

## Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2022



### I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

As of 23 June 2022, Pakistan has reported 1.53 million cases of COVID-19 with more than 30,000 deaths.<sup>1</sup> Since mid-June 2022, as Pakistan grapples with BA.5, a new coronavirus variant, fears of a sixth wave of the novel coronavirus have heightened.<sup>2</sup> Combined with the recent political debacle as well as the ongoing economic turmoil, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities dictating record-high petroleum prices in the country, Pakistan is beset with varied challenges and tasked with the dilemma of working towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments while undergoing a severe fiscal crisis.

Despite being prolific with regard to food production, 36.9% of the country's population remains food insecure,<sup>3</sup> a majority of which are women and children. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2018-19, about 41.7% of women of reproductive age are anaemic, with a slightly higher proportion in rural (44.3%)

than urban settings (40.2%). Similarly, adolescent girls in rural areas are more likely (58.1%) to be anaemic rather than those in urban areas (54.2%). Children fare no better; 37.6% of children under the age of 5 are affected by stunting while 7.1% experience wasting.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, only 44% of the population has access to non-contaminated drinking water and only 46% have access to safely managed sanitation facilities on household premises.<sup>5</sup> Dengue, malaria, cholera and other water-borne diseases continue to afflict the population of Pakistan.

Pakistan ranks 8th on the list of countries most vulnerable to climate change<sup>6</sup> with a recorded increase in glacial melting, erratic rainfalls, extreme temperatures, forest fires, flash floods and other climate-related events that disproportionately impact women, children, farmers, migrants, IDPs and coastal communities.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, a

government initiative to prevent and reverse ecological destruction is lacking. On the contrary, as of 2019, 90% of forest land was illegally occupied by the feudal elite, political leadership and other influential factions of society, leading to a spike in deforestation.<sup>8</sup>

As far as education is concerned, Pakistan's literacy rate has remained more or less the same for a decade (62.8% in 2020-21 as compared to 62.4% in 2018-19<sup>9</sup>) and is heavily skewed against women; compared to 71% males, only 47% women are literate.

### II. CHALLENGES IN AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Pakistan has specifically adopted SDG 4 targets on quality of education, gender equality, adult literacy, improvement of infrastructure and training of teachers. While Article 25-A enshrines the right to free and compulsory education for all children between five and sixteen years of age in the Constitution, federal and provincial governments are yet to rise up to this promise.

1 <https://covid.gov.pk/>

2 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1696304/covid-19-positivity-rate-in-karachi-climbs-to-2123pc>

3 Pakistan National Nutrition Survey (2018). Key Findings Report. <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/1951/file/Final%20Key%20Findings%20Report%202019.pdf>

4 Global Nutrition Report. Pakistan Country Profile: Malnutrition at a glance. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/pakistan/>

5 Pakistan: Spending Needs for Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - International Monetary Fund.

6 [https://germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021\\_1.pdf](https://germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_1.pdf)

7 IFRC. 2021. Climate change impacts on health and livelihoods: Pakistan Assessment.

8 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1494234>

9 Labour Force Survey 2020-21.

A significant challenge to Pakistan's commitments of 100% enrolment and retention by 2030 under the National SDG Priority Framework is that 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out-of-school children (OOSC). It took a decade (2010-2020) to bring 2.2 million OOSC back to school but according to projections, about 930,000 children dropped out in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>10</sup> undoing significant progress. To integrate OOSC, the government needs to be cognizant that the reasons for OOSC are multi-faceted and span demand and supply-side issues. Of course, there is a crucial need to direct funding to improve the quality of education vis-à-vis teacher training, a focus on early childhood education and remedial learning programs. However, to truly integrate all OOSC, it is imperative to identify which populations constitute OOSC as well as the specific barriers they face with regard to accessing education. For instance, a vast majority of OOSC (77%) reside in rural regions<sup>11</sup> and a majority (54%) of OOSC are girls. Moreover, 96% of children with disabilities are out of school.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is clear that a majority of OOSC exist on the periphery of Pakistan's social strata. However, the effective integration of these diverse groups demands equitable, need-based and multi-pronged strategies. While the provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities might increase girls' enrolment by ending the period of poverty, cash incentives to families in lieu of attendance records will be a better strategy for integrating OOSC who were employed as child labour to support their families.

Addressing financing and equity concerns is critical for improving progress on SDG 4, particularly in light of the setbacks during COVID-19. As per IMF's working paper, Pakistan's total (public and private) education spending reached 4% of GDP in 2018. However, addressing low performance in the education sector in Pakistan calls for total (public and

10 Geven, K., & Hasan, A. (2020). Learning Losses in Pakistan Due to COVID-19 School Closures.

11 Faran, H., & Zaidi, Z. (2021). The missing third: an out of school study of Pakistani 5-16 year olds. Pak Alliance for Maths and Science. Retrieved 19 December 2021, from <https://mathsandscience.pk/publications/the-missing-third/>

12 Manzoor, A., Hameed, A., & Nabeel, T. (2016). Voices of out of school children with disabilities in Pakistan. Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 16, 1099-1103.

————— “—————  
*Addressing  
financing and  
equity concerns  
is critical for  
improving  
progress on SDG 4,  
particularly in light  
of the setbacks  
during COVID-19.*  
————— ”—————

private) additional annual spending of 5.7 percentage points of GDP (from 3.9% in 2018 to 9.6% in 2030), along with improving spending efficiency.<sup>13</sup>

As far as public spending is concerned, cumulative education expenditures by federal and provincial governments in FY2021 remained at 1.77% of the GDP,<sup>14</sup> instead of the recommended global benchmark of 4-6% of GDP. According to a study conducted prior to the pandemic, Pakistan needs to invest at least Rs. 12 trillion<sup>15</sup> (USD 58 billion) in order to bring 22.8 million out-of-school boys and girls into schools. However, it should be noted that this estimate does not account for the rise in OOSC post-pandemic and thus, the requisite investment might be higher. Thus, federal and provincial governments, along with CSOs and all development partners should rally together to arrange financing for education through urgent and innovative channels. Despite the economic state of the country, the lack of investment in education at this moment will lead to backtracking on SDG 4 progress.

While it is heartening that in the education budgets for 2022-23, KP and Punjab set aside 2.4 billion (USD 11 million) and 5.5 billion (USD 26 million) for

girls' stipend programmes, no province apart from KP has adopted gender-responsive budgeting, making it difficult to ascertain the percentage of funds that are specifically channelled into girls' education on the whole. The lack of a mechanism to review indicator-specific investments and monitor progress toward gender parity in education is a significant barrier to making headway with regard to educational indicators.<sup>16</sup>

A review of provincial budgets reveals that so far there is no indication of allocating funds to rectifying learning losses incurred during COVID-19 or even assessing gaps in knowledge. A sudden shift to online and remote teaching and learning in the middle of the pandemic created an uneven playing field for learners who suffered due to the digital divide, unsupportive families or economic constraints that forced them into child labour.

While there are glaring gaps when it comes to data on the efficacy of distance learning during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, the Pakistan Economic Survey 2021-22 findings found inequitable access to distance learning media—across rural districts of Pakistan, 65% of households, 62% have smartphones and merely 23% have internet connections.

16 Khan, Asim Bashir (2021). Public Investment in Education: An Appraisal of SDG-4 in Pakistan, A White Paper, published by Pakistan Youth Change Advocates, Islamabad.

————— “—————  
*Federal and  
provincial  
governments, along  
with CSOs and  
all development  
partners should  
rally together to  
arrange financing  
for education  
through urgent and  
innovative channels.*  
————— ”—————

13 Pakistan: Spending Needs for Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -International Monetary Fund

14 Pakistan Economic Survey 2021-22

15 Khan, Asim Bashir. "Bringing all the girls to school: A case for more investment." Published by Pakistan Coalition for Education, 2020. The currency converter used for the Rs figures in this document was XE Pakistani Rupee to US Dollar conversion, Retrieved Jun 27, 2022, 06:22 UTC, from <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=60000000&From=SBD&To=USD>

Moreover, the effectiveness of digital content is questionable due to long power outages, unstable and insufficient internet bandwidth, devices being shared between multiple household members and girls having limited access to devices.

Going forward, while planning for imparting education via remote or online modalities, there needs to be a thorough audit of the digital divide so that effective and inclusive pedagogical approaches to remote and online learning leave no one behind. While some efforts to shift to blended learning were government initiatives, the majority of the ed-tech solutions were developed by private ed-tech startups. In light of this, there is a need to be mindful of the risks of the growing commercialisation of education, for in-person as well as online learning modalities.

### III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4'S ROLE IN THE SDGS FOR REVIEW

Education is what binds the integrated, indivisible framework of the SDGs and as we navigate the complex and interconnected challenges of a globalised world, education is integral for both adapting to and changing the world we inhabit, in order to make it more inclusive and equitable. Thus, there is a need for governments to embed Goal 4 in plans and policies for all SDGs.

#### Gender equality (Goal 5)

Traditionally, to the disadvantage of women and girls, gender has been the single largest factor in the disparity in education. In remote areas, the lack of transportation coupled with mobility restrictions, lack of WASH facilities, and poor awareness around menstruation lead to girls dropping out in adolescence. Thus, there is a need to advocate for gender-responsive educational policies that work to offset gender-specific barriers to educational access. That being said, education can be used as an equaliser to not only promote gender equality but also give equal opportunities to those from the poorest, most excluded and vulnerable groups. For girls, one of the ways education promotes gender equality is by reducing the chance of

“  
*Going forward, while planning for imparting education via remote or online modalities, there needs to be a thorough audit of the digital divide so that effective and inclusive pedagogical approaches to remote and online learning leave no one behind.*

early marriages and pregnancies for girls and allowing girls to attain higher levels of education.

#### Life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15)

Agriculture is an important source of food and livelihood for 42% of Pakistan's population. Crop and livestock production face imminent threats from climate change. Monocropping practices and unchecked use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides are propagating unsustainable food production models and worsening climate impact by causing land degradation, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity. Similarly, for coastal communities, rising sea levels as a result of climate change are causing degradation of mangrove forests and a decline in fish and shrimp populations thus impacting the lives and livelihoods of fisherfolk.

On one hand, there is a need to leverage education by enhancing the curriculum to include awareness-building interventions around climate change and provide climate-smart solutions that are simultaneously good for human health and environmental wellbeing. However, since exposure to climate-related events is also a leading cause of OOSC, preventing and bringing back

OOSC involves identifying communities most susceptible to climate change and working to make education accessible to them, while tailoring the educational delivery to their unique needs.

#### Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)

To achieve the goal of free and compulsory education for all, there is a need for diverse stakeholders to engage with consultative and decision-making processes to fulfil multiple roles and responsibilities. Civil society organisations (CSOs), teachers, students, parents, and wider communities should be engaged at local and national levels and work alongside the government. The robust engagement of CSOs is critical to fulfilling the SDGs by ensuring the representation of community voices. Indeed, many CSOs do the crucial work of promoting citizen-led development by mobilising people at the grassroots level to gather community-level data with the intention of identifying their unique needs and then leveraging findings to engage in policy processes. Moreover, given the economic conditions and the simultaneous need to invest adequately in education, it has become the need of the hour to finance development via partnerships with the corporate sector and philanthropic foundations. Moreover, regional and international engagement with CSOs is critical for capacity development as well as a coordinated effort for advocacy on a global scale. With only 8 years to go, there is an urgent need to pool resources and expertise for the realisation of SDGs.

“  
*The robust engagement of CSOs is critical to fulfilling the SDGs by ensuring the representation of community voices.*

## IV. KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- All consultations and policy-making processes on education response should be inclusive and deliberate in engaging relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, teachers' associations and community members to ensure that decisions undertaken reflect their needs and interests.
- Disaster risk management specific to the education system should be a priority area to increase the resilience of the education system and build an education framework that supports distance learning effectively and equitably to bridge the gender, income and rural-urban divide.
- Active coordination between federal and provincial governments is key to enabling the nationwide implementation of principles of leaving no one behind and ensuring uniformity in documenting and reporting progress.
- Improve systems for the efficient, effective and equitable allocation and utilisation of the development budget at all levels by developing a planning and implementation framework at the local level that includes local governments, education managers, and Schools Management Committee.
- Build institutional capacity for building and maintaining data management systems that allow for easy collection and collation of data to monitor progress for SDG indicators.
- Enhance curriculum across educational institutions (formal and non-formal) to ensure that students gain foundation skills, transferrable skills and technical and vocational skills for decent work as well as skills needed to understand and address



the challenges of current and future times, while effectively contributing to sustainable development.

- Prioritise action to enrol out-of-school learners, particularly girls and those from marginalised segments, by designing equity-focused and contextualised plans that cater to students' specific needs during the transition.
- Build and upgrade more schools, from primary to secondary, and ensure the provision of transport to improve girls' access to secondary and high schools.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of learners with disabilities at all levels of education by ensuring disability-friendly school premises and teacher training on disability-inclusive teaching.
- Administer economic incentive programmes for reducing OOSCY along with comprehensive awareness programmes that address and work to change mindsets that devalue girls' education.
- Work to end period poverty by creating access to menstrual hygiene products and awareness in schools.
- Incorporate meal programmes in schools, especially for young children and in areas where there is high poverty, in order to offset nutritional deficiencies and their impact on brain function and learning capacity.
- Implement and mandate teacher training programmes at all levels of education in formal, non-formal, and informal institutions by utilising existing teacher training academies and programmes as well as prioritising the formation of more institutions and making it mandatory for teachers to get official certification from verified institutions.
- Adopt a progressive taxation system to create fiscal space for higher investments in education.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms for financing public sector education, including calling upon corporations to invest in education as part of their CSR, paying fair taxes to increase government revenue, allowing for increased public spending, and strengthening government-civil society partnerships. •



The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

Unit 106 Sterten Place Condominium, 116 Maginhawa Street,  
Teachers Village East, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines  
Tel/Fax: 63 2 8441 4594  
Email: [aspbae@gmail.com](mailto:aspbae@gmail.com) | Website: [www.aspbae.org](http://www.aspbae.org)

ISBN: 978-621-95859-0-3



Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE Pakistan)  
Office no. 12Y Block 12 Business Bay Commercial  
Sector F DHA 1 Islamabad  
Tel: 051-8447966  
Email: [info@pcepak.org](mailto:info@pcepak.org)  
Website: <https://pcepak.org/>

Established in 2005, Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) registered as Society for Access to Quality Education with the aim of working towards ensuring free quality education for all, irrespective of gender, religion, and class differences, that promotes peace, tolerance, democracy and justice, and safeguards diversity. PCE is now taking on several issues including the implementation of the right to education, education governance, girls' education, education financing, public-private partnerships in education, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the course of several years, PCE established strong linkages with key stakeholders at local, provincial and national, and international levels and has been working to make coordinated efforts in highlighting the prevalent issues in education. PCE is a member organization of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).