Incorporating data into education policymaking

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In defense of the blind men
Why data are important

- **On a philosophical level:**
  - If there is no epistemological basis for making a statement of fact, then it is worthless
  - “That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence” – Christopher Hitchens

- **On a practical level:**
  - How do we know what works and what does not?
  - In the absence of evidence all policies being put in to place can be described as shots in the dark.
  - Which policy recommendations should be discarded as a waste of precious resources and what should be replicated? E.g. Was nationalization of educational institutions a success or failure? Do financial inducements for enrolments (stipends, vouchers) work?
  - **ONLY** data and evidence can tell.
The data regime in Pakistan

- Data & evidence – despite the lip service they have received recently – are not a top priority within the development context in Pakistan

- Too often governments, donors and non-governmental organizations are only interested in basic levels of data which help them confirm that their institution/project/aid spending is working well based on very limited metrics

- Publicly available data are:
  - Not timely (the most recently available PSLM data were collected in late 2012)
  - Riddled with errors
The data regime in Pakistan

- No census since 1998: This means that every year we get further away from the truth.

- Levels of disaggregation: A LOT of data are not representative at the district or lower levels like Tehsil, UC, etc.

- Data availability is very limited and highly unequal.
The data regime in Pakistan

- There is no standardization of metrics
- PSLM provides no data for AJK, FATA or G-B; includes Islamabad in Punjab
- ASER uses Gross enrolment instead of Net enrolment
- Nomenclature: Is it Jhelum or Jehlum?
- What data are collected and reported vary across datasets but also across iterations of the same dataset
Data on education

A thought experiment
Universal Primary Enrolment

- Net enrolment has remained largely stagnant for the best part of a decade
- At current rate of increase target will be achieved in 2045
Disaggregated by gender and area

- Challenge remains across the board.
- Rural NER lower than urban NER.
- Female NER lower than male NER.
Disaggregated by Province

- Punjab has the highest enrolment rate with the smallest gap between male and female enrolment.

- Balochistan has the lowest rates of enrolment.
Size of the challenge: Out of School Children

- Pakistan has one of the largest populations of out of school primary school going-age children in the world
- Other more recent estimates place the number at 5.4 million
Budgetary Choices: Where are we putting our money?

- Development spending on education which includes school construction has actually declined as a percentage of total education spending.

- Spending increases have been due to current expenditures which include salaries and maintenance.
When we talk about school infrastructure in Pakistan we talk about these five things.

No talk of playgrounds, science or computer labs, etc.

We see the bias in favour of higher levels of education compared to lower levels of schooling.
How much do we spend per child?

- A review of spending per enroled child shows the drastic variation of focus. (Federal)
- Why federal?
- Of course the numbers here are problematic
What is the student teacher ratio?

- The ratio of primary school students to teachers has increased steadily over the last decade and has pushed over 40 students to every teacher.
What does this mean?

- **Budget:**
  - Rs. 8,000 * 5.4 million = Rs. 43.2 billion

- **Teachers**
  - 5.4 million / 40 = 135,000
What we need to know?

- How does this level of spending per child relate to attainment and achievement levels?
- Is the current mix between current and development expenditure the most effective?
- Which teacher recruitment methods have proven effective in attracting the best teachers?