The purpose of this policy brief is to sharpen the understanding of the linkages between gender equality and sustainable development and to scrutinize ways in which these linkages can be reflected into policy formulation and public resource expenditure towards meeting gender specific targets.

Research has shown how educating girls has a multiplier effect and is linked with economic growth and social transformations. The World Bank has reported that 49%¹ of the population of Pakistan comprises of women. Unleashing the full economic potential of half the population can drive the growth and prosperity in Pakistan. Moreover, education has the power to transform lives through entitlements, and prospects of girls, their families, communities and country. According Education as a fundamental right for ALL children aged 5-16 in the constitution of Pakistan in 2010 is to draw attention to an urgent public good that must be delivered without discrimination as a State responsibility.

Achieving education equality has been a global priority for over two decades. The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) in Jomtien, and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) set out an overall vision to Universalize access to education for all children, youth and adults, and promoting equity. Gender concerns were embedded in all six goals set in the Dakar framework as it called for “eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girl’s full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.” The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in September 2015 in New York with SDG 4 goal articulating “Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” along with its 7 targets and 3 means of implementation clearly spell out the agenda for lifelong learning, and bridging gender gaps.

Substantial progress has been made around the word in increasing Gender equality. The ratio of girls attending primary school relative to boys in Nepal, Bangladesh, Senegal and Gambia indicate a reversal of the Gender Gaps. South Asia lagged behind sub-Saharan Africa in 1999 at the primary school level, but has significantly improved over time in reducing disparities. However, with less than 90 girls per 100 boys at school, Pakistan and Afghanistan have yet to achieve Gender parity.

According to the Human Development Index (2014), Pakistan ranks 126 out of 149 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII). Pakistan fell short of achieving the MDG targets and is now getting ready to work towards the SDGs as the next set of promises for children in education. Reducing educational inequality and narrowing the gender gap is a key theme of the SDGs. Reflecting this theme, one of those targets is to provide free equitable and quality primary and secondary education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes by 2030. While progress

is being made in Pakistan in primary education, gender inequality is still the norm among these children. The PSLM 2014-15 data indicates that 88 girls for every 100 boys go to primary school in Pakistan.

Data indicates that girls are lagging behind boys in multiple education indicators including literacy rates, enrolment rates and learning levels.

A) Literacy Rates
In Pakistan, there is still a large gender gap in literacy rates for adults aged 15 and above with a literacy rate of 45% for females, as compared to 57% for males (PSLM 2014-15). Persisting Gender disparities are further reflected in the findings from the ASER 2015 report (rural) revealing that only 25% of the mothers have at least primary schooling in comparison to 50% fathers. Studies have shown that parental education is very important, especially a mother’s education as it affects her ability to create a learning conducive environment at home for the child and help with homework. Andrabi and Khwaja (2009) found that Children’s test scores and time spent on educational activities inside home showed a strong correlation with mother’s schooling². Moreover, an educated mother is able to earn higher income, have fewer children, and enable better health care and education for her children. Educating a mother contributes to diminishing gender inequalities with higher likelihood of sending her daughters to school.

B) Enrolment
Every passing year, we are denying millions of girls their right to education. In 2000 we made a promise to enroll all children in school by 2015 and while we have made progress towards reducing the number of out of school children, we are still a long way from realizing our targets for equality. In rural Pakistan, 37% of the children aged between 3-5 years are enrolled in Early Childhood Education out of which 49% are girls. However, the disparity increases with school level as only 43% of the 81% children aged between 6-16 years enrolled in schools are girls.

Disparities within provinces
The inter-provincial differences in gender opportunities within Pakistan also contribute to the overall inter-provincial growth disparities. ASER 2015 data reveals that in Islamabad and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), the percentage of out of school girls is 2% whereas in the province of Balochistan, it is as high as 16%.

Moreover, the difference between percentage boys and girls out of school in Pakistan is 3%. However, this difference is lesser in areas that are more developed like Punjab and Sindh as compared to Fata and Balochistan.

Disparities within types of schools
Assessing gender equality in different types of school over the years, ASER 2015 data reveals that currently private schools are playing a better role in promoting education for girls. From 2013 to 2015, the noticeable trend is the decreasing difference in percentage girls and percentage boys out of school in non-government institutions.

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Disparities within Households

Addressing the question of Who is being left behind, studies consistently reinforce that girls who face multiple sources of disadvantage such as a poor economic background, living in remote locations, suffering from disability are farthest behind. ASER 2015 findings reveal that currently the poorest girl is being left behind. From the poorest quartile girls are 20% more likely to remain out of school (52%) than their male counterparts (32%). The difference in educational opportunities for different income backgrounds is highlighted through the findings that on average, 52% of girls in the poorest-quartile households in these countries are out of school, compared with 24% of girls in the richest-quartile households. The situation appears to be much worse in rural areas in Pakistan, where issues of access for girls are exacerbated due to the dearth of schools and security concerns; therefore getting to school takes longer and may be more dangerous.

C) Learning Levels

Schools have the potential to transform girls’ lives, unlocking the door to future opportunities, better health and greater autonomy. But in many places, schooling falls short of that aspiration. The gender disaggregated data highlights the disparities in learning outcomes. ASER 2015 reports that 42% girls in rural areas of Pakistan can read a class 2 level story as compared to 49% boys. A similar trend can be noticed in English and Arithmetic competencies. If these learning disparities are further analyzed keeping their economic background in mind, they are widest in the poorest quartile resulting in the poorest girl learning the least.
Recommendaons:
Increasing importance is being place on making the education system more equitable worldwide as a public good. The World Bank and Michelle Obama have promised over 2.5$ billion over the next 5 years to be invested in adolescent girls to stay in school with the “let girls learn” initiative. With increased funding promised from a number of sources to promote education for girls, it is imperative to make sure that the objectives are fulfilled on ground with domestic financing assured for girls education.

In order to achieve our goal of ensuring that boys and girls have equal access to good quality education and opportunities to successfully complete schooling and make educational choices, we need to allocate more resources with high utilization annually for specified targets consistently and predictably.

Gender Responsive Budgeng (GRB) is a holisc strategic process that entails first looking at the policies from a gender lens and then scrutinizing the budget. Beyond the gender budget analysis of domestic government expenditure, donor funding also needs to be examined from a gender perspective, for example, by using sex disaggregated benchmarks and targets. GRB is a means of integrating a gender perspective in all steps of the budget process - planning, drafting, implementing and evaluating. This form of budgeting is being increasingly followed around the world in developing countries including Karnataka, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Mauritius. Pakistan has also adopted this approach in its planning processes but budget allocations and expenditures lack the rigor and commitment of practicing the theory of GRB and spending.

In order for Pakistan to follow Gender Responsive Budgeting and channeling resources effectively, it is important to understand the barriers to education faced by girls and look to fund solutions. There is a need to adopt practices that promote gender equality in education by:

1. Making education attractive for girls instead of a burden in the 21st century! Currently if a choice has to be made between sending a boy or a girl to school, the boy will usually be given precedence even in this day and age. Through stipends, scholarships, conditional cash transfer programs or voucher schemes targeted for girls, this partiality towards sending only boys to school can be offset - some evidence is already available at post primary levels- but the amount of stipends have to be reviewed (Currently Rs. 200-300 per month is given every quarter for post primary levels and also by BISP for the poorest).

2. Providing basic facilities /infrastructure in single sexed and especially mixed schools - Especially separate covered and functional toilets (Of the surveyed primary schools, ASER reports that 48% of the government schools and 22% of the private schools did not have toilets.)

3. Increasing access - Reducing the distance to school by opening more all-girls schools not just at primary but especially at post primary levels to attain 25 A Right to education and SDG 4.2.

4. Recruiting Female teachers- In Sindh province only 25% teachers at primary level are female (SEMIS).

5. Awareness /mobilization campaigns and proactive measures for ending child marriages through Child Registration Cards (CRCs) by NADRA and more facilities for educating girls at post primary levels along with implementation of the new laws on raising the age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18(Sindh S-CMRA 2014).

6. To push proactively for more girls education facilities with nationwide initiatives such as the China Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) with a mirror China-Pakistan Education Corridor ensuring more focus on gender specific targets and budgets to reduce inter-provincial gender disparities.


While some hindrances are common to all provinces, there are variations due to context and critical barrier which are not uniform across provinces. In rural Sindh and Balochistan, while there is still a need address the chronic facilities gaps for girls and to change the mindsets by increasing awareness of the importance of educating girls; Punjab faces more issues related to governance especially in low performing districts.