

## ASER 2011 - Meeting the Gender Challenges in Pakistan

By Baela Raza Jamil, Coordinator SAFED,

Director Programs, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), Director, Institute for Professional Learning (IPL)

Asiya's mother finally won the day in her household when she enrolled her daughter to the village school at age 7 in the Katchi (pre-primary) class. Asiya felt happy but a bit awkward since she stuck out as an older/taller child. In Katchi, she was lucky because the teacher began her day by coming first to her class and then moved to other classes in the two teacher girls' primary school with an enrolment of 150 children. After spending four years in school Asiya at age 10+ is now in grade 3, after repeating grade 2. She is determined to complete primary and secondary school.

In October 2011 when the ASER team knocked on Asiya's door her mother was delighted. In 2010 the survey team went to the house a few doors away. Asiya along with her mother had rushed to see what was happening in their otherwise undisturbed village. How her mother begged the team to test Asiya and her three brothers to report in the national survey, but was told that the survey was for a specific household only. Exactly one year later in 2011 a small miracle had happened when the survey team returned to their village and home to ask many questions and test Asiya and her brothers.

The gender challenge in Pakistan is a major one almost across all provinces and districts as corroborated by the ASER 2011 report for rural (84 districts) and urban areas (3 districts). According to the Human Development Report (HDR) 2011<sup>1</sup>, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary level in Pakistan is 0.85 and for secondary it is 0.83, targeted to reach 1 at primary and 0.90 at secondary level by 2015 in order to meet the MDGs and the EFA targets. The gender gaps are boldly illustrated by the primary completion rate (PCR) in the Pakistan Social Living & Measurement (PSLM) survey 2010-2011.

**Table: Percentage distribution of population that has completed primary level or higher- by province & districts**

Level	Male %	Female %	Total %
National	59	39	49
Punjab	60	44	52
Sindh	62	40	52
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	57	26	41
Balochistan	48	13	32
Dera Bugti (Balochistan)	15	0	9
Kohistan (KP)	21	2	13

Source: PSLM 2010-2011 (Table 2.2)

The districts of Barkhan and Dera Bugti in Balochistan reveal 2% and 0% female primary completion rate or higher respectively! At the provincial level, in the best performing provinces of Punjab and Sindh the overall gender gap is 16% and 22%, whilst in KP it is 31% and Balochistan 35%! If we further disaggregate by locality (urban/rural) and gender the results are stark. According to Lloyd, Mete and Grant (2007) and Lockheed (2008)<sup>2</sup> heterogeneity in society (language, socio economic status, religion, and exclusions) create constraints to access in learning resulting in learning lags<sup>3</sup>. When girls take extra holidays as surrogate mothers, helping in domestic chores, child minding, harvesting and sowing seasons, the contact time for learning is reduced. It is further exacerbated by gender bias in textbooks, curriculum and classroom teaching practices. Only 8 percent of Balochi and 16 percent of Sindhi rural girls complete primary school compared to 42 and 49 percent of male counterparts and 64 percent urban girls and 72 percent urban Punjabi boys (PSLM 2010-11).

The Annual Status of Education report (ASER) 2011 surveyed a total number of 146,874 children, of which only 41 % were girls compared to 59% boys (in FATA 33% and Balochistan 36%). Access to girls is not always easy even at the household level. The case of missing girls has been highlighted as one indicator of gender inequality in societies where nature's survival advantage for girls soon disappears due to son preference and culturally constructed exclusions.

ASER data is collected and organized each year through a gender disaggregated lens for access, quality and equity. It vividly illustrates the challenges of gender equality across several dimensions.

Overall the enrollment in rural areas across public and private schools (5-16 years) is 63.5 % and 63% respectively (ages 5-16) for boys, whilst the comparative figures for girls are 36.4% and 37.4%!

The ASER 2011 reached out to 3,642 government and private schools across Pakistan revealing 37% government/public schools are mixed/coeducation institutions with the highest percentage in Sindh (83.4%), followed by Balochistan (40%) and lowest in FATA (4%) . In contrast, 88.34% private

<sup>1</sup> Human Development Report 2011 [http://www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human\\_developmentreport2011.html](http://www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human_developmentreport2011.html)

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd, C. A., C. Mete, and M. Grant. 2007. "Rural Girls in Pakistan: Constraints of Policy and Culture." In *Exclusion, Gender and Schooling: Case Studies from the Developing World*, eds. M. Lewis and M. Lockheed. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. Lockheed M. (2008) The Double Disadvantage of Gender and Social Exclusion in Education in "In Girls' Education in the 21st Century Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth, eds. Mercy Tembon and Lucia Fort

<sup>3</sup> Lockheed M. (2008). The Double Disadvantage of Gender and Social Exclusion in Education in "In Girls' Education in the 21st Century Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth, eds. Mercy Tembon and Lucia Fort

schools are mixed with the highest in Punjab (92.3%) and lowest in Balochistan (75%) with FATA at 79.1%! Currently large amounts are spent in the public sector for maintaining parallel offices for girls and boys schools up to the elementary /secondary level. It is a policy issue worth reviewing to free critical resources for quality in education.

**Table: Co-education Schools as a Percentage of All Schools (Rural)**

	Public	Private
National	36.9%	88.3%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	21.6%	83.6%
Punjab	20.8%	92.3%
Balochistan	40.0%	75.0%
Sindh	82.4%	87.8%
ICT	14.3%	96.1%
FATA	4.0%	79.1%
Gilgit-Baltistan	30.8%	81.5%
AJK	30.6%	86.9%

Source: ASER 2011 (Rural)

#### Learning levels by Gender (National/Rural/Urban)

At the heart of ASER is its focus on learning outcomes of children no matter which type of school/institution they attend or do not attend. The learning instruments comprise of grade two level competencies as given in the national curriculum 2006 along with the textbooks in use in all provinces in reading Urdu or the local language, English and arithmetic. The children (5-16 years) are tested in their homes and reported by gender, location and grade level if going to school or otherwise. In 2011, ASER Pakistan tested three major urban city districts as well (Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar) for the first time in collaboration with Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS). The gender comparisons in 2011 results reveal the following trends at the national rural and in the three urban cities.

**Table: Learning Levels- National (Rural)**

	% who can read at least a Sentence (URDU)	% who can read at least Words (ENGLISH)	% who can at least do Subtraction
Girls	26.5	27.9	25.0
Boys	33.7	35.7	32.6

Source: ASER 2011

**Table: Learning Levels- Urban-City District Karachi**

	% who can read at least a Sentence (URDU)	% who can read at least Words (ENGLISH)	% who can at least do Subtraction
Girls	44.7	56.7	43.1
Boys	38.0	50.1	39.7

Source: ASER 2011

**Table: Learning Levels- Urban-City District Lahore**

	% who can read at least a Sentence (URDU)	% who can read at least Words (ENGLISH)	% who can at least do Subtraction
Girls	42.7	47.2	41.4
Boys	44.2	51.6	41.1

Source: ASER 2011

**Table: Learning Levels- Urban-City District Peshawar**

	% who can read at least a Sentence (URDU)	% who can read at least Words (ENGLISH)	% who can at least do Subtraction
Girls	32.3	39.0	32.7
Boys	48.1	54.9	48.1

Source: ASER 2011

#### Persistent gender based gaps in learning levels - the rural and urban evidence

The comparisons reported are for reading at least one small paragraph of sentences in Urdu/Sindhi, four out of five words with comprehension in English from a list of words and solving two sums of subtraction (two-digit) in arithmetic. The learning levels for girls in rural areas are consistently lower than boys in all three competencies across all provinces and areas reinforcing the notion that heterogeneity lowers access to learning, particularly for girls who may be more easily retained and restrained from regular attendance, even if they do get enrolled into schools. In the urban areas however, the gender gaps in learning narrow down and in the case of Karachi a mega city, girls clearly have done better than boys in all three areas. In Lahore the girls slightly surpass boys in arithmetic



<sup>4</sup> ASER India - <http://www.asercentre.org/ingo-education-india.php?ip=Spotlight%3A+ASER+2011>

The passing of the 18th amendment Education and insertion of Article 25 A in the Constitution in 2010 has finally made education a fundamental right for all children aged 5-16 but almost 21 months down the road the legislation is yet to be finalized. In neighboring India the implementation began on April 1, 2010 and ASER India 2011 is already benchmarking the evidence for right to education (RTE)<sup>6</sup>.

In Pakistan we hope that 2012 will be a year of action in bringing out the legislation for 25 A backed by government resolve to back it up with resources and implementation. In the education landscape we have many plus points with respect to gender if our policy makers take time to hear the people's voice. The households want education for their girls and boys, coeducation is not an issue to a majority of the households provided they are sure that learning is taking place. Many externalities are well understood by parents such as Asiya's mother with compelling evidence on impact of learning and progressive levels of schooling such as

becoming a good human being/civic education; possibilities for higher labor force participation and economic productivity; lowering of infant and maternal mortality rates; reduction in fertility rate; opportunities for political participation and intergenerational benefits in multiple dimensions including challenging of adverse cultural practices and gender empowerment (Dollar & Gatti 1999; UNICEF 2003; Filmer 2000; Klasen 1999; ). The government of Pakistan is committed to this principle and convinced of its advantages but the implementation remains painfully slow.

Asiya will go to school at all costs but will she be able to have consistent access to learning in school? Will she be able to have the luxury of her urban counterparts to narrow her learning gaps, even out or perhaps even outsmart the boys!

