

## Gender and Education for All THE LEAP TO EQUALITY



### Regional Overview

## South and West Asia<sup>1</sup>

The region is home to three of the world's nine most populous (E9) developing countries – Bangladesh, India and Pakistan – that weigh heavily in global education trends. It has made notable progress at nearly all levels of education, but realizing EFA remains a major challenge and substantial gender disparities persist. The commitments to international treaties and declarations<sup>2</sup> by most countries will have to be fulfilled<sup>3</sup> if education indicators, all still below world and developing country averages, are to improve.

### Early childhood care and education (ECCE): still a luxury for most children

In half the region's countries, gross enrolment ratio (GER) in pre-primary education was less than 25% in 2000 and lowest in Nepal (12.7%) and Iran (17%). ECCE is often provided by public institutions but concentrated in urban and wealthy areas where parents tend to be more aware of its benefits and sensitive to the gender issue than rural ones. As a result, girls' access to ECCE is much better than to other levels of education. Girls' enrolments are higher in all countries except Nepal and Pakistan, which have big disparities in favour of boys.

### Universal primary education: progress but significant gender disparities remain

Gender parity is closely tied to universalising primary education. Access to and participation at this level has

greatly increased in the region and total enrolment rose 19% – from almost 135 million to 160 million – between 1990 and 2000. But a fifth of children of official primary school age (more than 32 million) remain out of school and NER, at 81%, is one of the lowest of any region and below the world average of 84%.

Two-thirds of out-of-school children are girls (21 million) and the region has the greatest gender disparities in primary education of any, with a female-male enrolment ratio (GPI) of only 0.84. Very large disparities are found in Pakistan (0.74), followed by India (0.83) and Nepal (0.85). But parity has been achieved in Bangladesh and the Maldives.

Gender disparities concern not only access to school but also participation in the learning process, where the inequalities are reversed. In most countries with data, survival rates to grade 5 are often higher for girls than boys, showing that once girls have access to school, they do as well or better than boys. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have low survival rates and India has the highest survival disparity in favour of boys (GPI of 0.81).

1. This is the EFA classification of regions. The countries in South and West Asia are listed in the Table.

2. The first was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acknowledged the right of all to education and stated that elementary education would be free and compulsory and higher levels of education accessible to all on the basis of merit.

3. Primary school fees continue to be charged in Bhutan and Nepal despite legally-guaranteed free education, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

## Participation in secondary and tertiary education: significant advances over last decade

Demand for **secondary education** has increased as more pupils graduate from primary school. The median gross enrolment ratio rose by 45% between 1990 and 2000 – from 34% to almost 50%. But the GER is still very low in some countries, such as Pakistan (24.5%).

Girls' participation grew over the period, with strong gains in Bangladesh, where disparities have been reversed and girls are now in the majority (GPI up from 0.52 to 1.05). However big disparities in favour of boys remained in Pakistan (0.68), Nepal (0.71) and Sri Lanka (0.75).

Enrolment in **tertiary education** also increased substantially, though this level is still open to few students. The GER in half of the countries was below 4.7% in 1990 but had improved to below 6.6% in 2000, a rise of more than 40%. Gender disparities were generally sharp in most countries with data. Women students are few in Nepal (GPI of 0.27), Bangladesh (0.55) and India (0.66).

### The right to education: a concern for adult women

South and West Asia has the world's lowest adult literacy rates, with only 55% of the population of 15 and over able to read and to write in 2000, far below the world average of 80%. Almost half the globe's illiterates live in the region and their number is growing, mainly in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Almost two-thirds of the region's adult illiterates are women (412 million), a proportion expected to increase slightly by 2015 on present trends. Substantial gender gaps to the disadvantage of women are found in most countries, and Nepal and Pakistan have fewer than five literate women to 10 men.

## Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education

Achieving this goal involves understanding what holds girls and boys back so that policies can be designed to overcome these obstacles and improve access to and participation in education.

Urgent action is needed in countries where the gender gap is still large in primary and secondary education. An overriding priority is to tackle poverty constraints by reducing the direct and indirect cost of schooling to families and addressing the incidence of child labour. The school environment requires equal attention. Sexual violence and harassment within schools, particularly where HIV/AIDS is prevalent, needs to be confronted vigorously. Revising biases in teaching materials, training teachers to be gender aware and working with them and parents to break taboos are essential ingredients of an "engendered" strategy.

As in other regions, girls' enrolments have increased faster than those of boys over the decade, easing disparities in both primary and secondary education. The median ratio of female-male enrolment at secondary level rose from 0.44 to 0.82. But two of the four countries in the region with data may not achieve the gender parity goal either in 2005 or 2015 unless appropriate policies are put in place. Prospects for countries achieving it are based on recent rates of change in the gender parity index in primary and secondary enrolment.

### Countries that have already achieved gender parity:

- **Primary education (2 out of 6 with data):** Bangladesh and the Maldives.
- **Secondary education:** None of the six countries with data.

### Gender parity prospects

(4 countries with data in 1990 and 2000 for both primary and secondary education have not yet achieved it):

- Countries likely to achieve parity in 2005 (2): Iran and Nepal.
- Countries likely to miss parity in 2005 but to achieve it by 2015: none.
- Countries that may not achieve it in 2015 either at primary, secondary education or both levels (2): Bangladesh and India.

These are forecasts based on past trends. In the two countries likely to miss reaching gender parity at secondary level (Bangladesh), or at primary and secondary levels (India) by 2015, policies are or can be put in place to enable the pace of progress to accelerate.

### Resources and aid

Eliminating gender disparities and inequality while achieving all the other EFA goals is costly. Countries will need to allocate more of their own resources and use them more effectively. Half the countries in the region with data were spending less than 3.8% of national income on education in 2000 – up from 2.7% in 1990 but still lower than the 4.1% average for developing countries.

Globally, bilateral and multilateral aid to education fell between 1998/99 and 2000/01, though it increased for basic education.

South and West Asia (with one third of the world's out-of-school children) faces similar difficulties to other regions but receives less than 10% of the total bilateral aid to education while sub-Saharan Africa (27%) and the Arab States (16%) receive more. In addition, current problems of turning aid commitments into reality do not augur well for international assistance to countries at risk or serious risk of not achieving the EFA goals, particularly the gender targets. ■

### ACRONYMS

**FTI** Fast-Track Initiative. Designed primarily by the World Bank, the FTI was launched in April 2002 as a process that would provide quick and incremental, technical and financial support to countries that have policies but are not on track to attain Universal Primary Education by 2015.

**GER** Gross enrolment ratio. Number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age group.

**GPI** Gender parity index. Ratio of female to male value of a given indicator. A gender parity index equals 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 means a disparity in favour of boys; a GPI > 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls.

**GNP** Gross national product.

**NER** Net enrolment ratio. Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age-group.

**UIS** UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

## South and West Asia: Selected education indicators, 2000.

Countries	Total population (thousands)	Compulsory education (age group)	Legal guarantee for free education	Adult literacy rate (%)		Pre-primary education		Primary education		Secondary education		Tertiary education		Total public expenditure on education as % of GNP	EFA Development Index (EDI)
				Total	GPI	GER (%) Total	GPI	NER (%) Total	GPI in GER	% of female teachers	GER (%) Total	GPI	GER (%) Total		
Afghanistan	21 765	7-12	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1.0	...	...	...
Bangladesh <sup>2</sup>	137 439	6-10	Yes	40.0	0.61	24.6	1.12	88.9	1.01	45.7	1.05	6.6	0.55	2.5	0.70
Bhutan <sup>1</sup>	2 085	...	Yes	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	5.1	...
India <sup>2</sup>	1 008 937	6-14	Yes	57.2	0.66	25.8	1.03	85.7	0.83	48.7	0.71	10.5	0.66	4.1	0.66
Iran, Islamic Republic of	70 330	6-10	Yes	76.0	0.83	17.0	1.07	73.6	0.96	78.1	0.93	9.9	0.93	4.4	0.85
Maldives	291	...	No	96.9	1.00	49.9	1.02	99.0	1.00	55.3	1.07	...	...	...	0.98
Nepal <sup>1</sup>	23 043	...	Yes	41.7	0.40	12.7	0.79	72.4	0.85	50.6	0.75	4.6	0.27	3.6	0.61
Pakistan <sup>2</sup>	141 256	...	No	43.2	0.49	55.0	0.74	60.1	0.74	24.5	0.68	...	...	1.8	0.53
Sri Lanka	18 924	5-14	Yes	91.6	0.94	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
South and West Asia	1 424 070	...	...	55.3	0.66	25.2	1.08	80.6	0.84	49.7	0.82	6.6	0.55	3.8	...
Developing countries	4 700 496	...	...	73.6	0.82	30.9	0.99	82.1	0.92	59.9	1.01	10.4	0.73	4.1	...
World	6 041 386	...	...	79.7	0.87	46.7	1.01	83.8	0.93	77.5	1.06	22.9	1.04	4.5	...

Source: EFA GMR 2003, Statistical annex.

Data in italics are for 1999.

1. Primary school fees continue to be charged despite legally-guaranteed free education, according to a World Bank survey (2002).

2. Countries invited to participate in the Analytical Fast-Track Initiative, which aims to provide them with technical support for the mainstream Fast-Track Initiative (FTI).

Note: EDI is a new composite index that incorporates indicators for the four most quantifiable EFA goals – UPE, adult literacy, gender parity and quality of education. It aims to give a broader picture of progress toward EFA and identify countries doing well on all fronts, those succeeding in only some areas and those with all-round difficulties (for further explanation, see Appendix 2 in the full Report). The EDI for a country is the arithmetical mean of the observed values of indicators selected for each of the EFA goals. Since these are percentages, the value can vary from 0 to 1. The higher it is, the closer a country is to the goal and the greater its EFA achievement.