



## Is it mere lack of resources that holds Pakistan back from achieving education for all? Evidence from the grassroots

Conventionally, unavailability of education infrastructure such as classrooms, separate toilets for girls and boys, and electricity has been blamed for poor educational outcomes worldwide. While this is necessary, this policy brief emphasises, two broad critical factors namely poor educational governance and socio-cultural norms are mainly responsible for holding Pakistan back from achieving its desired educational outcomes in South Asia and meeting the 4<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal. Based on primary evidence from the grassroots communities belonging to the province of Sindh, this brief calls for policy adjustment to improve educational governance and need for a parallel behavioural change strategy to win over parents to send their children, particularly girls, to schools.

### CONTEXT

Pakistan's education woes are commonly known. According to the United Nations Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016 (UNESCO, 2016), Pakistan is more than 50 years behind in its primary education targets. This is despite the fact that Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan, since 2010 via the 18th amendment, states that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law". With national literacy rate of 58% and 7.8 expected years of schooling, less than its South Asian neighbours (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal), the country faces huge difference in each province. Punjab has a literacy rate of 61%, followed by Sindh (56%), Khyber Pukhtunkhaw (KPK) (53%) and

Baluchistan (43%) (Haq, 2015). Gender disparity at national level is apparent with the male literacy at 70% compared to 47% for their female counterparts.

In terms of educational disparities in cities, Islamabad's literacy rate is 96%, but in Kohlu, in Balochistan province, the literacy rate is only 28%. These regional disparities also reflect on gender with 53% girls and 47% boys out of school children (AFP, 2016) at the national level. Within provinces, Sindh ranks better than KPK, where the latter has the largest gap with 30.3% more girls out of schools than boys, while Sindh has 10.3% more girls out of school than boys (The Pakistan Data Portal, 2016), as shown in Figure 1.

According to the Sindh Education Department Data (2014-15) of district Tando Allahyar, 210 km north east of

**"Poor educational governance and socio-cultural norms are mainly responsible for holding Pakistan back from achieving its educational targets".**

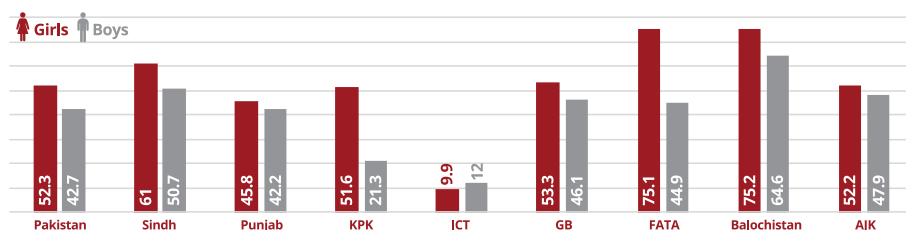


Figure 1: Regional disparities showing gender-wise percentage of out of school children [Source: The Pakistan Data Portal (2016)]

Karachi (capital of the Sindh province), there are total 20 schools in Union Council (UC) Masoo Bozdar including 18 primary, one middle and one secondary school. With total 37 teachers, there are 30 male teachers and seven female teachers. However, out of 6149 children of school going age, only 2272 children (1565 boys and 707 girls) are enrolled in these schools. At the UC level, this brings the pupil-teacher ratio to 61:1. The number of out of school children is 3877 including 1702 boys (52%) and 2175 girls (75%). Only 18.51% males and 4.96 % females are literate in the UC.

UC Dad Khan Jarwar has 43 schools including 40 mixed primary schools, two middle schools and one elementary school. With a staff of 55 teachers, there are 47 male teachers and eight female teachers. However, out of 8327 children of school going age, only 3333 children (2179 boys and 1154 girls) are enrolled in these schools. At the UC level, this brings the pupil-teacher ratio to 61:1. The number of out of school children is 4994 including 2269 boys (51%) and 2725 girls (70%). Only 19.77% males and 6.77 % females are literate in the UC.

In both the UCs, over 50% (3971) of the male children and 70% (4900) of female children are out of school. Though high, these UCs' statistics are better than the overall district statistics out of school children; 62.1% male and 81.5% female children are out of schools (Khan & Ahmad, 2016). Unlike popular perception of unavailability of school buildings, this high out of school number of children owes more to a host of governance, and socio-cultural factors than mere unavailability of educational infrastructure as such.

## THE ISSUE

While this grim picture of educational status is known, this policy brief highlights the critical issues holding children back from enrolling into schools as identified through primary qualitative research in the two rural union councils of district Tando Allahyar in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. The data was collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and poverty score card survey from February to August 2016. Broadly, educational governance involves authority and decision making processes and structures, roles and responsibilities that affect delivery of educational services

including teachers' performance and students' learning outcomes.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Absence of competent teachers

Many parents do not see value in sending their children to school. In the words of a key informant from Jaffar Khushik village, UC Dad Khan Jarwar, "The residents are not satisfied from the standard of education as they believe that teachers are not recruited on the merit. They are not qualified to teach their children and they do not turn up on duty. Therefore, parents' lose their interest in sending their children to school." Another key informant from a village Hashim Gaho says that "the real teacher is not present and one boy, Sulaiman, teaches there and gets Rs. 3,000 per month by the actual teacher who is posted there but does not attend the school and has kept this boy on salary". Those who can afford, mostly landlords, send their children to the top schools in the city and are not bothered whether the public school are functional or not. However, they usually enjoy rich political clout and take keen interest in influencing appointment, posting and transfer of the concerned teacher in their UC.

### Closed Schools

Built with tax payers' money on government or community land, seven schools in UC Dad Khan Jarwar and one school in UC Masoo Bozdar are closed. Mostly, poor educational governance has been deemed responsible for school closure. Abdul Rehman, a student of the 4th class, informed that "the only teacher in this (a primary school closed in village Godoo Thaim, UC Dadu Khan Jarwar) retired six months ago, and since then no one replaced him. Therefore, me and my friends are out of school and help our parents in farm work".

### Socio-Cultural Norms

In addition to poor governance, socio-cultural factors are also responsible for low enrolment, particularly of girls. There are four main Madrassas and two of them are run by Jamait Ulma-e-Islam in UC Dad Khan Jarwar. As per the key informant interview, "roughly 85% girls do not go to schools and those who go to school, about 5% reach matriculation. People of this area are not interested in sending their girl child to school due to prevalent old traditions and ignorance in the area. People are more interested for their

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daughters to learn Holy Quran through recitation in house, mosque or Madrassa". During a focus group discussion in Masoo Bozdar, one of the female respondents stated, "there is a stereotype about education in our people that if girls get education and do a job they will go astray."

## **SUCCESS STORY: The Difference that Organised Communities can Make**

How to address this multi-dimensional education crisis? This is what motivated the DIFD supported Alif Ailaan Education Campaign to have partnership with Rural Support Programmes network (RSPN) to launch a campaign for education advocacy to engage policy makers in the country. In this partnership, RSPN worked through four Rural Support Programmes namely Sarhad Rural Support Programme, National Rural Support Programme, Thardeep Rural Development Programme and Balochistan Rural Support for implementation. The project covered 152 Union Councils in 14 Districts of Pakistan including Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur in Punjab, Thattah, Jamshoro and Tharparkar in Sindh, Jaffarabad and Pishin in Baluchistan and Battagram, Haripur, Mansehra Swabi and swat in Khyber Pukhtunkhaw.

The project facilitated communities to actively engage with the political system, involving political parties, public representatives and concerned Education departments to improve the state of education and related physical infrastructure. Through the formation of a 'District Parent Ittehad' (parent's union), communities worked together with the Rural Support Programmes fostered Local Support Organizations (LSOs) at the Union Council level to identify problems in the education and school infrastructure in their communities and advocate with the political system to ensure that their problems are resolved, so that every child can go to school. Community activists and community resource persons were trained by the Local Support Organizations to ensure the attendance and retention of every child in school. Parent Ittehad acted as an accountability mechanism whereby organised communities can access and ensure quality education.

RSPs fostered Local Support Organizations (LSOs) were the chariot for this campaign that had two main components. One, mobilizing parents for enrolment of out of school children and their retention in schools and two, social accountability of politicians and department of education for improvement in schools. "LSOs members, on daily basis sent the text messages to elected representatives (MNAs, MPAs), Deputy Commissioners and key Officials of the Department of Education to share the number of out of school children and about supply side needs and demanded the immediate actions", says Mr Bashir Anjum, Specialist Social Sector, RSPN. Furthermore, these LSOs collected data of out of school children (OSC) from all households in their area. Total OSCs were 361,545 (192,551 girls and 168,994 boys). LSOs motivated the parents of OSC to send the children to schools and as a result 128,789 (49,626 girls and 79,163 boys) children, 36 % increase from the baseline enrolment, were enrolled in schools. In addition to enrolment, LSOs efforts resulted in different improvements in 949 schools including opening of closed schools, construction of boundary walls, procurement of furniture, construction of latrine and water supply schemes, electricity, and construction of new rooms in schools.

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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Improvement in the education sector of Sindh calls for multi-faceted reforms, this policy brief makes two key recommendations. These key recommendations are mainly based on the field research undertaken in district Tando Allahyar.

### **1. For the Sindh Government**

The 18th Amendment to the constitution in 2010 made education a provincial subject. Education governance at the provincial level must be improved in order to create value of education in the lives of children and parents. A policy shift is urgently needed. Mere supply side view of pumping more resources in the education infrastructure would not automatically lead to improvement in enrolment and students' learning outcomes. Qualified teachers must be recruited on merit and teachers' attendance and performance must be monitored. For this to happen, mere technological solutions such as having biometrics would not be sufficient unless communities are actively involved through genuine participation in school management committees. At the moment, most of the school management committees are dominated by those who do not have any stake in the school, including influential people, not having their children in village schools.

## 2. For the civil society organisations

Behavioural change measures must accompany all measures to improve education infrastructure and governance. Here it calls for a decisive role to be played by civil society organisations through meaningful engagement with the communities. District governments must develop customised behavioural change communication plans in collaboration with all stakeholders and in particular with organisations having household access owing to their grassroots presence in communities at each union council level under the overall supervision of district governments. Community leaders such as competent school teachers, Imams and notables having favourable opinion towards education must be identified and engaged to convince unwilling parents to send their children to schools, especially girls. One such demonstrated example of meaningful engagement with communities is that of the collaboration of Rural Support Programmes Network through its community, village and local support organisations and Alif Ailaan under a project named "Parent Ittehad as Critical Mass to Demand Access to Quality Education". This collaboration led to multi-faceted improvements in both, education infrastructure and quality of education (The Nation, 2016). To address this education crisis, there is urgent need to scale up such efforts in order to meet Pakistan's global commitments, particularly 4th Sustainable Development Goal that calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

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## ABOUT SUCCESS

This policy brief has been prepared under the research component of the Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) programme.

SUCCESS Programme is based on the Rural Support Programme's (RSPs) social mobilisation approach to community-driven development (CDD). Social Mobilisation centers around the belief that poor people have an innate potential to help themselves; that they can better manage their limited resources if they organise and are provided technical and financial support. The RSPs under the SUCCESS Programme provide social guidance, technical and financial assistance to the rural poor in Sindh.

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