

Comparative Analysis of Urban Polarization - Education for Sustainable Development

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Policy Brief 02



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One third of Pakistan's current population is living in urban areas - this is expected to rise by 50% by 2030. In the light of Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) findings, this brief analyses the emanating rural-urban divide in education and emphasizes on the learning disparities. The brief also recommends broad policy actions that aim to improve the quality of education in urban settings and foster equity in the long run.

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Background and Introduction

More than 50% of the world's population is living in the urban areas and about one third of this urban population lives in slum conditions. In Africa, that proportion is greater than 60% (Urbanization in Pakistan, 2014). Much of this bias is caused by the growing urban population in developing countries. The annual aggregate population increase in the six major developing-country cities¹ is higher than the entire population of Europe. Approximately half of the world's urban population is living in Asia. According to United Nations Population Fund, Pakistan has the highest level of urbanization in South Asia, and is expected to have 50% urban population by 2030.

Pakistan has an estimated population of 180 million – making it the world's 6th most populated country. The annual population growth rate of Pakistan stands at 2.1% whereas its urban population is growing at a much higher pace (3.3%)². These estimates are believed to be understated as the definition of urbanization in Pakistan is controversial; with changing ground realities, some rural high-density areas are showing urban characteristics similar to low-and-middle income communities in urban areas.

Rural Urban Divide in Education:

Given the nature of this transition, it is important to examine the status of infrastructure and services such as education and health facilities in both rural and urban areas in a bid to determine the extent to which they meet the needs of a growing and changing population. Amongst all public services, education has always been considered

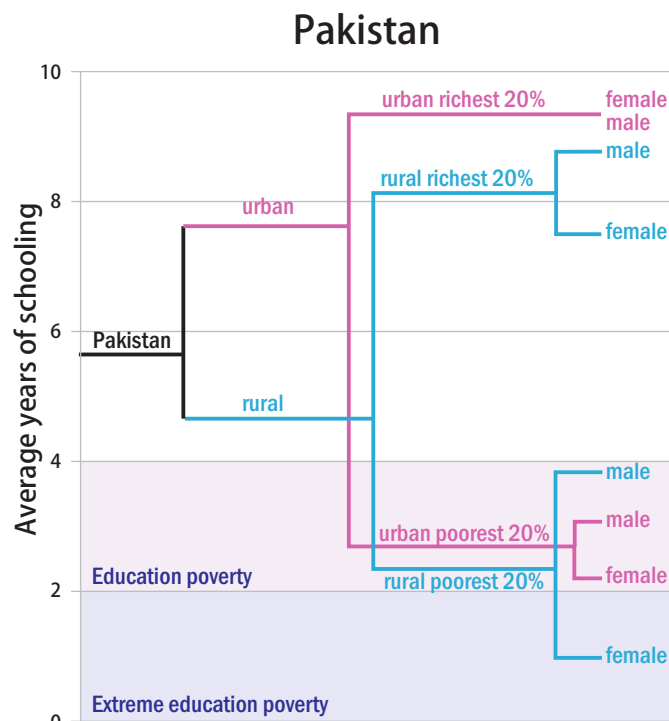
¹ Karachi (Pakistan), Mumbai & New Delhi (India), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Lagos (Nigeria), and Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo).

² Urbanization in Pakistan, 2014

central for swift and substantial progress. The future of a state rests upon the type of education provided to its citizens since it holds a direct correlation with economic progress and social evolution.

In Pakistan, large disparities in learning achievements exist and are heavily influenced by their socio-economic backgrounds. Alongside rural settings, urban areas have also begun to show pronounced disparities in the amount of schooling children receive. The gap in total years of schooling between the richest and poorest 20% of the population has been found to be greater in urban than in rural areas (UNESCO Deprivation and Marginalization in Education database).

On an average, children in urban areas are more likely to have more educational opportunity than their counterparts in rural areas. Nevertheless, the scale of inequality within urban areas is a matter of great concern. Gaps between rich and poor in towns and cities can sometimes be equal to, or exceed those found in rural areas. As the diagram shows, in Pakistan, the education gap between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% is greater in urban than in rural areas³.



Source: UNICEF analysis based on UNESCO Deprivation and Marginalization in Education database (2009) using household survey data: Benin (DHS, 2006); Pakistan (DHS, 2007); Tajikistan (MICS, 2005); Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (MICS, 2000).

Girls growing up in poor households are at a great disadvantage regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. The difference in educational attainment between the poorest boys and girls is about three years in rural areas and about one year in urban areas⁴. ASER Wealth Index⁵ also supports that the gender gap in education is widening. In 2013, 12% girls can do two-digit division whereas 19% boys could do the same division problems.

Status of Education in Urban Areas:

ASER 2013 shows a stark difference in the learning levels of children of the rural and urban population. Despite higher enrollment levels, increased additional learning support and better mother's literacy in the urban areas, progress in the quality of learning is inadequate. There is only a difference of a few percentage points. The figures raise a lot of questions for the policy makers. Are the children in urban areas really learning or is their comparatively better performance only due to improved facilities extended to them? ASER allows us to look at the data of three urban districts over a period of three years (2011, 2012 & 2013).

Learning Levels of Children – ASER Pakistan 2013									
	Local Language*			English**			Arithmetic***		
	(Urdu, Sindhi & Pashto)								
	Peshawar	Karachi	Lahore	Peshawar	Karachi	Lahore	Peshawar	Karachi	Lahore
2011	54%	48%	78%	63%	68%	70%	49%	50%	52%
2012	38%	43%	84%	40%	47%	82%	39%	31%	70%
2013	14%	49%	78%	27%	53%	88%	31%	43%	71%

*Learning levels of class 5 children who can read at least story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto
 **Learning levels of class 5 children who can read at least sentences in English
 ***Learning levels of class 5 children who can do at least two-digit division

Source: Annual Status of Education Report, 2013

³ Focus on Urban Disparities (UNICEF)

⁴ Status of World's Children (www.unicef.org/sowc)

⁵ www.aserpakistan.org/document/asere/2013/notes_aser_2013/Sahar_Huma.pdf

The table shows that the learning levels of children in the urban areas are rather rusting over the years, especially for Peshawar & Karachi. District Peshawar shows the most concerning numbers: from 54% of children being able to read a story in their local language (Pashto) in 2011, the learning levels dropped to 14% in two years. Similarly, if we look at the learning levels of children in English, 63% children could read sentences in English in 2011; the figures fell down to 40% in 2012 and now in 2013 data shows that only 27% class 5 children could read sentences in English. Likewise, children are not showing any progress in Arithmetic: in 2011, 49% children of class 5 could do 2-digit division whereas in 2013 only 31% can do the same task. Results from Karachi narrate the same depleting learning levels in English, Sindhi/Urdu, and Arithmetic. Learning levels of children fell by 15 percentage points in English and by 7 percentage points in Arithmetic over the past three years.

Lahore is the only district where children are learning somewhat over the years. Seventy percent children of class 5 could read sentences in English in 2011 whereas now (2013) 88% of children can do the same task. In 2011, only 52% children could do division whereas in 2013, 71% children are able to do two-digit division. Likewise, 78% of children in Lahore are capable of reading a story in Urdu.

ASER results show that enrollment in urban areas has risen significantly since 2011. Enrollment in Lahore rose from 89% to 95%, in Karachi it went from 90% to 93%, and in Peshawar it peaked to 98% from 89% in 2011. This will not be fruitful if it is not accompanied with learning. The focus of our Education Reforms should shift from access to “access plus learning” for sustained development; access without learning is not sustainable. No parent would like to keep sending their child to school if he/she is not learning. Reports such as “Towards Universal Learning: Recommendations from LMTF⁶” and “Making Education a Priority in the Post 2015 Development Agenda⁷” have also proved that in the long run, if the goal of universal primary education has to be achieved and sustained – it has to be linked to LEARNING. If the children are not learning despite being enrolled in schools – we stand nowhere; children are most likely to drop out sooner than later or graduate with no learning leading to not being able to find a job in the market.

Conclusion:

With 2015 almost around the corner, now is the time that policy makers should focus on coming up with educational plans that support the urban population equally e.g. establishing a regulatory authority to oversee the prominent private education system and many others. Over the years, ASER shows that the quality of education imparted to the children enrolled in urban schools is better than their rural counterparts. However, efforts need to be made to sustain and speed up this development. Despite the fact that learning of children in urban areas is higher when compared to children in rural areas; the overall urban learning levels still remain considerably low and are declining over the years.

“Is the increased enrollment leading to better learning? Are more children better prepared today than yesterday? Do the increased investments and enrollment in urban areas translate into a more literate, numerate and skilled nation?”

Although the Education Department is focusing on providing quality education to children going to schools in rural settings, it is now time to think about the quality of education in the urban areas as well, as in only a little more than a decade's time, an equivalent proportion of children in urban setting will need attention. With the increase in the enrollment levels of children, we are losing are focus of the ultimate goal – learning.

ASER results give us a reality check on the state of education in urban areas.

Despite higher concentration of private schooling (which is said to be imparting comparatively better learning as compared to government schools), abundance of additional learning support, and a higher percentage of literate parents, the performance of children in urban areas is distressful.

⁶ www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/09/learning-metrics-task-force-universal-learning

⁷ www.unicef.org/education/files/Making_Education_a_Priority_in_the_Post-2015_Development_Agenda.pdf

Recommendations:

1. While enrollment has increased dramatically over the past three years, it is not enough and should not be confused with increased learning. ASER results show that the actual quality of learning of children in urban areas is quite low. Focused efforts need to be made to provide incentives to improve learning of children alongside enrollment at all levels of schooling.
2. The Education Millennium Development Goal of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 is not sustainable if it is not linked to learning. Expanded access to quality learning should be ensured for all at all levels of education. A lifelong learning approach should encompass learning throughout the life-cycle including access to pre-primary, primary, and post-primary. Focused attention should be on the “Quality of Education”.
3. Much more needs to be done to achieve acceptable quality measured in terms of improved abilities of children, rather than inputs. The learning results of urban children of Peshawar and Karachi are examples that measurement only in terms of inputs of education is not enough to provide conducive learning environment to children.
4. Lahore is one district showing progress in terms of actual learning levels of children over years. Other districts/provinces may want to follow the Education Policy of Punjab to improve the actual learning of children. After the 18th amendment, the power has been dissolved to the provinces and therefore, each provincial government can/should be held responsible for the state of education in their respective regions.
5. Most importantly, appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms are needed at national and provincial levels to prioritize transparent, effective and accountable education systems capable of delivering high-quality education to all.
6. Lastly, education agenda must include engagement with real-time data collection for generation of a comprehensive, reliable, and disaggregated dataset linking past and current data from nations' education system to effectively monitor progress towards education goals.

Ultimately, Pakistan must take ownership of its urbanization challenge. Policymakers will need to strike difficult balances between urban industrial growth imperatives and residents' basic needs. Amongst all other needs, education is one affair (which is by far the most neglected) that can make or break our future nations. Without good education, children have little hope of participating fully in the economic and civic life of our increasingly knowledge-based and globally competitive society. Not surprisingly, reform of urban education is not on priority



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