

Improving Transparency in Textbooks Procurement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Provision of free textbooks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa first started in 2004 for primary students and were then subsequently provided to secondary and higher secondary schools in the following years. Millions of textbooks are printed every year in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thereby utilizing huge financial resources. For printing and distribution of free textbooks, the provincial government allocated Rs. 2.5 billion in 2014-15. Considering the huge resource envelop for the textbooks procurement in the province, there is a need to ensure that the procurement process is not only transparent but also that the accountability mechanisms exist and function according to the mandate.

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

Actors and Institutions involved in Horizontal Accountability for Textbooks Procurement

The role of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board (KPTB) is central in development, printing and distribution of textbooks in the province. Many other departments including Elementary and Secondary Education Depart-

ment (ESED), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KPPRA), Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly are also involved in the procurements process with a responsibility to ensure transparency and efficiency in the textbooks procurement system.

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Policy Conclusions

- ✓ There exist a number of transparency issues in the textbook procurement process owing to weaker implementation.
- ✓ Disclosure of information, establishment of a monitoring system and addressing the conflict of interest can be effective tools for improving the textbooks procurement process.
- ✓ A mandatory annual report for the textbook board detailing the procurement process can be essential in ensuring transparency in the process.

Although the mandates and roles of these departments are clearly defined but still there exist a number of transparency issues in the textbook procurement process owing to weaker implementation.

Accountability Challenges in textbooks Procurement

Although the textbooks procurement process in the province is moving towards efficiency but still there exist certain issues which hamper the transparency of the process. Some of these issues are presented below:

Sub-contracting to Small Printers

The textbook printers sometimes outsource their printing jobs to sub-contractors in order to meet the demand of textbooks in time. This seriously impacts the quality of textbooks printed as the sub-contractors, who are generally small printers, do not have the relevant capacity to perform the printing job according to the specifications.

Conflict of Interest

The procurement committee of the textbook board includes a prominent publisher of the province which is a clear example of conflict of interest as the publisher gets access to any privileged information available with the committee.

Compliance with Technical Parameters

Poor quality of textbooks is one of the reasons for the lack of interest of children in the textbooks¹. It has been noted that the sample submitted at the time of bidding is sometimes

different from the ink and paper used in the textbooks. The technical specifications set by the board are violated this way and because the department is under pressure to provide books to the schools before the start of the academic session, a huge loss is incurred in terms of achieving the best value for money.

Opportunities to Enhance Transparency in Textbooks Procurement

Following opportunities will help enhance transparency in textbooks procurement system in KP:

Establishment of a Monitoring System

A monitoring system may be introduced to make spot checks at regular intervals to ensure that the printing is in line with the desired specifications. Rather than waiting till the publication of all books, a certain number of books may be decided as the inspection cut-off point after which the monitoring team may check the samples and establish if the process is transparent and according to the technical parameters agreed upon or not.

Re-organization of the Procurement Committee

The conflict of interest in the textbook board procurement committee needs to be managed by not allowing a member who has any affiliation with the potential bidders or the procurement or review process. The composition of the procurement committee may be changed to exclude the prominent publisher.

Publication of an Annual Report by the KP Textbook Board

In line with Section 5 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information (RTI) Act 2013, an annual report detailing the textbook procurement process including costs, timelines and cost escalation details, if any, should be made compulsory for the textbook board. This would help in keeping the process transparent and readily available for scrutiny for all the stakeholders.

Reference

1. I-SAPS (2014), *Education Sector Procurements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Horizontal Accountability Perspective*, Islamabad



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