



**Institute of
Social and Policy Sciences**



Background Note

Policy Dialogue

on

Procurement and Purchases by School Councils:

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability at School Level

Gujrat

December 3, 2014

Background Note

1. Introduction:

Procurement of school supplies, construction work, purchase of textbooks and services is an extremely important function for seamless working of any education system. Construction of new schools, classrooms and missing facilities is probably the biggest development expenditure in the education sector at provincial level every year. In Punjab, school construction budget was approximately Rs. 3.3 billion in the FY 2013-14 – which is 44% of the total development budget of the School Education Department. Free textbooks in the province are funded from recurrent budget and cost around Rs. 3.3 billion, annually. Along with the school construction and textbooks procurements at provincial level, the School Councils (SCs) in the province also receive an annual grant based on a flat rate¹ for primary and middle schools. SCs can spend this grant to procure learning materials, furniture, and minor repairs and maintenance works for schools.

School councils are required to maintain financial records to an acceptable standard, and are subject to third party verification of their records and accounts. However, the councils are exempt from standard government financial and audit procedures because it has deterred the school councils from spending the funds in the past.

Selective evidence indicates that cash book and other records are maintained by majority of school councils (94%), and same are available for scrutiny. In order to ensure horizontal accountability, 78% of school councils were visited by AEOs on regular basis and their financial records were duly inspected². According to a DFID study, school councils utilized funds to carry out minor as well as major civil works in the schools. Based on a comparative analysis, the study concluded that civil works executed by the SCs were economical and got completed in less time as compared to the conventional government contracting³. However, recent research has highlighted procedural issues and capacity gaps that hamper effective fund utilization by SCs especially for the procurement of construction services and materials.

In this context, Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), in collaboration with Ilm Ideas, is conducting a Policy Dialogue on “Procurements and Purchases by School Councils: Enhancing Transparency and Accountability at School Level”. The dialogue is aimed to discuss the role of school councils in procurement procedures and to share experiences, best practices and recommendations for improving transparency and accountability in the school council procurements.

¹ The flat rate is Rs. 20,000 per year for school councils in primary schools.

² Government of the Punjab, School Education Department, 2010, *The State of School Councils in the Punjab: A Baseline Study of Community Participation in School Management*. (The study was conducted by I-SAPS for the Government of Punjab)

³ Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS). 2012. *Leadership in School Councils of Punjab: Insights into Composition and Capacity*. Islamabad.

2. Aim and Objectives

The broad aim of this dialogue is to facilitate an informed debate on procurements of school supplies and constructions by the school councils, in order to ensure effective utilization of available resources in a transparent manner. Specific objectives of policy dialogue are to:

- Facilitate an interface between the government officials, public representatives and civil society for improving the effectiveness and transparency in the school council fund utilization for schools improvement;
- Discuss concept of horizontal accountability at school level and debate role of the stakeholders for improving transparency and accountability in school council procurements; and
- Share viable options and best practices for enhancing transparency and accountability in the school council purchases.

3. Topics to be covered by Speakers

The speaker and discussants at the policy dialogue will include experts in the areas of education, procurements and community participation in school development. The topics to be covered in the policy dialogue include;

- Improving Horizontal Accountability at Service Delivery Level: Capability, Accountability and Responsiveness of School Councils.
- Procurement and Purchases by School Councils: Challenges at Policy, Procedure and Practice Levels.

4. Participants

The participants of policy dialogue will comprise the key stakeholders including public representatives, district government officials, representatives of the district education department, members of school councils, office bearers of district bar association, civil society organizations, and representatives of electronic and print media.

5. Follow-up

I-SAPS has initiated a series of policy dialogues on education procurements at provincial and district levels with a view to creating and sustaining a vibrant interface between civil society, public representatives and government officials for improving transparency and accountability in the system. In addition to more issue-based dialogues, I-SAPS will provide department-specific recommendations and facilitate the departments and school councils for improving procurements in education sector.