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Gender gap in primary education: Sindh province

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Gender gap in primary education SUMMARY Sindh

The first in a series of community-based surveys in Sindh, this exercise links individual and household experience to institutional reviews, and the views of opinion makers at community level in 44 representative sentinel communities. It is the follow-up in Sindh of the country-wide Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in 1995 to obtain data for monitoring progress towards the mid-decade goals set by the World Summit for Children.

The sites of the 1995 MICS sample were revisited in August 1996. In Sindh, seven communities were added to increase the proportion of communities with poor access to services to reflect more recent estimates. In each site, the number of households was increased to expand the sample size and other measurement processes were introduced into each cluster. Box 1 shows the information base established on primary education in Sindh province through the implementation of these processes.

There are two important characteristics of the survey as a tool for planning. First, the survey aims to *look behind the indicators*. The objective is thus not to establish whether primary school drop-out is x% or y%, but to learn about the gender gap in drop-out and to look at the modifiable components of the gender gap. Second, the methodology promotes the *use of the data* in planning. The challenge is to go systematically through the known causes of the gender gap in primary education, and to identify which among these are actionable. The results from the cycle, therefore, should inform policy and programmes directed at reducing the gender gap in education.

A key concern is that the recommendations emerging from the survey be based on what is feasible in the country today. The analysis has as its centre point the contrasting of where a gender gap exists and does not exist. By holding up communities where there is no gap as positive examples, implementing recommendations to close the gap in other communities should not require a massive injection of new resources; local solutions, then, are intended to be sustainable.

To look behind the indicators of primary education, several methods were applied in the same sites; linkages between methods permitted a penetrating look at the problem. Nearly 6,000 households contributed baseline data on attendance, drop-out and several associated individual household factors.

Box 1: Information base on primary education in Sindh province

Number of sentinel sites	44
Number of households	5,751
Urban areas	2,161
Rural areas	3,590
Children aged 5-12 years	9,456
Schools reviewed	130
Teachers interviewed	335
Focus groups	
fathers	44
mothers	44
girls going to school	44
girls not going to school	43
Key informants	
PTAs interviewed	32
Community leaders	25
Pesh Imams	44

A review of records and facilities in schools serving these households permitted comparison of household and institutional data. Interviews with Pesh Imams, community leaders and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), where these existed, brought their important perspectives to the discussion. In addition, teachers were interviewed about their personal backgrounds; this information was then linked to attendance and drop-out. Education data from the 1995 survey were discussed in four different focus groups in each of the 44 sentinel communities.

Net school enrolment based on household information (weighted for urban-rural balance) was 59%. The gender gap in urban areas is unremarkable (73% boys to 68% girls); in rural areas, a boy is considerably more likely to be currently enrolled in school than a girl (66% compared with 47%).

To identify the actionable components of the gender gap, communities were coded by the size of the gap in primary school attendance. All communities with a gender gap less than 10%, or with a gap in favour of girls, were coded "low gap", and used as a reference for those with a large gender gap. Not surprisingly, most urban communities (62%) showed a lower gender gap in attendance, where most rural communities (74%) had evidence of a gap larger than 10% in the school attendance rates of children.

The risk this implies for individual children was evaluated by formal epidemiological analysis, identifying special subgroups at greater risk than others. For example, a child in a household where the mother has a say in education is twice as likely to attend school compared with a child in household where the mother has no say. For girls in rural areas, where only 5% of mothers have a say (24% in urban areas), this means a substantial disadvantage. Parental education is another key factor. A child whose parents are more educated is nearly three times more likely to attend school compared with a child whose parents are less educated. A child whose mother completed Class 5 or higher is two and a half times more likely to attend school compared with a child whose mother has received no education or reached only Class 4. Some 85% of mothers in rural areas had less than four years of education (70% in urban areas).

In households where education was given as the priority for children, children are 70% more likely to attend school than children in households where other priorities (such as health care or income) were given. The gender gap in enrolment is slightly higher among those households with six or more children. The gap is higher in households with less favourable socio-economic conditions (e.g., unemployed, farmer).

Definition of drop-out or discontinuation from school depends on the point of view considered. According to schools, a drop-out is someone who does not attend school for a certain period. For households, if the *intention* to return to school exists, the child is not a drop-out. Consequently, from the household point of view, only 3% of primary school children discontinued their education. Even at this level, however, there is a suggestion of a gender gap. A girl is 37% more likely to drop-out than a boy.

Drop-out becomes a powerful issue in some subgroups identified in this survey. For example, older children are three times more likely to drop-out than younger ones. A child whose parents are not satisfied with the teacher is four and a half times more likely to drop-out than a child whose parents are satisfied. In communities where the mothers' focus group concluded job security was the most important reason for education, a child is twice as likely to drop-out compared with one living in communities where other reasons were given.

Views about why children ought to go to school -- and what could be done to ensure their attendance -- were drawn from household respondents, four different types of focus group participants, PTAs and Pesh Imams. A typology was drawn up linking the recommendations coming from these different sources with the epidemiological evidence of potential impact. Since these estimates are based on comparisons of local situations, for example analysing the difference between those who drop-out and those who do not, or those who enrol and those who do not, the solutions should be affordable and effective.

These results were discussed in three Analysis Workshops: with government education sector counterparts (14-15 October); with NGO counterparts (16-17 October); and with UNICEF staff from the four provinces, UNDP, World Bank representatives, and Federal and other provincial counterparts (22-23 October). One recommendation made by all workshops was that an important step to reduce the gender would be an effective communication strategy on government policy regarding school attendance.

Action in the household

The main actors in closing the gender gap are the householders themselves. They can do at least three things to increase attendance and decrease drop-out.

(i) Children who are *helped with their homework* fare better than those who do not have this support from parents or older siblings. For example, among rural girls aged 9-12 years, a child receiving help with her homework is nearly five times more likely to stay in school than one who does not. If all girls currently not receiving this help were to receive it, this could increase attendance in this group by as much as 28%.

(ii) Parents should insist their children have a *full set of text books*. A child who does not have a complete set of text-books is three times more likely to drop-out than one who has a complete set. There was little difference in the proportion of boys and girls who had a full set of text books: 87% of girls and 83% of boys currently attending school. These text books are made available by the Government of Sindh, and parents can insist on receiving them.

(iii) There is also a measurable dividend from having *other study materials* in the home. An older girl in rural areas with access to these materials has less than one third of the risk of dropping out, compared with one that has no other materials. Both text books and other materials require a substantial investment -- and a belief it will pay dividends -- on the part of the parents.

Action in the community

(i) A conclusion of the governmental and NGO workshops was that *Parent-Teacher Associations* (PTAs) should play a more effective role, providing an interface between government and the communities. Crucial for a long-term solution, in contrast with the shorter term incentives, PTAs should be established by the communities themselves and not by the government of Sindh. In order for PTAs to act in a meaningful way, more authority should be given to this body. Recommendations included co-signature of the PTA chairman on teachers' salary and in the administration of the school budget (this already occurs in Balochistan and Punjab). A special function should be encouraging children who currently do not attend, and inclusion of their parents onto the PTA.

(ii) The belief in the importance of education held by *community leaders and Pesh Imams* should be reinforced, and extended to secondary and higher level. Although less than ten percent of the population considers religious leaders as a source of advice about primary education, where the Pesh Imam is against education the attendance rates are very low. Where the Pesh Imam is positive about education, this tends to favour boys and the gender gap is wider. Most Pesh Imams are convinced about the need for primary education, although there is evidence this is more true for boys than girls.

(iii) *Role models* -- successful women who have received education -- could have a strong effect on attendance and drop out. This could be a useful task for NGOs working at local level, as could the *linking of female education with income-generating schemes*.

Action in the schools

(i) *Dissatisfaction of the teacher* is a significant factor. Some 12% of urban and 5% of rural teachers were dissatisfied with their job. The survey found a strong link between the dissatisfaction of a teacher with his or her job and community dissatisfaction with the teacher. Since this is a key factor in dropout -- a child in a household dissatisfied with the teacher is five times more likely to discontinue education -- it should be acted on where it occurs by the school. There was no relationship between the levels of satisfaction with teachers and different levels of teacher training.

(ii) *School facilities*. Only one rural school in four has a separate toilet for girls, and less than one half of rural schools have any toilet at all. Of schools with toilets, only one in four was functional on the day of the survey. Two in five rural schools have a source of drinking water; only 70% had chalk on the day of the survey. These are not things that need wait for provincial government action.

(iii) *Teachers meeting parents*. Although almost all teachers reported they had met the parents on some occasion in the last year, only one in three rural teachers and two in three urban teachers had discussed school progress of the children. In rural areas, one half of the parent teacher interactions was about absence of the child. Only one in twenty contacts was about homework. Yet regular teacher-parent meetings to review the child's progress, an inexpensive interaction, can reinforce the importance of education for the child and address potential barriers to the child continuing education as they arise.

Action at policy level

(i) The Government of Sindh has for several years distributed *free text-books* as an incentive for

increasing girls' attendance. There are loopholes in the accounting processes for free text-books. Despite the expenditure by the Government, only 12% of urban schools and 28% of rural schools say they give free text books to girls. At present, the distribution is not reaching the right children and there is no evidence the policy reduces drop-out of female children. However, a male receiving free text-books was only one half as likely to drop-out as one who did not. This shows the policy should work if implemented correctly. It was recommended that the Department of Education take steps to inform householders of their right to these free books.

(ii) The Government of Sindh has also removed the obligation that children wear *uniforms* to primary school. Uniform expenditure constitutes on average more than Rs400 out of a total household spending of slightly over Rs800 per year for the average child attending a government school in rural Sindh. At present, 92% of urban schools and 63% of rural schools still require uniforms, and most of these did not even know of the policy. Steps will be taken by the Education Department to inform PTAs and teachers about the benefits of uniforms not being compulsory.

(iii) *Recruitment of female teachers* at local level was a key recommendation emerging from the three analysis workshops. Instead of building new schools, workshop participants felt the government should first focus on placing female teachers in existing schools. Alternative solutions included two school shifts and "community-based home schools", where communities provide the facilities and the government provide the teachers.

Prospects

Messages about the values of education, however good these might be, would have little impact in poor, remote areas. The emphasis should be on long-term initiatives such as income-generating interventions, empowering mothers, and making education become an asset. For example, the survey shows that mother's say has a strong impact on attendance. However, the current situation in rural areas is not favourable: voice impacting children's education. Difficulties of women participating in PTAs, where men are present, was in workshops.

Future enquiry using the same methods may address requirements of primary health care and rural water supply and sanitation in subsequent cycles (the Community Voice project envisages four cycles in its initial funding phase).

This first Sindh cycle involved a unique partnership between governmental, intergovernmental, international and local NGOs, and private sector organizations. In addition to participating in design and analysis workshops, the Department of Education provided policy orientation, access to existing data, and district level contacts. UNICEF provided funding, technical guidance, liaison, transport, publication and hardware support. The Sindh Journalists Network (SJN) participated in the preparatory phase (pre-testing, translation of instruments into Sindhi) and field work, mainly through collection of qualitative data. Gallup supported the preparatory phase (pre-testing, translation of instruments into Urdu), field work and data entry. CIET provided overall technical support for design, logistics, analysis, and report writing.

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