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Exclusion of Girls from Education in Rural Pakistan

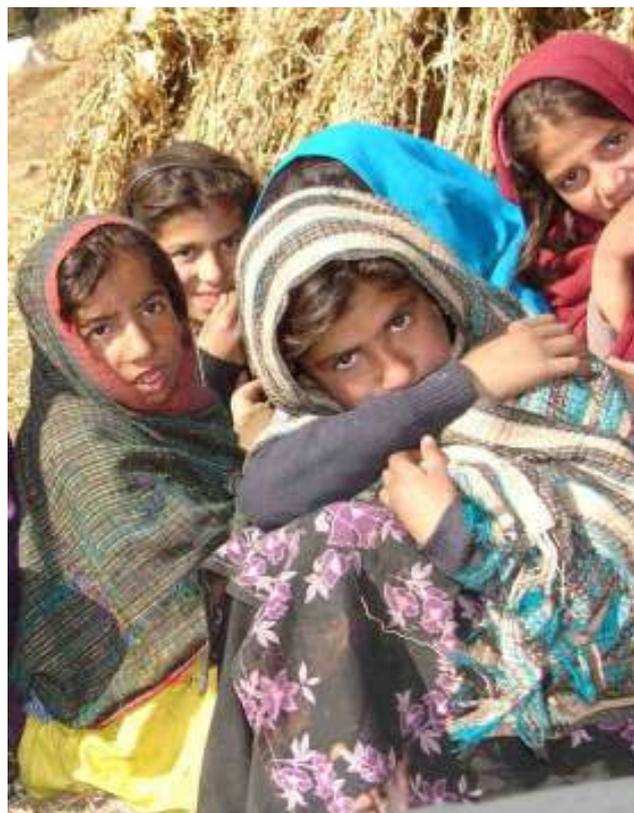
Parvez Pirzado

This article discusses the issues regarding barriers to girls' education in rural Pakistan. The data is drawn from various sources and some barriers have been identified which are hindering the progress of achieving the goals of Education for All.

Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework for Action (2000) considers education as a fundamental human right and ensures good quality education of all children, especially girls, by year 2015. Pakistan is also a signatory of EFA document, but the target of achieving Education for All is still evasive. One of the objectives of Pakistan's National Education Policy 1998-2010 (Government of Pakistan 1998: 7) is 'to expand basic education qualitatively and quantitatively by providing the maximum opportunities for free access of every child to education'. The Government of Pakistan is striving to hard to improve the situation and achieve the desirable targets, but the state of education especially for girls in rural areas of Pakistan is alarming. There is lack of educational facilities for girls and high gender disparities are visible in education.

Pakistan has been placed at 135th position (out of 177 countries) in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) (Human Development Report 2005). The HDI is summary of a country's per capita GNP, literacy rates and life expectancy. Unfortunately Pakistan's performance is very poor in all the mentioned indicators. The net primary enrolment rate in Pakistan is just 46%, which is lowest in South Asia, and the number of out of school children is 13 million (out of 50 million children of age 5-9 years). Girls' educational attainment in Pakistan continues to lag behind the level of attainment of boys. This is seen in literacy levels and school enrolment figures, which reveal that large number of girls have limited access to even basic schooling. The overall literacy rate in Pakistan is 43%, but it is alarmingly low at just 18% for rural females. (Social Development in Pakistan 2004)

There are many barriers, and social and cultural reasons for this imbalance such as lack of educational facilities for girls, poverty and child labour. The problem of dropout is very serious and the percentage of dropout before completing the grade V is very high. Currently 56% children leave school before completing grade V (Social Development in Pakistan 2004).



Courtesy of Save the Children Sweden, Pakistan

Nicholas Stern (2001) indicated three major social divides in access to education. These are the wide gap between school enrolment rates for children living in urban and rural areas, children from rich and poor families and enrolment along gender lines. One of the major reasons of low female literacy rate is lack of educational facilities for girls, especially in rural areas of Pakistan. The ratio of girls' primary schools is 35% of all primary schools in the country and the number of female teachers is almost half of the male teachers (Data of 2000-01 available at website: www.moe.gov.pk). On one hand many families view the formal education of girls as a waste of family resources and give priority to educating sons and on other hand some families who

want to educate their daughters can not send them to schools due to lack of separate schools for girls and lack of female teachers. Other factors include the distance of schools from villages and poor quality of teaching. As a result, the educational facilities and resources allocated to girls persistently fall behind those given to boys.

Poverty is another major barrier towards achieving the goal of Education for All. It has increased from 27% to 37% in Pakistan and about two thirds of the rural population lives below poverty line i.e. on less than about \$1 a day. (ADB: Pakistan; Country Strategy and Program Update, 2003). In Pakistan where the average family size is as big as 7 (Pakistan Contraceptive Prevalence Survey 1994-95), the income generating opportunities are less for the majority of population, its really difficult for children to be able to get to the school. Most of the children, who do not attend primary school or drop out early, live income poor households (The OXFAM Education Report: 2001). If there is any possibility for the poor to send some of their children to school, they prefer to send boys.

Poverty is closely related to the incidence of child labour. One of the most common reasons for children not attending school is that their families need them to work (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003-04). With the growing inflation poor families are forced to involve all members in the income

generating activities, including children, in order to manage their kitchen. In cases of extreme poverty children may contribute up to 40% of family income for their survival. (DFID: The Challenge of Universal Primary Education, 2001). The rights of children are equally violated when they are forced to contribute to the family income. There are separate activities for girls and boys through which they contribute to family's Income. Girls in most parts of rural Pakistan are mainly involved in agricultural related activities, taking meals to workings in the field and looking after their younger siblings in case their mothers are also busy in agriculture work. Boys are often involved in selling food, working in garages, shops and carpet weaving businesses. The children mostly involved in child labour are in the age group of 8-15 years. This means that there is an obvious possibility that children leave school before reaching grade V.

The above mentioned barriers clearly indicate that the goal of achieving Education for All is not easy. There is a need for sincere commitment and systematic planning to ensure the inclusion of all children, especially girls, in education in the rural areas of Pakistan.

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“A holistic child centred education must be our mission!

One cannot focus on academic issues alone. This means that one must:

- **Approach and nurture all aspects of development: physical, social, emotional and intellectual;**
- **Appreciate children's curiosity, fantasy, creativity, their opinions, ideas, interests;**
- **Appreciate, respect and trust children;**
- **Communicate and promote dialogue in the classroom”**

Miriam Donath Skjørten (International Symposium 09/2005)

“A child friendly school is inclusive actively seeking all children and adopts effective child centred and creative classroom methods and there is no corporeal punishment or bullying. It is healthy, safe and protective environment and provides toilets and drinking water. It emphasises of participation by community and parents and ensures gender equity, not just equal numbers, but equity in content, treatment and respect.”

Cliff Meyers (International Symposium 09/2005)