Gender & Educational Inequality-Addressing the Marginalized

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Over the past decade, the major focus of the global education community has been on increasing school enrollment. As a result of this global focus, 89% of primary-age children are now enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2012). Free, compulsory primary education is recognized as a fundamental human right (United Nations 1948), and primary education is compulsory in almost every country, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS 2012). Though it is clear that considerable progress has been made since the establishment of the EFA and Millennium Development Goals, the goals have yet to be achieved. More than 57 million children continue to be denied their right to primary education. Access to education falls woefully short of the need in many countries and especially amongst nomadic populations, geographically remote groups, and the socially and economically disadvantaged (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2012).

Failure to address such structural disparities linked to wealth, gender, ethnicity, language, disability and other markers of disadvantage is holding back progress towards Education for All and fuelling wider processes of social exclusion. The UN’s 2013 Millennium Development Goal report highlights the gains made so far in achieving the MDGs as well as describing the major challenges that remain. As the report notes, the world is not on track to reach the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Despite a significant reduction in the number of out-of-school children – from 102 million in 2000 to 57 million in 2011 – progress has slowed in the last few years and inequalities remain high (Pauline Rose, World Education Blog).

According to the analysis of household survey data carried out by The Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children, 23.8 million primary and 15.6 million secondary-age children are out of school in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (UIS and UNICEF, 2010). The total number of out-of-school children in these countries is 39.4 million, out of which 53% are girls (UNESCO, 2010). Even in sub-Saharan Africa, over half of all out-of-school children, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys. Poor rural girls in particular face multiple disadvantages through gender discrimination and poverty which bar them from enrolling and lead to dropouts at greater rates than boys (The Global Compact on Learning: Policy Guide).

Where economic and gender disparities are preventing millions of girls and boys from even attending school, those who are attending often leave both primary and secondary levels without acquiring the basic knowledge, skills, and competencies. According to estimates in the 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report: At least 250 million primary-school-age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including girls and boys who have spent at least four years in school. In Pakistan, large disparities in learning achievement exist and are heavily influenced by the type of school students attend and their family backgrounds. ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) data reflects such inequalities very clearly. Shocking results from ASER Pakistan have shown that the vast majority of pupils between 5-16 years old have not even achieved what is expected of a grade 2 student in language and mathematics. This is coupled with widespread social and gender disparities in educational outcomes reflected by creating an ASER wealth index with the help of household indicators tapped during the survey. Learning levels of children juxtaposed against the wealth status of households will provide a snapshot of the current status of learning inequalities and demonstrate how these have narrowed/widened in comparison to last year.

**ASER WEALTH INDEX: FINDINGS**

In order to determine differences in learning levels arising from inequalities, an ASER composite wealth index has been constructed by integrating the significant household indicators mentioned in the survey form. These indicators measure the economic potential and achieved levels of income and wealth of a household. ASER wealth index has been developed by using principle component factor

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1 World Education Blog, UN 2013 MDG Report: Despite major progress, greater efforts are needed by Pauline Rose.
2 Household indicators used: Type of house {Type of house is a categorical variable with kutchi given the value 1, semi-pucca equals 2, and pucca equals 3), house owned {Dummy equaling 1 if the house is owned, 0 otherwise}, electricity connection {Dummy equaling 1 if the house had electricity, visible wires and fittings, 0 otherwise}, mobile {Dummy equaling 1 if anyone in the house has a mobile, 0 otherwise} and television {Dummy equaling 1 if the household has a television, 0 otherwise}
analysis procedure in the STATA software. Using this methodology, ASER 2014 national data (144 rural districts of Pakistan) has been divided into 4 categories/quartiles (i.e. poorest, poorer, richer, and richest) thereby representing the entire population of Pakistan in a socio-economic context.

The results depicted by ASER Wealth Index (2012, 2013 and 2014) are no different. The results reveal that the richest quartile has the highest percentage of children enrolled (85%) whereas the poorest quartile has the lowest enrollment rate (59%). A strong correlation between wealth and enrollment is established as we move along the wealth index. Moreover, socio-economic background is also found to be influencing gender inequity. The males and females belonging to the poorest quartile are particularly disadvantaged as depicted by the lowest enrollment rates. The highest enrollment of males and females is again in the richest quartile (87% and 83% respectively). The most alarming trend is that of female’s enrollment which not only decreases across all quartiles but also is lower than the enrollment rate of male population.

Results of the ASER 2014 data reveal that the poorest quartile has the highest level of children enrolled in government schools (77%) whereas the remaining 19% of the children are enrolled in private sector schools. On the other hand, the richest quartile has the highest number of children enrolled in private schools (53%) and the lowest percentage of children in government schools (46%). It is evident from the figures that enrollment in government schools falls and for that of private school increases as we move along the wealth index towards the richest. Status wealth is thus found to be influencing the type of school chosen by households. Though a number of low fee private schools exist in the country, they are still more expensive than their public counterparts and thus are not affordable for all income quartiles.

Given the bleak picture portrayed by the disparities in enrollment according to types of schools, a similar image comes to light when the “learning levels” according to wealth status are taken into account. The graph clearly indicates that the learning levels of children are directly related to their wealth status. The learning level of children in all three subjects increases as we move along the wealth index towards the richest quartile. Poorest have the lowest learning levels (19% Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 17% English/Reading Sentence, 16% Mathematics/Division) whereas the richest have the highest learning levels (39% Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 33% English/Reading Sentence, 29% Mathematics/Division).

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1 It factorizes variables by creating a weighted combination of the input variables in the following manner e.g.

   \[ F_1 = a1X1 + a2X2 + \ldots \]

   In order to select factors, eigen values from a principal component analysis are used and the factor coefficient scores are created. Further, the indicator values are multiplied by the coefficient scores and added to come up with the wealth index. The index is then divided into groups/quartiles to categorize the population according to their wealth status.

17% English, and 16% Math) and richest have the highest learning levels (44% Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 43% English, and 39% Math). The households with better wealth status are able to spend significantly more on their children’s education improving their opportunities for better quality schooling as reflected by the enrollment figures mentioned above.

Following the overall national trends, a gender-wise analysis was also conducted in order to determine the differences in learning levels of males and females. Males and females falling in the richest income group are better able to perform the language and numeracy tasks than children falling in low income groups. However, the learning levels of the females are lower when compared to the learning levels of males across all quartiles in both language and arithmetic competencies. 14% of the poorest females can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto as compared to 22% poorest males. Similarly, 11% poorest females can do two-digit division sums and 12% can read sentences in English whereas 20% of the poorest males can read sentences in English and 19% can do two-digit division sums.

Similarly, 43% of the richest females can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 42% can read sentences in English and 38% can do two-digit division sums whereas 44% richest males can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 44% can read sentences in English and 40% can do two-digit division sums.

The current education status of Pakistan as demonstrated by ASER 2014 clearly sheds light on how disparities created by differences in wealth status are jeopardizing the future of millions of children. If our objective is to educate all children, we need to challenge the existing differences and divisions in order to provide equal set of opportunities to all children of the society. Moreover, at a time when the international community begins to plan post-2015 education goals and framework, it is vital to ensure that equity based targets are included and measuring marginalization in education is given a high priority. The new goals should invest in citizenship and emphasize on human well-being. There is a dire need to include the use of metrics that go beyond standard income measures so that all countries converge not only in living standards but also in their global responsibilities to sustainable development.