**ITA Inputs: Preamble for the Upcoming NEP 2021**

Pakistan developed a National Education Policy in 2009 (Sept.). However shortly thereafter, in April 2010, the Constitution was amended and the subject of Education was fully devolved to the Provinces. After the 18th amendment the status of the NEP 2009 was revisited, and in September 2011 a Joint Declaration on Education was signed by the representatives of all the provinces and areas to honor the NEP 2009 and National Curriculum 2006/7. The main text of the declaration stated that the federal, provincial and area representatives declare that the “National Education Policy 2009, subject to such adaptations as necessitated in view of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, shall continue to be jointly owned national document.” However, Pakistan does not have an updated comprehensive education policy document to represent the country. In 2010 the 18th Amendment also resulted in the addition of Article 25A or the fundamental right to education for all 5-16 years old children. In 2016 there were efforts by the PML N government to produce the NEP 2017 Draft; however the latter remained still born. The new PTI Government soon coming into office produced the [National Education Policy (NEP) Framework 2018](#) with four key pillars which remain highly relevant as major themes viz

1. Out of School Children (OOSC)
2. Uniform Education System
3. Quality
4. Skills and Higher Education

With Learning Poverty (WB 2019) estimated at 75% of all 10 year olds in the country (in and out of school) compared to 58% in South Asia, Pakistan continues to face an ongoing education and learning emergency. The learning losses have been further exacerbated, due to prolonged school closures due to Covid-19; the WB further estimates another 5% increase in Learning Poverty to 80% (Koen 2020) and another million children (estimated) affected by enrolment losses (20+ million 5-16 years). There is thus a dire need to prepare a consolidated National Education Policy document with inputs mobilized from all provinces/areas and diverse stakeholders as a coordinated national response for systematic nationwide implementation. The Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MoFE&PT) taking lead in the open call for public inputs to the proposed NEP 2021 has provided good space for rapid discussions/consultations at a provincial and national level; sadly the time line is superfast tracked with less than 3 months to finalize the NEP 2021! For a country which is 5th largest in terms of global population, it is imperative to include vital sections of our diverse communities to create national ownership of the document and more importantly its targets and implementation process.

Education governance, accountability and quality for ALL ensuring equity and inclusion remain the most critical challenges in the federation at local, provincial and national levels. The anchor reference documents for the upcoming NEP 2021 include:

- the Constitution and 25 A as a fundamental right, along with others encompassing the holistic right to education for all children 5-16 years of age (all 5 laws/acts on 25 A);
- the Education Sector Plans of all provinces and areas of Pakistan
- the concurrent finalization of the Single National Curriculum (2020-22)
- the manifestoes of political parties with respect to education, disability, child rights, gender equality, youth and TVET
- past NEPs (including draft NEP 2017)
- SDGs 2030 and in particular SDG 4 on Education and SDG 5 on Gender Equality
- International Covenants and Commitments by the Govt. of Pakistan on Education, Disability, Child Rights, Women Rights and Elimination of All forms of Violence, Child Labor and its Worst forms
The role of various active stakeholders including, youth, teachers, civil society and industry is critical to ensure wider ownership and success of the new National Education Policy 2021.

ITA is well known for its work across Pakistan and beyond especially on citizen led country wide initiative on quality, research, inclusion and governance – ASER Pakistan (www.aserpakistan.org), engages vibrant with youth and the Education Youth Ambassadors, teachers, closely engagement with SDGs post 2015. ITA led active consultations for NEP 2016/17 [http://itacec.org/nep.php] and engaged various segments of influencers who may be directly or indirectly affected by the alteration in NEP including youth, teachers, children/adolescents, government officials etc. Similarly, for NEP 2021, ITA is engaging with key groups and coalitions, holding consultations on areas such assessment, early childhood education, inclusion (disability, minorities) and child rights/protection to highlight current gaps in NEP 2009, current practices and share recommendations with MoFE&PT/provincial education departments. This exercise is a public good initiative with ALL alliances.

Some key pivots to lead the discussions on core areas of inter-sectoral convergence that must be given due importance are shared below:

**ITA: Key Pivots for the NEP 2021 – some urgent linkages and ideas to consider**

1. **The NEP 2021 is an opportunity to frame education challenges through a dynamic lens that represents a break from the usual historical template** of National Education Policies (1947 onwards). It is vital to recognize that Education is a multi-sectoral activity which is its true essence and purpose; a means to reach one’s optimum human potential for ALL without discrimination. Such an approach to education acknowledges that only good learning makes you survive better, participate with knowledge and information in making informed choices about every aspect of life, including economic decisions and active citizenship’. In this sense education has to be unfolded through a ‘capabilities to possibilities’ approach (Amartya Sen)

2. **There is also an urgency to look for convergence of education across already scaled up public sector enterprises** that may be working with reasonable efficacy as public goods, e.g. Social Protection/Safety Nets like Ehsaas /BISP and education. Under SPP the most vulnerable households across Pakistan have been targeted for support; they often are the same households where children in need tend to drop out of school; similarly, the sectors of health, nutrition and population, converging with education. These sectors have vast and growing networks of service delivery/human resources across the country and so does education. How can they converge more optimally to cover every child 5-16 years of age, or even 0-16 years and youth?

3. **COVID-19, Human Agency, Trust & NEP 2021**:- The context for policy making has been suddenly upgraded and accelerated in the face of COVID-19. On the one hand, the entire nation converged around a common issue with logical consistency through platforms like NCOC; and, on the other hand there was implicit trust in each provincial government’s leadership and autonomy to follow SOPs for the particular and the greater good. There was also an overwhelming reliance on human agency, autonomy and trust vis a vis students, parents/guardians, teachers/principals etc.

4. With long and intermittent school closures, the rise of EdTech and accelerated digital responses to learning is rapidly becoming a norm despite challenges of digital deprivation. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that Pakistan has a deep digital/ cell phone, Television penetration that needs to be accounted for in planning and policy making. There is hope that everyone will be learning across homes
and schools, rich or poor, in school or out of school, with due care to benefit their lives. Learning cannot, and does not take place through fear and compulsion of an external agency, but through internally driven motivation and processes convinced of the learning efficacy at home and school simultaneously. **How will NEP 2021 build on these blocks of hyper EdTech options, COVID new normal skills and motivations?**

5. **OOSC & Marginalized 2nd Chance Options:** The stark gap of 19 million children out of school especially at post primary levels of marginalized groups, girls/adolescents, children with disabilities, minorities, the poorest, need urgent action where academies are combined with non-cognitive life skills and protection. These OOSC need solutions with quality content, pedagogies that combine academic and life skills and social emotional learning (SEL) with well-prepared workforce/teachers. This needs a long-term policy commitment to gender and inclusion. It must be backed by resources to ensure supply-side adequacy of facilities and procurement of service delivery to reach the most vulnerable & hardest to reach through PPPs where needed for alternative and accelerated second chance programs with measurable outcomes.

6. **Early Years Education is An Imperative Investment with Many Multipliers:** The anchor investment in early years 0-8 converges with the challenges and opportunities for health, nutrition, population and education targets. Human learning during this period as programmed by nature progresses at an accelerated pace due to hyper active brain development and wiring/rewiring. To continue thinking of Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a peripheral engagement leading to tragic outcomes in all indicators including child mortality, growth/ stunting, malnutrition and learning. ECE must be given its rightful space in collaboration with the Ministries/Depts of Health, Nutrition, P&D Reforms Initiatives, Scaling up Nutrition in Pakistan (http://sunpc.org.pk) (Ehsaas (Nashonuma), NADRA/CRC/Birth Registration and Education all together. The latter approach will spread benefits costs across ministries and multiply benefits a million times for Pakistan at the foundational levels. **This multi-sectoral investment in early years will automatically elevate and support the status of women and mothers in Pakistan, a long overdue compelling investment with many more multipliers! This is a low hanging fruit.** Working collaboratively will create good spaces for investment in Foundational Stability from 0-8 for each child, including healthier, happier and stronger Learning of children from 3-8, that in turn will help ALL children transition better across grades. ECE is measured across 4 domains:

- Literacy and numeracy;
- Physical
- Social Emotional Care &
- Learning (UNICEF 2020)

7. **Ehsaas social protection with a lifelong and inclusive spectrum:** Ehsaas was set up under the Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety (PASS) Division (2019) to support the vision of the ‘welfare state; that is both accountable and transparent. [https://www.pass.gov.pk](https://www.pass.gov.pk) Ehsaas is targeting the poorest through the national socio-economic registry (house hold surveys) under the BISP criteria. Eshaas has boosted its outreach during COVID in an unprecedented manner supported by the GoPakistan and development partners with its strong Theory of Change and Outreach, building on the BISP infrastructure. These programs have been working through a fast track nationwide hyper-active pathway of reaching more than 20 million+ HHSSs of the country. Ehsaas has a series of social protection/social safety net instruments for the poor and the poorest relating to education, skills and livelihoods through a lifelong learning and inclusive continuum:

- Ehsaas Nashonuma (Early Years -ECCE)
- Education CCT -Waseela e Taleem (Primary)
- Schools for the Marginalized
• Ehsaas and disability support¹ (Kifalaat² and jointly with PSPA BISP and Bait ul Maal)
• Ehsaas Undergraduate student scholarships (Tertiary/University)
• Graduation and interest free loans
• Ehsaas Online Education
• Ehsaas TV
• Several livelihoods and micro-credit instruments for artisans to daily workers)

There is discussion about girls/women second chance programs as well in education

8. COVID 19, Health Services and Healthy Safe Schools: For too long Pakistan has side stepped the need for healthy and safe schools. Organizations like UNICEF have been at the forefront of promoting safe behaviors and facilities in schools for Hygiene, WASH and health. These initiatives notwithstanding, every emergency has pushed the urgency of bringing health services at the centre of active responses. CoVID-19, even more so required a joint orchestration of health and education for a responsive health program with safe healthy behaviors/SOPs to survive the pandemic. The Ministry of Health /NIH issued nationwide guidelines for various sectors including schools,³ colleges and universities (hyperlink) readily adopted nationwide with SOPs for safe structures (classrooms, labs, toilets etc.) and safe behaviors. Given these, every school and institution has building standards that are not aligned and need revision progressively as a joint national enterprise for All provinces and areas; it has massive budgetary implications as well in a country that has avoided to increase fundamental education budgets. Schools/colleges, TVET centres and universities without an active health services program not connected to the health networks (primary, intermediate and tertiary) in public and non-state public health space is not an option any more. There is an urgency to activate progressively a School Health Program again through a convergence lens. There will be many partners to support this within the public sector, non-state actors, innovators in telehealth and global development partners. Not to engage with health services is not a choice anymore—there is an ongoing health emergency in Pakistan just as there has been an ongoing Education Emergency.

9. Nutrition Support at School or Household Level? Which model works best – given challenges of governance, shortage of teachers in schools and a culture of authority and rent seeking. Should nutrition support be fielded through BISP/EHSAAS at the household level across the country or through schools?

10. Disability & Inclusion as a mainstream education initiative: ASER surveys 2018 (http://itacec.org/inclusion) reveal that 15.5% children (ages 5-16 years) suffer from some sort of disability or the other. It is critical to ensure that disability does not remain marginalized but is part of the NEP 2021 as per promises made

Note: ITA has developed and shared with policy makers 2 key policy notes during the Pandemic with the MoFE&PT on Schools Reopening Principles and Pillars and Shifting of the Academic Year from April 2021 to Post Summer Holidays in 2021 (Annex). The latter has already been notified through a national decision of all provinces and areas spearheaded by MoFE&PT.

¹ https://propakistani.pk/2020/12/03/imran-khan-announces-monthly-stipend-for-two-million-special-persons/
Annex 1:

School Re-Opening & COVID-19

Three Principles & 5 Pillars of Actions

1. Collaborate with SMCs, teachers, headteachers, field, training personnel for COVID 19 mitigation

2. Celebrate re-opening of schools with all WASH Precautions and Key Actions

3. Communicate through a bold nationwide strategy to reach out to citizens, families, children & youth.

The Five Pillars of School Reopening are proposed as follows:

1. Schools should be functional, inclusive and safe spaces where daily hygiene and COVID-19 preventive and protection routines can be implemented

2. Rotational Days Opening: 50% Students present for each grade over next 4 months: this will ensure implementing the Social Distancing Principle.

3. Curriculum Delivery for Paced Academics, Mapped to light touch Assessments; Multimodal Accelerated & Social Emotional Learning

4. Partnerships: A) Parental, Community Engagement & Oversight & B) CSOs, Philanthropists, Industry & Donors

5. Inter-Departmental & Support Linkages: Health, Nutrition; Social Safety Nets/EHSAS, NADRA -Child Registration Cards (CRC), Sports/Youth and TVET/Livelihoods
Annex 2

Excellencies
Ministries Education and Literacy, Advisers and Secretaries Education
At the Federal, Provincial and Areas
Government of Pakistan
ITA/COVID-19/08/20

Excellencies and Esteemed Education Policy and Decision Makers of Pakistan

August 25, 2020

Subject: Shifting the Next Academic Year from April 2021 to August 2021 for COVID-19 Catch Up Adjustments to Academic Trauma & SNC roll out

We, from Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and our partners, congratulate ALL our leaders and their teams for the timely, caring and intensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic in many innovative ways to encourage distance learning and safety for our children, teachers and personnel across Pakistan; this is no small feat! ITA profoundly acknowledges ALL of You and your amazing Teams as the Govt. of Pakistan, at the Federal, provincial and area levels for your round the clock dedicated work and services rendered during the intense COVID-19 crises. The pandemic continues to be a ‘multi-dimensional and multi-layered’ challenge for a world we could never imagine a year ago! Your timely responses, monitoring with care and efforts, coming up with innovations and national strategic plan with consensus have been no mean achievement and we put our appreciation on record. But, you would all agree that we have many more milestones ahead that need to be met in the coming weeks and months; Insha Allah we can achieve them through good data, insights and partnerships for resiliency and recovery.

As an organization deeply invested in education comprehensively (service delivery, capacity building and research and advocacy) since two decades, ITA has engaged in creating public goods and services through multiple initiatives and flagship programs that have informed public policy, plans and actions. We remain humbled and we appreciate your support in this meaningful journey as partners, strongly leveraging our evidence based advocacy.

Acknowledging the emerging SOPs for School reopening by the Govt., ITA had earlier sent a note (enclosed) to all decision makers on school reopening measures (3 Principles and 5 Pillars). We take the liberty to request ALL of you for a Big ASK. We request in the best interest of our Children, Teachers, Parents and our Education System.

Our Request/ASK
The current complexity of COVID-19 pandemic and its mitigation measures since Feb/March 2020 through school closures, social distancing, learning losses, the challenge of school reopening amidst massive missing facilities (in some areas, more, in others, less) for effective COVID-19 response across WASH needs is indeed extremely daunting; but a positive all out response is necessary for system resiliency, for safety and psycho-social support of our children, teachers and communities. There is also the upcoming roll out of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in 2021 with many important implementation/preparation steps that need to be in place and met, prior to the beginning of the next academic year scheduled on April 1, 2021. The trauma of 6 months of schools shut down, automatic promotions, the concerns of the unknown in the coming months, students/teachers making up for time lost in covering the syllabus for the next examination/assessments, parents reeling under job losses and vulnerability are all very complex challenges to negotiate concurrently. Thus, many tough challenges lie ahead and Insha Allah we know that together we shall ALL rise up to them, but you would agree that we need flexibility of approach, resource mobilization and scheduling without compromising on the principles of safety/protection, quality, equity and inclusion.
We request our worthy policy/decision makers to delay the academic year from April 1, 2021 to after the summer break, with schools commencing on August 1 or August 14th 2021 for grades K-9, which will offer a breather for the following reasons, viz:

1. The school reopening planned on September 15, 2020 will need 4-6 weeks of settling down to the 'new norm' putting a lot of pressure on the Systems for adjustments.
2. These 6 weeks will also help mobilize children, especially girls likely to be held back, who may not return to school due to escalating poverty and issues at household level.
3. The first 4-6 weeks (Sept-Oct, '20) will also help the system to assess students' and teachers' coping ability and light touch assessments on 'learning losses' at foundational and also progressive levels; this will help to pace the learning/syllabus coverage up to March/April 2021 followed by hybrid student friendly assessments for the next grade.
4. This extension of the academic year will allow the teams working on the SNC and its roll out some more time to prepare teachers, pedagogies, textbook production and roll out at the beneficiary/school level.

Some of us who have been engaged previously in academic year shifts in the past in Pakistan, know that there is a major resistance from the private sectorespecially large number of low cost private schools due to fear of income/fee losses, as parents tend to withdraw children during the summer break to save on fees. Fee recovery during summer becomes compromised with outgoing liabilities that must be met becomes a contentious issue.

Thus, the request for an extraordinary shift of academic session in 2021 only from April to August 2021 would go a long way in providing relief to the ongoing COVID-19 trauma for parents, students, teachers and the whole system. This action will help the system recover, become more resilient and responsive to ‘preparedness measures’ for the new normal.

Excellencies, we request you to consider our collective ASK with an open mind; in anticipation of a positive response. We, are willing to support you in this task as needed. When I say 'we', ITA has been privileged to have 100s of organizations as supporters and alliances in creating public goods for education, and they ALL stand by this ASK for 25 A and SDG 4 as an entitlement for human well-being.

Stay Safe and Sincere Regards

Baela Raza Jamil
CEO ITA
Commissioner - Education Commission

Cc: Prime Minister of Pakistan
President of Pakistan
Chief Ministers of Provinces and Areas
Chief Secretaries of Provinces and Areas
Education Development Partners/Donor Groups of Pakistan

Distribution List
All Ministers Education and Literacy Federal, Provincial and Areas (GB and AJK)
All Advisers to the Ministers Federal, Provincial and Areas (GB and AJK)
All Secretaries Education, Elementary, Secondary and Non-Formal/Literacy at Federal, Provincial and Areas
ANNEX 3

INDICATOR 4.2.1
Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex

Description

Definition and key terms
The proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being is currently being defined as children aged 36-59 months who are developmentally on-track in at least three of the following four domains: literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional and learning. This proxy indicator, for which comparable data are available, is being used while the SDG indicator’s definitions for other domains are being operationalized.

SDG indicator:
Numerator: Number of children under the age of five who are developmentally on track in health, learning, and psychosocial well-being
Denominator: Total number of children under the age of five in the population

Proxy indicator:
Numerator: Number of children aged 36-59 months who are developmentally on-track in at least three of the following four domains: literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional and learning
Denominator: Total number of children aged 36-59 months in the population

Key terms:
The domains included in the indicator currently being used as a proxy for reporting on SDG indicator 4.2.1 are operationally defined as follows:

• **Literacy-numeracy**: Children are identified as being developmentally on track if they can do at least two of the following: identify/name at least 10 letters of the alphabet; read at least 4 simple, popular words; and/or know the name and recognize the symbols of all numbers from 1 to 10.

• **Physical**: If the child can pick up a small object with two fingers, like a stick or rock from the ground, and/or the mother/primary caregiver does not indicate that the child is sometimes too sick to play, then the child is regarded as being developmentally on track in the physical domain.

• **Social-emotional**: The child is considered developmentally on track if two of the following are true: The child gets along well with other children; the child does not kick, bite or hit other children; and the child does not get distracted easily.

• **Learning**: If the child follows simple directions on how to do something correctly and/or when given something to do, and is able to do it independently, then the child is considered to be developmentally on track in the learning domain.

National data sources
Household surveys such as UNICEF-supported MICS have been collecting data on early childhood development through the Early Childhood Development Index or ECDI in low- and middle-income countries since around 2009. Many of the individual items included in the ECDI are collected through household surveys and administrative sources in high-income (OECD) countries as well.

A new measure of ECD is currently under development — see below.

Data collection innovation
As noted above, UNICEF, in collaboration with academic and technical experts and key partners, is currently undertaking methodological work towards the development of a new measure of ECD. The methodological plan includes several steps: (1) review and map existing measures and items on ECD derived from both caregiver report and direct assessment; (2) technical consultations with experts in the field of ECD measurement and tool development; (3) cognitive testing of a bank of items across a variety of country contexts to gain understanding on how items are performing in terms of respondent interpretation and comprehension; (4) development of a series of background papers on the available literature and evidence pertaining to young children’s development in health, learning and psychosocial well-being; (5) dedicated field test of the new ECD measure; (6) development of a manual for field implementation; (7) field testing of the new ECD measure in a MICS survey; (8) dissemination and capacity-building for countries to implement and use the new ECD measure.

The new measure of ECD will be made publicly available for use and inclusion by all countries in national household surveys.