

## Capacitating School Councils for Effective Use of School Funds: Strengthening Procurement Capacities



### Education Procurements In-sight

An initiative to bring issues in education sector procurements in the forefront of policy debate and strengthen institutional capacities within the concerned government departments to exercise their mandate of security more effectively



*In collaboration with*



### Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS)

(I-SAPS) is a national research and policy advocacy organization undertaking multi-disciplinary research and evidence-based policy engagement

**S**chool Councils (SCs) in Punjab are functioning since 1994 with an aim to instill a culture of citizen participation, voice and accountability in school management. Although SCs have been effective to some extent in enhancing community participation into school management but there still exist various gaps regarding awareness and capacity of SC members to conduct procurement-related business.

### Introduction

Highlighting the capacity gaps in school councils, research evidence points towards inability of SCs to utilize the available resources<sup>1</sup>. In this regard, lack of relevant knowledge and skills to conduct purchases and procurements<sup>2</sup> is one of the major issues which needs to be focused in order to improve the ability of SCs to use school funds effectively.

The Punjab government provides Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 50,000

annually to primary and middle schools for operational expenditure and minor civil works. Last year, the government also initiated a non-salary budget (NSB) programme under Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme II (PESRP II). In 2014-15, SCs in 18 districts of the province have been entrusted to execute substantial amount of non-salary budget in lieu of the annual grant. In 2013-14, the Punjab government allocated Rs. 5 billion for procurements and purchases made at the school

### Policy Conclusions and Recommendations

Key policy conclusions that emerge from the analysis and functioning of schools councils are summarized as follows.

- ✓ Evidence points out that the SC members are not well-trained on rules and procedures related to procurements and relevant record keeping. Hence, capacity building initiatives should be implemented on priority and regular basis where all SC members participate and their capabilities are enhanced.
- ✓ A mandatory sub-committee on procurement within each school council with 2-3 skilled members may help in better performance of SCs for procurement-related functions.

level out of which Rs. 1.5 billion were allocated for 27 districts of Punjab whereas Rs. 3.5 billion were allocated for the pilot 9 districts under NSB. This non-salary budget allows the SCs to improve infrastructure in their schools and make other non-salary expenses. Under NSB initiative, many school councils receive around Rs. 0.1-1 million per annum.

Considering that the resource envelop of schools is increasing, it is important to ensure effective and efficient utilization of this budget by SCs and to ensure the best value for money. For this, the SC members need to be duly capable and aware of their responsibilities. However, evidence informs that the SC members are not only untrained but in some cases are even not aware of the procedures and policies<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the ability of members to effectively use these huge funds for school development and improvement remains questionable.

### **Awareness of Responsibilities, Procurement Rules and Procedures**

Lack of awareness of basic procurement practices and record keeping procedures undermines the organizational effectiveness of SCs. A recent survey conducted by I-SAPS<sup>4</sup> established that some of the SC members were not even aware of their basic responsibilities and did not have an understanding of the basic rules and procedures of school purchases. Given the limited knowledge, it is unlikely that the community members of SCs will be skilled enough to understand and execute their responsibilities. It is therefore important to build capacities of SC members for procurement related functions along with increase in the school funds.

### **Lack of Focused Trainings on Procurement and Purchases**

Keeping in view the educational backgrounds of the members and the organizational awareness, it is imperative to have capacities of SC members built so that they can effectively participate in development of the school. Initiatives by the provincial government like call centres for supporting school councils and introduction of other capacity building programs partnered with National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) in the past have tried to bridge the capacity gap, but there still exists a need to build capacities of individual SC members on procurements and purchases. Referring to I-SAPS school councils' survey, more than half of the members of the surveyed school councils had never received any training with regard to planning, financing, record keeping and monitoring of procurement-related functions.

### **How to Enhance Organizational Capability of School Councils?**

Giving more autonomy to school councils and enhancing their role to conduct major civil works in schools on their own is no doubt an effective step towards best value for public money. However, the overall purpose seems to be compromised without proper capacity building of the SC members on an ongoing basis. Following are some of the suggested ways to strengthen the existing policies and improve functioning of the school councils:

#### *Procurement Committees*

Although not mandatory, some of the school

councils in Punjab have formed procurement committees by choosing 2-3 members who are not only literate but also well-versed with the procurement functions. This not only helps in better decision-making but also ensures that the process is inclusive and not dominated by a single person (head teacher in many cases). Formation of a procurement committee selected from within the SC should be made obligatory for each SC in order to ensure better oversight and decision-making. This committee should report to and share all purchase related records with all members of the school council.

### *Enhanced Representation of Teachers*

At present, as per the School Council Policy, only one teacher is member of the school council. Since teachers are more qualified in terms of education received and have direct stakes in the development of school, their enhanced participation is expected to improve the overall functioning of the school council.

### **Composition of School Council**

- ◆ Comprises of 7-15 members
- ◆ Head Teacher – Chairperson
- ◆ Parents – 50% or more representation
- ◆ General Members

### *Capacity Building of School Council Members*

It goes without saying that building the capacity of SC members is the most significant function if they are to be entrusted with the responsibility of conducting and monitoring major procurement works in the schools, developing plans for school improvement and ensuring transparency and accountability in all schools-related procurements. It also needs to be ensured that all members of the school council are provided training on rotational and ongoing basis rather than a one-time capacity building of only chairperson and co-chairperson.

### **References and End Notes**

1. I-SAPS (2013), *School Level Budget Analysis of Government Schools in Punjab: The Case of District Lodhran*, Islamabad.
2. I-SAPS (2014), *Education Sector Procurements in Punjab: A Horizontal Accountability Perspective*, Islamabad.
3. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/817867/focus-on-education-members-of-school-councils-lack-training/>
4. I-SAPS School Councils Survey 2014



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