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LATEST WRITING

WHAT ARE WE MEASURING WHEN WE MEASURE LEARNING?

by Perwinder Singh and Agastya Shukla

Public discussions on learning outcomes often become debates over numbers, with different assessment results presented as though one survey must prove the other wrong. However, differences between learning assessments such as the National Achievement Survey (NAS), the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), and independent assessments conducted by organisations like Sanjhi Sikhiya (SS) do not necessarily indicate that one of them is inaccurate. Instead, these differences suggest that each assessment measures a different aspect of learning. The more important question, therefore, is not which survey is “correct”, but whether our assessment system is capturing the knowledge and skills that children actually need.

To better understand this question, Sanjhi Sikhiya conducted a school-based assessment of Grade 3 students in government primary schools across four districts of Punjab during May 2025 and May 2026. Unlike NAS, however, the assessment focused not only on foundational reading and numeracy skills but also on whether children could understand what they read and apply basic mathematics in everyday situations. This allows the findings to complement, rather than replicate, existing national assessments.

According to the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2024, nearly four out of five Grade 3 children in Punjab achieved the expected level in reading, and over three-quarters demonstrated basic numeracy skills. However, assessments that focus on foundational skills tell a different story. Substantially fewer children could read a simple story with understanding or apply basic mathematics in practical situations. It suggests that different assessments capture different dimensions of learning.

NAS consistently reports high reading and numeracy achievement in districts like Bathinda (80%), Fatehgarh Sahib (72%), Patiala (77%) and Ropar (81%). Sanjhi Sikhiya, however, shows far lower levels of story reading and comprehension viz.

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LATEST OPPORTUNITIES

COMMUNICATION DESIGN INTERN

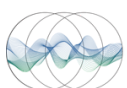
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MUST READS

With the rise of the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm in public policy, the focus of contemporary societies has shifted from the classic Weberian bureaucratic agency towards participatory models of governance. The promise of concepts such as ‘collaborative governance’ has been particularly compelling, which attempts to foster a more ‘prosocial orientation’ by bringing stakeholders together in the process of decision-making. However, the implementation of these models in complex environments has raised concerns about their efficacy. The role of government, therefore, becomes highly critical in facilitating the entire process. The paper titled “*Lead, Link, or Leverage? An integrative framework to assess different government roles in collaborative governance processes across political systems*” by Sullivan et al. (2025) builds on the existing literature to understand the role assumed by the government within collaborative governance processes and how their roles vary across different institutional contexts.

The authors’ main move is to reorient literature that often analyses government participation in fragmented, actor-level ways into a more integrated framework that captures institutional context and governments’ behaviour at different stages of collaboration. To fill this void, the authors synthesise the existing typologies on institutional roles by Koontz et al. (2004) and Wondolleck and Ryan’s agentic-level behaviour to formulate an analytical framework that divides government’s functions into three parts—leading, linking and leveraging. Then, they triangulated each of these functions with three different positions—starting, operational, and engagement—to examine cross-institutional differences. The paper employs a qualitative case study approach, which is framed as a ‘plausibility probe’, to study the roles of the national ministries of Canada and the Netherlands in the formulation of the climate policy. The selection of the two countries is based on their markedly different institutional structures: a unitary vs a federal setup. To analyse the variations, the authors review the official, publicly available statements and documents, commentaries from major newspapers and other public documents, covering the time period from 2015 to 2019. The paper underscores that the culture produced by the institutional setup decides the broad contours of the government’s engagement, and these differences must be accounted for whenever collaborative governance is assessed across different environments. Where the Canadian government delegated more powers to the provinces and mainly acted as a linking element between various actors, Netherlands’ government exhibited a dominant attitude throughout the entire process. Perhaps the most important finding of the paper is that the governments in both countries sidestepped collaboration and reverted back to leveraging or other “uncollaborative-like” means during the period of heightened political contestation.

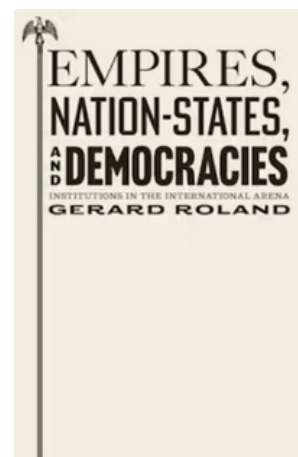
The study also has certain limitations. Although it examines the institutions primarily through the formal division of power, particularly the distinction between federal and unitary systems, this approach may not be able to capture the broader political and administrative contexts that influence institutional behaviour. Nevertheless, this limitation is partly mitigated by the authors’ explicit acceptance that the study is intended as a plausibility probe rather than a definitive comparative test. The paper underscores a major theoretical lacuna within the scholarship of collaborative governance: how the nature of government shapes the collaboration process. Future work needs to apply and refine this framework across more cases.

[Read the complete publication here](#)

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



The Rise and Fall of the Artificial State by Jill Lipore published by Penguin Allen Lane in 2026



Empires, Nation-States and Democracies by Gerard Roland published by Princeton University Press in 2026

POLITICAL ECONOMY, LAND & LIVELIHOOD DYNAMICS IN PUNJAB

'FIVE QUESTIONS' WITH DR. SANDEEP KAUR

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Q1. Land dispossessions in Punjab often leave acquired acres unutilized while stripping farmers of their main income. What structural gaps in land acquisition cause this disconnect, and how can policy better protect rural livelihoods?

Ans: The most important thing is that compensation must act as a 'long-term sustainable livelihood' in the Punjab, so that utilisation of compensation for unproductive activities, especially for luxurious ones, must be checked. Some compensation for the land dispossessors in the same project must be invested, as we must understand that Land has a social value for them; the land dispossessors must be linked to the same land, from generation to generation. Also, there is a requirement to generate employment opportunities not only under the land dispossessed project but also in some other allied activities, which will be demanded through the project simultaneously, so that the circulation of money for unproductive activities must be checked. Along with the main project, the land possessor should initiate a small project to build skills among land dispossessors in the project for which the land has been transferred, so that the argument of low education and a skill gap in providing employment in the project can be avoided. For the same, priority must be given to marginal and small farmers to ensure equitable distribution of income.

Q2. What mechanisms should the state implement to build sustainable non-farm livelihoods instead of relying on lump-sum payouts?

Ans: Rural development in Punjab will not come through only agriculture. Since Punjab is famous for food and cultural heritage, but it should not be missed out through supply of goods and cultural services at national and international level. The marketing network must be created by the Punjab Government which will increase the demand of the products. Not only the MSMEs but also the local micro-enterprises should be given incentives for connecting with the national and international markets. Training of the rural youth along with employment of various levels is another major initiative, which should be done in these enterprises.

Q3. Unlike East Asia's smooth shift from agriculture to manufacturing, Punjab faces a jobless agrarian-to-services transition. What structural policies can the state adopt to build an industrial base capable of absorbing displaced farm labour?

Ans: The farm labour skilling is more important to build industrial base for generation of employment. Skilling cum training is important requisite which should be done as per the specific requirements. Besides the development of infrastructure for establishing agro-based clusters focusing on paddy, wheat, horticulture, and dairy, the provision of skills in these clusters must be ensured for displaced farm labour. Not only the food processing industry but also the tourism industry has a significant scope in Punjab due to its food specialties and cultural heritage. Women can play an active role in these industries, which will increase the female participation rate in the Economy.

‘FIVE QUESTIONS’ WITH DR. SANDEEP KAUR

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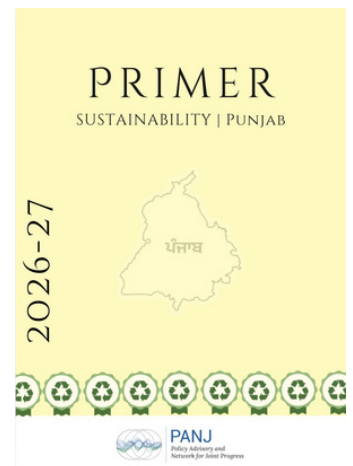
Q4. Skill schemes like DDU-GKY face persistent rural job-market mismatches. How can state training initiatives move beyond basic vocational courses to align with local green technologies, and rural entrepreneurship?

Ans: The ‘rootup model’, i.e. creating roots of skills from school level, must be initiated through various industries for the students. In such scenarios, higher education institutions, especially technical and agricultural universities, must play an active role. These various public universities must ensure the participation of various schools equally, along with other research institutions, industries. The curriculum in schools, colleges, and universities that provides courses in green technologies and rural entrepreneurship must be implemented strictly. As in many states, especially Kerala, some fellowships must be awarded to ensure student participation. Doctoral fellowships must be awarded to students to generate new ideas and establish rural industries. ‘Nasha Mukat’ Punjab can be dreamt not only with the checking of supply of synthetic drugs, establishment of medical centre and camps but also the provision of training along with part-time employment at the mass level after schooling must be given. Moreover, academia—industry collaboration must be initiated for creating employment at faster level. This collaboration model, especially through public institutions, must be set up, which will increase the enrollment in public schools and colleges.

Q5. Industrial land reallocation in Punjab risks compounding environmental crises like groundwater depletion. How can planners effectively integrate socio-economic impact mapping with environmental risk assessments before transferring agricultural land?

Ans: Not only the livelihood, but also the installation of technology for analysing environmental risk must be ensured for any industrial land project. The technology installation handling environment risk by the industrialists must be part of the agreement without any financial burden on the state. The strict limits on land transfers, especially where local groundwater is at greater depth and is more toxic. Also, there must be a check on the suitability of incoming industries for pollution risk to keep high-hazard units away from fertile, multi-cropped zones. Since the usage of canal irrigation is limited, there must be a ban on the reallocation of land that relies on advanced, sustainable canal irrigation networks.

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