

## Partnerships in Education (Schools)

***“An illiterate person is not only a burden on society, he is a threat” (Anonymous)***

The Constitution of Pakistan promises to remove illiteracy and to provide free and compulsory secondary education to all children. The Government of Pakistan is committed to the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Education For All (EFA) goals, to eliminate gender disparity and to ensure the education of all children by 2015. Considerable progress has been made towards these objectives. The literacy rate has been improving over the years and drop out rates are declining. Enrolment is on the rise and gender disparity dissipating. Expenditure on education has also been increasing year on year, except for last year, because of the peculiar situation that Pakistan is in now. In spite of this progress, much more needs to be done.

The literacy rate, with a very liberal definition of the term, is about 55% but, only 42 % for females. Of the 161,000 middle level schools, about 29% have no drinking water, 50% have no electricity and 35% have no toilets. Some 34% of high schools are without computer laboratories, and 15% without science laboratories. Dropout rates are still quite high – about one-third of children who enroll drop out before class 5.

With this backdrop, the Government has re-committed itself to providing quality education to the children of Pakistan. A National Education Policy was recently approved by the Federal Cabinet after almost three years of debate and discussion across the country. Universal and free primary and secondary education is a main objective. An important component of the policy is to encourage private sector participation in the sector. Given the mammoth task ahead, it would be difficult for the government to achieve it alone. The standard of education will be raised by bringing improvement in areas such as the examination system, quality of teachers and curriculum. Early childhood education and inclusive education will also get attention. Better facilities will be provided in existing schools while new infrastructure will be created to accommodate out of school children. Literacy programs and vocational training will be expanded. The management of schools and school systems will be improved.

Some policy reforms and infrastructure improvement have already started. The curriculum is being updated to correspond to the challenges of the modern world and the job market. A new textbook policy has been announced to provide better quality books at affordable prices. The private sector is being allowed to publish books on a competitive basis. Examination and assessment systems are being upgraded. Programs to promote girls' education are being introduced. Free education and free textbooks up to class 10 are now the norm in the public sector schools. Computer education is being encouraged.

Some of the areas where the private sector can contribute and benefit from the opportunities are given below.

The enrolment in public sector schools is about 21 million. Since the Government provides free **textbooks**, its publishing can be a viable proposition for public-private partnership. The current market is of the order of USD 60 million. This is going to expand as the number of students increases. There is also a large market for **computers** along with the **software** and equipment for **science laboratories** that must be provided to schools. Innovation will be required to run computers in areas with no electricity.

With the emphasis on improving the quality of teaching, the existing **teachers training institutions** need to be upgraded (including the provision of new equipment). There is also a need for establishing new training institutions.

The Government plans to introduce a **nutrition program for rural primary schools**. It is thought that, apart from attracting and retaining children in schools, it would help overcome malnutrition problems. The first phase of the program, to cover some 11 million students, will cost about USD 210 million.

The Pakistani private sector already plays an important and substantial role in the education sector. A number of good quality school systems have been established across the country. The systems could be expanded, or new systems introduced, through **private-private** partnerships.