

# GENDER IN ASER FOR LEARNING & WELL BEING

## THE ASER 2018 RESULTS

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**A**SER 2018 is a milestone survey in Pakistan. It is well known for generating time series data on education quality and equity. This year's report comes at a critical time when a new government has stepped into office in August 2018 with ambitious resolve, public declarations, policy frameworks and plans announced after 100 days in office to positively tackle the challenges of education equity and quality. All ears, heads and hearts were abuzz when the newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan in his maiden speech to the nation mentioned education 14 times! Against this opportune backdrop, ASER rural 2018 collected evidence nationwide covering 154 districts to inform policy, planning, financing and accelerated implementation for out of school children, but more importantly also those enrolled in schools but not always learning. ASER reaches out annually to almost 290,000 girls/ boys all genders (5-16 years), one on one from the poorest to richest in 89,966 households understanding at close proximity issues of gender justice on account of wealth, geography and disability (Washington Group short survey conducted in 2018 in KP and KP-Newly Merged Districts, ICT and Punjab). The ASER tool is mapped to lower primary competencies of grades 2-3 or indicator SDG 4.1.1a. This indicator is now a recognized indicator for tracking SDG 4. ASER actively informs implementation of Article 25 A as a fundamental constitutional right for 12 years of schooling for ALL.

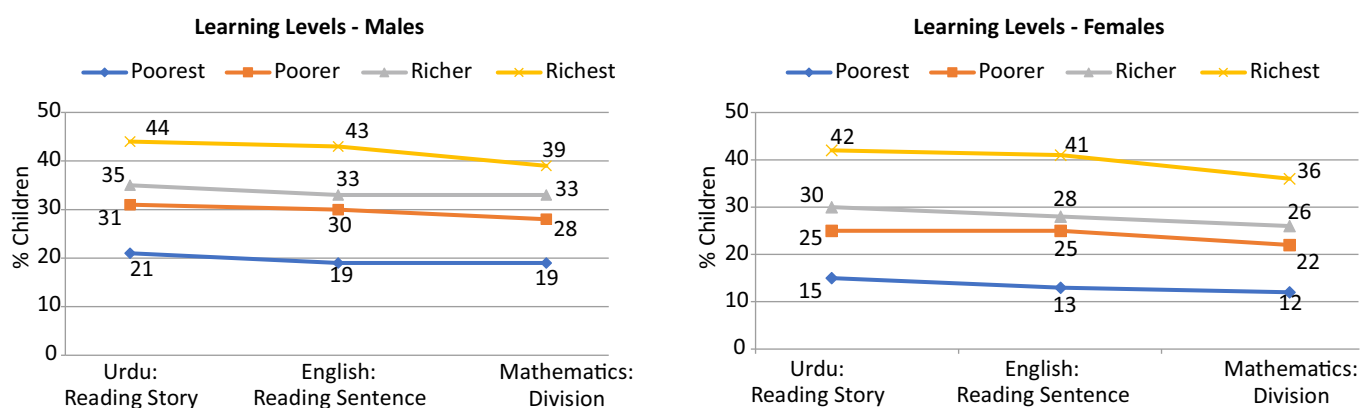
ASER produces data that is gender disaggregated for enrolment, learning, teachers and facilities by grade and age across Pakistan. It is led by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) through partners' mobilization (27) and with assistance of 11,000 educated and trained volunteer-enumerators to conduct the oral one-to-one assessment in homes triangulated by information from the households and visits to the local schools. The learning tool is simple covering up to grade 2 competencies of all children aged 5-16 to assess foundational learning of (girls and boys).

As national and global advocacy escalates, demanding 12 years of schooling to implement Article 25 A for ALL 5-16 year olds, and SDGs 2030/SDG 4 on education, ASER is well aligned to track trends by gender (5-16) for a universal entitlement of 'Learning for ALL'. Of the 22.8 million children out of school in Pakistan as quoted by the government (AEPAM 2016-17), 12.2 million are girls (10.6 million boys)<sup>1</sup>. Pakistan remains a significant contributor to the 130 million out of school girls globally. The government is firmly committed to reverse this tragedy.

The number of out of school girls and boys matters but what ASER and all citizen led assessments are iconic for drawing attention to most is an even bigger crisis of those children in school, but not necessarily learning.

1. <http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202016-17.pdf>

**Figure 1: Learning –Wealth and Gender Matters**



Following the overall national trends, a gender-wise analysis reveals differences in learning levels of males and females across all wealth groups. 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 females are lower when compared to the learning levels of males across all income quartiles in both language and arithmetic competencies. Fifteen percent of the poorest females can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto as compared to 21% poorest males. Similarly, 12% poorest females can do two-digit division sums and 13% can read sentences in English whereas 19% of the poorest males can read sentences in English and do two-digit division sums respectively.

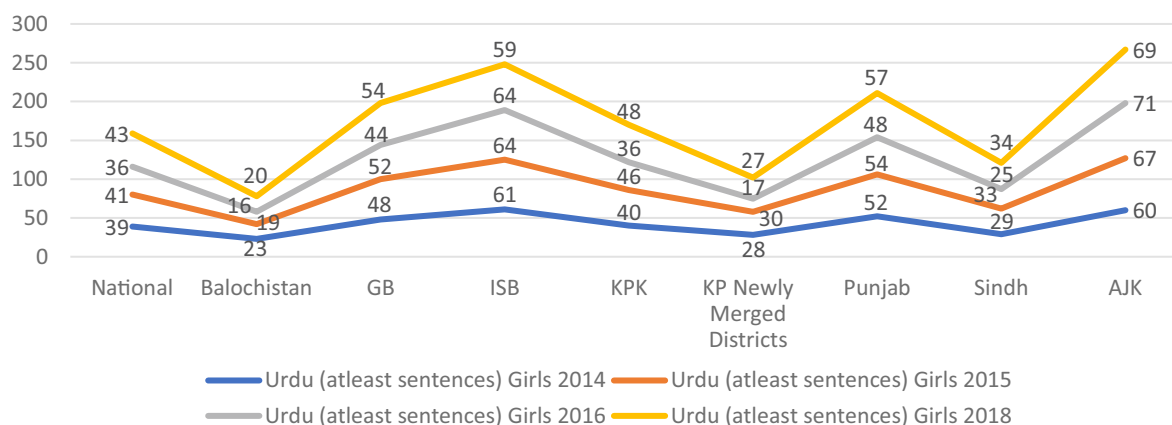
In the richest quartile 42% females can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 41% can read sentences in English and 36% can do two-digit division sums whereas 44% richest males can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 43% can read sentences in English and 39% can do two-digit division sums. Clearly there is a minor gap in learning among males and females of the richest income groups than among their counterparts in the poorest income quartile, but inequality matters across income groups and gender.

Inequalities remain entrenched intersecting along multiple dimensions. The ambition of 12 years of right to education when faced with disadvantages lead to exclusions from school, inability to compete education and poor levels of learning. ASER 2018 Pakistan highlights these exclusions starkly across provinces, across districts that affects girls disproportionately as corroborated by many. As quoted by some studies, in 'Sindh only 16% of the poorest girls and 30% of the poorest boys complete primary school, compared with 75% of the richest children' (Alcott and Rose (2017)<sup>2</sup>

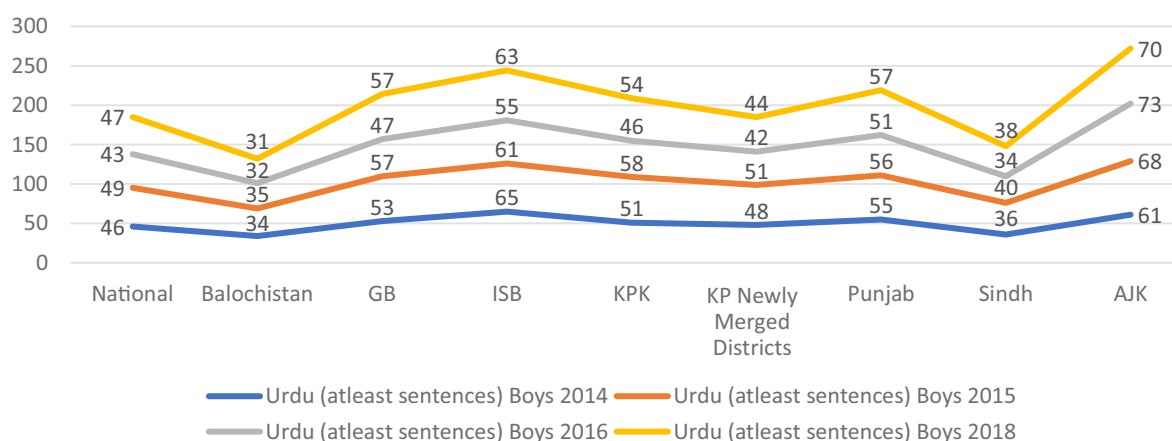
Learning for girls, however remains 'stuck' with unsettled improvement trends over four years in all provinces /areas (2014-2018). There is a critical challenge for sustained learning gains.

<sup>2</sup> Alcott, B., & Rose, P. (2017). Learning in India's primary schools: How do disparities widen across the grades? International Journal of Educational Development, 56, 42-51.

**Figure 2: Learning Gains Over the Years**  
Learning Level-Girls, Urdu (Sentences)



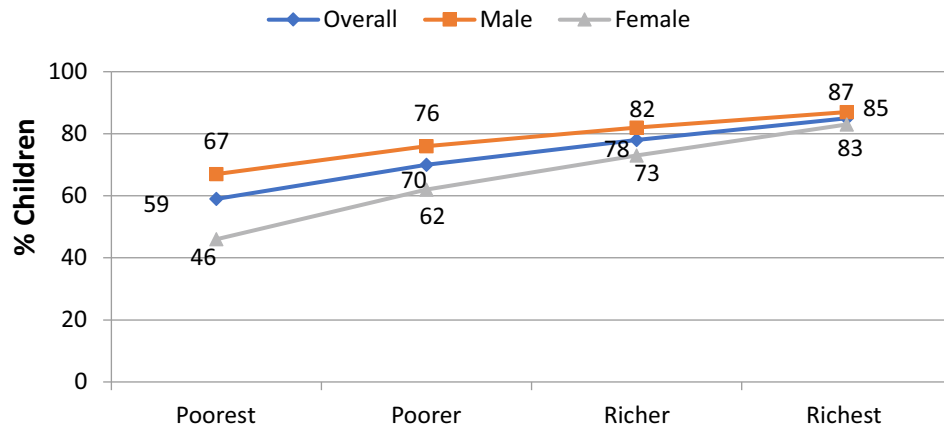
**Learning Levels-Boys, Urdu (Sentences)**



There is good news in ASER 2018: national enrolment for 5-16 has risen from 81% in 2016 to 83% in 2018 with gender gaps gradually narrowing. Mothers completing primary education has also steadily increased from 24% in 2014 to 33% in 2018! There is a positive trend of higher enrolments concurrent with narrowing of gender gaps in learning outcomes over years (2014-2018) between girls and boys and government and private schools in some regions. These include Punjab, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). How can these trends be accelerated for all provinces?

Gender challenges are well illustrated across wealth, enrolment and learning. ASER 2018 reveals that girls in poorest households are likely to suffer lower enrolment than their male counterparts in the poorest income strata by 21% (46% girls vs. 67% boys). The gap between enrolment of poorest girls (46%) and richest boys (87%) is 41%. These are unacceptable mounting equity gaps in Pakistan that need to urgent actions. Female enrolment remains depressed across all income quartiles and is consistently lower than the enrollment rate of male counterparts.

**Figure 3: Enrollment by Gender & Wealth**



The business case for urgency of girls' education and that of the most marginalized is well illustrated above. The reasons for gender gaps could be many ranging from lack of facilities, security, poverty, son preference and other customary codes/practices.

There is an overarching imperative to expand educational opportunities for both girls and boys for all income groups but especially targeting the poorest/poorer quartiles to achieve the target of 12 years of schooling (25 A and SDG 4). The recently released report 12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls: A Commonwealth Perspective (2019)<sup>3</sup> for the Platform for Girls' Education of the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) examined data trends in 53 commonwealth countries' including Pakistan. The report highlights that girls remain particularly disadvantaged and there is a compelling case for targeted efforts to support them. 'Not only is this the right thing to do, it is also one of the smartest investments for fair and resilient societies' as...educated girls marry later, earn more, and have healthier families'. The report suggests 12 holistic doable recommendations around three thematic policy and action strands to reach 12 years of schooling for life-long learning 'leaving no girl behind'. There is an urgency to embed these recommendations in Pakistan's policies and education sector plans for 2019-2023.

**A. Leadership and financing**

1. Visible high-level political commitment backed up with resources.
2. Grassroots leadership increasing awareness about the value of girls' education.
3. Formula funding targeting resources at those most at risk of being left behind.
4. Use of data to inform policy change.

**B. Targeted approaches**

5. Prioritizing early childhood education and early learning.
6. Addressing multifaceted challenges that girls face when they reach puberty.
7. Eliminating cost barriers.
8. Tackling disadvantages that intersect with gender, such as disability, location, poverty.

**C. Tackling discrimination**

9. School environments that are safe spaces.
  10. Gender-sensitive teaching practices and materials.
  11. Promoting women's economic empowerment and providing pathways to productive work.
  12. Tackling access and learning simultaneously, with sufficient resources.
- (ibid. 2019)

3. <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/Platform%20for%20Girls/REAL%2012%20Years%20of%20Quality%20Education%20for%20All%20Girls%20FULL%2084pp.pdf>

District level results (2018) reveal stark challenges of access at primary and post primary levels due to paucity of schools /especially for girls. There are emerging good practices and disruptive innovations being tested successfully within Pakistan. Some of these tackle transport to cover distance to school through vouchers and bicycles and second shift schools (STRIDE) in KP and Punjab; others demonstrate through accelerated learning programs, Chalo Parho Barho (also known as teaching at the right level) for out of school girls and boys (6-12) showing positive results in enhanced learning and access in just 60 days for more than 60,000 girls/boys in KP. CPB's contents are mapped to the National Curriculum 2006, and pedagogies are pitched to each child's own level through rigorous routines with baseline, midline and end line tracking. Tech enabled learning gains with evidence is gaining ground in Pakistan at all levels of education in an environment that is encouraging innovative learning and governance, solutions. Some of these good practices are beginning to be scaled up for both girls and boys but more resources are needed for innovations to be adopted nationwide.

Citizen led ASER 2018 is all about Assessment for Action. In essence, ASER Pakistan builds a strong evidence based narrative for gender justice. It calls for collaborative efforts by multiple ministries /departments including conditional cash transfers / social safety net programs for quality pre-primary/ECE, primary and post primary education, especially for girls. There is an urgency for action as girls cannot wait – they hold half the sky as generational catalysts for societal well-being and economic growth; and Pakistan needs both!

