

THE NEWS Recalibrating governance: Part IV

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Pakistan faces two serious problems in education. Twenty million children are out of school and learning outcomes from existing schooling are quite weak. To resolve both these problems, governance reforms are badly needed.

These reforms should begin with a clear division of responsibilities between the federal, provincial and district governments in the delivery of services. While the federal government should focus on higher education financing, regulations and standards and curriculum, the provincial governments should be made responsible for college education, technical and vocational education.

The district governments will have the exclusive powers to manage and operate primary and secondary education up to matriculation. Examination reforms have to be carried out to bring the standards of various boards at par. Management and teaching cadres should be separated and the career paths for the two cadres would not discriminate against the teachers. Curriculum at all tiers from school to higher education should be developed at the national level jointly by the federal and the provincial governments.

To bring about coordination and ensure uniformity in standards of public, private and not-for-profit schools, a District Education Board should be established in each district. The board will consist of eminent persons enjoying a good reputation in their communities and will have the district education officer as the secretary to the board. The board will be assisted by school management committees which will be empowered to oversee the school's functioning. Head teachers will enjoy more administrative authority in running the schools and disciplining teachers and arranging inspection of schools periodically.

To provide financing for talented students to pursue studies at top institutions in the country, endowment funds at the provincial levels should be topped up every year out of the budget. Student vouchers or stipends should be available to meritorious children from the poor families to attend private schools of their choice. Private-public partnerships in the form of 'Adopt a School' programmes should be encouraged and given incentives. To promote increased female enrollment at primary schools, only female teachers be employed whenever possible.

Science, mathematics and computer literacy courses should be introduced right from the middle school level which should be equipped with networks, internet connectivity and laboratories. To attract out-of-school children, both modified formal schooling without age restrictions and vocational and technical training streams should be offered.

Most of the problems in healthcare delivery arise not from financial constraints but due to poor management practices. The health management cadre should therefore, be separated from teaching and service providers in each province and the federal government. Only those with aptitude should be recruited as health managers and trained at the national and provincial health academies. District, teaching and other specialized hospitals should have their own autonomous board of directors and should be given autonomy in administrative, financial, legal and human resource matters.

Health, manpower, development, particularly in the nursing and paramedical professions, require urgent attention for quality and volume increase. The health regulatory frame- work should be made more effective and also set up at the provincial level. Pay scales for health professionals should be separated from those with basic pay scales.

There is almost a consensus that the law and order and security problems that have worsened in recent years have arisen due to inefficiency, corruption and politicization of the police force. The original Police Order 2002 had been compromised by amendments that weakened the functioning and accountability of the police. Legislative amendments and revised disciplinary rules are needed to allow police officers to perform their duties in accordance

with the police order and to remove the discretionary powers of politicians in postings and transfers, a powerful tool that has created the present state of indifference, inefficiency and unresponsiveness on the part of police officials.

The reversal to the Old Police Act after 2008 has, in fact, aggravated the situation as the police have become highly politicized. The police force should not fall under the purview of the Civil Servants Act (except those belonging to the Police Service of Pakistan) as it impedes internal accountability.

Disciplinary rules should be framed under the Police Order. The provincial police office should be organized along functional lines and powers should be delegated to the lower tiers.

Urban police stations should be merged, upgraded and headed by a directly recruited officer of Grade 17 with full responsibility for Watch and Ward, Investigation and Operations. Training, allowances, mobility, logistics support, lodging and boarding, medical facilities and welfare of the police force fall short of their requirements and create demoralisation, too. These should be reviewed and strengthened. Traffic police in all large cities should be organized and operated on the lines of the Motorway Police.

Land records as maintained by the patwari are the single largest source of disputes and litigation in the country. Attempts to create a digital database of land records have remained halfhearted except in Punjab where some progress was made but reversed recently by reinstating the patwar system. Land revenue assessment and collection, adjudication and dispute resolution, maintenance and update of land records should remain under the district government. The patwari should be replaced by a qualified revenue assistant and recruited through the provincial Public Service Commission. The Colonisation of Government Lands Act 1912 should be revised for better and transparent allocation and utilization of state land.

The governance agenda outlined above should not be considered a technocratic exercise as it is essentially a political exercise that takes into account the existing power relationships in which the polity is rooted. The balancing of diverse interests of the various stakeholders involves many politically tough choices which cannot be made by technocrats. The

sustainability of reforms requires broad consultation, consensus building and communication to articulate the long-term vision.

People should see beyond the immediate horizon and buy into the future changes. Concerns, criticism and scepticism should be addressed. The scope, phasing, timing, implementation strategies, mitigation measures for the losers from the reforms should be widely discussed and debated. If things do not proceed the way they were conceptualized, corrective actions should be taken in light of the feedback received. Citizen charters, citizen surveys and report cards, citizen panels and focus groups should be used as instruments for receiving regular feedback about the impact of reforms on society and its different segments.

To conclude, in order to nurture democratic governance, law and order and the justice system need to be strengthened, and government structures and institutions revamped to promote efficiency by hiring on merit, deploying e-government and decentralizing power. Authority and resources have to be devolved to the elected local governments where most of the essential public goods and services are delivered.

The government must refrain from unnecessary intrusion and provide an enabling environment for the private sector to invest and operate. For the common person, satisfaction level is correlated with access to jobs, livelihoods, price stability, affordable dispute resolution, security of person and property and delivery of education, health care, drinking water, transport etc. When this happens, economic growth will not be far behind.

The majority of the population is not concerned with foreign exchange reserves, current account or fiscal deficit or other macro indicators but with the delivery of these basic public services.

The writer is the author of 'Governing the ungovernable'