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Exploring Structural Challenges for Coordinating Education Policy in Sri Lanka

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The problem of coordinating the multi-layered education system of Sri Lanka is studied from a structural-instrumental perspective with reference to mechanism and constraints for effective policy coordination. The interface of the educational services provided by the central government is the most significant element where the responsibilities of other relevant government institutions operating at different levels meet. Hence, the coordination of the educational policy is an important aspect of effective and efficient policy implementation in the country. Therefore, the study focuses on how different sectors in the system are coordinated and cooperated while performing their tasks at different levels in order to accomplish vision and mission of education and what strategies they use to formulate and implement the policy.

To understand the coordination problem, a structural- instrumental approach is applied as it is one of the common, yet highly contested means of doing organizational studies. This perspective emphasizes that the organization is an instrument and hence, important goals and expectations identified by the society can be accomplished by following the standards set by the organization. This means that if one needs to understand how public policies are coordinated, it is necessary to examine the way the public sector has been organized. Based on structural-instrumental analysis, three interrelated structural variables have been considered; division of tasks, inter-organizational communication and interagency control. These three factors, have greater impact on the education policy making it less coherent and paving the way for the system to be fragmented. Therefore, these factors have been analyzed in terms of their potential influence on coordination using empirical data collected through 52 in-depth interviews and secondary evidence gathered from various documents.

The argument stressed here is that for effective and efficient policy coordination, the organizational structure matters. There are two reasons for it. First, the designing policies and related matters are mostly the responsibility of the dominant or powerful organization (in this case, the national and provincial ministries) and they act on behalf of the formal organization. However, in a fragmented and decentralized policy sector, these organizations should critically consider the entire policy spectrum within which the formulated policies or policy matters are implemented so as to avoid unexpected externalities. Second, to understand how policies are formulated and operated, it is pivotal to study how the policy sector has been structured, and how the inter-links between different sub-organizations have been designed. Hence, the conclusion of this paper is that the organization structure, at one point, could be a reason for failures in the coordination and at another point it could provide some solutions to ensure an effective coordination.

Keywords: organizational Structure, policy coordination, education policy, division of tasks