**Illiteracy in Pakistan**

Pakistan is among the most densely populated countries of the world. Currently, over 180 million people reside here making it the 6th most populous country of the world. People belonging to various casts, culture and color can be found. The overall literacy rate has always been a huge concern here.

The picture of illiteracy in Pakistan is grim. Although successive governments have announced various programs to promote literacy, especially among women, they have been unable to translate their words into actions because of various political, social and cultural obstacles. Access to basic education is the right of every individual. Education is the most important instrument in enhancing human capabilities, and in achieving the desired objectives of economic development. Education enables individuals to make informed choices, broaden their horizons and opportunities and to have a voice in public decision-making. It is one of the most important factors that act as a counterweight to social and economic mobility imposed by cultural and historical biases. Education is a vehicle of nation building through which a nation’s shared interpretation of history and cultural values are reproduced across generations. At the country level, education means strong economic growth due to productive and skilled labor force. At the individual level, education is strongly correlated to higher returns in earning and a more informed and aware existence. The emerging global scenario offers immense opportunities and challenges, and only those nations can benefit from it, which have acquired the required knowledge base and skills.

There are 163,000 primary schools in Pakistan, of which merely 40,000 cater to girls. According to UNICEF, 17.6 per cent of Pakistani children are working and supporting their families.

Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world and according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it is 55 per cent and Pakistan stands at 160th in total countries of the world.

Many schools and colleges are entering the education industry especially in various big cities of Pakistan but those living in rural areas are on a greater loss. Even if children want to study, they can’t, due to lack of resources or family pressure. The main reason for families not allowing their children especially girls to study is again illiteracy.

Proper education provides a child with lifelong benefits. It does not just give you knowledge, but also makes you a better person. It provides you with social acceptability in the society and gives you empowerment regarding decision making, problem solving and even multi-tasking. Education should not be considered as a want in fact, it should be perceived as a need for every living human being on earth.

The general understanding of literacy is to be able to read and write but unfortunately millions of people in Pakistan are deprived of even that. Pakistan is divided into multiple provinces and each province is facing different literacy scenarios.

**Punjab**

Having over 56% of countries population makes Punjab one of the most populous provinces of Pakistan. It consists of many important cities such as Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Bahawalpur, Gujranwala, Sialkot and so on. Over 3.8 million illiterate people currently reside in Punjab. This means that millions of people over the age of 15 cannot read or write in any language.

There are only six districts in Punjab that have above 70pc literacy rate. They are Lahore, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Chakwal and Gujrat. Most of the improvements have been seen at the primary level. Still a lot of work needs to be done in order to bring a bigger change.

**Sindh**

Known for having a population of over 25 million people, Sindh can be called the most populated province of Pakistan. As far as its literacy rates are concerned, they are below 50 percent in rural areas. Karachi is leading the race and the rest are not even on the second or third position. Hyderabad, MirpurKhas, Larkana and Jamshoro are a few other cities that can see a reasonable amount of literacy rate. On the whole, many children are deprived of education due to which a greater percentage of child labor can also be witnessed.

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Due to increasing security threats, families here are always concerned about sending children to schools. According to a recent report, the overall literacy rate in this province is 50%. Peshawar is among the most densely populated cities of KPK and is known for having a number of private and public schools. Some of the other major cities such as Mansehra, Mardana and Mingora are still deprived of a proper educational system.

**Balochistan**

For being an arid desert and a mountainous region, this province has always had hardships in building school based amenities. Just over one-quarter (28%) of the population 10 years and over is literate, with males 39% and females 16%. The barren land plays the role of a barrier in most of the cities resulting in a very poor literacy rate.

It is a challenge for Pakistan to improve its literacy rate and the situation demands that the government rethink the whole issue of literacy. Children are among the most valuable assets to any country and they need to be provided with proper education no matter what circumstances. Education works as a foundation for any child, it needs to be strong and firm in order to change the face of Pakistan.

**7. CAUSES OF ILLITERACY IN PAKISTAN:**1) Half-hearted planning and management of literacy and continuing education.
2) Limited budget.
3) Lack of reliable statistics and research.
4) Weak community participation.
5) Lack of multimedia material.
6) Lack of special skilled textbook writers.
7) Poor follow up of programs.
8) In-service teachers do not take such work seriously.
9) Dependence on foreign aid.
10) Dropout rate is high.
11) Over-crowded classrooms.
12) Panacea of private sector.
13) Outdated curriculum.
14) Problems of higher education; brain drain etc.
15) Corruption.
16) Rote learning.
17) Unfair examinations.
18) Lack of adequate facilities such as clean water, electricity etc. in the rural schools.
**8. EFFECTS OF ILLITERACY:**1) Over-population.
2) Low-GDP and per capita income.
3) Increase unskilled labour.
4) Infant mortality and maternal mortality.
5) Political instability.
6) Poor use of natural resources.
7) Heavy international debts.
8) Child labour.
9) Poor international image.
10) Low per acre agriculture yield.
11) Halting industrial growth and less trade activities.

**9. PRESENT GOVERNMENT POLICY:**

According to World Bank Report, Pakistan’s spending on public sector education is only 2.3 per cent of the GDP and this is much lower than the south Asian average of 3.6 per cent and the low-income countries’ average of 3.4 per cent

**I. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):**

Pakistan has committed to all the International declaration to extend the agenda of providing the basic right of education to all of its citizens. Pakistan is among the signatories of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Dakar World Education Forum 2000. The Government of Pakistan has taken several policy and program initiatives to achieve these international goals since then. The National Plan of Action for Education for all was initiated in response to the commitment made at Dakar for World Summit. The Education Reform Action Plan (ESR), which is built upon the National Education Policy 1998-2010, is a long-term plan, with three yearly action plans. The ESR addresses the development of the overall education sector through investment in rehabilitation of schools, improving the curriculum and assessment reform system, an adult literacy campaign, mainstreaming the Madressahs, a pilot school nutrition program and technical stream in secondary schools. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) views education as a strong policy instrument in bringing poverty down.

Three main goals that are the underlying objectives of all of these programs and initiatives include universal access to primary education by increasing the net enrollment and higher rate of survival of children till grade 5, increase in the adult literacy rate and to attain gender equality at all levels.

Currently, adult literacy rate is 53 percent; net enrollment at the primary level is 52 per cent, retention rate for 2004- 05 is noted as 61 per cent and significant gender gaps at all levels especially in the rural areas persist. Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP is 2.1 per cent and has approximately increased by less than one percentage point since 2000-01.

**II. Education Institutions and Enrollment**

Attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has become a compelling national priority. This is a challenge that has been accepted at the highest level in the federal and provincial governments. UPE is anticipated to increase in access to education by 4%, reduction in gender disparity by 10% and enhancing primary completion rate by 5% per annum. In the past year, 2187 new primary schools were established, 1221 in the public sector and 881 in the private sector. This increase has occurred in both rural and urban areas. Statistical annexure table 9.1 and 9.2, show the number of the girls in the primary and middle school in year 2004-05. The expansion in the number of institutions is inconsistent with the need to provide easy access to the half the country’s school going population. The public sector was able to establish only 999 new primary schools for girls in 2004-05. The responsibility of expanding the primary and middle schools for girls has been devolved to District Governments under the devolution plan.

**III. Primary education**

Two main indicators that show the changes in the primary schooling are Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment rate (NER). The last four years have witnessed 14 percentage points increase in the gross primary enrollment which is more then 3 percentage point per annum increase on average. This increase from 72 percent in 2001-02 to 86 percent in 2004-05 is a result of targeted and resilient polices of the government. Adoption of free provision of universal basic education polices in the provinces (except Balochistan) is gradually delivering the promised increase in the enrolment rate. In the urban areas, the GER is impressive in all provinces, ranging from 84 percent in Balochistan to 108 percent in Punjab. In the rural areas, Punjab has made a marked progress, particularly in female GER, which increased from 61 percent in 2001-02 to 82 percent in 2004-05. The Gender gap has also seen an improvement at the primary level in Punjab and has been modest in Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan.

**IV. Gender gap**

Gender disparity in literacy and enrollment is one of the key concerns of the Government. Pakistan’s overall record in promoting and delivering gender equality has been weak. There are, however, areas in which significant progress has been made and indicators point to a steady though slow improvement in the ratio of girls to boys at all levels of education, the ratio of literate females to males, share of women in urban employment (as proxy indicator for share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector) has improved marginally and improvement in participation of women in national decision making process.
Statistics show that gender disparity has been declining since 1998-99, however the recent decline is only marginal from 26 percent in 2001-02 to 25 percent in 2004-05. Reducing gender gap in education at all level will ensure equality of opportunity and economic participation for females. Gender disparity in literacy is lower in urban areas where it is 16 percent, as compared to 29 percent in rural areas in 2004-05. In fact there has been no progress in reducing the gender gap either between the urban and rural areas or between genders in both areas.

**V. Public Private Partnership**

The Community Support Rural Schools Program (CSRSP) is NEF’s largest program and it encourages pilot innovations to promote education in rural areas. Notable among them are Child Friendly School Program and Education for Working Children. Currently, 260 schools are running under CSRSP with an enrollment of 23300 students and another 350 schools are established in 2005 supported by NORAD. Moreover, teacher training has been a significant component of CSRSP, with the goal to enable in-service community teachers to re-learn modern pedagogical principles and techniques to manage today’s classrooms.

**VI. Higher Education Commission**

Pakistan is ranked amongst the lowest in the world in higher education enrollment rates at 2.9 percent. Other Asian developing countries, such as India and Korea, stand at 10 percent and 68 percent respectively. According to a report of the steering committee for higher education in 2001, only 2.6 percent of the students between the ages 17-23 enrolled in universities, which have increased to 2.9 in 2005. The target is to double enrollment in the next five years by increasing the capacity of the existing higher education institutions and also establishing new ones. The quality of education provided is not up to the mark, which can be gauged from the fact that not a single Pakistani university is ranked among the top 500 universities of the world.

**VII. Financing of Education in the public sector**

Public expenditure on education as a percentage to GDP is lowest in Pakistan as compared to other countries of the South Asian region. Pakistan spends 2.1 percent of it’s GDP on education as compared to India which spends 4.1 percent, Bangladesh 2.4 percent and Nepal spends 3.4 percent.

**VIII. National Education Assessment System**

National Education Assessment System (NEAS) is a World Bank funded project with a total cost of Rs. 319.364 million including foreign exchange component with World Bank share of Rs. 273.110 million. The government of Pakistan is committed to improve the quality of education at all levels. The NEAS is one of the key programs of the Ministry meant to improve the quality of education at elementary level, with the objective to measure learning achievements of grade 4 and 5 students, to develop capacity in educational assessment related activities, to institutionalization of sustainable monitoring system and information dissemination.

**IX. Curriculum Development**

The curriculum development is an on going process to respond to global challenges and emerging trends. This process has been initiated in collaboration with the federal units and provincial and regional governments (AJ&K, FATA). The present government realizing the importance of vibrant and dynamic curriculum has decided to review /revise curriculum of class 1 to 8. The committee has initiated consultative meetings to develop a curriculum reflecting the latest trends in individual subjects as well as equipping the education of the country with the requirement of today and tomorrow.