



Education for All is the Solution for All
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Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan makes free and compulsory education the fundamental right of every Pakistani child. The country is also a signatory to various treaties and international commitments related to universal education, but progress towards meeting this goal has been painfully slow.

Following the enactment in 2010 of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, legislative and executive powers related to school education have been devolved to the provinces. They are required to enact legislation for free and compulsory education as an important initial step towards ensuring that every Pakistani child is in school. The onus is now on the provinces to make this possible.

25.02 million Pakistani children between the ages of 5 and 16 are deprived of their right to an education. Among children of primary school age, almost one in every five is not in school and this proportion increases at higher levels of education. By region, the province of Balochistan is home to the highest proportion of out-of-school children, followed by the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). In terms of overall distribution, meanwhile, more than half of the total number of out-of-school children are in Punjab. Of the 25.02 million such children, more than half are girls. The data also reveal vast regional disparities in providing equal opportunities for schooling to girls, with the greatest disparity in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). For both girls and boys, access to schooling is more difficult in rural areas and the gap widens at higher levels of education. Similarly, children from the poorest families are more likely to be out of school compared to their counterparts belonging to richer families.

Pakistan is morally, politically and, most of all, legally obligated to provide a quality education to every child in the country. No one denies the challenges our children face inside and outside of school, and all politicians and decision makers express commitments to solve the problem. But expressing a commitment to education has become a universal platitude in Pakistan.

Gender Data on enrolment across Pakistan show that 15.9 million boys between the age of 5 and 16 are enrolled in school, compared to just 11.9 million girls. As a result, 13.7 million girls and 11.4 million boys are out of school. Of the total number of girls aged 5-16, 53% are out of school, compared

to 42% of boys in the same age group. Of the total number of out of school children, the majority are girls, comprising 55% of the total.

As stated earlier, there are vast regional disparities in providing girls with equal opportunities for schooling. With the exception of the Islamabad Capital Territory, the proportion of out-of-school girls is higher than that of boys across the country. The greatest disparity can be seen in the province of KP where half of all girls are out of school, compared to just 20% of all boys. This is followed by FATA, where 78% of girls are not in school, compared to 47% of boys. The situation is similar in AJK, with 45% of girls and 40% of boys out of school.

There is a tendency to generalise the restrictions that Pakistani culture imposes on education, particularly girls' education, whether on the grounds of religious or tribal traditions. Yet the evidence for such claims is extremely thin. There are specific regions where social constraints prevent schooling, but they represent a small share of national aggregate data on enrolment, especially that of girls, which indicates a failure to supply services rather than the society's failure to demand them.

Rather than regarding as a cultural failure, it is important to recognise this as the state's failure to provide security and requisite facilities so that Pakistani parents can confidently send their children to school. In fact, it should be seen as a testament to the determination of Pakistani parents that they send their 11.94 million daughters to school amidst the many risks involved.

Again, Pakistan has not been able to bring all children to school. Low enrolment rates and the rapid growth of population have led to steady increase in out-of-school children. In this country, 45% of the population is younger than 20 and only 71% of the children attend primary school. This means that 23 million children are deprived of education. Furthermore, school attendance rates are higher among boys than girls.

The situation in Baluchistan (Deprived province of Pakistan) is the worst. Just over one-quarter (28%) of the population 10 years of age or older is literate, with males 39% and females 16%.

The role of parents towards child education is painfully limited, and this is the reason behind the huge number of out-of-school children in Pakistan. Mostly parents desire good education at low cost, but it is not possible because of the multiple education systems in the country, which also indicate class-based education. A good and quality education provided by private schools is only for children with strong financial background, whereas children from poor families are struggling to receive a good education in government schools, which are in worse conditions in terms of facilities and the quality of education.

Another factor responsible for such a high number of out-of-school children is the lack of parental supervision of their children. Once enrolled, the students become the responsibility of the teachers and institutions, and the parents set themselves free from all the burdens and worries.

Moreover, parents enrol their children in school to get an education solely for the purpose of securing a job in any private or government organization. The environment surrounding the children is not favourable for learning. The learning process is focused entirely on securing one's position in an organization to earn money and feed the family. The main reason behind the low school enrolment rates for girls is the parents' patriarchal thoughts that promote boys' education because they consider

males as breadwinners for their families and females as housewives. Gender equal opportunities are critically needed in this country to tackle with educational issues and to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.