

## Horizontal Accountability and Education Sector Procurements

**V**ertical and horizontal accountability are the two key routes to efficient and transparent public procurements thus leading to improved public services. Public procurements are most prone to corruption, bribery, graft and embezzlement mainly because they operate at the perilous convergence point of powerful private and public interests. Vertical accountability by virtue of its procedures and forms is a longer route to accountability. On the other hand, Horizontal accountability is less time consuming and produces sustainable impact as it is embedded within the existing government systems.

### 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

Public accountability relates to the actions of public officials and institutions which are subject to oversight so that not only the stated objectives for an initiative are met but also to ensure that the initiative undertaken is responsive to the needs of the society. In the process of public accountability, public officials (elected and unelected) are obligated to explain and answer for their

decisions and actions to the citizens. O'Donnell (1999a)<sup>1</sup>, bringing the conceptual framework of vertical and horizontal accountability into the forefront of democracy-related debates, described the two routes to accountability. According to him, "accountability runs not only vertically, making elected officials answerable to the ballot box, but

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### Policy Conclusions

- ✓ There is a need to emphasize more on horizontal accountability in education sector procurements as its impact is more embedded within the system and therefore more sustainable.
- ✓ Despite the mechanisms for horizontal accountability being clearly laid out in policies, instances of mal-practices and corruption are existent in education sector procurements in Pakistan.
- ✓ There is a need to enforce clear and strict rules for enhanced scrutiny of the procurements. A coordination forum would be helpful in providing an avenue for clarification, discussion and follow-up of horizontal accountability functions for the involved departments.

also horizontally, across a network of relatively autonomous powers (i.e., other institutions) that can call into question, and eventually punish improper ways of discharging the responsibilities of a given office" (O'Donnell 1999a: 165). Similarly, the Capability, Accountability and Responsiveness (CAR) framework views accountability as a vertical or horizontal relationship between citizens and state officials in which individuals and groups claim rights from the state. The state is expected to have capability to be responsive to the needs of the citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Vertical accountability operates both upwards and downwards; for example, a senior government official is held to account for his seniors and he also holds his subordinate officials accountable for their actions and decisions. Similarly, under vertical accountability the state, its institutions and its representatives are held answerable for their decisions, promises and actions by the citizenry.

O'Donnell describes horizontal accountability as "the existence of state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered, and factually willing and able, to take actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state that may be qualified as unlawful (O'Donnell 1999b: 38).<sup>3</sup>

### **Theoretical Approaches to Horizontal Accountability**

The accountability process is expected to have four sequential stages: setting the standards, investigating if the standards are met or not, giving the accountees an opportunity to explain

themselves and sanctioning or rewarding them for their actions. The Accountability Framework proposed by The World Bank<sup>4</sup> envisages accountability to be achieved through a short and a long route. The short route does not involve the state institutions and works through client power and direct relationship whereas the long route is more similar to the concept of horizontal accountability and works through the state to hold the service providers accountable.

Schillemans (2011)<sup>5</sup> defines horizontal accountability in terms of "mechanisms of accountability in which agencies account for their behavior toward accountees that are not hierarchically superior, such as boards of stakeholders, boards of commissioners, and visitations". According to him, accountability deficit arises from two related issues. First, demanding accountability is difficult from semi-autonomous agencies because they exert their powers and autonomy. Secondly, public sector is organized along a hierarchy of power and strictly speaking all government agencies and officials are not horizontal. Schillemans also evaluated the extent to which horizontal accountability mechanism can remedy accountability deficit. Horizontal accountability mechanisms serve as promising and moderately positive remedies for the insufficiency of vertical accountability by civil society and other groups. These mechanisms may be valuable as additions to top-down control but cannot be proxies for democratic control. He didn't find horizontal accountability, however, to be an effective way of realizing democratic control via a different route.

## **Horizontal Accountability Mechanisms in Pakistan: Provincial Level Education Sector Procurements**

Various government departments are involved in public education sector procurements in Pakistan with the education department as the primary client at the provincial level. The role of Communications and Works Department (CWD) and Works and Services Departments of District Governments is important as these carry out major civil works in the provinces including construction of new schools and provision of missing facilities. For textbooks, provincial Textbook Boards play a central role in manuscript development, printing and distribution. School Council (SC) or Parent Teacher Council (PTC) in each school fall under the administrative oversight of the district education departments. Departments such as Planning and Development (P&D), Finance, Audit, Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) and Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) also have a role in the procurement process involving the approval of a procurement and general oversight at different stages of the process. In addition, parliamentary bodies such as Public Accounts Committees (PAC) and Provincial Assembly's Standing Committees on Education have the mandate to hold all these departments to account for their performance in the procurement process.

Despite the mechanisms for horizontal accountability being clearly laid out in policies, instances of mal-practices and corruption are existent in procurements done in the education sector. Weaker implementation and partially functional checks and balances are some of the

major issues hampering the best value for public money in the education sector.<sup>6</sup>

## **Opportunities for Effective Horizontal Accountability: Education Sector Procurements at Provincial Levels**

Failure of government departments to engage in mutual scrutiny is costing the public millions of rupees every year. Following are some of the ways to ensure an effective implementation of the horizontal accountability mechanisms in education sector procurements:

### *Enforcement of Clear and Strict Rules for Enhanced Scrutiny*

There is a need to clearly outline the role of individual departments in the procurement process. At the moment, some of the rules cannot be referred to as the responsibility of a particular department or individual within that department. Also penalties for any negligence to engage in mutual scrutiny should also be enforced by the PPRA.

### *Establishment of a Coordination Forum*

The Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) should establish a coordination forum for all the departments involved in education sector procurements in order to address the existing institutional gap where the departments are not clear onto their horizontal accountability functions. The forum would help in providing an avenue for clarification, discussion and follow-up of horizontal accountability functions for the involved departments.

### *Enhancing the Mandate of CM Secretariat's Monitoring Cell*


The mandate of the Chief Minister's Secretariat's monitoring cell should be enhanced with powers to review the release and utilization of funds, especially in the case of civil

works procurement. It should also commission independent special reports to assess the quality of infrastructure built and the extent to which horizontal accountability functions were performed by the mandated departments.



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