

Public Private Crossings: Who is Minding the Gap for Post Primary Transitions - Evidence from ASER 2014

Baela Raza Jamil

Country Coordinator, ASER Pakistan

Director Programs, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA)

Coordinator, South Asia Forum for Education Development (SAFED)

There are two conversations that are getting louder in the education discourse globally; are our children learning? And, if so, where is greater learning taking place, in public or private schools? The walls get higher across the two sectors creating exclusionary positions both in perceptions and reality. ASER 2014 gives us strong evidence on shifting trends from public to private schools in rural and urban areas. There is also an official narrative in the education sector plans¹ supervised by the government for meeting education targets through non state providers, but financed through the education foundation and/or autonomous financing bodies such as the Education Fund for Sindh (EFS). The challenge of governance in education remains fundamental to undermining the education enterprise in Pakistan. It may take some time to be settled, but it is leading households to leave government schools sometimes at great costs if households are not subsidized to ensure better learning outcomes for their children.

Given this situation, governments, civil society and academia may need to revisit the binary conceptualization if state responsibility is seen as overarching principle for reconstructing public policy on how ALL children must get a fundamental entitlement. It is widely acknowledged that the movement for citizen led accountability on learning engaged through large scale learning assessments in many countries across three continents Asia, Africa and Latin America, a south - south initiative has influenced the articulation of the learning crisis at global forums (Hewlett 2014; Save the Children 2013; Brookings 2013). In some countries evidence on what works well to improve learning is also being collected to influence an equally scalable global movement (GPE 2014, ASER Centre 2014; QEDC Hewlett 2014). As the post 2015 Development Agenda shapes its final goals and targets the chances of a standalone Education goal anchored in learning plus access targeted to address inequality remain strong as education is seen as a cross cutting capability for many of the proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cognizant of 58 million out of school children and 250 million not learning well the Muscat Agreement's

overarching goal/targets (2014) and the proposed Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 and its 9 targets are ambitious and boldly set out to do what must be done by all countries for their children and youth, particularly the most disadvantaged who are likely to remain excluded².

The latest round of ASER 2014 data from Pakistan reveals strong trends of children shifting from public to private schools, a whopping 4% over 12 months in rural areas 2% in urban centers already biased in favor of private sector. This is raising concerns on exacerbating inequality by excluding those groups who cannot afford even low cost private schooling and disproportionately affecting girls (GCE 2014; DFID 2014). The government obligated to article 25-A of the constitution has to provide free compulsory education to all children aged 5-16 at the minimum and can do more if it so chooses under the devolved provincial set up after the passing of the 18th amendment in 2010. Governments can opt to become direct or indirect providers of education through various policy options on financing and management arrangements in government owned public sector schools or private sector government financed schools; this must be done through a social justice lens. How is the social justice issue addressed considering the poor quality of public sector schools? What is the evidence on targeting girls for choice in non-state schools? Clearly the ASER data shows that in 2014 both at the rural level only 37% girls were enrolled in private schools whereas it was 44% in



¹ Education Sector Plans have been developed by all provinces 2014-2018/19 as medium term action plans with targets, strategies and budgets through stakeholder groups' consultation; two provinces are being supported by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) viz. Balochistan and Sindh.

² <http://en.unesco.org/post2015/all-resources>

urban areas. Overall girls remain marginalized and especially those from poorest families, in both public and private schools.

A growing concern among households is about where their children will go beyond the primary level? When their children are unable to move from primary to post primary level simply due to lack of schools parents begin to make hard and angry choices, withdrawing children even prior to primary completion as the future looks very stark and vulnerable for a primary graduate. In public sector for every 8 primary schools there is only 1 middle school and for 11 primary schools there is only 1 secondary school at the National level. Province wise ratios are shared below:

Province	Primary - Middle Ratio	Primary - Secondary Ratio
Balochistan ³	9:1	14:1
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ⁴	9:1	12:1
Punjab ⁵	4:1	6:1
Sindh ⁶	18:1	24:1

Pakistan's out of school children or in school children at risk fall prey to severe violations of child rights including, child labor, trafficking, early marriages etc. The transition gaps are wide in terms of availability of schools at the primary, middle and secondary levels compromising children's life chances beyond primary level. In rural Sindh and Balochistan ASER 2014 reveals that private sector has grown from 15% in 2013 to 17% (1% madrasah) and 10 % in 2013 to 20% (6% madrasah) respectively; however, the expansion is mostly in primary level institutions since investment costs are much higher in middle and secondary schools.

According to ASER 2014 rural for out of school age groups rises from 18% for 6-10 to 22% for 11-13 and 30% for ages 14-15. The corresponding figures in urban areas is 4.3% (6-10) to 5.7% (11-13) and 11 % (14-15), where private sector is a major player across 21 districts of Pakistan. Balochistan and Sindh rural stand out for having the highest out of school children for almost all ages, whilst Punjab is highest in urban areas for middle and secondary age groups.

Table: Out of School children in Rural and Urban areas of Pakistan by age level (ASER 2014- National)					
% Children out-of-school by age group					Rank*
Province / Territory	Age group 3 – 5	Age group 6 – 10	Age group 11 – 13	Age group 14 – 16	
Balochistan	72.4	30.1	33.3	41.7	1
Sindh	63.3	22.6	28.8	41.0	2
Federally Administrated Tribal Areas	64.1	16.8	19.8	32.6	3
Punjab	44.9	9.7	14.0	26.9	4
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	61.8	12.6	14.7	22.9	5
Gilgit-Baltistan	60.4	13.6	10.9	19.0	6
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	49.9	4.4	4.8	11.1	7
Islamabad - ICT	24.2	1.0	0.5	0.0	8
National Rural	60.8	18.0	20.3	30.1	
Punjab-Urban	41.4	4.5	8.1	16.3	1
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Urban	54.4	3.5	6.1	10.8	2
Sindh-Urban	40.7	4.9	5.1	9.2	3
Balochistan-Urban	47.3	2.3	2.7	8.5	4
Islamabad-Urban	28.7	0.3	0.0	0.0	5
National Urban	42.2	4.3	5.7	11.0	

Taking the case of Sindh province where public sector provision is 91% primary schools, 5% middle and 3% secondary schools (SESP 2014-18), ASER has recorded a rise of non-state providers 17% (ASER 2014) compared to 10% (ASER 2013) revealing that the demand and supply for alternatives is increasing in Sindh. There are active programs for increasing non-state low fee paying options provided free of cost to out of school children through vouchers by the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) or Education Fund for Sindh (EFS). Increasingly in Punjab, Balochistan and KPK a similar public financed program is also expanding, but not necessarily supporting post primary education.

³ Balochistan Educational Management Information System – BEMIS

⁴ Elementary & Secondary Education department

⁵ Educational Management Information System – EMIS

⁶ Sindh Education Profile (2013-14) prepared by RSU

The trends of low provision at post primary levels, illustrate sad prospects for the children and youth of Pakistan in the post 2015 period after MDGs. This grave reality must be immediately addressed through innovations for access to secondary level sustained through learning outcomes. ASER each year informs the plight of 11-13 and 14-16 (mentioned in the table above) who remain unenrolled because either they never enrolled in the first place or dropped out due to lack of facilities adding to the numbers of primary graduates or illiterates with nowhere to go.

Pakistan's biggest challenges on learning and access beyond primary level especially for the most disadvantaged seek a departure from traditional planning

for bridging the widening gaps. Neither the government nor the private sector is actively investing for facilities required at the secondary education. The walls across providers need to soften through public policy dialogues and programs. Who will bridge the gap? Who will ensure that 5-16 year olds get their right to education as per 25-A? Who will proactively engage with post 2015 goals and targets? Who will ensure that our children do not end up as youth without hope and capabilities?

For taking this conversation forward to influence public policy choices kindly contact:

Baela Raza Jamil: itacec@gmail.com

Sahar Saeed: sehar.saeed@aserpakistan.org (Program Manager, ASER Pakistan)

