

## Background Note

# Aggregating Voice for Better Results: Learning from Policy and Constituency Level Engagements

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Islamabad

## Aggregating Voice for Better Results:

### Learning from Policy and Constituency Level Engagements

#### I. Introduction:

Education sector in Pakistan is facing myriad challenges, ranging from limited access to poor quality. The causes for the present state of affairs are multiple, ranging from technical reasons, the political will to undertake and implement reforms to the resistance from various interest groups. The absence of education sector issues from the political discourse at the national and provincial level in general and at the constituency level in particular has remained the most striking feature of the present scenario. Though in recent years education has become very conspicuous in the political rhetoric and the statements of the politicians but there is scant evidence on translating this political rhetoric into a reality.

We understand that the challenges in the education sector can only be addressed by creating a buy-in of the political actors and a rigorous follow up by the citizens on the political commitments. Public representatives and politicians are essential partners in this process as being representatives of the people. They can influence and direct the actions of the executive through political debates in the legislature, media, and through the interaction with their party workers, voters and interest groups of their respective constituencies.

However, education in Pakistan had been planned and delivered largely as a technical response. The political leaders have been unable to perform their role effectively for a number of reasons including; weak public demand for political action to improve education; availability of constituency specific evidence to the politicians on issues and needs in the education sector; and absence of technical backstopping to frame issues and questions to be taken up in the legislature and with the provincial and district education administration. In this backdrop, I-SAPS has been taking various initiatives to influence the political capital with an aim to strengthen the political voice and oversight for better planning and delivery of education by addressing these constraints.

I-SAPS' understanding of synergizing technical and political interface for education reform was largely informed by the works of Amitai Etzioni<sup>1</sup>, Albert Hirschman<sup>2</sup> and Tip O'Neil's<sup>3</sup> work on politics and voice. The work under this initiative is

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<sup>1</sup> Amitai, Etzioni. 1991. *A Responsive Society: Collected Essays on Guiding Deliberate Social Change*. Jossey Bass Business and Management Series. & Amitai, Etzioni. 1968. *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*. Collier-Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> Albert O. Hirschman. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Tip O'Neill and Gary Hymel. 1994. *All Politics is Local, and other Rules of the Game*. Mass.: Bob Adams.

pioneering and avant-garde in the education sector in Pakistan. During the course of the initiative, we have been able to successfully demonstrate that a tradeoff between the political interests of local political elite and the issues faced by the education sector in that particular area can lead to affirmative political and administrative actions. The initiative has been able to generate a sustained interest and positive actions by the political leadership who was informed technically through the locally relevant and actionable evidence. The political actions have been able to contribute substantially towards improving the education services at the constituency and district levels.

## **II. Objectives:**

The dialogue is being organized to share our learning about the dynamics of education and politics within the framework of voice and accountability. The primary objective of the experience sharing dialogue is to have robust evidence on policy table that is both theoretically sound and empirically relevant in Pakistani context. The dialogue aims to provide insights and explain the interface of political and technical side of education reforms at district and constituency levels.

## **III. Topics to be covered by Speakers:**

The topics to be covered at the dialogue will include the following:

- a. Synergizing Technical and Political Dimensions of Education Reform: Learning from Policy and Constituency Level Engagements
- b. Political Voice: Cross Province Experience Sharing by the Honourable Parliamentarians and Public Representatives

## **IV. Participants:**

The participants of the experience sharing dialogue will include the key stakeholders i.e. Parliamentarians, Members of the Provincial Assemblies, Members of Standing Committees, international and national development partners, academia and representatives of print and electronic media.