The importance of educating girls in the Newly Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Sumbal Naveed

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Sumbal Naveed is a 2018 Echidna Global Scholar at the Brookings Institution and Education Specialist at USAID Pakistan

Sumbal's work spans 19 years at both the classroom and policy level. She had been involved in designing a number of education programs, evaluations, and research studies, including the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). She has also mentored teachers to apply participatory learning methods in schools to help improve children's cognitive skills. She has developed and implemented an adolescent girls-focused education and skills development program in Pakistan. Ms. Naveed holds a Master's degree in Botany from the Islamia University, Bahawalpur and a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Management from the University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DoE   Directorate of Education

ESP   Education Sector Plan

FATA   Federally Administered Tribal Areas

NMD   Newly Merged District

TIJ   Taleemi Islahi Jirga

ABSTRACT

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, named the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in July 2018, have begun rebuilding after years of Talibanization and military operations. This policy paper focuses on how the government-led education activities can be best aligned to make education possible for the districts' girls, who have long been excluded from education due to conflict and war. Based on stakeholder perceptions, the paper identifies some barriers missed by the FATA's Education Sector Plan (ESP) and points out the opportunities within communities to accelerate the efforts to improve the girls' participation in schools. The results of the study propose to use a gender lens for planning and implementing the activities that can improve access to quality education, to prepare the girls for a better and more productive life.

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) formerly known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan—are moving toward normalization. The Talibanization period has ended and the Pakistani military has largely cleared violent extremism from this area (see Box 1 for details on the history of the NMDs). At this historic time for this war-torn area, to bring it on par with the rest of the country, it is highly important to focus on the gender aspects of the NMDs' policies and their implementation. This is especially urgent given that traditionally, this area has operated as a patriarchy.[1] There should be immediate attention to gender equity in two sectors that are fundamental for development and where the NMDs' reform program will roll out: health and education.

The Directorate of Education (DoE), housed in the FATA Secretariat, developed a five-year comprehensive Education Sector Plan (ESP) for the NMDs—a planning document that was based on the 2009 National Education Policy.[2] While developing the ESP, the FATA Secretariat identified barriers to education, taking into account input from teachers, head teachers, and government officials. However, it appears that most of the barriers identified are applicable to both boys and girls, despite the fact that more girls don't attend school. The few gender-specific barriers mentioned are distance from school and related security concerns, parents' reluctance to send girls to school, and other cultural issues. However, the ESP lacks specifics about which cultural or environmental aspects and parental perceptions stop families from sending their daughters to school. Furthermore, under the ESP's section on "Gender Issues," the only issue identified is the shortage of women staff in the DoE. Without a deeper understanding of the problem, it will be difficult to devise a plan that can address the core reasons for the low participation of girls in education.

Most importantly, the ESP's macro-level performance indicator list does not include indicators that measure quality of education and gender equity. Without relevant and adequate indicators, it will be hard to measure the progress in achieving gender equity.

Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the gender-related gaps in the ESP identified through a study on barriers to and opportunities for girls' education in the NMDs of Khyber and Mohmand. This qualitative study used a semi-structured tool to conduct interviews with 36 participants, including teachers, government officials, nongovernmental organization field staff, and girls from colleges and schools. Based on study data, this paper provides a review of the ESP with a gender lens. The paper first discusses a few ESP activities that must be implemented differently to address barriers to girls' education, then moves on to explaining the gender-specific barriers that were missed by the ESP. The paper highlights significant opportunities that can be instrumental in accelerating efforts to reduce the gender gap in education in the NMDs. At the end, the paper presents recommendations on how to make evidence-based and context-specific decisions to strengthen education planning, develop a monitoring and governance structure and engage local communities and other sectors to achieve the goal of gender equity in education.

Box 1. A brief history of the Newly Merged Districts, through a gender lens

The NMDs, formally known as the FATA of Pakistan, have a rich but tumultuous history, because of their geographic location, laws, and governance structure.[a] This tough, mountainous territory in the northwest region of Pakistan, on the border with Afghanistan, is home to a population of 5 million people, 48.9 percent of whom are female,[b] and that includes more than a dozen Pashtun tribes.[c] Administratively, the FATA is divided into seven agencies and six smaller frontier regions.[d]

After the Talibanization of this region in the 1990s, the human rights situation in the FATA territory dramatically worsened, particularly for women and minorities.[e] The FATA was once considered:

> *"The worst place for women to live, where all their basic rights to life are crushed. The FATA had been in the hands of the Taliban with unlawful killing, unlawful detention, torture, ill treatment, inequality, inadequate health care, no freedom of movement, and dwindling education for girls and women".[f]*

The evidence available from the region at this time suggests that many women are confined to their homes throughout their life. The rare occurrences in which they leave their homes are to visit a doctor—during which they must wear a burqa (veil). Most married women give birth to six to ten children by age 40. Because there are few economic opportunities in this area, many men leave in search of work, in some cases traveling as far as the Middle East, which makes women's lives even more difficult, when they have to depend on male in-laws or extended family as they are not allowed to live on their own.[g]

The Pakistani military launched a much-anticipated operation against the Taliban in 2002,[h] which resulted in the migration of 3 million FATA residents to the neighboring province KP.[i] After militants were driven out of the territory, more than 95 percent of residents were resettled back home,[j] but the recovery and rehabilitation are still in progress. The most important step in normalizing this post-war region, recently taken by the government of Pakistan, is the integration of the FATA with the neighboring province of KP, through an amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan.[k] Before this, FATA was governed under the Constitution of Pakistan through a special law inherited from the colonial times in the sub-continent, called the Frontier Crimes Regulation.[l]

The secretariat of the chief minister of KP, in a July 16, 2018 letter to all provincial administrative offices, declared that the FATA region will no longer be called FATA in official communication. Instead, the former agencies of the FATA will be called the "Newly Merged Districts" of KP. In the first phase of this change, the health and education sectors of the FATA Secretariat (which retains the same name) will be integrated into the KP Civil Secretariat.

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BACKGROUND: GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE NEWLY MERGED DISTRICTS OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

The most recent data from the Annual Education Census (AEC) of the NMDs shows that 37 percent of girls are enrolled in primary schools but only 5 percent of girls are enrolled in secondary schools.[3] In contrast, nearly half (49 percent) of boys are enrolled in primary schools, and 16 percent of boys are enrolled in secondary schools. When compared with the national averages at both the primary (70 percent girls, 71 percent boys) and the secondary levels (35 percent girls, 39 percent boys), the NMDs' enrollment number for girls is the lowest in the country.

According to the NMDs' Annual Education Census 2017, girls' enrollment has always been low compared with that of boys, showing the large gender gap in education (Chart 1). With the emergence of the Taliban, the situation worsened when militants partially or fully destroyed 1,195 schools in the FATA, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of their basic right to education, and particularly girls, who already had low participation in schools.[4] AEC enrollment data, when compared and analyzed over the last few years, shows the impact of this turbulent time on girls' enrollment (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. Girls' and boys' school enrollment in the Newly Merged Districts, 2012-2017
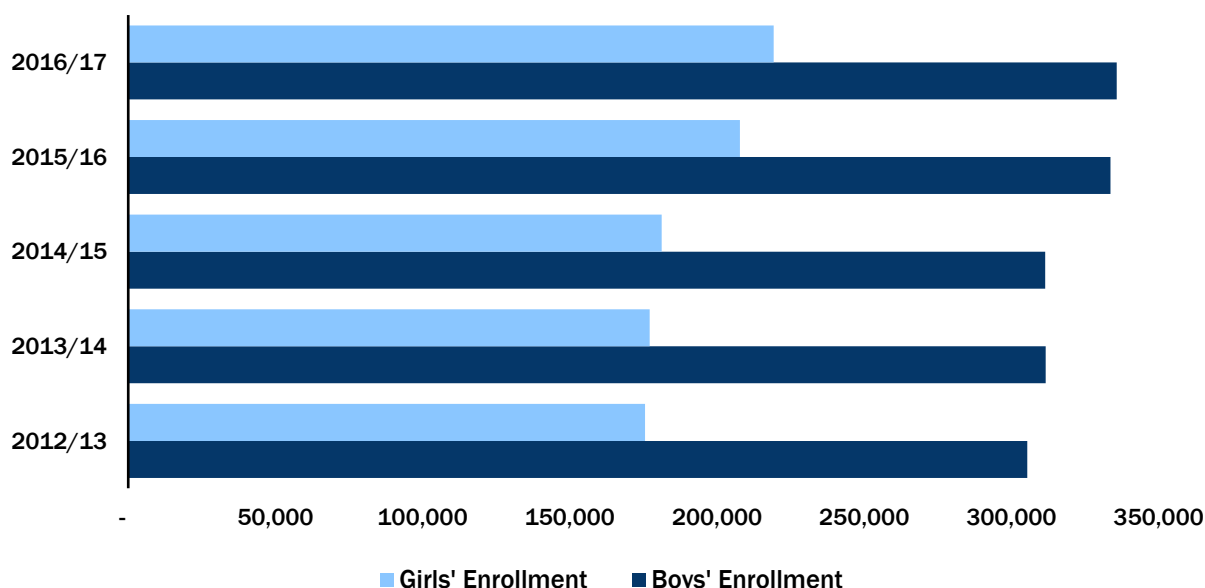
Source: Annual Education Census 2017, conducted by the FATA Secretariat, NMDs.

Followed by militancy and the military operations, another factor that makes the NMDs contextually unique and comparatively different from the other underdeveloped areas of Pakistan is the massive displacement of residents, many of whom have stayed in temporarily displaced persons camps. Children in these camps had the opportunity to continue their education in temporary schools opened by nongovernmental organizations, but those who did not migrate had limited or no access to education. This situation resulted in more girls leaving schools compared with boys in the years prior to 2015, before peace-building and resettlement took place.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE NEWLY MERGED DISTRICTS

Although education is important and beneficial to both boys and girls, not educating girls costs families and communities more, because it is linked to early marriages and poor child and maternal health.[5] Post-war regions like the NMDs, with multiple issues on all fronts, are wasting 50 percent of their young and energetic human resources by not educating girls and leaving them behind.[6]

Box 2. Reasons why girls in the NMDs are not attending school

There is a perception that parents are unwilling to educate girls in the NMDs. However, this needs to be revisited. Why are 50 percent of primary-aged and 95 percent of secondary-aged girls not attending schools? The research suggests the following:

- More than 50 percent of residents live under the poverty line and cannot afford education expenses.
- Just under 300 secondary schools cannot accommodate all the graduates from 1,896 primary schools.
- More than 50 percent of girls' schools have no toilets, water, or electricity.
- There is insufficient transportation to access secondary schools that are distant from homes.
- There is insufficient understanding about the broader purpose of education for girls.
- The purpose of education for all children is tied to employment, but the NMDs lack jobs for women, with the exception of teaching jobs.
- Male relatives—not fathers—are often the dissenting voices to girls pursuing an education.

See Annex A and B for more barriers.

Given the rapidly changing situation and the missed opportunities in the war-torn NMDs of KP, policymakers have much more to do for girls—both for the development of their full potential as family members, workers, and citizens, as well as for the development of this region which must overcome decades-long development gaps and be more resistant against insurgencies and violent extremism. To perform each one of these roles, the girls in the NMDs will need a "breadth of transferable skills," such as 21st century skills that go beyond literacy, numeracy, and vocational knowledge.[7] While the importance of family and society in children's learning cannot be neglected, schools do have a role to provide a protected environment and allow children to learn the skills they need to survive in such post-conflict areas, which are struggling with their sustainability and development.[8]

A quality education provides girls with resources to help them emerge from the trauma that war and violence has brought to their lives, and plays a role in post-war reconstruction.[9] Education, which includes learning 21st century skills, will make girls more confident and socially aware and improve their decisionmaking power.[10] In the context of the NMDs, where job opportunities for women are limited, getting an education will help girls find their own way of contributing to the economy and improving the standard of living in this highly impoverished region.

A LOOK AT THE EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN WITH A GENDER LENS

Activities promoted by the ESP are predominantly basic in nature and address improvements to access for both girls and boys. However, an analysis of data from the present study on barriers to and opportunities for girls' education in Khyber and Mohmand cautions against such a universal approach, because there are gender-specific barriers that must be addressed. Drawing from this data, this section provides a review of the ESP with a gender lens and is divided into two subsections: (1) what must be done differently, and (2) what must be added.

A. Five issues that must be approached differently to address gender-specific barriers to education

Infrastructure planning

While the data are inconsistent and limited, the most recent numbers coming out of the Annual Education Census 2017 show that there are 5,957 government education institutions in the FATA, excluding degree colleges. Of these, only 5,101 schools are functional, and of these, 2,074 are girls' schools.

Chart 2. Percentage of girls' and boys' schools in the Newly Merged Districts
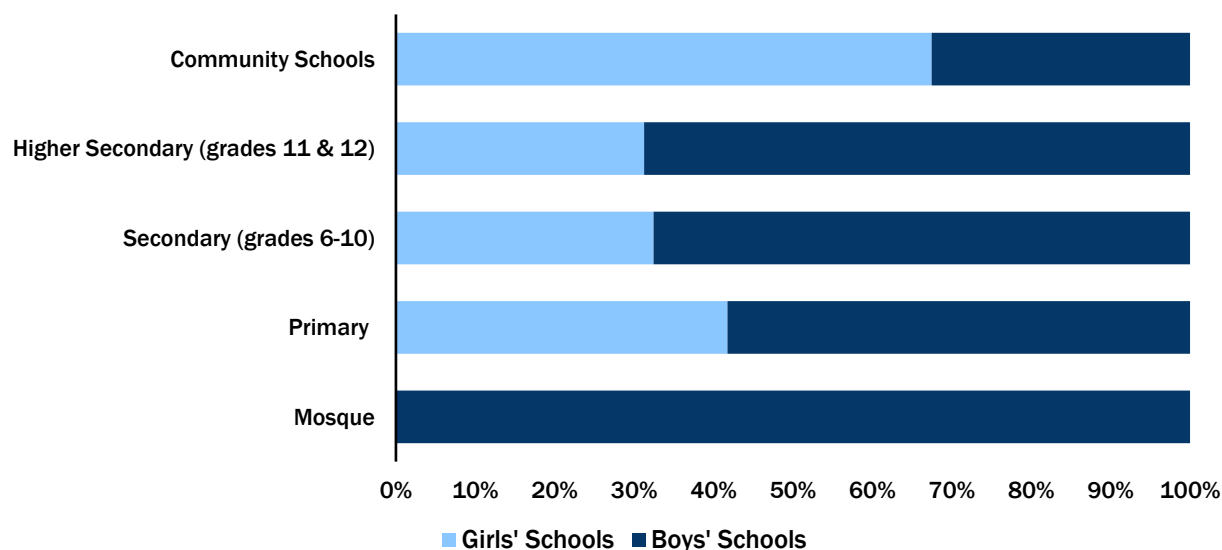
Source: Annual Education Census 2017, conducted by the FATA Secretariat, NMDs.

Therefore, as illustrated in Chart 2, girls have less access to school than boys do. At the same time, data from the study on girls' education in Khyber and Mohmand indicate the importance that political influence has over planning the establishment of primary schools. This is particularly true regarding influence by "Maliks"—community elders who played the role of facilitators between the people in different agencies of the FATA and the Frontier Crimes Regulation administration—a role initiated during the former British rule of the Indian Subcontinent to govern local communities. One study participant noted that the Maliks "provide land for schools and in return, get incentives, like a couple of class 4 government jobs." This political influence over school construction may be contributing to the sparse distribution of schools that has been known to impede girls' enrollment. The ESP also mentions the influence of Maliks on the establishment of primary schools in the NMDs.

Similarly, Chart 2 shows an alarmingly low number of secondary schools. This, according to findings from the study on girls' education, is resulting in primary school graduates dropping out after grade 5 because there are

not enough secondary schools to accommodate all of them. Completing only primary education does not bring about the full social and economic returns of education; research shows that it is important for girls to complete at least 12 years.[11] Furthermore, the establishment of more secondary schools can result in higher girls' enrollment in primary schools, since girls will see that there is an opportunity to continue their education after grade 5.[12]

To improve girls' enrollment, the DoE opened community-based schools for girls, consisting of a single room with one teacher, in the late 1980s. However, because of a lack of monitoring by the DoE, teacher absenteeism, and delays in paying teachers' salaries, the majority of community schools were closed but are now being revamped. In general, the community-based schools were valued for meeting the immediate need for girls' education in communities where there are no formal schools.[13] However, data from the study on girls' education show that community-based schools did not operate successfully in the NMDs. More research is needed to explore whether the community-based schools model may work in the NMDs.

Incentives to meet education expenses

More than 50 percent of the FATA's population lives under the poverty line.[14] As such, the official and hidden costs of children's education can be prohibitive for many families. The ESP recommends that the DoE provide financial incentives for families that send their daughters to secondary schools, in an effort to improve girls' enrollment. However, due to the vagueness in the ESP regarding incentives, there are currently no incentive-driven programs in the Khyber and Mohmand districts. Participants from the study on girls' education overwhelmingly points out the need for providing scholarships to girls—either cash or in kind—to improve the enrollment of girls from poor families. However, the participants cautioned against using incentives that are similar to providing food to children as a motivation to attend schools, because they did not find this strategy effective. While the results vary from providing scholarships or other types of financial and in-kind support, the literature generally shows that such support in poor areas does positively impact girls' enrollment.[15,16]

A further hurdle for girls is parents' belief that—as expressed by a teacher in the study on girls' education—"only a son can earn money for the family." The study shows that although the majority of parents would like to educate both boys and girls, they decide to educate only boys because they have limited resources, and they find that educating boys is a better return on investment than educating girls. As such, providing financial or in-kind incentives, such as fee waivers, uniforms, and school supplies, to the girls or their families may be successful in persuading families to send their girls to school.

Recruitment of female teachers

The lack of local female teachers has led to the hiring of female teachers from outside the NMDs, mostly from the neighboring KP districts of Peshawar and Charsadda. This practice has resulted in frequent teacher absenteeism, because these outside teachers travel long distances, face several security checks, and stay at Maliks' houses if they want to avoid travel, which many people in this region do not deem culturally appropriate. Furthermore, government teachers have increasingly hired proxy teachers to cover their absences. These proxy teachers often are local women who are not qualified for the job. These issues have contributed to low quality education and demotivated students, which have led to girls' dropout and low enrollment.

Research participants suggested hiring more local female teachers. One nongovernmental organization official noted that "parents trust the local teachers more." In addition, fearing for their daughters' safety, parents do not want their daughters to be taught by male teachers, especially in an area with high security risks and lawlessness.[17] However, because of the low quality of local education, there are few women with the required level of schooling to go on to become teachers.

One specific area of need is for female science teachers. The study on girls' education finds high demand from both girls and parents for science education in schools, because they want to have female doctors in the region. However, there are only 61 female science teachers for all the girls' schools in the NMDs, which is not sufficient.[18]

Training and capacity building for teachers

According to the ESP, the DoE will focus on both pre-service and in-service training for teachers, based on capacity assessments of current teachers. Data from the study on girls' education show that some female teachers were hired with minimal qualifications (only 10-12 years of education) to meet the urgent need for teaching staff.

There are several options for hiring and capacity building of teachers in the NMDs. Pre-service teacher training is a lengthy process and requires two to four years of training after a teacher is hired through a competitive testing process, according to the ESP. However, given the urgent need for teaching staff in the NMDs, there is no time for these long trainings. At the same time, appointing teachers without any pre-service training will result in compromised quality of education, unless the teachers receive intense in-service support. Hiring teachers from KP is another option, but as previously mentioned, that can result in teacher absenteeism. A final option suggested by the study findings is hiring local teachers with somewhat lower qualifications—say 12 years of education. This latter option will be viable only with a regular and well-planned in-service training program.

In summary, each of the options for hiring and capacity building of teachers in the NMDs requires some sort of tradeoff. No matter which options are selected, at the end of the day, quality teachers are needed most, for it is only a quality teacher who can help girls succeed and inspire them as a role model.[19]

Monitoring and governance of girls' schools

Weak monitoring and governance of schools is one of the major issues identified by the ESP. There are not enough female staff in the DoE or in the field to monitor girls' schools, according to the study on girls' education. The ESP only mentions hiring more female staff in the DoE, but that alone will not solve the complex issue.

An interconnected issue is school governance. There are no formal school governance structures in the NMDs, particularly for girls' schools, and the ESP is also silent on how girls' schools will be governed when the local culture does not support women's participation in any social activity. The Taleemi Islahi Jirga (TIJ)—a community-based school governance structure like a parent-teacher association—exists, but it has never been used for girls' schools. The ESP lacks a gender-specific governance structure like TIJs in girls' schools. In the absence of female field monitors, TIJs with female representation from the local communities would be extremely helpful in monitoring girls' schools. Since women's roles are generally limited and stereotyped in the NMDs, the government must work closely with communities to identify ways in which women can participate and play an effective role in TIJs.

At the DoE level, it is not just the number of female staff that matters, but also the position in which they are hired. For women to play their role effectively in improving girls' education and influencing education policies, it is crucial to have them in decisionmaking roles and with the required authority. [20] The former principal of the only women's teacher training college noted,

> "Similar to insufficient quantity of female teachers, there is insufficient female representation in the DoE in the FATA. I hope the department hires female education officers for grades 18 and 19. Before that there were only male education officers and the women had the assistant education officers' role for grade 16 and had no say in any decision."

This discussion of issues that must be approached differently now brings us to a review of what must be added to the ESP to address gender-specific barriers to education.

B. Three issues that must be included in the education sector plan to address the gender gap

The broader purpose of educating girls

The predominant purpose of education that stems from the study findings, for both boys and girls, is "shaoor"—an Urdu language word that means consciousness. The purposes that emerge for boys only were to bring

respect and honor to the family, to be able to solve problems on their own and for their community, and to secure a better job to support their family, because boys are considered the breadwinners of their family. The study data show that parents do have interest in educating their daughters for work or jobs, but not as much interest as in educating their sons. This is mainly because girls have no job options other than becoming a teacher, whereas boys have a multitude of job options. The study identifies the main purpose of educating girls as teaching them to become good mothers who can raise good children.

Education is an investment that does not only relate to employment or economic gains, but also relates to knowledge, skills, and social outcomes.[21] In poverty-ridden areas like the NMDs, emerging from war and with complex educational, health, environmental, economic, cultural, and political issues, the purpose of educating girls is far more nuanced than the current perception. This purpose involves the broad range of roles that girls can play, as family members, citizens, and active members of society.[22]

"People have not seen ... successful examples of girls in their families or communities. If they know what girls can do, they will understand their multiple roles," said a teacher quoted in the study on girls' education. It is important to have female role models in different fields, to help the long-isolated communities of the NMDs understand the broader purpose of education and the different roles that girls can play in life.

Transport facilities for distant schools

The study on girls' education reveals that transportation is a barrier for adolescent girls traveling to distant secondary schools and for teachers traveling from neighboring villages in the NMDs or from KP districts. As one teacher commented,

> *"More than 60 percent of girls are not going to school because of long distance, particularly in the middle and high schools. We, as parents, don't have sufficiently strong economic status to pay for their transport expenses."*

Making this situation more complex, the study reveals, are two other issues: local rivalries, and a scattered population living in difficult mountainous terrain, which make this area unsafe for girls to travel alone.[23]

In areas like the NMDs, where providing new schools appears to be a time-consuming task because of the magnitude of the need, transportation will remain a huge barrier to accessing distant secondary schools for quite some time. Generally, parents in such post-war areas are not willing to send their daughters outside because of the security risk, so distant schools with no transportation means no girls going to schools.[24]

Female teachers face the same issues, because "without proper transportation, teachers cannot make it to schools in a timely manner. The male teachers do not face transportation challenges because they use their motorcycles, but women have to walk to get to the schools because they cannot drive," a woman teacher quoted in the study said.

Contextual variations by district (formerly known as agency)

The NMDs is a complex region, where every district is different from the others geographically, culturally, economically, and demographically.[25] According to findings from the study on girls' education, these differences are found even within the same district, where the education status, condition of schools, and parents' awareness of the importance of girls' education is different in different parts. For example, in Khyber and Mohmand, the areas that are closer to KP districts Peshawer and Charsadda, and specifically their urban centers, have better schools, higher enrollment of girls in schools, and more aware parents who are concerned about the girls' performance in schools. This means that the areas farther away from the KP districts will need more attention from the government. These areas may also need more schools, with better-quality education and awareness-raising about the importance of girls' education, compared with areas closer to the KP districts. In summary, education planning and practices that are not contextual and not based on the geographic, demographic, and economic status of the NMDs may not succeed in addressing the pressing issues in this region.[26]

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER OPPORTUNITIES TO REDUCE THE GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION

Despite the long list of barriers to reducing gender gaps in education, as enumerated in Annexes A and B, findings from the study on girls' education in Khyber and Mohmand bring up certain opportunities to leverage and reduce these gaps. These opportunities emphasize that the work to improve girls' participation in education can be accelerated, mainly because of the potential to innovate and develop approaches that save on time and efforts.[27]

Demand for employment opportunities for girls

The study on girls' education shows an interesting and encouraging trend of parents' and girls' interest in employment. Data from the study also show that many girls discontinue their education because they don't have the opportunity to work and make use of their education. Given the extreme poverty in the NMDs, residents have started seeing girls' role in the economic development of the family. So now, parallel to setting up the required number of schools, the next issue to work on is the motivations for parents to send their daughters to school. Traditional enrollment campaigns alone, like transmitting simple messages to communities to bring their daughters to schools, may not help in the NMDs. The barrier is not parents' ideology about girls' education, but rather other factors—namely a lack of school facilities, suitable transportation, and employment—that are stopping them from sending their daughters to schools.

A lack of employment opportunities is also linked to early marriages, because an early marriage reduces the economic burden of caring for a family member in poor families, the study finds. Thus, engaging girls in some sort of work delays their marriages and makes educating them more productive, by expanding their potential and opportunities in work and life.[28] Similarly, the study also finds that enrollment in neighboring colleges increased when graduates from the only female teacher-training college in Khyber district started getting jobs.

Another opinion poll conducted in the NMDs also shows jobs as one of the in-demand services for girls.[29] The demand for girls' employment was not as high as for boys, but its presence on the list of demands is highly encouraging. However, data from the study on girls' education show that the education sector alone cannot make all the arrangements for jobs. Since employment is a cross-sectoral issue, the DoE may need to work closely with other sectors to create job opportunities.

Quiet transformation of community beliefs

Although more in-depth research and understanding is needed, findings from the study on girls' education show that perceptions in the NMDs' communities about girls' education and involvement in economic activities have positively changed. Data from the study indicate two types of changes: one that occurred during a period of several years in this region and the other that was observed after the temporary displacement of the NMDs' communities in the neighboring provinces, particularly KP. The communities that were displaced for more than a year in a different province benefitted from seeing a completely different lifestyle in which girls and women attend schools, colleges, and universities, and have all sorts of jobs, particularly in hospitals and offices. While this may have been shocking and unacceptable to some men and women, to others—particularly men—it changed their stereotypical thoughts about a girls' role in society and her right to education and skills development. The limited research available on this subject supports the positive impact of exposure to other cultures and lifestyles on people's perceptions about cultural and social norms.[30]

Men's support for girls

Pakistan is generally perceived to be a male-dominated society in which the right to decisionmaking predominantly lies with elder male members of the family. The NMDs, "being Pashtun culture, follow this tradition even more strictly," a nongovernmental organization official shared in the study on girls' education. However, highlighting the positive side of the same patriarchy, when girls have support from a male family member, particularly fathers, they succeed in pursuing their education and entering the workforce. Other parts of Pakistan with a similar tribal culture have often experienced this phenomenon.[31]

While some men support girls' education and employment, others feel threatened by the confidence, self-reliance, decisionmaking, and economic independence of women and girls, some women mentioned in the study on girls' education. Literature shows that employment improves one's fundamental identity and social worth,[32] which on one side benefits women, but on the other side may challenge old and deeply-rooted patriarchy. In the majority of cases, the men who feel threatened are husbands, cousins, and uncles, and not the girls' immediate family; fathers and brothers have been shown to be supportive of girls' education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflict and war are by no means a positive development for any country or territory. However, after the peace process starts, looking optimistically at the post-war challenges may result in making that place better than before. The NMDs, after peace building, offer the opportunity to develop a gender-sensitive and high-quality education system from the start that addresses community needs and results in a new generation that makes this region more peaceful and prosperous.[33] While the rest of the country is at the bottom of the global gender gap index, the NMDs have the opportunity to reverse this trend, by starting from scratch.

This research study is a preliminary attempt to analyze education planning with a gender lens. Generalizations cannot be made because of the study's small sample size and data limitations. Nevertheless, some preliminary recommendations to the government of the NMDs can be made, based on the study's findings.

Strengthen education planning by using current data

Base all education planning on real-time data, and keep in mind the local community needs and the realities on the ground for each district in the NMDs, because each district is unique in terms of terrain, demographic characteristics, and the perception of residents about girls' education.

Provide schools, based on the population density and community needs. Conduct a survey of the existing primary schools to determine the need for primary schools. Keep the primary schools that are needed and upgrade the remaining schools to secondary schools to save on resources. Make sure that every sub-district, and village has its own primary and secondary schools. In areas with small populations, where providing a separate secondary school is not feasible, provide transportation to remove the barriers of distance and expenses for transportation to distant schools. Plan all girls' schools with a boundary wall, toilet, and water as compulsory components. When budgeting for school infrastructure, keep in mind the context-based barriers.

Deviate from the established systems for hiring. Based on data and contextual constraints, plan to hire either local female teachers or teachers from outside the NMDs, depending upon the local need. Hire local teachers for primary levels when possible, because they have the trust of the community. For secondary school teachers, and in particular, science teachers, it may be necessary to hire from outside the NMDs to find qualified professionals. In the short term, rethink the existing difficult and lengthy system of hiring that graduates from the NMDs struggle to advance through. Once the NMDs are normalized, revert back to the stricter system of hiring for new teachers. Do not treat this post-war area as a settled area for hiring teachers, at least not for a few years.

Improve the quality of teachers, by all means. In the current post-war situation, when the government is struggling with broad development issues, it will be wiser to strengthen the in-service teacher training model first, instead of relying on lengthy pre-service training. For quick in-service capacity building, train a few local master trainers/mentors and provide them with the required facilities to train teachers on the job. While there is not much evidence on whether in-service is better than pre-service training, the evidence from post-war education programming emphasizes relying on in-service training to meet the immediate need for trained teachers.[34,35]

Redefine education in terms of 21st century skills. The DoE must identify a set of skills that are prioritized for girls in the NMDs and incorporate it throughout the education cycle. An approach that focuses on teaching 21st century skills will work when "the education system undergoes a wholesale change," starting from strategy and extending to curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting.[36] This approach will help everyone understand the broader purpose of education and prepare girls for the multiple roles they can play in this post-war area, with its multiple and complex developmental needs.

Develop a strong monitoring and governance structure

Establish a comprehensive strategy, with clear objectives, benchmarks, and attached performance indicators, that is based on the distinct gender-specific barriers of each district in the NMDs. Clearly define the indicators, and develop tools to measure progress and help inform decisionmaking.

Hire women in the DoE for key decisionmaking positions and in the field for monitoring girls' schools. Hire women at decisionmaking and leadership positions levels and engage them in developing gender-based policies and implementation plans. In the field too, hire female staff to monitor the schools. Consider addressing safety and travel issues for female field staff, which are the same issues for teachers and schoolgirls, until the situation becomes more stable in the NMDs.

Develop effective systems to strengthen parent-teacher relationships and cooperation. Improving girls' education in the NMDs requires not only schools, but also strong school governance, which is only possible when there is a strong and sustainable structure like TIJs. TIJs are only successful when they are based on what communities can do and are willing to do. Therefore, revisit the structure and effectiveness of TIJs for girls' schools.

Engage local communities and other sectors as partners

Given the huge gender gap in education in the NMDs, it is not enough to make the DoE solely responsible for bridging this gap. Engage local communities, the private sector, and other directorates under the FATA Secretariat to catalyze the DoE's efforts to reducing the gap.

Make conscious and well-planned efforts to increase community support. Unless the local communities are supportive, the gender gap in schools can never be reduced. The DoE must make a conscious and well-planned effort to address gender-related social and cultural barriers. It must pay special attention to engaging men and boys in the communities to improve their perceptions of girls' education and employment and to sensitizing them about the support they can extend to girls around them. The DoE must engage nongovernmental organizations, volunteers, and the media as highly important partners in these campaigns, and identify role models who can provide inspiration.

Provide financial support to share parents' expenditures on girls' education. To reduce the burden of education expenses on parents in this war-torn and impoverished area, the government should provide need-based incentives to reduce the cost of girls' education. In-kind or cash scholarships are the best way to share education expenses, but the type of incentive should be decided based on local community needs. In case there are budget constraints, the government should leverage donor funding to support the education expenses.

Work closely with workforce development-related directorates. Providing job opportunities will create a pull factor for parents to educate their daughters and make education purposeful for girls. The DoE should closely work with other government directorates that are linked to workforce development to create job and entrepreneurship opportunities for girls, both with basic and with higher education qualifications. The DoE should engage the private sector to help with both developing more schools and creating jobs for educated girls.

CONCLUSION

As the NMDs are making history and moving toward a new normal, with a better and more prosperous future, it is crucial not to forget that half of the young and energetic population of the NMDs are girls. These girls will become a valuable resource when they are educated and equipped with 21st century skills. To make this possible, the DoE must revisit all education activities in light of gender-specific needs. The directorate must gather consistent and reliable data to understand the distinctive needs of each district in the NMDs and to create gender equity strategies that are specific to each context.

It is good news that the majority of parents in the NMDs are willing to send their daughters to schools and are also open to their eventual employment. However, to convert this willingness into actual participation of girls in education, education stakeholders must work together with the DoE, local communities, and other sectors to address all the barriers that are preventing girls from entering schools. These actors must provide both material and conceptual support, to improve the quality of education. Physical elements include schools, teachers, transportation, and financial support. Philosophical elements that will impact the quality of education include understanding the broader purpose of education, defining the quality of education, incorporating quality throughout the education system, and conveying the same concept of quality education to the general public to change perceptions of the benefit of education to girls.

In the end, it is important to include men in the process. In a deeply patriarchal culture like the NMDs, girls will need permission, confidence, and support from their fathers, brothers, and other men around them in society. The only factor that can serve as a pull in this complex situation is the availability of employment for educated girls. More jobs will produce increased demand for educated girls, which will gradually result in more girls enrolling in schools. Having positive role models in each field of work can accelerate this process and can also break stereotypes about women's roles in the NMDs.

ANNEX A. SUMMARY OF SYSTEMATIC BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NEWLY MERGED DISTRICTS

Systematic barriers identified by the research study	
Planning	• Lack of gender-specific planning to reduce equality • No consideration of population size and education needs • Lack of planning to engage the private sector and communities • Inconsistent data and not using data for learning and understanding • Severe lack of planning for hiring and training female teachers
Infrastructure	• Irrational and politically influenced distribution of schools • Inadequate classrooms • Inadequate secondary schools within reach of communities • Inadequate school facilities, especially water, toilets, and school supplies
Quality	• No clear definition of quality education or education outcomes for girls • Weak pre-service and in-service training for teachers • Inappropriate language used for instruction (English, which is not a local language) • Weak understanding of the breadth of skills that girls can develop in schools
Women's Representation	• Inadequate female staff in the Directorate of Education • Lack of women in higher leadership roles • Lack of female staff in field monitoring positions

ANNEX B. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY-RELATED BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NEWLY MERGED DISTRICTS

Community-related barriers identified by the research study	
Circumstances	• Poverty and inability to pay education expenses • Difficult terrain and lack of transportation • No employment options for girls other than teaching • No exposure to life outside the NMDs and no local role models
Norms and Traditions	• Boys preferred rather than girls for education expenses • Boys viewed as the only breadwinners • Early marriage preferred for girls • Household work preferred rather than education for girls
Perceptions	• Lack of understanding about the broader purpose of education for girls • Fear that a family will lose community respect if girls leave their homes • Fear of girls involvement in culturally inappropriate activities • Fear of challenges to patriarchy because of girls' empowerment

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