing recognition that the quality of supply is a key determinant of demand for basic education has been instrumental in shifting the focus back to the delivery of schooling services. A most obvious aspect of quality is that schools should be open and teachers should be present. Beyond this important but procedural matter, it is important to gain a clearer understanding of what factors parents

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rate as being important in their assessment of school performance. Preliminary investigations indicate that a teacher's commitment to the school, the children and the community, and parental trust of the teacher play a crucial part in whether or not children are sent to school. How parents perceive the school, and what matters to them as markers of quality requires further investigation.

### Female Schooling

One question of acute importance in this regard is parental and societal attitudes towards mixed gender schooling at the primary level. The premise that mixed gender schooling is culturally inadmissible even at the primary level, however, appears to rest on shaky evidence. Mixed schooling is a fact of life in many boys' schools and is the norm in private schools even in socially conservative regions of the country. The acceptability of mixed gender schooling and female schooling in general is closely correlated with the age of the girl child; social restrictions become increasingly stringent with age. Under these circumstances the completion of the primary cycle would require that girls are enrolled at a young age. The crucial issue of quality is likely to be the trust parents repose in the school and the teacher in looking after very young children.

The observed acceptability of mixed gender schooling is difficult to square with the administrative momentum towards gender segregation in all aspects of the government schooling system. There are now separate girls' primary schools in many of the rural localities in Pakistan. These schools are run by a separate directorate for girls' school, and are supposed to employ only female teachers. Our survey showed that single sex girls' schools are more prone to be closed and unattended, particularly in remoter rural areas, and that there are genuine problems of access and mobility for female teaching staff. In effect, therefore, the creation of separate girls' primary schools can discourage people from considering the option of mixed schooling, and can encourage them to pin their hopes on non-functioning girls' schools.

### Community and Accountability

The solution offered in the World Bank literature to problems of school performance and teacher accountability is the promotion of community participation. One aspect of community participation which is discussed is the formation of school management committees at the village level. The evidence for the positive performance of such committees comes from successful NGO-led interventions of this type in Balochistan.

While community participation can clearly be positive factor it needs to be understood more



carefully than is the case in the existing literature. Firstly, there is little analysis of the range of factors that might account for the good performance of NGO-led interventions in certain areas. These factors might include good management, motivated personnel, the type of intervention (i.e. non-formal versus formal) and the smaller scale of operations compared to the government schooling system.

Secondly, it is also worth asking whether the participatory model and collective action are more likely to succeed in certain types of communities than others; in other words, it is important to unpack the "community" in its local context. The widespread identification in the literature of "community" with location alone is problematic. Locational communities are made up of diverse classes, castes, kinships and other contending interest groups. Community, moreover, cannot be taken as a given entity, but is constantly in the process of being constructed, and education is often a vehicle for community formation.

#### Government Schooling System

It is striking that the main premise of much of the existing policy literature -- the failure of the government schooling system -- is relatively little documented. It is true, of course, that the outcomes speak loudly of the failure of this system. Our survey of schools and the schooling establishment indicates that there are important patterns in the performance of the government school system. Larger schools appear to work better than smaller ones, middle schools better than primary, schools near a metalled road better than more remote schools, and boys' schools better than girls'.

The schooling system is centralized and hierarchical. The distinction between primary and secondary school teachers is one of the main cleavages in this system. These two types of teachers have different qualifications, procedures of entry and career paths. It is the secondary teacher cadre that runs the school system at and below the district level. Primary school teachers are almost invariably "line-managed" by secondary teachers, or by individuals who entered the system as secondary teachers. Collusion among primary school teachers which often has the effect of reducing their accountability to parents and the community cannot be understood in isolation from the operation of other vested interests in the schooling system. Teachers' associations legitimize their actions with reference to the existence of other organised interest groups such as secondary teachers, the educational bureaucracy and political representatives.

Another source of segmentation in the education system is the division of the schooling establishment along gender lines. Girls' primary schools staffed by women teachers and managed by female functionaries perform poorly even by the rather limited standards of other government schools.

Female school teachers and administrators face even serious problems of access and mobility than female pupils. The gender-wise bifurcation of the schooling establishment does not appear to be the best way of dealing with the problem of low female participation; in some ways, in fact, it can be an obstacle to the expansion of female schooling.

### **Political Constraints and Political Resources**

Political factors of various types are routinely identified as obstacles to the effective delivery of schooling services in rural areas. Despite this almost universal recognition of political constraints, however, there is relatively little systematic analysis of the political economy of the failure of government schooling. Even where political constraints are recognised, strategic thinking is dominated by the paradigm of policy prescription. In other words, the question of political constraints while acknowledged, has not been properly incorporated in strategic thinking about educational reform.

The understanding of political constraints in the existing literature is built around a set of stylised propositions. The integrity of institutions is compromised by activities designed to create and capture rents. Formal mechanisms of public accountability are subverted by the local elites through the use of political and social power. Corruption and political patronage in the siting of school buildings and the hiring of teachers are the principal means of rent capture.

While these stylized propositions are broadly tenable, our surveys indicate the need for a more nuanced understanding of political constraints. It is clear, for example, that the traditional perception of local elites actively opposing school construction is no longer valid over much of Pakistan. In fact, there is fierce competition between rural powerbrokers to get schools and public services sanctioned for their own areas of influence. This they do partly in order to appropriate public resources for themselves (e.g. taking over school buildings) partly to be able to dispense patronage in their localities (through the appointment of teachers etc.), and partly as a result of popular pressure from their constituents.

The deterioration in institutional performance within the schooling establishment itself is also only partially explicable with reference to rent creation and capture. While it is true that organised vested interest groups such as teachers' associations and unions weaken the chain of accountability through the protection of their members, the emergence of these organised groups needs to be understood within the context of already existing vested interest groups within the establishment.

A general weakness of the treatment of political constraints in the existing literature is that political factors are regarded uniformly as obstacles and aberrations from a pristine administrative setup.

In fact political factors should be incorporated squarely into the analysis. A more systematic approach would also identify political resources which might overcome the political constraints. Our own survey suggests that positive interventions in the schooling system are also often motivated by wider political considerations.

The identification of political action with the private appropriation of public resources has the effect of ignoring other sources of political motivation. There appears to be a consistent pattern, for example, that successful interventions have emerged from politically and socially motivated groups and individuals who regard education as the means of constructing, consolidating and promoting a specific sense of community. Such communitarian motivations are difficult to incorporate into the standard rates of return models in the economics of education. Historical and international experience supports the contention that such positive political resources (often in the shape of post-colonial 'nation-building' projects) play a crucial part in the universalisation of basic education.

### **Literacy Transition and Social Norms**

The dominant 'rates of return' framework has been a source of valuable insight in identifying constraints to the expansion of basic education in Pakistan. It continues to have a role in sorting out a number of issues relating to resource allocation between different levels of non-basic education. The limits of this framework are severely tested, however, when it comes to providing an understanding of the change from mass illiteracy to mass literacy. This transition, which has been labelled as the 'literacy transition' in this paper, involves changes in the agency, values and preferences of individuals as well as the establishment of new social norms.

The resources necessary in order to effect a literacy transition arise not from the motivation of correcting markets (i.e. reducing the gap between private and social returns to education), but from wider political and social considerations of individuals and groups interested in the construction of community. The fact that the expansion of literacy can and does improve economic productivity and reduce fertility rates are beneficial external effects. It is not the politics of education as such, but the politics of universalisation that appears to be the key to educational progress.

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**Table 1: Key Educational Indicators for Pakistan**

	Literacy ratio		Net Primary Enrolment ratio		
	1981	1998	1991	1995-96	1996-97
<b>OVERALL</b>	26.2	45.0	46	44	42
<b>Males</b>	35.0	56.5	53	49	46
<b>Females</b>	16.0	32.6	39	38	37
<b>Urban</b>	47.1	64.7	59	55	55
<b>Urban Males</b>	55.3	72.6	61	56	56
<b>Urban Females</b>	37.3	55.6	57	55	55
<b>Rural</b>	17.3	34.4	41	39	37
<b>Rural Males</b>	26.2	47.4	50	47	43
<b>Rural Females</b>	7.3	20.8	31	31	30

*Explanatory Notes*

Literacy ratio: Per cent of the population aged 10 years or over which is functionally literate according to the criteria adopted by the Population Census of Pakistan.

Net Enrolment ratio: [number of children aged 5-9 attending primary level (classes 1-5) divided by total number of children aged 5-9] multiplied by 100.

*Sources*

Literacy ratio: Census of Population, 1981 and 1998, reported in Government of Pakistan (1999), Economic Survey 1998-99, Table 12.6.

Net Enrolment ratio: Pakistan Integrated Household Survey, 1991, 1995-96, 1996-97, reported in Federal Bureau of Statistics (1998), PIHS Round 2, Table 2.7.

**Table 2: Comparison with Selected Developing Countries**

	<b>Population, (millions) 1997</b>	<b>GNP per capita (US\$) 1997</b>	<b>GNP per capita annual growth (%) 1975-95</b>	<b>Adult literacy rate 1997</b>
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	18	800	3.2	91
<b>Iran</b>	65	1780	-1.6	73
<b>China</b>	1244	860	7.7	83
<b>Indonesia</b>	203	1110	5.1	85
<b>Viet Nam</b>	76	310	..	92
<b>Egypt</b>	65	1200	4.1	53
<b>India</b>	966	370	2.8	54
<b>Kenya</b>	28	340	0.5	79
<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>41</i>
<b>Sudan</b>	28	290	..	53
<b>Nigeria</b>	104	280	-0.6	60
<b>Bangladesh</b>	123	360	2.0	39
<b>Tanzania</b>	31	210	..	72
<b>Ethiopia</b>	58	110	..	35

Note: Countries are listed in order of their Human Development Index (HDI) ranking from the highest to the lowest.

Source: UNDP (1999), Human Development Report 1999.



**Table 3: Government Schools Open at Time of Unannounced Visit**

	<b>Number of sample schools in category</b>	<b>Number open</b>	<b>Per cent open</b>
<b>All</b>	30	18	60
<b>Girls</b>	9	3	33
<b>Boys/Mixed'</b>	21	15	71
<b>Remote<sup>2</sup></b>	9	3	33
<b>Middle/High</b>	4	4	100
<b>Sargodha</b>	11	8	73
<b>Thatta</b>	13	5	38
<b>Malir</b>	2	2	100
<b>Khairpur</b>	4	3	75

Source: Author's survey.

1. There was one 'mixed' Mosque school which was open.
2. Schools further than 2 km from metalled road.