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Third Primary Education Project

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The Pakistan Third Primary Education project supported by Credit 1821-PAK for US$145 million equivalent, was approved in FY87. The European Community provided cofinancing of US$10 million. After extensions totaling three years, the credit closed on June 30, 1996. A credit balance of US$3.8 million was canceled, as was the US$3.6 million balance of the European Community grant.

The Implementation Completion Report (ICR) was prepared by the South Asia Regional Office. The borrower's full report on the implementation and achievements of the project is included as an annex. cofinanciers comments were incorporated in the ICR.

The project objectives were to: (a) strengthen the capacity of provincial offices to oversee instruction; (b) introduce policy reforms, to facilitate enrollment, particularly for girls; and (c) support educational innovation by improving management, curriculum development, teacher training and communication with parents as well as increasing the demand for schooling. In support of these objectives, the project financed school construction and maintenance, assistance for curriculum development, materials supply, and teacher training. Policy reforms, particularly for strengthening girls' education were emphasized.

Project objectives were not achieved. Due to a lack of government commitment, the policy reforms that had been envisaged to facilitate access and improve quality did not take place. The studies that were to underpin them were delayed by 6-7 years, as was other technical assistance. Although a new curriculum and textbooks were introduced to schools, appropriate teacher training was not given. The training system was not reformed as planned, and the impact of the new textbooks is likely to be modest.

Rather than train teachers first, the government opened large numbers of poorly-staffed rural schools, which provided a very low quality of education. After many delays, most of the construction program was completed, but over 1000 schools remained incomplete when the credit closed. The program had many irregularities; 899 out of 1529 contracts reviewed (59 percent) during a special procurement study deviated from IDA guidelines. Furniture was provided only to 41 percent of the buildings. Schools were to be managed by local committees, but these did not function as expected, because of lack of administrative support and adequate funding. Also, poorer parents were not properly involved. Management training in the Ministry of Education focused on routine job functions rather than on higher-order managerial skills, and did not have a significant impact on staff development. Due to high staff turnover there was little continuity in training. As a result of these problems, access to education did not improve. After ten years of project implementation, Punjab's gross primary enrollment rate rose from 55 percent to 60 percent and there has been no progress in closing the gender gap.

Like the ICR, the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) rates project outcome as unsatisfactory, and institutional development as negligible. OED rates sustainability as unlikely (ICR uncertain) because the few project achievements (e.g. new curricula) were undermined by weak institutional support, such as inadequate teacher training. Sustainability depends crucially on adequate budgets, increased community involvement and improved sector management, issues that will be addressed under the second phase of the social action program, currently under preparation.

However, it will take a few years before it will be clear if these objectives will be achieved. OED rates Bank performance as unsatisfactory, due to the overly optimistic assessment at appraisal of the provincial capacity to implement a large and complex project and of the depth of government ownership of project objectives, particularly

with respect to policy reform. Steps taken to remedy slow progress on policy reform and institution building objectives were not effective.

Yet, three extensions were given to the project. No high-level review was made of the very significant procurement irregularities reported during project implementation, leaving open the possibility of large-scale mismanagement. Task managers changed six times during implementation, creating discontinuities in the project management of the project by the Bank.

The project illustrates that government commitment to project objectives is crucial to successful implementation. Where reforms are hard to implement, IDA should insist on tangible evidence of a willingness to carry out the reforms or actual implementation before it makes significant financial commitments. Policy studies should be completed early in order to underpin reforms, particularly reforms that may be unpopular with some officials. The project also illustrates that to increase achievements, demand-side initiatives should be given more attention, as should the involvement of communities in the management, operation, and maintenance of schools. The ICR is satisfactory.

An audit is planned.