



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Education in the Northern Areas



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www.akdn.org

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Transition

The data gives the clearest possible message regarding the importance of attention to transition points. The highest dropout and repetition rates are found right at the points when children enter and leave the different levels within the school system (primary, middle and high). This is when children are often unprepared for the demands placed on them and the schools do not provide the supports children need to succeed. The first few years of school are the most critical of all. This is when systems fail children the worst, resulting in them either leaving school altogether or becoming established in persistent patterns of under-achievement and a lack of enthusiasm for learning. Focused investment in providing a welcoming and supportive environment which supports effective learning would result in drastically reduced dropout and repetition rates and their associated costs (both for the individual and for the system) and increased completion and achievement.⁸ The benefits would resonate across individual students and their families, the education system and society. As such, attention to supporting successful transition should be a top priority for government, civil society organisations and donors alike.

Introduction: Changes over Time

The physical features of the Federally Administrated Northern Areas (FANA) of Pakistan (population 1 million) make it one of the remotest and most inaccessible areas in the world. Few roads penetrate the huge sweep of the Himalayas and these are mostly unpaved and dangerous. For many months in the year, the remotest valleys and their inhabitants are cut off from the outside world. Desert conditions and drought during summer months affect many areas, and food security is low in some areas. The poor infrastructure creates difficult conditions for economic improvement. Educational services are hard to deliver and even harder to supervise. Post-primary education, particularly for girls, is often not available in the vicinity, and cultural and economic constraints make it difficult for girls to travel. Early marriage and domestic work interfere with schooling and make it hard for girls to study. Parents, communities and children are demanding education, but there is a continuing need to develop the infrastructure and capacity to fulfil their demands.

Twenty-five years ago, the female literacy rate in the Northern Areas was under three percent, compared to 16 percent for Pakistan as a whole (Government of Pakistan, 1981). By 1994, enrolment in primary schools was 60 percent for boys but still only 29 percent for girls. Only one in 10 girls attended high school¹ and in many areas, there were no education facilities at all open to girls. In Ghizer district, there were 20 government middle and high schools – all for boys only.

The situation in Northern Pakistan is now strikingly different. By 2005, 82 percent of boys had been enrolled in primary schools, and girls' enrolments are well over double what they were 10 years ago. Over 88,000 girls are enrolled in more than 1,000 schools that offer female or co-education opportunities. (Northern Areas EMIS). More than two-thirds of girls attend primary school, and in many valleys the figure is over 90 percent, with steadily increasing numbers of girls going on to middle and high school. Enrolments have increased dramatically – especially with the EC supported Northern Pakistan Education Programme (NPEP), which started in 1997 and will be completed in 2008, and the earlier Social Action Programme² (SAP) which started in 1993 but was

ended prematurely. By 2005, 30,000 more girls were attending schools in the Northern Areas compared to when NPEP started eight years earlier. In those few years, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for girls has jumped from 38 percent to 67 percent (compared to 60 percent for the rest of Pakistan).

Examination of the change in particular valleys highlights the significance of recent shifts. In Nagar, for example, in 1994 only four percent of girls attended school and there were no education opportunities at all for girls beyond primary. Only four high schools and six middle schools existed - all boys' schools. The primary enrolment ratio for girls in Nagar is now 92 percent. Girls are not only entering primary schools in droves but go on to 22 newly established middle and high schools that cater to some 2,700 girls. Even at the high school level, 70 percent of girls are still in school. This reflects an extraordinary shift in attitudes toward girls' education amongst a community which only relatively recently opposed education, not only for girls but also for boys, and famously burned down a boys' school. So dramatic has this shift been that in several of the communities parents have clubbed together to arrange daily transport for their daughters to travel to Karimabad to attend college once they complete high school.

While plenty of challenges remain, the gains have been remarkable. What is the explanation behind this? Government, the SAP schools and private (both for profit and not-for-profit) education alike have played important roles in increasing access. Within the non-state sector, the Aga Khan Education Services (AKES, P) has helped provide education to significant numbers of girls and change entrenched attitudes about the education of girls and women. It has worked with communities to establish 22 middle and high schools - often making use of underutilised government facilities to operate a second shift serving girls.

Concentrated in Northern Pakistan and Sindh, the Aga Khan Education Service, Pakistan operates 186 AKES, P schools and supports 200 community-based and some 75 government schools all over Pakistan. These enrol about 62,000 children at any one time.

The first AKES, P schools in the Northern Areas were started in the 1940s, and now AKES, P operates 122 of its own schools and supports 123 community-based schools. One of the distinguishing features of the AKES, P system is its emphasis on girls' education. There is a clear policy maintaining a 65:35 ratio of

⁸ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007 (www.unesco.org)

¹ 1994 Northern Pakistan Education Planning Exercise

² The Social Action Programme began in 1993 as the federal government's main vehicle for improving social services – including basic health, population, water supply and primary education – nationwide.

girls to boys in its schools. Only in cases where there is no provision for boys does AKES, P allow the ratio to increase up to 50:50 – and even then that is only if all girls in the village have been admitted into school.

Schools and Enrolment in the Northern Areas

The Government is the largest education provider with over 1,000 schools in the six districts of the Northern Areas. Government schools include three different types of classifications of schools - federal government (FG) schools, mosque schools and non-formal education centres. There are 922 federal government schools in the Northern Areas; well over half (530) of these are boys' schools, whereas there are fewer than 200 girls' government schools. Approximately 200 schools are co-educational. Even where schools are nominally co-educational, enrolments are invariably heavily skewed towards boys. Indeed, more than 100 "co-educational" schools in Astore and Diamer have no girls enrolled at all.

Table 1 Student Enrolment across All Types of Schools, Northern Areas, 2005

| Level | Data | Government | SAP Comm. | AKES | Other Private | Grand Total |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Primary | Boys | 45,259 | 16,673 | 7,304 | 19,973 | 89,209 |
| | Girls | 26,744 | 21,649 | 9,913 | 8,004 | 66,310 |
| Middle | Boys | 16,084 | 32 | 2,138 | 5,457 | 23,711 |
| | Girls | 7,963 | 586 | 4,951 | 1,909 | 15,409 |
| High | Boys | 5,933 | 1 | 212 | 1,509 | 7,655 |
| | Girls | 2,775 | 69 | 2,777 | 768 | 6,389 |
| Total Boys | | 67,276 | 16,706 | 9,654 | 26,939 | 120,575 |
| Total Girls | | 37,482 | 22,304 | 17,641 | 10,681 | 88,108 |
| Overall Enrolment | | 50 % | 19 % | 13 % | 18 % | 100 % |

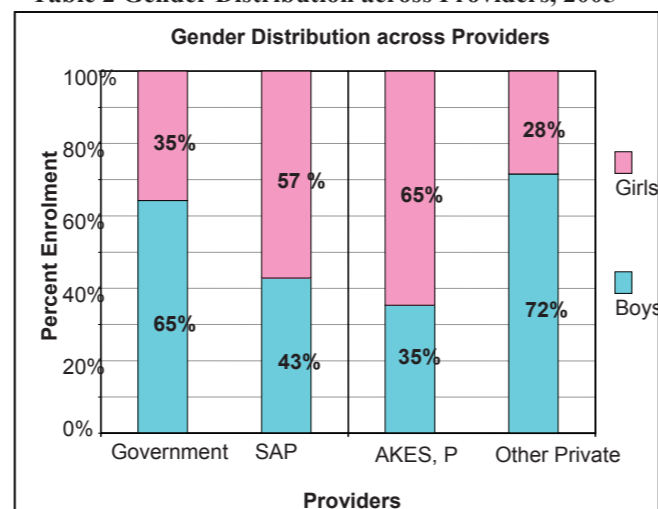
One of the most interesting points from Table 1 is the fact that government schools account for half of total enrolments. In other words, the non-state sector is highly significant in terms of education opportunities in the North, as indeed in the rest of Pakistan.³ Private schools have mushroomed in recent years. Just between 2002 and 2005, 440 private schools opened. The Government opened 153 schools during the same period. The increase in private provision has been most significant in Gilgit and Ghizer districts with many new non-state schools (in addition to AKES, P) creating education opportunities for students. In Ghizer, private providers make up 45 percent of all education provision. In Skardu, where other

education providers have only recently started working, one in four children attends a private school. Attitudes toward education are changing. In many places, it is no longer a case of community officials and leaders convincing parents to send their children to school. Now, parents are demanding schools, be they public or private, which they believe will provide quality education for their children. In practice, there is a good deal of movement between the different systems as parents make choices based on their perceptions of affordable quality.

Non-State Interventions – Key Contribution to Girls Increasing Enrolments

Girls account for just over one-third (36 percent) of government school enrolments. In SAP community schools, which also were established with the deliberate intention of bringing more girls into school, girls make up 57 percent of the enrolments and in AKES, P schools the figure is 65 percent. AKES, P's most significant contribution is at the middle and high school levels. The organisation accounts for 32 percent of all female enrolment in middle school, and is the single biggest provider at high school level. AKES, P and government female student numbers in reality differ by only a couple of students at this level, and between them, they account for 87 percent of enrolments. In certain districts, private provision is particularly significant – e.g. in Ghizer, private providers account for more than 70 percent of girls' provision at the middle and higher levels.

Table 2 Gender Distribution across Providers, 2005



When AKES, P first started to work in the North of Pakistan, there was a dearth of any schools open to girls. The challenge then was to get them into primary school. As time went on, more government, SAP and other private schools started up, the majority at primary level (for example, all but 10 of the 540 SAP schools are primary). The critical gap in many areas

of questionable quality, have poor classroom conditions, and maintain student-teacher ratios which are generally much higher than those of government schools. Parents vote with their feet when they are not satisfied.

One of the reasons for AKES, P's low dropout rates from Kacchi is the training it has started to conduct for its kacchi teachers. Teachers learn easy-to-implement, child-centred active learning methods. Many AKES, P kacchi classrooms have established learning corners, where children learn basic concepts and through play lay the foundations for subsequent more academic learning. However, the challenges of enabling teachers to understand the concepts of sound early education and development are many.

Reflections and Implications for Action

Importance of Data

The analysis of education data from different time periods and disaggregated by system, gender, grade/level etc. provides both affirmation of achievements and insights into the key challenges which need to be addressed – in terms of geographical areas, grades, different types of schools, quality issues, opportunities for both boys and girls etc. Regular analysis of this type of data can provide a basis for action which responds to the real issues. It thus has a central role in ensuring quality learning opportunities for all the children of the Northern Areas.

Access and Gender

Access to school for both boys and girls has increased dramatically, particularly over the last eight to 10 years. Although overall enrolments are considerably lower for girls, they actually complete primary school in larger numbers than boys. Despite this, there are three boys for every two girls in middle school – a clear illustration of the way their children's gender comes into play as parents make decisions about who will continue schooling post-primary and at around puberty. Interestingly, once the high school level is reached, boys and girls are present in roughly equal numbers. Access remains an important issue. A third of girls are still not in primary school and in a few of the most conservative areas, girls' enrolment rates are still below 10 percent. Ongoing analyses of gender issues in education are critical given the evolving picture of enrolment, dropout, repetition and success at different stages for girls and boys.

Community engagement

Community support for education is key to improving access. Where the gains have been most impressive invariably this has been preceded by a turnaround in attitudes such that families and community leaders are demanding education opportunities for their children – and often creating them through the establishment of private schools, hiring of extra teachers, transport arrangements etc. This shift in attitudes results, in part, from the local advocacy and provision efforts of AKES, P and other civil society organisations. The emergence over time of a group of well-educated, capable young people (and especially girls) who are seen to be making important contributions to the community then takes over as the key element in ensuring that demand and engagement are sustained.

Quality

Families and communities are increasingly concerned with not just access but quality. Indeed, the two are interlinked as is illustrated by the substantial movement between schools and systems. If education is perceived as being useful for children, both in the present and for their futures, families will make considerable effort to ensure their continuation in school. Where this is not the case, children either switch schools or drop out altogether. The high dropout and repetition figures are a clear indication that quality issues are in need of serious and continuing attention within all types of schools. Effective approaches to improving quality bring together professional development and in-class mentoring support for teachers, strengthened school leadership, enhanced community engagement and improved system supports.

Private schools

The burgeoning numbers of private schools is testament to parents who desire to offer their children a quality education. Private schools are perceived as "better". The very high dropout rates from these private schools indicate how gravely many families are being disappointed. This is because most of the new private schools are not part of any system of support, supervision or quality assurance. The need for a system to ensure basic quality standards is clear so that all schools, including private schools, adhere to basic requirements regarding quality of teachers, training, teacher/ child ratios, facilities etc.

³ 42 percent of students in Pakistan attend private schools.

and where there is more emphasis on primary and middle schools in many areas.

In a parent meeting in Nagar, parents pleaded with AKES, P to open a school in their village, since the road and travel conditions were not favourable to their girls walking to the neighbouring village. Since there were not enough girls to justify a school, AKES, P questioned the possibility of establishing a girls' school and deliberated with the community members. The community, so anxious to educate their children, agreed to a co-education high school for all. In this conservative community where girls were formerly never seen in public and are generally married before the end of adolescence, a co-education facility at the high school level is a massive break with tradition. This shift is the result of the successful identification of key leaders who were open to change, an understanding and respect for what the community was ready for at any given time, commitment to long term investment in education and resultant opportunities for girls who successfully completed their education to obtain jobs as teachers.

--Field Notes, Nagar, April 2006

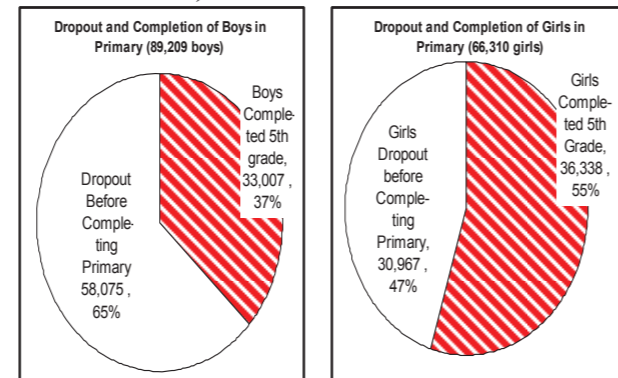
Primary Completion

Primary Completion (K-5) is a key EFA indicator and is one of the Millennium Development Goals. On average, across all schools, almost half of the children who enrol in school complete the primary cycle. However, only one in five does so without repeating at least one year. Significantly, more children in AKES, P schools – some 76 percent - complete primary (43 percent of them without repetition). The private school figures for completion need to be treated with some caution as many of the private schools are very new. However, there is cause for concern given the steady increase of private schools in the Northern areas and in Pakistan in general. Many parents initially enrol their children in private schools because of the presumed higher standards. However, many private schools employ poor teachers who lack certification, and have little or no training compared to government or AKES, P schools.

Table 5 Primary Completion Rates, Northern Areas, 2005

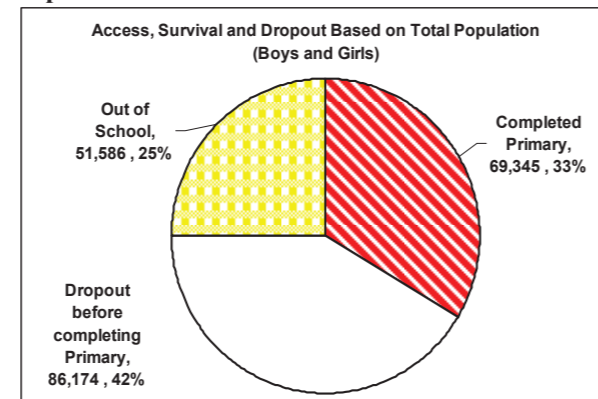
| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| Overall | 43 % |
| Government | 44 % |
| SAP | 49 % |
| AKES, P | 76 % |
| Other Private | 23 % |

Figure 1 Primary Completion by Gender (overall Northern Areas)



Once enrolled, 55 percent of girls complete primary, as compared to 37 percent of boys⁵. Interestingly, though 23,000 more boys enter primary school, 3,000 more girls complete primary level education. However, fewer girls continue on to middle school.

Figure 2 Access, Survival and Dropout Based on Total Population



The number of students dropping out from primary school adds to an already high number of out of school children. Two out of three children in the Northern areas either do not enter primary school or drop out before completing primary, hence lacking the basic standards of literacy and numeracy.

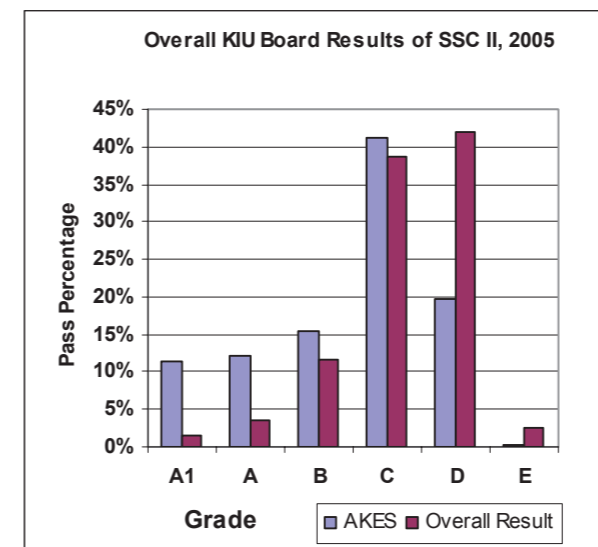
For those who do complete primary, the transition between primary and middle school is a bigger challenge for girls than boys. Social barriers to mobility as they enter adolescence, religious taboos, usefulness in the home among other factors, hinder girls' attendance in schools at the higher levels. The lack of schools for girls at the middle and high levels amplifies these barriers to their matriculation.

⁵ In AKES, P schools, 84% of girls and 65% of boys complete primary school.

Learning Achievement - High School Pass Rates

The most critical aspect in the assessment of how education systems are performing revolves around whether or not children are learning. At present, the only examinations which are common across all schools, and which are therefore comparable, are those at the end of the final year of high school (year 10). The results are telling. The general pass rate for all students for 2004-2005 was 59 percent. The pass rate for AKES, P students was 88 percent. Additionally, 57 of the 68 students achieving A1 (the highest distinction) attended AKES, P schools.

Table 6 Overall Matriculation Results, KIU Board 2005



In the Northern Areas, for every 1,000 students that enrol in a kacchi classroom, only 33 pass the final examination at the end of high school. This result foreshadows poorly on the future of the Northern areas, which rests on the shoulders of its future graduates. Additionally, because of high repetition, it would take an average of 14.5 years for a student to complete the 11-year cycle, meaning that most would be over 20 by the time they finish secondary education. More opportunities for non-formal education and adult literacy could help alleviate this burden, and create opportunities for economic empowerment for both males and females.

Internal Efficiency Indicators

Promotion, repetition, dropout and completion are key means of gauging internal efficiency. Below is a table summarising the internal efficiency indicators across a large sample of all types of schools in NAs.⁶

⁶ Calculated using UNESCO's reconstructed pupil cohort analysis method. Sample of schools includes all government schools and samples of SAP, AKES, P, and

Table 7 Internal Efficiency Indicators, All schools Northern Areas, 2005

| | Kacchi | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------|--------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Promotion rate | 63 | 74 | 78 | 77 | 72 | 55 |
| Repetition rate | 20 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 15 | 18 |
| Dropout rate | 17 | 15 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 27 |
| Survivors to the Grade | 100 | 79 | 65 | 58 | 51 | 43 |
| | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |

Promotion refers to moving from one class to the next each year. Dropout refers to those children who have left school during/at the end of a year. Repetition rate is calculated as the proportion of pupils who study in the same grade in the following school year. Promotion + Dropout + Repetition = 100% i.e. all children attending school are either promoted and move up, or they repeat, or they dropout.

Note the high repetition and dropout rates at the two transition points (Kacchi and Grade 5). The high dropout and repetition in Kacchi points to a lack of readiness amongst children for school, or perhaps more importantly, a lack of readiness of the school for young children. At Grade 5, high repetition rates again point to a lack of both child and school readiness – readiness to ensure the student can deal with the different challenges of middle school, and sometimes of course the existence of a middle school within reach. High dropout rates are also indicative of the low levels of motivation of children to continue further education.

Repetition

Comparing repetition across different systems has limitations since each utilises different criteria for passing and advancement. Having said that, it is the only means of comparing how each system does in enabling its students to progress. Below are the repetition rates for a sample of schools for 2004-2005.

Table 8 Percent Repetition by Administrator

| | Kacchi | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Av |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gov't | 19 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 19 | 18 |
| SAP | 29 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 21 | 25 | 21 |
| AKES, P | 18 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 11 | 8 | 11 |
| Other Private | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 7 |
| Overall | 20 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 16 | 18 | 15 |

other private schools. A total of 1,346 schools are included in the sample.

The Ministry of Education has mandated automatic promotion up to Grade 3. Despite this, repetition remains common - sometimes at the request of parents, sometimes for administrative convenience e.g. if there is an imbalance in class sizes. At the primary level, repetition rates in Kacchi, at an average of 20 percent, are almost twice that of Grades 1-4. Teachers of kacchi classes are generally the least qualified, have had access to the least training and usually no training in developmentally appropriate methods for working with young children. Kacchi classes are often held in the worst classrooms, if indeed they have a room at all, and are usually the most overcrowded (sometimes up to 100 children per room). This is in part because they often take on a custodial baby-sitting function – with officially underage children⁷ who are not actually admitted there. High repetition rates in Kacchi are partly due to the underage children that were not expected to move up and will repeat until they are of school-official age. However, the consequence of early repetition of classes bodes poorly for future success.

Within the government system, the last grade of primary (Grade 5) also has high repetition rates. Fear that the student might not be academically ready for middle school, weak foundations and content knowledge of primary grades, and parents' unwillingness to pay the higher fees associated with middle school, are reasons often cited for high repetition rates in Grade 5.

Repetition rates are the lowest in private education schools. Lower repetition rates may be somewhat attributable to parents' conscious support of their children's progress. Furthermore, since private education usually carries with it a financial burden, parents are more likely to withdraw their child from school and enrol him in "free" schools, rather than having him repeat a year.

Repetition is not only detrimental for the individual child. It also adds massive costs to the system. Resources are devoted to a repeater which could have otherwise been used to permit another child into the system, or hire another teacher for a school. Additionally, classrooms become larger since repeater students are in class with new entrants, making teaching and learning difficult for everyone.

⁷ Approximately 8,700 children were not admitted in the 2004-2005 school year but attended classes.

The table below details some of the costs of repetition:

Table 9 Cost of Repetition

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Repeaters | 26,852 |
| Cost per child | PKR 4,313 |
| Additional Teachers | 895 |
| Additional Classrooms | 597 |
| Total Cost (in millions) | PKR 247 |

Average cost of classroom construction estimated at three times a teacher's annual salary (World Bank, 2003)

Dropout

Calculating dropout is not easy. Particularly when there is no accurate data available on transfer of students between schools or systems, dropout figures can overstate the number of students that have really left school. Using the school sample, the following is dropout by class and administrator.

Table 10 Percent Dropout by Administrator

| | Kacchi | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Av |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gov't | 16 | 13 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 25 | 14 |
| SAP | 15 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 11 | 67 | 16 |
| AKES, P | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 5 |
| Other Private | 29 | 42 | 18 | 15 | 13 | 9 | 25 |
| Overall | 17 | 15 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 27 | 15 |

In looking at overall number of dropouts in the system, more than half of the students that enrol in schools drop out before completing primary. As with repetition, the highest levels of dropout are seen at major transition points in the system, namely Kacchi (starting primary) and Grade 5 (the transition to middle school). The dropout rate is significantly lower in AKES, P schools than in other systems, especially at the kacchi level, where it is imperative that children remain in school.

Since many kacchi classes have become downward extensions of grade 1 (where rote memorisation is common), high dropout rates in Kacchi in government and SAP schools are not surprising. Lack of interest in school is often cited as the primary reason for the sizeable dropout at this stage. The real crisis in education is during these early years of primary.

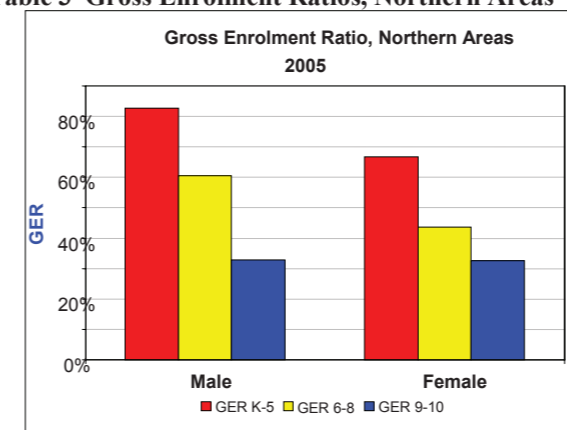
The extremely high dropout rates for other private schools (seven times greater than AKES, P schools and double that of government schools) are telling. Though hard to generalise since private education providers vary, many private schools employ teachers

thus shifted to middle and high school. AKES, P has responded to this demand from the girls and communities themselves – some 60 percent of the 96 girls' high schools in the Northern Areas are AKES, P supported institutions.

Gross Enrolment Ratios

In the Northern Areas, in 2005, there were approximately 324,000 children of school going age. Of these, 208,000 were enrolled in school. Overall, the gross enrolment ratio for education (K-10) is 64 percent (57 percent for girls and 71 percent for boys). At the primary school level, 83 percent of boys and 66 percent of girls are enrolled in school. While the improvements over time, discussed above, have been impressive, the fact remains that almost 14,000 more girls than boys are out of school at the primary level. The SAP review⁴ identified poverty as the most important factor contributing to this, and 39 percent of respondents cited the need for girls' contributions in domestic work. Over one-third regarded female education as irrelevant, and a third cited the importance of female teachers.

Table 3 Gross Enrolment Ratios, Northern Areas



The above graph reveals an interesting anomaly. In contrast to virtually all developing countries (and indeed the rest of Pakistan), the significant gender disparities at primary level actually decrease as children go up through the school system. The GER for boys at the primary level is 83 percent, and GER for girls at the same level is 67 percent. This gap in GERs narrowed marginally in middle school - despite the fact that there are twice as many middle schools for boys as for girls. By high school, the percent of boys and girls in school are almost equal - approximate GER of 33 percent. It is clear that the steady participation of girls in schools at the middle and high level is not only a factor of access, but also

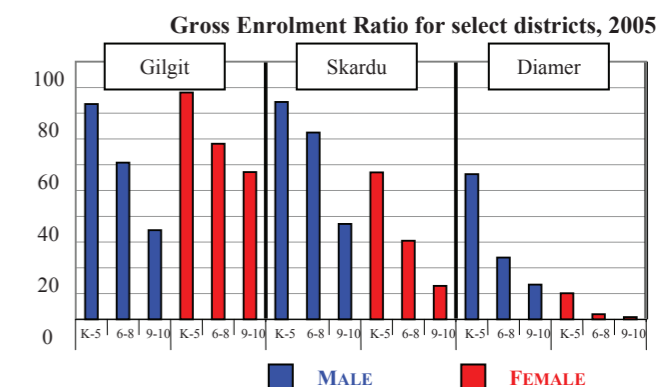
⁴ Gender Equity in Education in Pakistan, Evaluation of the education component of Social Action Programme Project I. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Netherlands. 1999.

of learning opportunities. In some areas, such as Gilgit, girls actually outnumber boys in high school: GER is 49 percent for girls, 40 percent for boys. With poor options for continuing education and the lure of paid employment in an urban area, boys appear to be at a higher risk of dropout and failure, especially in town, as compared to girls. Further investigation is needed to understand this situation.

Variation across Districts

There is substantial variation in enrolment ratios both within and between districts. Below is a chart of the Gross Enrolment Ratios in three select districts of the Northern areas. Interestingly, the two districts in which AKES, P has worked for many years (Gilgit and Ghizer) have the highest enrolment rates. The three districts (Astore, Ghanche and Skardu) in which AKES, P has started to work only over the last few years have relatively lower GERs. AKES, P has no interventions in Diamer, apart from offering training to a few government teachers.

Table 4 Gross Enrolment Ratios in Select Districts of Northern Pakistan (2005)



In Diamer, where religious conservatism has minimised education interventions, 72 percent of children are out of school. Only 10 percent of girls are enrolled in primary. There is one girls' government middle school and one girls' government high school in the entire district, giving access to only 400 girls out of 7,000. The communities' unwillingness to allow non-state partners to aid the Government in achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) has resulted in the deliberate exclusion of girls. AKES, P has started dialogue with community members to support change, but it will be a long and slow process.

The contrast with Gilgit is striking. Primary enrolment for Gilgit stands at 85 percent. It is almost 75 percent for the school system as a whole. Half the children in Gilgit are enrolled in high school as compared to less than 26 percent in Skardu where the gender disparities, while improving, remain marked