

## RISE in Pakistan: Non-technical research overview

The RISE Country Research Team in Pakistan will undertake a wide-ranging research agenda over six years to understand how market forces can be harnessed to improve education. The project will expand global knowledge on the challenges and opportunities that such market forces represent, especially in countries where learning levels are low despite progress in enrolment and increased spending on education by both government and parents.

An explosive growth in low-cost private schools in Pakistan provides a valuable setting with global lessons for how to harness market forces to improve learning. From 1982 to 2005, the number of low-cost private schools grew 14-fold - and just as fast in rural as in urban areas, with children from the nation's richest and poorest income groups attending. Nevertheless, student test scores in Pakistan remain low, with Grade 5 students barely at Grade 2 competency - even as government spending and parental involvement is increasing fast.

The Pakistan team proposes a set of studies and experiments that will innovatively build on the opportunities in this new educational landscape and enhance local capacity to sustain improvements in education over the long run. Examples of key insights from this research include:

- How does competition among public\* and private schools affect learning?
- How do private schools' independence from certain government regulations and bureaucracy allow them to innovate and improve learning?
- How do public sector reforms affect performance?

The research team proposes to test and analyse a variety of interlinked reforms and issues that are intended to work together to improve learning. The projects will focus on improving interactions among children and parents, schools, financiers and educational service providers: the people helping children learn in a sustainable and socially impactful way.



Key questions include:

- What market forces can be catalysed to improve learning outcomes?
- What are the long-term consequences of providing information regarding school quality on schools and children?
- How does alleviating financial constraints in public and private schools impact learning and educational outcomes?
- What factors limit the development and adoption of innovative ideas in the educational space in Pakistan?
- What are the failures in the teacher labour market?
- What lessons can educators in public and private settings learn from the experiences of, and competition from, low-income private schools?
- Can reforms leverage the interests, incentives and interactions between parents, teachers, administrators, governments and entrepreneurs to reward and achieve educational excellence?

The research will involve analysis of long-term data, consultation with partners in private industry and government, and the use of randomised experiments to provide an evidence base for policy making.

The issues that will be addressed include:

- **The market for quality teachers.** How does teacher training, pay for performance, recruitment, and retention affect the supply of teachers in the public and private sector? Researchers will pay close attention to the market dynamics in rural areas where shortages appear to be a factor, and improved education of local girls may pave the way for the next generation of teachers in villages.
- **Financial constraints.** A major constraint for public and private schools in Pakistan is a lack of adequate financial resources. The studies will explore the effects of innovative instruments that help bridge the resource and financing gaps that private and public schools face. Researchers will examine the effects that stem from providing grants, loans, and equity products designed specifically for the needs of low-cost private schools.
- **Information shortages.** Accurate information about school quality empowers parents to make informed decisions, and helps create a system that recognises and rewards learning innovations. Researchers will examine the long term effects of providing school and child report cards to parents, and will seek to understand whether increases in student learning quality translate into other student outcomes, including labour market decisions.
- **A lack of educational support services.** Researchers are working with partners to create and test new products specifically designed for low-income private schools. The aim is to see whether these measures (along with financial support) lead schools to adopt innovative curricula, teacher training, technologies, and other educational support tools. The experiments stem from the observation that while markets for schools' physical needs, such as desks and chairs, are easy to find, markets for suitable and innovative materials for student learning and teacher training are scarce.

The results from this set of studies will have immediate impact on policies in similar environments, particularly in South Asia, where private schools are a rapidly growing presence. But more broadly, the questions that are addressed in this research agenda respond to the age-old issue of what we ultimately want from our schooling systems, and whether one way to improve schooling is to reduce the frictions in the basic relationship between the parent, the school, and the child.

*\* In the RISE lexicon a public school refers to one operated by a government at little or no cost to students. This is to distinguish the definition of public schools as used in England and Wales, where the term refers to selective, and expensive, independent secondary schools.*

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