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Summary of DeliverEd Findings in Pakistan

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Introduction to DeliverEd program

DeliverEd is a global initiative, launched in 2019 by the Education Commission, in partnership with the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford, and funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), to investigate how governments can achieve their policy priorities through the use of delivery approaches. DeliverEd aims to define what different delivery approaches entail and build evidence on their efficacy in improving reform implementation and education outcomes. The initiative conducted a global mapping of delivery approaches, developed a framework to study delivery approaches, and is researching the effect of delivery approaches on the implementation of key policy reforms across five different country case studies, including Pakistan, Ghana, Jordan, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania. This note summarizes the key findings from the delivery approach adopted in Punjab, Pakistan.

DeliverEd definition of delivery approaches

A delivery approach involves the establishment of a new or reformed unit or organizational structure to rapidly improve bureaucratic functioning and achieve key targets. It redesigns management practices at central and decentralized levels to improve policy implementation through five delivery functions: target setting and prioritization, monitoring and measurement, leveraging political sponsorship, accountability and incentives, and problem-solving and organizational learning.

Overview of the delivery approach in Punjab's education sector

In Punjab, the most populous province in Pakistan, a delivery approach was introduced in 2010 (and ran until 2018) to support the implementation of the Punjab Schools Reform Roadmap. The chief minister (CM) established a delivery unit at his office (with national and international consultants), which identified priorities, developed indicators, and set targets to achieve the reform priorities. The delivery approach relied heavily on high-stakes accountability routines based on district and school-level performance indicators. District executive administrators were held accountable for meeting school- and district-level targets. Quarterly progress review meetings (called stocktakes) were chaired by the CM to rank the districts against their targets, based on school data aggregated by markaz (the cluster of schools) under each district. District rankings were displayed as heat maps to flag the districts

¹ "District executive administrators" refers to the district commissioners (DCs) that serve as the executive representatives of the bureaucracy at the district level. In Punjab, between 2012 and 2016, those in the position were referred to as district coordinating officers (DCOs), and they enjoyed significant executive powers at the district level. Following 2016, those in the position were referred to as district commissioners, and they had reduced executive powers.

that were lagging on their targets as red and those that were on track as green. District executive administrators of the districts that were performing well were rewarded, and administrators of the districts that were performing poorly were named and shamed.

Research design

\qualitative and quantitative perspective. The qualitative study, led by the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), conducted over 70 interviews (of federal and provincial bureaucratic leaders, district staff, and education officials) and conducted an extensive document review from 12 out of Punjab's 36 districts to examine the implementation and lasting impact of the delivery approach. The qualitative component of the research traced the enactment of the reform process to understand the practices that were introduced and identify how they changed the managerial practices at the provincial and district level. The quantitative study, led by the World Bank Bureaucracy Lab, examined the impact of a reporting framework with data-intensive monitoring routines, using the administrative data generated by the education management information system in Punjab. The study analyzed data from the 10 years of implementation, using a weighted difference-in-difference methodology that measured the impact of this monitoring and accountability system on student attendance, teacher absenteeism, and learning outcomes, among other indicators.

Key findings

1. Adoption and objectives of the delivery approach/institutional and political features that shaped the delivery approach

The political context of electoral competition, and the need for a clear set of targets developed through political consensus, were important drivers of the delivery approach's adoption in Punjab. Strong data capacity and donor involvement were important inputs into the delivery approach design and funding. The Punjab Education Roadmap reform required convening power and compliance across the delivery chain to succeed. The adoption of the delivery approach was comparatively easier, due to Punjab's decade-long investments in teacher policies, data systems, and school infrastructure, which created an enabling environment. The provincial government, with donor support, identified key priorities, including setting targets for short-, medium-, and long-term reforms implementation.

FCDO's role in facilitating the Education Task Force (ETF), a high-level forum established by the prime minister of Pakistan, and funding the education roadmap,

led to a strong influence of the UK Prime Minister's Delivery Unit model in the design of the Punjab delivery approach. The roadmap relied heavily on high-stakes accountability routines, based on district- and school-level data on specific performance indicators. Interviews with district executive administrators, however, revealed that it was difficult to be responsible for targets when there were no tools to achieve them. Decentralization reforms affected the role and capacity of district executive administrators to deliver on key reforms. At the start of the reform in 2012, the district executive administrators had financial, administrative, and executive authority over 11 services, but after 2016, their financial authority was removed, and the majority of the administrative authority was moved to the district education authorities (DEAs).

2. Changes in management routines and behaviors

The delivery approach in Punjab involved all departments at the district level; it was effective in setting targets across the delivery chain and harnessing routines for data collection and monitoring at the district level. High-stakes stocktake meetings and reputational incentives were used to foster competition among peers, based on school and district rankings. The delivery approach in Punjab introduced new routines and practices that focused on prioritization and target setting, measurement and monitoring, leveraging political sponsorship, accountability, and problem-solving.

- **Prioritization and target setting:** In the first few years, the aim of the Punjab Education Roadmap approach was to increase school enrollment rates and improve school infrastructure. These aims later evolved to focus more on improving process-level indicators, such as teacher presence and student attendance. In parallel, reforms were introduced for enhancing teacher professional development, expanding supplies, reforming textbooks, investing in routine and robust student testing, and strengthening school-level leadership (Malik et al., 2023). Targets were set at the provincial level and communicated downstream to district authorities. The new routines and practices set targets for shorter periods of time and made district executive administrators responsible for achieving them.

- **Measurement and monitoring** were based on school-level data collected by district monitoring officers (DMOs) and monitoring and evaluation assistants (MEAs); the data was curated by the delivery team representatives of the Project Management Implementation Unit (PMIU) and Special Monitoring Unit (SMU). The markaz (cluster of schools) flagging system was introduced by the delivery unit as a data-driven practice to signal the districts in which the markaz had unsatisfactory

performance on the education roadmap's key performance indicators (KPIs). The delivery unit converted the data into heat maps to show how districts were progressing toward their targets (see Diagram 1).

- **Leveraging political sponsorship:** The chief minister, the highest political leader at the provincial level, took complete ownership of the reform agenda, and this was clearly communicated to the provincial- and district-level bureaucracies for serious implementation, including working closely with the education department at the district level to monitor and take corrective measures at the local level. The high-stakes quarterly stocktake meetings chaired by the chief minister with all 36 district executive administrators were used to signal strong political commitment to improve district performance, based on school district rankings.

- **Accountability routines** were also introduced and leveraged to drive bureaucratic and school performance. The stocktake meetings served as the key accountability mechanism for the approach, whereby the district executive administrators were either rewarded for good performance or reprimanded publicly for the lack thereof. The district executive administrators reported a competitive spirit and a desire to show improvement in their districts. In addition to introducing informal reputational risks (naming and shaming) for underperforming districts, the delivery approach also introduced rewards to incentivize performance of the three top-performing districts by providing signed certificates and monetary rewards (bonuses) for their executive administrators, but not for their district education officers. The education department staff reported a much more negative response toward rigid accountability mechanisms (and a sense of distance from reform objectives).

- **Problem-solving** routines were more ad hoc. Even the monthly district review committees (DRCs) and pre-DRCs to review data and prepare for high-stake stocktake meetings served more as preparatory meetings rather than ground-up problem-solving and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

These routines appear to have been effective in introducing and harnessing new practices and routines, but their impact was perceived differently across administrative levels. In general, the delivery approach was effective in setting routines for target setting and prioritization, data collection and monitoring, and fostering a competitive spirit among district executives to try to achieve better outcomes for the district. For the period that the delivery approach was active, there was more use of data and analysis at the provincial and district level. The district

executive administrators were energized by the competition and promise of financial rewards. On the other hand, district education officials perceive that they were put in a “fire-fighting” mode, and they felt a great deal of stress and pressure from the frequent monitoring and review routines, which often affected their productivity and motivation levels, including by creating a culture of fear and pressure among junior bureaucrats.

3. Contribution to improved inputs, outputs and outcomes

As stated above, initially the Punjab Education Roadmap approach aimed to increase enrollment rates, improve teacher attendance, and improve school infrastructure. The qualitative and quantitative studies sought to understand how well the delivery approach achieved its intended goals and assess the approach’s impact on inputs, outputs, and outcomes. The mixed methods approach used by DeliverEd has helped to build a certain amount of evidence on the effects of the delivery approach in Punjab, but it is not possible to isolate the impact that the combined set of DA functions have had on learning outcomes.

The qualitative study showed that the delivery approach was perceived to have some positive effects on managerial processes, while the approach was active. Some district executive administrators perceived that teacher attendance and infrastructure improved; however, they also reported that it was not possible to claim any impact on learning outcomes or more complex process-level outcomes of teaching and learning. In interviews, the district-level staff within the education department reported that they understood the importance of utilizing school-level data to make informed decisions and to support school leaders and teachers to improve school performance. The district executive administrators noted that the routine stocktake meetings and upstream reporting requirements enabled the district to align toward common priority targets. The accountability-associated routines also signaled the importance of education reform, focusing both resources and attention on key reform areas that received political support across different administrative levels in the education sector.

The quantitative component assessed the markaz- and district-flagging system, a subset of the data for the monitoring and accountability routines that were introduced within the delivery approach. The study found that flagging low-performing schools had no effect on output-type or outcome-type metrics. These included district and school rankings, teacher and student attendance, functional facilities, and scores in math, English, or Urdu. This finding suggests that the flagging system was not able

to help change the management practices and ultimately improve student performance, perhaps because the monitoring was capturing the high degree of variability within the system (short-term fluctuations in the schools), rather than more structural issues that could better explain school performance.

Preliminary policy considerations

Punjab introduced a top-down data-driven accountability reform initiative in education with the intent to improve education outcomes. The reform effort introduced a set of routines typically associated with delivery approaches, including target setting, collective monitoring and accountability through high-level meetings, and explicit and visible political ownership.

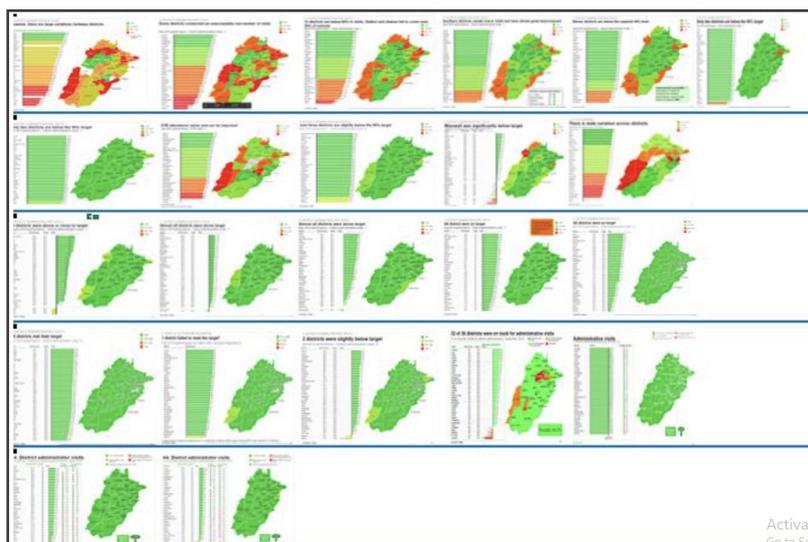
- **Bureaucratic and management practices:** At the district level, bureaucratic and management practices changed in response to the reforms, including target setting, use of data for monitoring, and incentives linked with district performance. These practices did not endure once the reform effort concluded. More study of the attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and practices of bureaucrats at the middle and ground level is needed to understand the long-standing structures that govern bureaucratic practice.

- **Sustainability:** Punjab's delivery approach was funded by donors, supported by external consultants, and strongly linked to one political leader: the chief minister of Punjab. For continuity of reforms and funding, sustainability should have been a key design consideration when the delivery approach was being initiated, as the donor funding ended, and the political leadership changed, due to elections, affecting the continuity of the roadmap. Having a sustainability strategy in the beginning of such an undertaking increases the likelihood that the approach will be sustained beyond the tenure of a single political leader.

- **Use of data:** The roadmap reform effort formalized the practice of linking performance accountability to the well-established mechanism for data collection from schools and expanded the availability of data and aggregation at the district level. Despite there being a high-frequency monitoring system in place, and granular data, the absence of detailed analysis on the data led to the continuation and expansion of the program over a multiyear period. The quantitative analysis of the data showed that there was no improvement in the district officer behaviors and in school or student performance due to the flagging system. The monitoring system did not improve the performance of the weakest districts, as defined by the rankings.

Instead, the relative rankings remained unchanged. An alternative reporting mechanism, based on the same data, may have better captured the relative progress. Data should be analyzed, reviewed, and interpreted with the right analytical team, on a regular basis, to identify whether the reforms are having an impact on education outcomes or not. This assessment should then inform policy formulation, implementation, and reshaping. Big data could also have been used to identify other priorities, such as more effective managers (head teachers) to improve learning outcomes and school performance.

Heat maps for one indicator along with district rankings, 2012–2018



Source: Chief minister's stocktake meeting documents, PMIU. Artifact creation: authors

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