

Citizen-Centered Governance Reforms in Education: A Review of BESP

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Abstract

Almost all countries of the world are facing the challenge of governance deficit in different departments with varying degrees. However, the situation of governance deficit is most alarming in developing and under-developed countries of the world. The deficit of governance is reflected in law and order situation, poor economic growth, lack of basic health facilities, poverty, illiteracy and poor standard of education etc. This article is focused on the governance deficit in education. To overcome the governance deficit in education department and making its governance good, large number of countries have involved the common man in educational management. Government of Balochistan has also made a similar decision. Under article 25[a] of the constitution of 1973, primary education has been made compulsory and free for children from 5 to 16 years of age. This article is aimed at exploring the level of public participation and its outcome in the improvement of schools' performance. The data for the research article is collected through qualitative method of research in which field experts in education management and administration and other stakeholders have been interviewed.

Key words: *governance, citizen-centered governance, top-down approach, bottom-up approach*

Introduction

Before discussing the citizen-centered governance reforms with special focus on BESP, it is pertinent to define the term governance. World Bank (1992) has defined the governance as under:

“A general definition of governance is the exercise of authority, control, management, power of government.” “As per development assistance committee of OECD, governance is the use of political authority and

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exercise of control in society in relation to the management of its resources for social and economic development”

According to ESCAP “governance means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented [or not implemented]. Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance and local governance.

(<http://www.unescap.or/pdd/prs/project/activities/ongoing/gg/governance.asp>)

In light of above definitions, we may say that governance is the ways and means of running the governmental affairs. It ranges from individual to institutions as well as structural and functional aspect of an organization.

There are mainly two ways of governance approach i.e. one is top-down approach in which there is a centralized decision and policy making and implementation; while the other is bottom-up or citizen-centered approach towards governance in which public is given active participation in running the government. According to citizen-centered governance the government is a pillar of the state and its prime responsibility is to facilitate the common man. Hence it is urgently needed to involve the public in solving their core issues faced by them in any sphere of life according to their wishes.

As education is one of the main public sectors in which quite a large number of human resource is involved. Further, education is one of the primary needs of the public. Previously education was run under top-down approach in which educational policies, decision making processes, fiscal policies and fiscal management were centralized subjects. Public had little say in educational planning and management. Consequently, a wide gap was found between the public demand and government supply of services. So after due consideration and studies it was set to reform the governance approach changing it from top-down approach to bottom-up or citizen-centered one to fix the ills in education department and it was specially felt in developing countries of the world. So in light of the above facts in most of the developed and developing countries, public has been involved in school management and improvement plan, expenditure of budget, curriculum development as well as decision making process.

Some of the examples are mentioned herein below:

According UNESCO (2012) for almost the last two decades decentralization and public participatory approach got a lot of importance and is considered a best tool in educational planning. Many of the countries have reformed

their education, particularly primary and secondary education accordingly. Some of the examples are given here in below.

In New Zealand, the school management is based on citizen-centered governance approach. Schools are managed by an elected trustee board in which the community members have a big say in school management. In Nicaragua, governance councils have been setup in schools which includes the members of all stakeholders including parents. Daun (2004) is of the view that in Sweden most of the decision about school management are made by municipalities or school principals themselves. In England, Local Education Authority and Local Management of Schools are powerful public participatory bodies for school management. In France, School councils have been made which include head teachers, elected representatives of parents, the mayor and town councilor representatives for school. In Germany, teachers, parents and students are given direct participation in decision making. According the analysis of Bjork (2004) the same practice of public involvement of public in governing schools has been experienced in Czech Republic, Iran and Indonesia. The results are almost positive but results are different from country to country.

So keeping in view the importance and viability of participatory governance, government of Balochistan framed Balochistan Education Sector Plan (BESP) 2013-18. In BESP, it was decided to decentralize the power to local level so as to improve the managerial efficiency of the department by involving public as well lower level of management.

The main purpose of BESP was to materialize article 25-A of the 1973 constitution in which education has been declared free and compulsory for the children from 5 to 16 years of age. As in other parts of the world; developed, developing and under developed countries of the world where in education management and even curriculum is developed with the help of people. The main reason behind the fact of public involvement in school plans and curriculum is that parents and public know better than the higher authorities the problems of their children and they can find best solutions to fix these problems. Under BESP, public participatory committees have been formed to involve the public school management. PTSMC, LEC, DEG are the committees in which parents, civil society, private schools members, members of local government are included to gauge the performance of schools, discuss school problems and solve them mutually. They are to ensure the right use of money in schools. Such participatory committees will be giving their suggestions to the higher authorities. Such participatory

committees are the hallmark of decentralization of power to the public and therefore best to be called as citizen-centered governance reforms.

Views of different interviewees about the participatory committees

Different stakeholders in the education department have been interviewed regarding the effectiveness of the public participatory committees. All the interviewees have endorsed the citizen-centered reforms in the education department in the form of committees like PTSMC, DEG, and LEC. However, they displayed reservation about the effectiveness of the said committees. Mr. Raza Barech (2019) ex-education minister during whose tenure as an education minister the BESP was framed, is of the view that higher authorities as well as political leadership is not ready to give power to the public and the said committees are therefore not so effective. Mr. Gulab Khan Khilji (2019) a full bright scholar and deputy focal person of PPIU, is of the view that the said committees are ineffective because there is a parody of decentralization under BESP. There is only a supply driven decentralization and hence public has no say in the school plan. Another interviewee Mr. Abdul Khaliq (2019) an M. Phil holder from Australia and deputy focal person in PPIU, is of the view that there is deconcentration of powers which means powers rests with higher authorities and public will have to follow the decision of higher authorities. Mr. Gulab Khan Mandokhail (2019) ex-director of education [schools] and ex-director of BOC, said that the said committees are worthless because the higher authorities have even snatched those powers from education officers and given to DC which were previously held by education department at district level. Mr. Wazir Khan, senior headmaster government high school Wadh Sheikhan is of the view that the participatory committees are ineffective because even the school headmasters consider the said committees as intervention.

On the contrary, Secretary of Education, Mr. Tayab Lehri (2019) called these committees very important because according to him these are public platforms who know better their problems and can find better solutions. Mr. Ghulam Ali Baloch (2019) ex-secretary of education, is of the view that these committees are like other platforms of decentralization and can play a better role in school based management.

Analysis of Different Views

In the light of research based interviews some of the faults have been found with regard to citizen participatory committees:

1. The participatory committees not been granted with decision making power with regard to a school plan.
2. Not to speak of higher authorities, even the school headmasters are reluctant to endorse the role of such committees as they consider them an intervention in their authority.
3. The said committees have no financial powers. They have neither the power to demand for budget nor the power to spend the existing budget.
4. There is quite a meagre amount which is spent in consultation with PTSMC.
5. The insignificant role of these committees have made them passive. The community members know that they have no say in the school plan. They have therefore taken for granted their participation in the meetings of these committees.
6. Still another issue is the incapacity of the lower level of management and the public to efficiently exercise the deconcentrated power.

The above facts show that the citizen-centered reforms taken under BESP is a mere parody of decentralization of powers to the public and lower level of management.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It is a proven fact that citizen-centered or participatory governance reforms, especially in education, has proved effective throughout the world. Decentralization in all its forms i.e. deconcentration and delegation of powers with public participation in decision making and budget expenditure has been overcome many of the challenges in school management. Decentralization has played a key role in ensuring quality education, overcoming drop-out of children and other educational issues confronted by different countries of the world. So far as the citizen-centered approach governance under BESP is concerned all the stakeholders have endorsed such move of the government of Balochistan. However, to overcome the aforesaid flaws, following steps are deemed necessary:

1. Public committees are needed to be empowered by giving them effective decision making power in school plan
2. Committees should be involved in budget proposal and budget expenditure.
3. The higher authorities should take suggestions from public and they must consider their suggestions while framing any policy, plan or program about education.

4. Now there is a meagre amount spared for PTSMC. This amount should be increased so that they may be able to purchase the required material for the school.
5. The issue of incapacity of exercising the given powers at lower level or of public is real. But this issue can be overcome by conducting seminars, conferences, trainings and advertisements.
6. An empowered local government can also play an effective role because it is the nursery for public maturity by seeing the consequences of their decision from very close.

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