

# Bring 'Magic' into Girls<sup>1</sup> Lives

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The last few years have seen intense debates and efforts among different stakeholders in the international community to arrive at a meaningful and well-defined post-2015 education agenda. There is considerable hope, at what has been achieved, but there is also a strong desire to achieve a more well-defined plan that is more inclusive and able to target persistent marginalizations more effectively.

The story of girls' education is one of mixed success. The latest Global Monitoring Report (2013-2014) identified 57 million children as being out of school, 31 million of whom were girls<sup>2</sup>. Pakistan is also the country reported to have the second highest number of children out of school and two-thirds of them – 3 million - are girls<sup>3</sup>. If the progress in gender equality is seen as a whole, there is no denying the great strides that have been made across different parts of the world. However, there is also a very clear recognition that education in general and gender equality in terms of

access and provision of quality education remains one of the 'unfinished businesses' of the MDGs<sup>4</sup>. According to UNESCO, Pakistan also continues to be a country with some of the widest education inequalities in the world<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, the country presents a representative case where girls' education is continually said to have met with 'mixed success'. Table 1 below illustrates this by showing Pakistan's progress towards achieving Goal 3 of the MDGs – promote gender equality and empower women – and Target 3.A. – eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. It is clear that strides have been made in reducing gender gaps in educational access especially across primary and secondary levels of education. However, gender gaps still exist across all education levels (and have increased in post-secondary education) and a larger majority of out of school children continue to be over-represented by girls.

**Table 1: School Attendance Ratios and Out-of-School by level, according to background characteristics, Pakistan 1990 and 2012.**

1990							
	Primary			Secondary			Post-secondary
	Gross Attendance	Net Attendance	Proportion of out-of-school	Gross Attendance	Net Attendance	Proportion of out-of-school	Gross Attendance
<b>Total</b>	80.8	52.5	46.5	36.3	27.7	49.9	2.5
<b>Gender</b>							
<b>Boys</b>	94.2	60.7	37.9	46.7	34.6	38.4	3.2
<b>Girls</b>	66.3	43.6	55.7	24.8	20.2	62.5	1.7
<b>Gap (Boys-Girls)</b>	+27.9	+17.1	-18.0	+21.9	+14.4	-24.1	+1.5
2012							
	Primary			Secondary			Post-secondary
	Gross Attendance	Net Attendance	Proportion of out-of-school	Gross Attendance	Net Attendance	Proportion of out-of-school	Gross Attendance
<b>Total</b>	88.4	61.9	36.6	41.8	36.8	39.9	18.7
<b>Gender</b>							
<b>Boys</b>	95.1	65.1	33.3	46.0	40.1	33.9	22.2
<b>Girls</b>	81.0	58.3	40.3	37.1	33.1	46.4	15.6
<b>Gap (Boys-Girls)</b>	+14.1	+6.8	-7.0	+8.9	+7.0	-12.5	+6.6

Source: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/Education/wDHS/HProfiles.aspx>

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the statement by Nivasini, a high school student from India, that "Education is the closest thing to magic in the world. Nothing can transform a person's life the way education can. It instills confidence and gifts people with a voice. Apart from the obvious benefits of a better lifestyle and a more meaningful life, education can lead to a better society at large; a society with people aware of their rights and duties", cited in Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, downloaded 2 December 2014: [http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Making\\_Education\\_a\\_Priority\\_in\\_the\\_Post-2015\\_Development\\_Agenda.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Making_Education_a_Priority_in_the_Post-2015_Development_Agenda.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/GMR/pdf/gmr2013/oosc2.jpg>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/EDUCATION\\_IN\\_PAKISTAN\\_\\_A\\_FACT\\_SHEET.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/EDUCATION_IN_PAKISTAN__A_FACT_SHEET.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/EDUCATION\\_IN\\_PAKISTAN\\_\\_A\\_FACT\\_SHEET.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/EDUCATION_IN_PAKISTAN__A_FACT_SHEET.pdf)

The collection of data on learning outcomes through the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), each year since 2008, have been instrumental in highlighting the stories of success and identifying the key areas where we have failed the millions of girls in the country. In terms of out of school children, ASER data have consistently shown there to be no gender gaps nationally. Whilst in 2011, 11% girls aged 6-16 years across rural Pakistan were out of school compared to 10% boys, the national average has not changed in 2014<sup>6</sup> (see Table 2). There are, however, regional differences. For example, in Balochistan, whilst 12% girls were out of school in 2011 compared to 12%

boys, in 2014 the figures are 17% girls versus 16% boys. Similarly, in FATA, 15% girls were out of school in 2011 compared to 10% boys and in 2014 the figures stand at 13% girls to 8% boys. These figures indicate two things. Firstly, there are clear differences across different regions. Secondly, while gender gaps in access may not be large in certain parts of the country, where they do exist, they are quite persistent. Worryingly, in some parts of the country, the percentages of out of school children have actually increased rather than declined over time, and this is a disturbing trend.

**Table 2: Percentage of Out of School Children (OOSC) by Gender, (ages 6-16 years)**

Province	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
<b>National Rural</b>	11	10	13	10	11	10	11	10
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	21%		23%		21%		21%	
<b>National Urban</b>	8	9	3	4	4	4	3	3
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	17%		7%		8%		6%	
<b>Punjab</b>	9	7	8	8	8	8	8	7
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	16%		16%		16%		15%	
<b>Sindh</b>	15	15	17	16	15	14	14	13
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	30%		33%		29%		27%	
<b>Balochistan</b>	12	12	21	13	17	17	17	16
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	24%		34%		34%		33%	
<b>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</b>	9	6	9	7	9	6	10	5
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	15%		16%		15%		15%	
<b>Azad Kashmir</b>	6	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	10%		8%		6%		6%	
<b>Gilgit- Baltistan</b>	11	11	9	8	10	6	9	5
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	22%		17%		16%		14%	
<b>FATA</b>	15	10	15	11	13	8	13	8
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	25%		26%		21%		21%	
<b>Islamabad - ICT</b>	2	2	2	3	2	3	0	0
<b>TOTAL OOSC</b>	4%		5%		5%		0%	

Source: ASER reports (2011-2014)

Furthermore, gender gaps are more strikingly visible in terms of learning outcomes. ASER data from the last 4 years have consistently shown that among children aged 5-16 years old, boys consistently outperform girls in Urdu

and Mathematics outcomes (see Tables 3 and 4 below). Whilst in some instance, this advantage is marginal, in others it is worryingly high.

<sup>6</sup> However, it is very important to note that the number of districts covered in 2011 was 85, 136 rural and 6 urban districts were covered in 2012, 138 rural and 13 urban districts in 2013, 144 rural and 21 urban districts in 2014. This limits comparability across the years.

**Table 3: Percentage Learning Levels by Gender (Urdu: % who can read at least sentences), ages 5-16 years.**

	2011		2012		2013		2014	
Province	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
National Rural	27	34	37	45	57	60	39	46
National Urban	-	-	56	65	57	60	61	63
Punjab	36	40	52	55	54	55	52	55
Sindh	17	25	22	30	25	33	29	36
Balochistan	16	29	29	34	25	35	23	34
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	26	36	37	50	40	50	40	51
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	46	51	60	62	63	63	60	61
Gilgit- Baltistan	29	38	52	53	46	51	48	53
FATA	9	29	19	39	23	43	28	48
Islamabad - ICT	50	58	71	74	59	59	61	65

Source: ASER reports (2011-2014)

Table 3 for instance shows that the national rural picture indicates boys having a clear advantage in terms of their Urdu reading and mathematics competencies as

compared to girls. In both competencies, FATA is one of the worst performing regions in terms of gender inequality in learning outcomes.

**Table 4: Percentage Learning Levels by Gender (Arithmetic: % who can at least do subtraction), ages 5-16 years**

	2011		2012		2013		2014	
Province	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
National Rural	25	33	35	44	38	45	38	45
National Urban	-	-	54	63	57	60	59	61
Punjab	33	37	49	53	51	54	50	54
Sindh	14	21	17	25	20	28	25	32
Balochistan	17	30	18	33	24	33	19	29
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	27	37	38	53	41	53	43	55
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	41	49	57	59	60	62	59	59
Gilgit- Baltistan	29	39	52	54	48	52	51	56
FATA	10	30	21	41	26	49	29	53
Islamabad - ICT	47	58	69	73	57	55	68	69

Source: ASER reports (2011-2014)

The data speak for themselves. Girls in Pakistan continue to be marginalised in the provision of a basic human right – the right to a good quality education. The cost of this marginalisation is large. The denial of a quality education has lifetime consequences that impact generations. Girls' disadvantaged position relative to boys and men in accessing education compromises their agency in several domains including in the control over household resources, in the age of marriage and in the ultimate relationship with their partners, reflected in incidents of violence (World Bank Group, 2014). The role of education

in improving girls' and their families' lives is not in question. Education plays an important transformative role in every aspect of an individual's life and the lack of a good quality education leaves a costly legacy behind. If education is the 'closest thing to magic', we need to bring this magic into girls' lives to ensure that they achieve social, economic and life outcomes to the best of their potential.