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Millennium Development Goals: Reducing Gender Disparity through Educational Incentives (Evidences from Sindh-Pakistan)

Dr. Hamzo Khan Tagar

Senior Program Manager, School Development, Reform Support Unit (RSU),
World Bank Program of Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh,
NJV School Building, MA Jinnah Road Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

Andsyed Roshan Ali Shah

Staff Economist, Applied Economics Research Centre (AERC) University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

Abstract:

The enrollment of girls and their retention in, basic education is widely accepted amongst policy makers and researchers in Dakar conference on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in early 2000. But it is a fact in less developed countries like Sindh-Pakistan that backward communities still preferred a boy as better investment of the future in comparisons of their girls for education which creates a large gender gap in education sector, served an obstacle to met MDGs and to also harm the national as well as international development agenda. In the province of Sindh over all girls' participation in school about to 35% and in rural Sindh girl's enrollment is less than 25% to date.

The study contributes significantly in the existing body of knowledge on this subject and based on five years data of the program and also concludes that incentive programmes have a direct response on enrollment. It suggests widely that more incentives can bring more improvement in girl's enrollment, i.e. distribution of uniforms, shoes, food snacks, free transport facilities, particularly for girls of unserved communities living in far-flung areas of the region to achieve universal target of women literacy/gender development as given in MDGs.

Keywords: *Girl's stipend, DSP, SSP, MDGs, SMC, TPV*

1. Introduction

The girls' primary education has been centre of attention of researchers and policy makers and there has been consensus on enhancement of girls' school enrollment at all levels. In order to raise girls' enrolment, policy makers and researcher have agreed to provide financial support which has been highly encouraging in developing countries. The financial schemes are given different names such as 'girls' stipend' provides benefits to families and earn familial support to send girls to school. Recent studies also have shown a positive relationship between financial incentive and girls' enrolment. These types of investments are gender dimension. Where families have to choose between educating a boy or a girl, often a boy will be chosen in the belief that he is a better investment. Girls are more likely than boys to work in the home, to look after siblings, and to do household chores. Flexible schooling is seen as one way of helping girls to manage an education and still be able to help in the home.

The above mentioned success stories have inspired social scientists, governments, international donor organizations, NGOs and policy makers to experiment financial incentive programs for families in areas of persistent poverty. Further, financial programmes such as (a) small scale scholarships (b) subsidies (c) food (for example, providing cooking oil or a midday snack) and (d) uniform allowances would help retain children in the school.

The available studies have shown that development would be accelerated if girls were kept in school to complete a quality secondary education. Education of girls is one of the most powerful tools for women's empowerment, but discrimination continues to keep girls out of school. In 2007, only 53 of the 171 countries with available data had achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education (UN, 2009).

Primary school enrollment is very low in developing countries across Africa and Asia and Pakistan is no exception in this situation. Removing school fees and providing financial incentives for girls to attend school have proven to be effective. At the same time we need to build schools closer to remote communities, ensure that schools have quality teachers and adequate sanitary facilities and those they are safe places for girls.

1.1. Girls' School Enrolment and Incentive for Retention in Sindh-Pakistan

The basic statistics of Pakistan's education sector reveals that there are more than 150,000 public education institutions serving over 21 million students and ever-growing private sector that serve another 12 million children population in the country. It is also estimated that only 57 per cent of girls and women can read and write in the country but in rural areas picture is very dark and only 23 per cent of girls have completed primary level schooling.

The Pakistan's position at regional level still remained the lowest in South Asia with alarming gap in male-female, inter-regional and rural-urban disparities. These data suggest that some serious and sustained efforts are needed to address these issues to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals in education - full primary completion and gender parity in enrolments.

In attempt to attend MDGs on education, government of Pakistan has initiated a number of measures in collaboration with World Bank and other international organizations and developed countries' governments to improve girls' school enrolment. One of the programme of Government of Sindh has launched is Girls' Stipend in its more than 23 districts across Sindh to ensure maximum enrolment in the school since 2001-2002 under the Sindh Structural Adjustment Credit (SAAC) and same was handed over to the Reform Support Unit in 2005-06.

Keeping in view of the above the main objective of the study is to conduct impact assessment of the investment and to provide recommendation for its improvement/more betterment and sustainability. The study contributes significantly in the existing body of knowledge on this subject and based on five years data of the Education Reform Program and also provides in-depth analysis about girl's incentive programmes in Sindh and its correlation with girls' enrollment and retentions.

2. Methodology & Data Source

An evaluation and assessment exercise was carried out with last five years primary data set collected by the author in the capacity of senior program manager girl's stipend in reform support unit, and covered a set of key indicators by using Eviews software for valid results and sufficient evidences. Empirical evidence mostly provided in conclusion and policy recommendation section is based on TPV firm hired for independent studies and transparent and impartial verification on the subject.

3. Discussions and Result

Girls' Stipend Programme in Sindh: The Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh initiated distribution of Stipends since 2001-2002 under the Sindh Structural Adjustment Credit (SAAC) as discussed above and the Reform Support Unit (RSU) has taken this responsibility from 2005-2006 through Money Orders to achieve followings objectives in the region.

3.1. Objectives

- Relieve parents from financial burden of educating their children
- Provide an incentive for girls to remain in school

The Stipends are given to girl students only who are studying from class-VI to X in any Government School. This intervention is of two types.

- i. Standard Stipends Policy (SSP)
- ii. Differential Stipends Policy (DSP)

Reform Support Unit (RSU), Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh coordinates the implementation of the Government of Sindh's Education Reform Programme (SERP) by providing policy inputs and implementation-capacity building support to improve education access and quality in Sindh province. Girls' participation in secondary schools appears to be one area where significant improvements can be made, especially in rural areas. In order to set the right incentives for households to send their girls to secondary schools, a subprogram for distributing cash stipends to girls in grade VI-X has been set up under SERP.

In the year (2012) almost 400,000 girls in grades 6-10 across the whole province were benefited from a yearly stipend conditional on enrolment. Talukas/town with low transition rates were targeted for a higher stipend of Rs. 3,500 as opposed to Rs 2,500 per student received by other Talukas. Money order acknowledgement receipts from beneficiary students are sent back to RSU for its records and analysis. To increase the effectiveness and transparency of the girls' stipend programs every year firm has also been entrusted to conduct a survey-based third party validation (TPV) exercise. The primary goal of the Third Party Validation (TPV) Girls' Stipends Programs was to carry out transparent and impartial verification whether intended beneficiaries received their stipends on time and in full. The scope of the project areas are 23 districts of the Sindh and Target population for the survey was head teacher/teacher and at least 12 students. The yearly survey has concludes that over 98% girls received stipend and are the real beneficiary of the program.

Reform Support Unit (RSU), under SSP distributed stipend to girl students amounting to Rs. 1,000/- per student studying in class-VI to X till 2008-09. But from the academic session of 2009-10, the amount has been enhanced from Rs. 1,000/- to 2,400/- per annum throughout the Sindh (except DSP talukas). In DSP talukas, the beneficiaries received Rs. 2,400/- from 2007-08 to 1 2008-09 and from 2009-10 the stipend amount has been enhanced to Rs. 3,600/- per student in those DSP talukas where the transition rate from class 5 to class 6 is low. It is revised in 2011-12 as 2500 in standred area and 3500 in 45 DSP Taulka.

The rationale behind this scheme was to increase the enrollment of girl students in secondary classes in remote and unprivileged areas of Sindh. Under DSP, 30 low transition rate talukas were selected by World Bank and from 2010-11, fifteen (15) more talukas from various districts were taken for DSP status, thus, the number of DSP talukas in the academic year 2010-11 and 2011-12 were 45. The number of beneficiaries were 2,59,539 in 2007-08, 3,30,941 in 2008-9, 3,70,000 in 2009-2010, 4,09,376 in 2010-2011 and 415,868 in 2011-12 respectively as mentioned in table 1. The year wise increase in beneficiaries are also shown in figure 1. The increased

in DSP Taulka is impressive and doubled in last five years as mention 24236 in 2007 and 51448 in 2011-12 in table 2 and figure 2. It has been analyzed on the basis of last five years data that total girl's enrollment has been increased from 3% to 6% and varies from year to year. Despite increase in total enrolment transition rate is not sufficiently increased as per expectations as mentioned in table 3 and also in figure 3. 4 % to 5 % increase can be measured in above referred table/graph.

Year	No. of Schools	No. of Beneficiaries	Year wise expenditure in Rs
2007-08	2229	259539	269,805,200
2008-09	2491	330941	363,626,800
2009-10	2752	380423	951,240,000
2010-11	2835	409376	1,083,948,000
2011-12	2865	415868	1,132,202,000

Table 1: Year wise No. of Beneficiaries and total expenditure

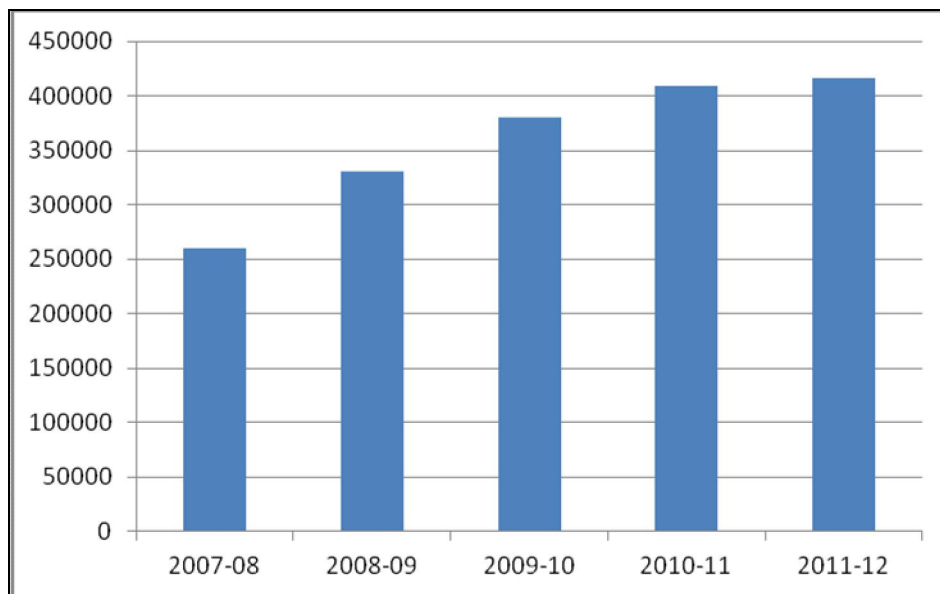


Figure 1: Year wise No. of beneficiaries

No. of Tehsils	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
1st (15)	7333	11537	14900	18689	19339
2nd (15)	8862	11810	16954	19629	21745
3rd (15)	24236	32984	40884	46220	51448

Table 2: Impact in DSP Taulka

- In 2007-08 15 talukas
- In 2008-09 30 talukas
- In 2009-10 30 talukas
- In 2010-11 45 talukas
- In 2011-12 45 talukas

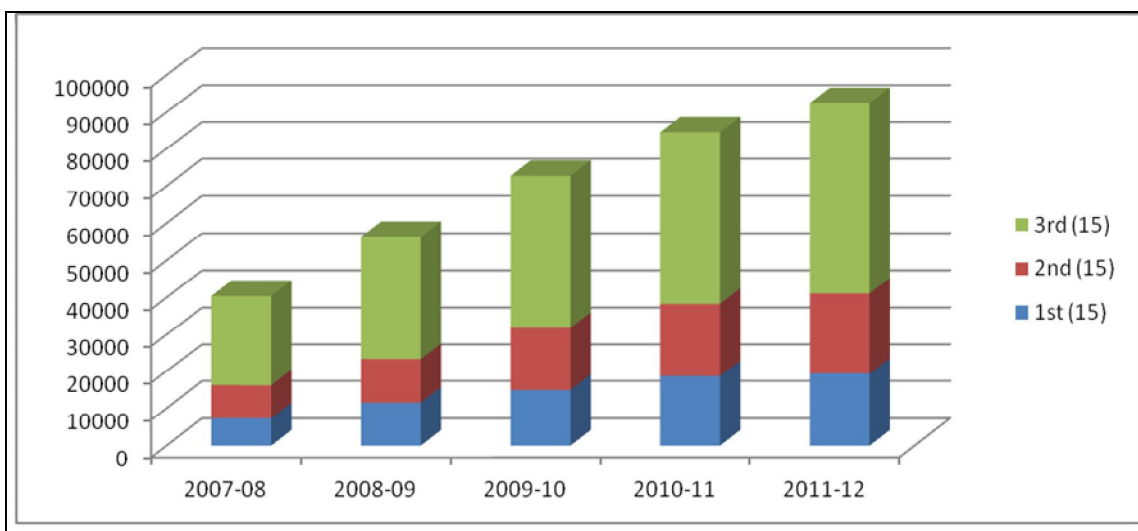


Figure 2

Year	Class		Transition rate
	V	VI	
2004-05	120243	73609	
2005-06	127896	73919	61.47
2006-7	131854	82442	64.46
2007-08	131777	82562	62.62
2008-09	149642	82001	62.23
2009-10	159112	98580	65.88
2010-11	157578	103084	64.79
2011-12	1053536	102161	64.83

Table 3: Transition Rate of Girls students from class v to vi

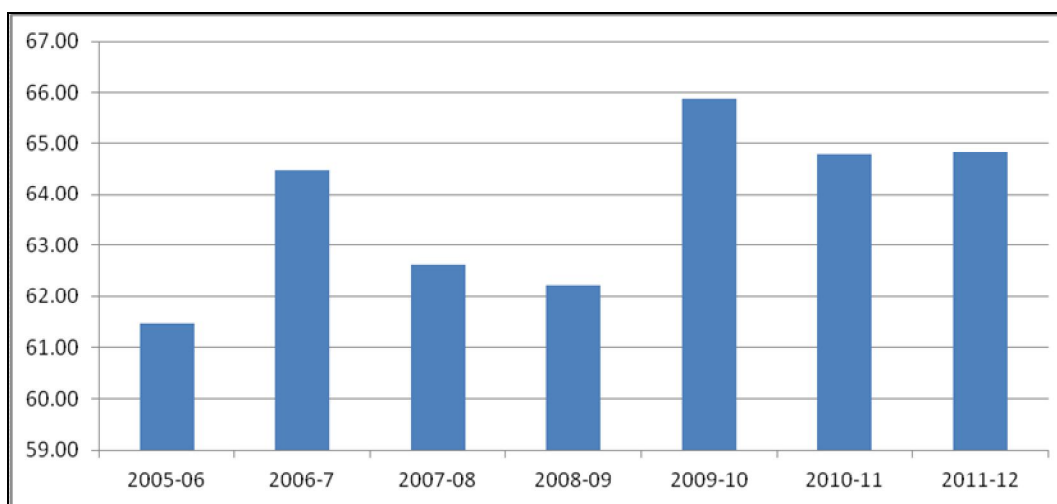


Figure 3

Data Source: Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS).

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The main goal of the investment was to increase the enrollments of girl students in primary schools which are 23% in rural areas and their retentions in secondary classes in remote and unprivileged areas of Sindh. The above refereed analysis indicates that there is slow, but steady increase in girl’s enrollment in Sindh province due to girl’s stipend program. In depth analysis also indicates that the number of beneficiaries were 259,539 in 2007-08 and 415 868 in 2011-12 it shows the significant of the program. The increased in low literacy areas is impressive in last five years and retention rate of girl’s from primary to secondary also stabilized and increased up to 5%.

It is suggested that more incentive should be introduced in the province for more enrollments to meet MDGS in next five years. The proposed incentives are distribution of uniforms, shoes, food snacks, provision of free transport facilities, particularly for girls of unserved communities living in far-flung areas of the region.

An empirical evidence, mostly provides by TPV firm M/s MDC hired for independent studies on the subject identified that about 98% schools were open and functional. Although about 97% girls reported they have received the stipend money, however, there were 3% girls who could not get their stipend money due to mismanagement of school administration. Therefore, concerned authorities at district level, SMC, school administration and parents recommended ensuring all girls get their right. Similarly, a comfortable majority of girls witnessed they received the stipend money by themselves. This is an encouraging finding, which indicates transparency and fairness of the stipend distribution system. However, for establishing more faith in the distribution system authorities might consider instructing head teachers to give away stipend money to parent(s) in the exceptional circumstances otherwise ensure the presence of both girls and parent(s). So that girls must know that money for them have been given which virtually will encourage enrollment and attendance.

Study, further indicates that over 16 percent school reported unavailability of proper accommodation for classrooms. Consequently, by taking advantage of this empirical evidence, the concerned quarters are strongly recommended to investigate through School Management Committee SMC or District Education Office about the available accommodation and facilities at the schools to improve school access for girls and school environment also for them. Also, 95% schools reported they have SMCs which may be mobilized for school monitoring and recommending required facilities for classrooms for more enrollments of girls for long run gender parity in Sindh Pakistan. This study also recommends the policy making institutions e.g. Sindh Government to enhance the scope of the stipend Programme for girls in primary and elementary schools with the belief that stipend scheme would definitely attract parents to get their girl(s) enrolled in primary level and continue to secondary and higher secondary level. Virtually, this would ensure enhancement of education and literacy of the women education in the province

Provincial and district level authorities should follow up courier/post for efficient and in time delivery of the post, e.g. money orders to the schools. Likewise, head teachers should also communicate girl students and parents soon post arrive. This distribution mechanism may pave the way for smooth, efficient and transparent distribution of stipend money from RSU to end beneficiary by eliminating both postmen and head teachers. Present policy is more focused on supply side in this connection RSU is fully responsible from data collection to distributions at the door step of students /schools but demand side failed to fulfill only one prerequisite to provide correct and timely information.

The wake up call for community participations for girls enrollment and about incentives introduced should be published in nation local daily news papers, and through SMS and FM radio, first during school attendance proforma / data collection and second during stipend distributions and third for complaints calls for help of unattended schools and girls student.

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