

[Right to Education Bill 2012: Little more than a pat on the back for parliamentarians, donors](#)

ISLAMABAD: A public forum organized by UNESCO to celebrate the passing of what is deemed a historical milestone towards education in Pakistan turned out to be little more than a metaphorical pat on the back for its catalysts: noted parliamentarians and donor agencies.

The National Assembly unanimously passed the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill this Tuesday, weeks after the 14-year-old Malala Yousafzai was targeted in her hometown of Mingora, Swat for championing the cause of education.

While the existing Article 25 of the constitution advocates the right of education for all, the passing of the bill reiterates the government's commitment to educating its youth through the provision of primary and secondary education under the mandate of the federal government.

The bill targets children between the ages of 5 and 16. It allocates a 10% quota in private schools for free education, in addition to the provision of no-cost education through formal and non-traditional schools. The passing of the bill comes at an opportune time for the current democratic government, which is the first to ever complete its term, with elections proposed within the next seven months. However, the implementation and monitoring of the bill is a cause for concern for taxpayers funding the initiative, said speakers at the event. The bill may seem strong on paper but remains a daunting challenge for its implementers.

MNA Yasmin Rehman, a key player in the passing of the bill, was unable to provide a timeline its implementation, explaining that implementation is the prerogative of the Ministry of Capital Administration and Development (CAD). The CAD, she said, hopes to introduce its plan of action on December 5 to be finalised and subsequently shared with donor agencies.

Riffat Shaheen Kazi, Secretary CAD, said that though the current bill is intended to target the 70,000 out-of-school children in Islamabad, it is vital in setting precedence for other provinces to follow. Sindh's Ministry of Education, for instance, has already expressed willingness to propose the bill to its provincial assembly.

While the forum brushed on the need for additional funding and support, including funds for training teachers and giving parents incentives to send their children to school, the transparency and effective execution of these lofty plans remain elusive.

Additionally, problems within the existing education system are not being taken into account, such as those of ghost schools and outdated syllabi irrelevant to the demanding job market.

MNA Dr Haresh Kumar from K-P highlighted the need for a modified syllabus for minorities, but was met with little response.

Questions from journalists about the government's previous record of poor implementation and corruption were also shot down.

Approximately 5.1 million children in Pakistan are uneducated, according to estimates.

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