

What the Annual Status Education Report tells us about learning inequalities in Pakistan

*Pauline Rose, Professor of International Education, University of Cambridge.
Director of the 2013/4 Education for All Global Monitoring Report.*

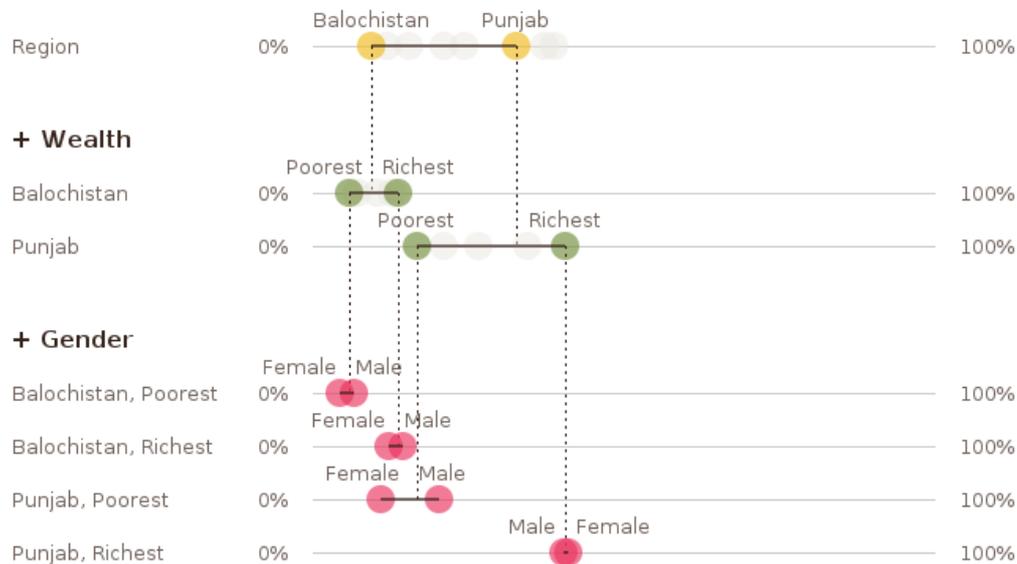
With the recent announcement of [proposed post-2015 education targets](#), which place good quality education at their centre, it becomes paramount to make sure we are able to measure progress to achieve 'relevant learning outcomes, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized'. The debate on what is meant by 'relevant' learning outcomes is likely to ensue, but in the meantime it is important to look at the information we have available on learning outcomes to see how far we have reached, and so the distance to travel to 2030.

Along with international and regional assessments, there have been important locally-driven initiatives in countries such as Kenya, India, Pakistan, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda to measure learning – not as an end in itself, but as a means to engage communities and inform policy.

As part of this movement, data collected for the [Pakistan's Annual Status of Education Report](#) (ASER) present a sobering picture. Analysis of ASER data (2012) presented in the Education for All Global Monitoring Report's [World Inequality Database on Education](#) shows us, for example, the wide gaps between regions, income groups and gender.

Even amongst the richest rural areas in the wealthier province of Punjab, only 41% are learning the basics in reading. Within the Punjab, there are wide disparities, to the extent that only 11% of the poorest, rural girls in this province are learning the basics – a proportion which is close to the average for the much poorer province, Balochistan. Gaps within Balochistan reveal that a mere 4% of poorest, rural girls are learning the basics. These figures take into account the fact that large numbers of children remain out of school in Pakistan, affecting poorest girls in particular – those not in school are assumed not to have learnt the basics. They also take into account that the learning standard is very low, as it focuses just on the ability to read rather than on reading comprehension. As the 2013/4 Education for All Global Monitoring Report shows, these data [place Pakistan towards the bottom of the pile](#) of the proportion of children learning the basics – on a par with poorer countries in West Africa.

Wide inequalities in learning in rural Pakistan by region, poverty and gender



Source: ASER data (2012) analysed in the [World Inequality Database on Education](#)

So returning to the question of what ‘relevance’ should like – if children are either not completing primary school, or reaching the end without being able to do simple calculations, or read a story in Urdu, Sindhi or Pashto, this needs to be the starting point. Unless all children, regardless of their background, are able to achieve these basic skills, they are unlikely to be able to achieve the other important learning skills that education systems ought to offer (as other proposed post-2015 education targets aim to address) - whether critical thinking, or knowledge, skills, values and attitudes related to global citizenship and sustainable development.

If we do not start with these basics, there is a danger that these children in Pakistan, who are amongst the 250 million not learning the basics, will be leap-frogged over as policymakers decide to focus on other parts of the education system which the most disadvantaged will have no chance of benefiting from.

BIOGRAPHY:

Pauline Rose joined Cambridge University in February 2014 as Professor of International Education. Prior to this position, she was Director of the EFA Global Monitoring Report (from August 2011) during which time she directed two reports on youth, skills and work, and on teaching and learning. She is an author of numerous publications on issues that examine educational policy and practice,

including in relation to inequality, financing and governance, democratization, and the role of international aid.