Bridging the gap
Holistic education policy to foster opportunities for girls in rural Pakistan

20 YEARS
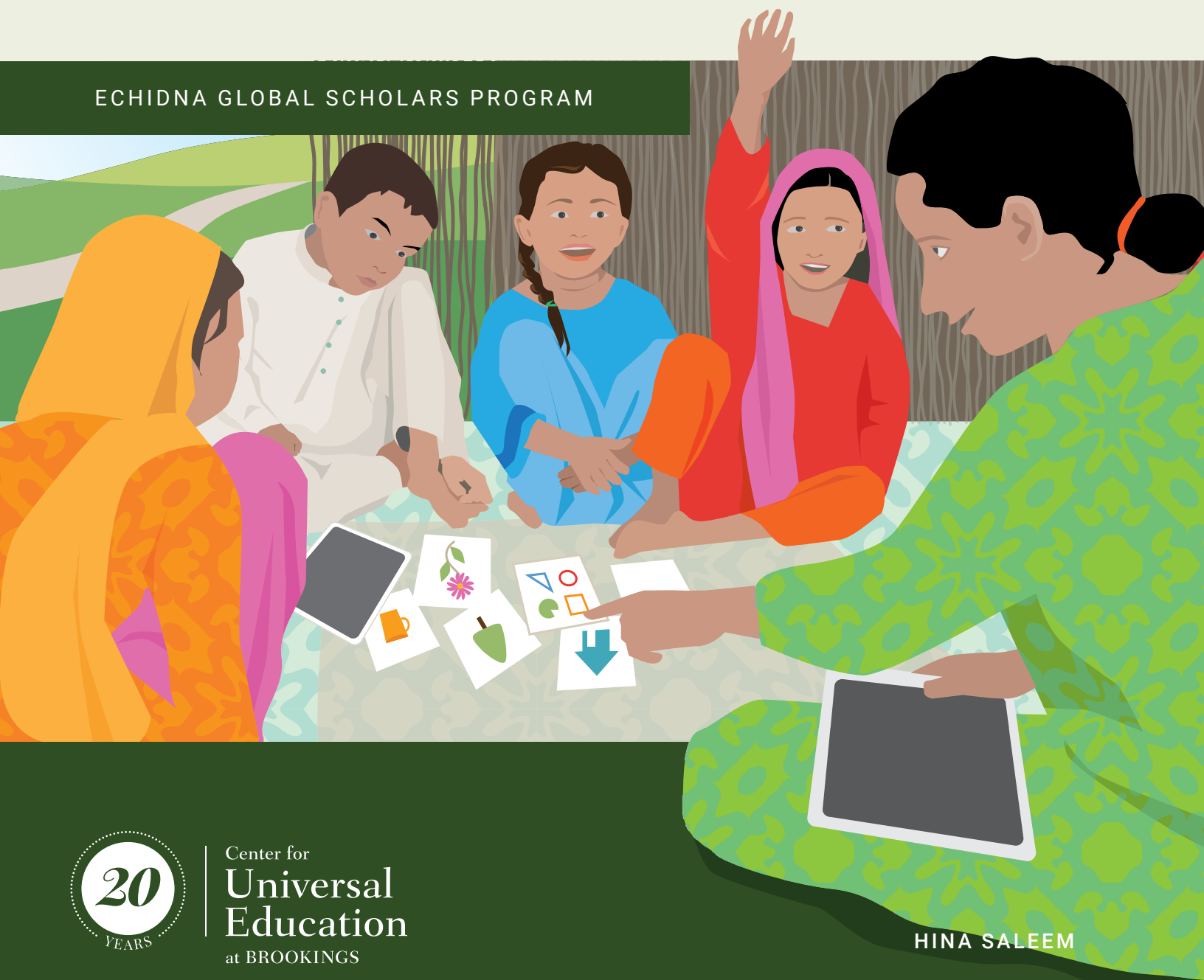
Center for
Universal
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at BROOKINGS

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Executive summary

Seven out of ten girls in rural Sindh are excluded from schooling. This happens for a myriad of reasons and occurs both in the presence and absence of operational school buildings. When schools are present, the challenges that children—especially girls—face due to their economic and social context often go unaddressed; children who are able to enroll in school often find their learning affected by classroom design and practices and experiences that mirror the exclusion they experience outside of school. At the broader level, this exclusion is reflected in limited representation of the needs and aspirations of sizable rural populations in Pakistan's formal education system and the pathways beyond it.

This policy brief presents findings from on-the-ground research in rural settlements in Sindh province that explores the disparities between boys and girls in enrollment and continuation of schooling in addition to overall inadequate education outcomes. It also provides policy recommendations to support all children and particularly girls in meeting their education needs and aspirations.

Education policy must respond to these challenges of unmet education needs and aspirations by taking a holistic, welfare-based approach that supports children to overcome the effects of exclusionary conditions to meet their education needs. However, the benefits of such an approach can only be realized if teaching practices and learning experiences are contextualized, build a connection with local knowledge, question root causes of exclusion and support and prepare all children in negotiating pathways beyond education.

I. In Pakistan, children from rural areas—particularly girls—are more likely to be out of school

Pakistan's rural population is significantly underserved and disproportionately affected by the low quality of the public systems responsible for protecting its rights. Education is a clear example, where significant inequalities exist between urban and rural areas, with girls and young women bearing the brunt of ineffective public services. Of the 20 million children not going to school, 4 out of every 5 live in rural parts of the country (PAMS, 2021), even though only about two-thirds of school-aged children reside in rural areas. Within rural contexts, girls make up 3 out of every 5 children not in school (PAMS, 2021). Not surprisingly, this inequality in educational access contributes to unequal education outcomes; Pakistan is amongst the very few low-to-middle-income countries where a sizeable gender gap continues to exist at the primary completion level (Evans et al., 2021).

Primary completion rates for Pakistan have shown improvement in recent years, yet these gains are seen primarily in two provinces: Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) (see figure 1). In Sindh, primary completion has stagnated at around 60 percent, and in Balochistan it has decreased 8 percentage points. Sindh, the second-most populated province in Pakistan, also has the largest disparity between urban and rural areas when it comes to school participation rates: 29 percentage points versus less than 17 for the rest of the provinces (PSLM, 2020). Given Sindh's sizeable population, it is imperative that these education inequalities within the province be addressed if Pakistan is to achieve universal primary education and see significant progress in successive education levels.

FIGURE 1. Pakistan's primary completion rates vary widely by province
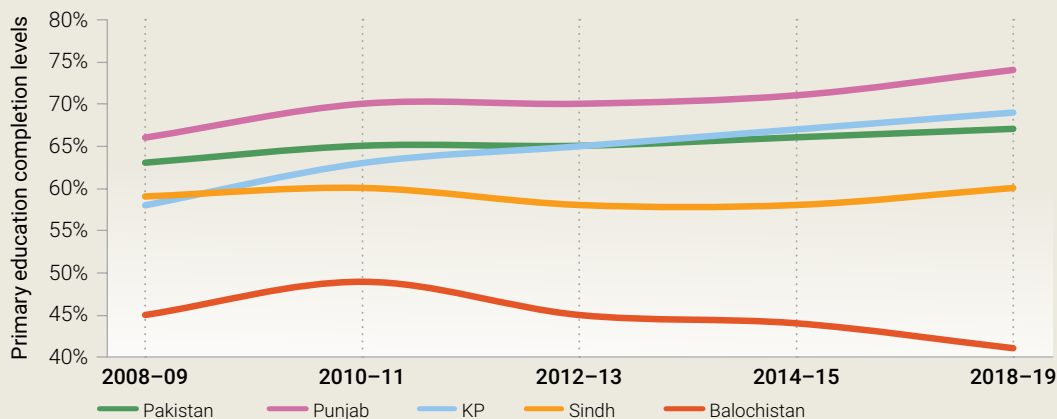
Source: Policy framework for out of school children, World Bank, 2020

Note: In addition to Sindh, Pakistan has three other provinces: KP, Balochistan and Punjab. Other territories, not classified as provinces, include Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Education inequity in Sindh is expected to further increase due to massive floods that hit Pakistan in August 2022, affecting large swathes of rural Sindh. In addition to the floods' direct effect on school access and learning, they also impacted poverty rates, nutrition and health of children, which are in turn expected to negatively affect school attendance and learning in the long term (PDNA, 2022). Apart from learning losses experienced by the province due to COVID-related school closures from February 2020 to September 2021 (ASER, 2021). To arrest these trends that have the potential to amplify exclusion, efforts to rehabilitate communities and schools must consider both the urgent and long-term needs and aspirations of children in rural areas, so they are able to (re)enter, learn, and thrive in schools.

If the intention and spirit of education policy and practice is to engage out-of-school children, particularly girls, in quality learning opportunities, it must respond to the lived realities of systemically excluded populations. To effectively address educational inequality in Pakistan, the problem must be looked at holistically, capturing the nuances that arise due to the economic and social contexts surrounding schools and children. Inequalities that lie outside of schools have implications for the dynamics taking place between actors inside these institutions and vice versa. This is especially true in rural areas that are traditionally represented as homogenous, masking the many complex sets of unequal power relations that lie within diverse rural communities (Rose et al., 2021).

This policy brief seeks to understand how education policy and programming can better respond to the education needs and aspirations of children and their parents. It presents policy recommendations for effectively engaging out-of-school girls in rural Sindh based on field research on the lived realities of children—particularly girls—excluded from education, as well as an exploration of how current policies aimed at achieving equity in access and learning respond to these contextual realities. But first, a closer look at who are the children that are excluded from education in the province of Sindh, Pakistan.

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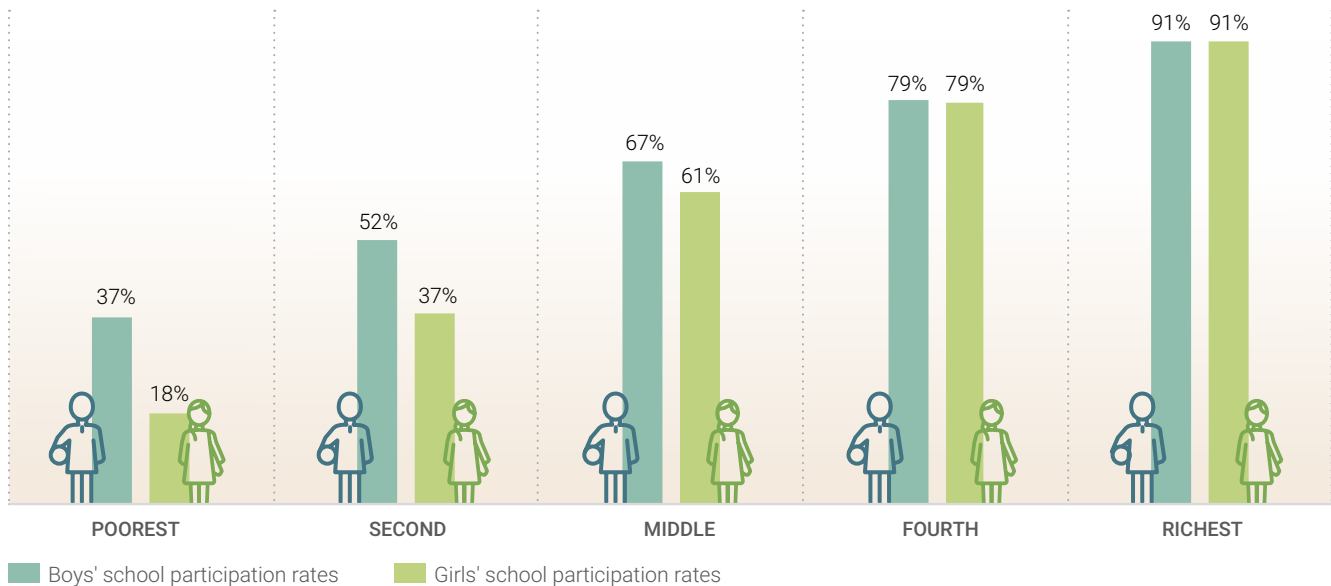

Photo credit: Ali Hyder Junejo

Note: In Sindh, 11 percent of public schooling infrastructure has been destroyed and 18 percent damaged by the 2022 floods.

II. Who are the most excluded children in Sindh?

In Pakistan, children from low-income families as well as rural children and girls have the lowest basic education rates at each level (World Bank, 2020). These patterns of inequities repeat themselves in Sindh. Girls in rural areas and those who belong to low-income families are among the most excluded children in the province (see figures 2 and 3). The penalty for being a girl is much worse when combined with other types of exclusion. While it is not possible with existing data to examine the intersection of gender, poverty, and rural context, previous research highlights that the exclusion of girls grows from multiple, overlapping sources, especially when they are members of tribal, ethnic, or linguistic "minority" communities, live in remote settings, or are associated with lower castes (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006).

FIGURE 2. In Sindh, girls in lower income quintiles are less likely to be in school

	POOREST	SECOND	MIDDLE	FOURTH	RICHEST
Boys' school participation rates	37%	52%	67%	79%	91%
Girls' school participation rates	18%	37%	61%	79%	91%

Source: School participation rates between the ages of 5–9 years, Sindh, UNICEF, 2020

FIGURE 3. In Sindh, girls in rural areas are less likely to be in school

RURAL
51% BOYS
31% GIRLS

URBAN
73% BOYS
68% GIRLS
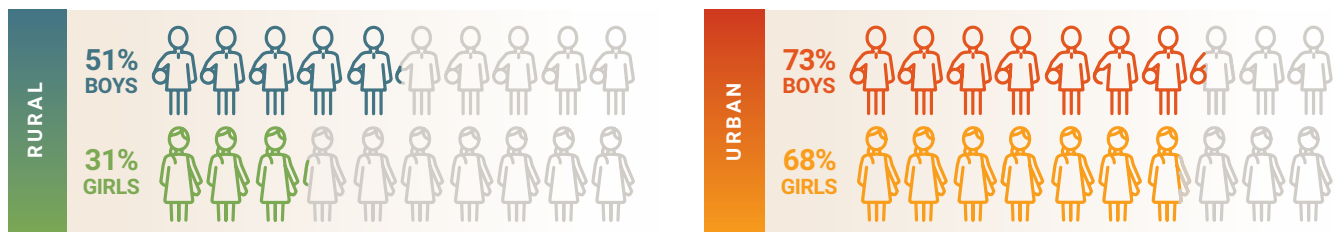
Source: Proportion of out of school children between 5–16 years of age, Sindh, PSLM, 2020
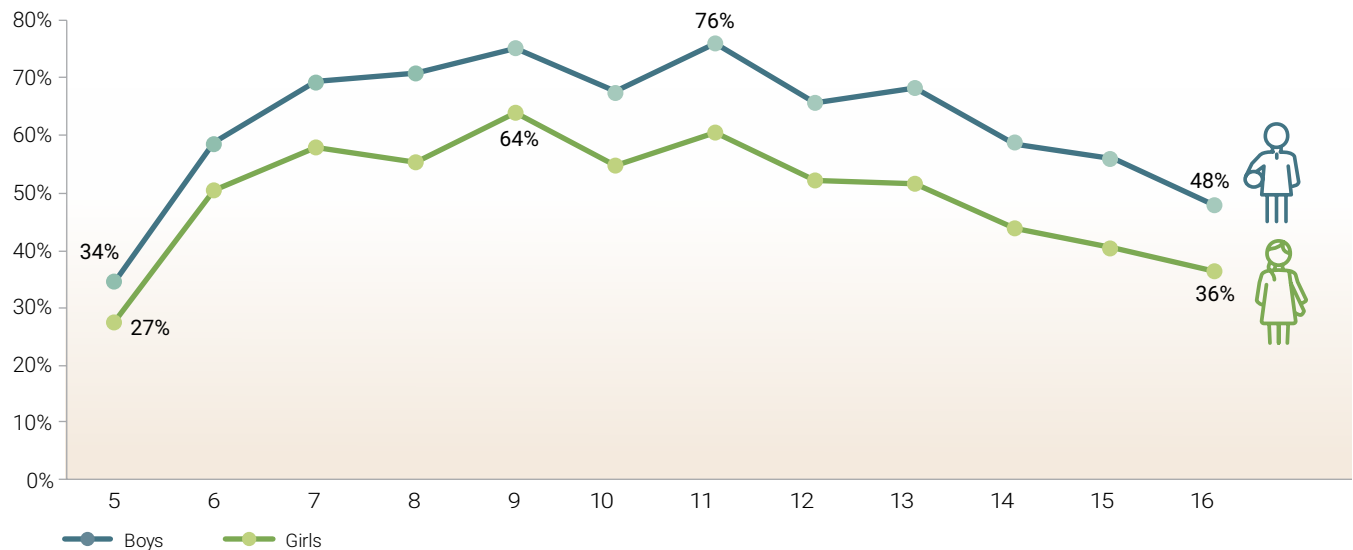
THE MAJORITY OF GIRLS IN RURAL AREAS OF SINDH ARE NOT REACHED BY SCHOOLS AND THOSE WHO ENROLL HAVE A LOW LIKELIHOOD OF COMPLETING SCHOOLING

As in other provinces, the exclusion of children from the education system starts in the early years. Fewer than one-third of children in Sindh are reached by schools at age 5 and maximum school participation for girls is seen at age 9 (64 percent) and for boys by 11 (76 percent) (PAMS, 2021; see figure 4). This delayed enrolment is especially troubling as it has been found to increase a child's likelihood of leaving school in successive grades (Sunny et al., 2017).

Importantly, in rural areas, most children who are not in school are not those who have left, but mostly those who have never begun (see figure 5), highlighting how the public system in Sindh has been unable to guarantee, at a minimum, entry of a large population of children. The problem is experienced most intensely by rural girls.

Low school-participation rates in Sindh are further complicated by a system that does not provide quality learning opportunities within schools. For children in school, specifically those in rural areas, only 2 out of 5 can read a story in Urdu or Sindhi by grade five (ASER 2019). It is unclear from existing data if there

FIGURE 4. In Sindh, of the children who are enrolled, delayed school entry is the norm

Source: School participation rates of children by age, Sindh, PAMS, 2021

FIGURE 5. Girls in rural areas of Sindh are more likely to have never begun school
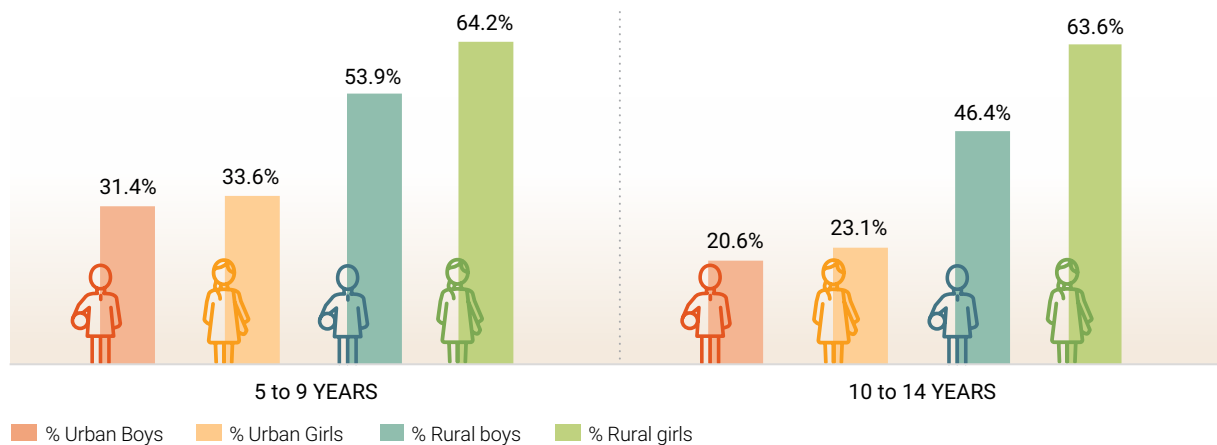
Source: Children who have never attended school, Population Census, 2017

Note: The 2017 Census reports that around 5.5 million children in Sindh between the ages of 5 and 14 years have never enrolled in a school; of these, 71 percent live in rural areas.

is a gender gap in learning outcomes for children attending school in rural areas of Sindh.

It is important for girls to be in schools and learn, but benefits of schooling can only be realized if teaching and learning experiences are transformative and create space for students' aspirations. To move the needle on education in Sindh, the government must reach the most excluded populations—rural girls from low-income families—from the earliest years. This means ensuring all children are enrolled at least by age 5,[1] providing them with quality learning opportunities, and supporting them to complete their schooling. For this, we need to know why current education policy and practice is not working for all children.

WHY HAS EDUCATION POLICY NOT WORKED FOR THE MOST EXCLUDED CHILDREN?

Over the past 75 years, policies to support girls' education have been constrained by policy design that did not holistically consider the context surrounding schools. For example, initiatives to open girls only schools and / or co-educational schools with female teachers since the early 1950s have been constrained by the fact that women's school completion rates in rural areas are very low and supply of local female teachers is limited (Siddiqui, 2015). In the 1980s, the placement of local and non-local female teachers in rural schools involved setting up residences for single female teachers, but the policy was ineffective as it did not take into account gender norms that prohibited women living away from their families (Warwick et al., 1991). By not considering the local context holistically, policies on female teachers have experienced the same barriers that girls experience in accessing education in Pakistan. It has been previously argued (Siddiqui, 2015) that limited supply of women with qualifications to become teachers and low female labor force participation

have thwarted government's efforts to support girls' education through employment of female teachers.

Another issue with policy, in terms of access is that it has not offered a level playing field to all populations. Between 1988 and 1998, Pakistan promoted the rapid expansion of primary schooling with policy that proposed the building of primary schools in every settlement with a minimum population of 300 people (Seventh five-year plan, 1988 and eighth five-year plan, 1993).[2] Two and a half decades later, education infrastructure in Sindh (see table 1), still reflects the priorities of the 1990s, with 90 percent of schools offering education service up to the primary level, and very few public schools offering the opportunity to transition to higher education levels. Gross enrollment rates for secondary schools in rural Sindh hover at just around 26 percent and as low as 12 percent for girls (PSLM, 2020). Moreover, the primary schools that were built in the 1980s and 1990s were small, multi-grade schools, often composed of two classrooms for six grades. Despite population increases of more than 50 percent since 1998, these small structures continue to dominate; more than 4 out of 5 public primary schools are one- or two-room schools or have no building at all (Annual Profile of Schools in Sindh, 2019).

The latest National Education Policy was adopted in 2009 and includes a large number of policy objectives, such as free primary education for all by 2015, eliminating social exclusion (especially for girls), and including meals as part of free education, among others. These have remained unfulfilled (Siddiqui, 2015). As others have argued (Rose et al., 2021), attempts to address the problem of education inequalities through education reforms alone are likely to fail if they do not consider the economic and social contexts surrounding schools and how these factors play out within the classroom.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Schools, teachers and students in public education system, Sindh

| ISCED LEVEL	ISCED CLASSIFICATION	SINDH CLASSIFICATION	GRADES	NO. OF SCHOOLS	% OF TOTAL SCHOOLS	NO. OF TEACHERS	% OF TOTAL TEACHERS	NO. OF STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL STUDENTS
0	Pre-primary	Pre-Primary (katchi)	1−2 years					885,243	19%
1	Primary	Primary	Grade 1 to 5	44,296	90%	77,811	58%	2,473,693	54%
2	Lower Secondary	Middle	Grade 6 to 8	2,712	6%	12,147	9%	690,528	15%
3	Upper Secondary	Secondary (Matric)	Grade 9 to 10	1,777	4%	33,407	25%	382,558	8%
3	Upper Secondary	Higher secondary (Intermediate)	Grade 11 to 12	318	1%	9,711	7%	129,118	3%
				49,103		133,076		4,561,140	

Source: Annual school profile 2019, Government of Sindh

III. What are the aspirations and lived realities of the most excluded children?

In this policy brief we present lessons learned from qualitative research on the aspirations and lived realities of children, particularly girls living in rural areas of Sindh, who are excluded from education. Findings are based on data collected in July and August of 2022 in eight rural settlements across four districts of Sindh, located in lower (Thatta), central (Sanghar), upper (Kashmore) and desert areas (Tharparkar) of the province (see figure 6). The four districts were chosen to represent different geographies in Sindh but have a high proportion of out-of-school children. The chosen districts vary in population density, representation of minority religions and languages. This was done so as not to generalize findings from one district or similar districts to the whole province.

FIGURE 6: Map of 8 locations covered as part of the study
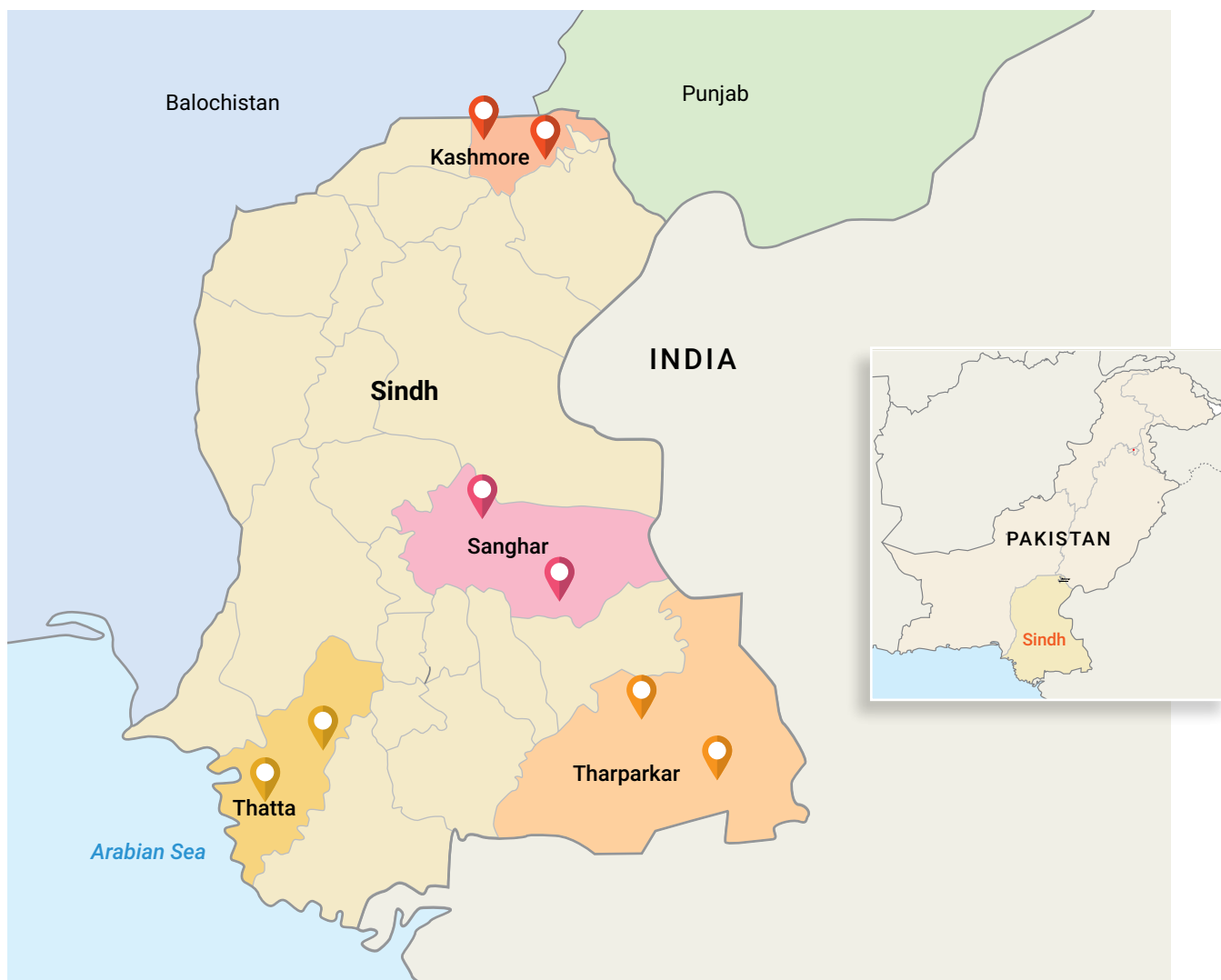
Note: Each location pin on the map above indicates a settlement. A single settlement, called paro in the local language, is usually occupied by a single kinship or caste group. Adult women have limited unchaperoned access to public spaces outside the paro, and adult men from outside the paro are generally not allowed to enter (Gazdar and Mallah, 2010).

In addition to interview and focus group discussions, our methodology incorporated participatory art- and visual-based activities that sought to capture parents' knowledge as well as identify children's educational interests. The learnings from these activities have contributed to both the findings and recommendation sections of this brief. Visuals were introduced to encourage mothers and children to share their views on education and overcome their hesitance arising from lack of prior exposure to schooling, which we had observed in our previous experience of conducting research in similar settlements.

In one such activity, parents and children were asked to create their ideal school, which was then compared to the on-the-ground situation in their community to explore the contrast between their aspirations and needs and their lived reality (see table 2).

To conduct this research, I also relied on a female research assistant who speaks Sindhi fluently and is culturally responsive to the needs of the community. While women from the settlement have limited unchaperoned access to public spaces outside the settlement, as women we were able to enter the settlement and meet with them. Detailed methodology is presented in appendix A.

Note: This findings section also draws on previous research conducted by the author and colleagues as part of the design and implementation of a non-formal education program for older out-of-school children (ages 8–16 years) at The Citizens Foundation (TCF) from 2019 to 2022.

1. PARENTS VALUE EDUCATION AND BELIEVE IT CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES, BUT THESE ASPIRATIONS ARE NOT MET

Overall, we found that parents value education for both boys and girls, maintaining that it should positively impact their children's lives.

> *"We have got everything from God, land, cattle, and means to earn. But we don't have education. If my son could be educated, he would not be illiterate like me, and would not see hardships of fodder and fields. He could get a job and would be able to offer prayers for a deceased relative. If my daughter were to have an education, her life would be better. She would be able to offer prayers and observe fasts. We believe that even if one girl from the community gets an education, then it's like the whole district getting an education."* (PARENT, THATTA DISTRICT)

We explored parents' educational aspirations for their children from the lens of impact on their children's futures, their lives, and potential skills they could acquire. Parents' aspirations for boys and girls were often gendered, though there was variation in our findings across districts. In two communities, parents had similar aspirations for their children in terms of future careers and years of schooling, irrespective of gender. These two communities were in the same district.

> *"If my daughter completes matric or intermediate, what she has studied will decide if she wants to be a teacher or work in a hospital. Then she will complete that course. If she wants to become a doctor then she can study further. There is no age involved here."* (PARENT, THARPARKAR DISTRICT)

TABLE 2: Results from the "build a school" activity conducted with parents and children

IDEAL SCHOOL	REALITY
• Safe building structures • Safe means to get to school (safe roads, safe transport) • Pedagogical practices that reduce distance between the teacher, children, and communities • Broad range of learning activities, including play-based* • Provision of skills alongside other learning activities in schools • Provision of food and health facilities at the school	• School buildings considered unsafe by parents and teachers • Lack of safe ways to get to school, including lack of public transportation • School building existent but non-functional • Understaffed, one-to-two-room school structures catering to large populations of children of different ages • Teachers not supported to include all children in the learning process

*Children in the study chose more play-based activities compared to parents.

Note: As part of this brief, use of "community" signifies people living in a single settlement. "Settlement" and "community" are used interchangeably throughout the brief.

Photo: Huda Ahmed

Parents also expressed interest in schools' teaching skills to both boys and girls, which we observed that local schools do not offer. Here we saw a preference for girls to learn more home-based skills, while skill preferences for boys were not limited to home settings.

We found that in communities marked by an absence of schools, parents' aspirations for education, including careers, skills, moral education, and overcoming social inequalities were not met. In places where working schools were present, parents cited low levels of learning in schools and limited economic opportunities as reasons for unmet aspirations, which, in turn, was reported to discourage investment of resources (time and money) in schooling:

"Despite being poor we bear expenses to educate our children, but we see that there are no jobs for them, and they cannot do any business. They become a burden. [To avoid this] we feel it is better that we don't let them study further."
(PARENT, THATTA DISTRICT)

As a result of unmet aspirations across these communities, children, especially girls, are missing out on the opportunity to explore their potential in school. Whether schooling for girls would lead to a shift in gendered aspirations is a question mark, as others have argued previously that schools, through textbooks they use, reinforce gender norms and expectations from girls and young women prevalent in the larger society (Agha et al., 2018).

In communities where aspirations varied by gender, we noted that aspirations for boys more often included jobs, professions, earning a living, and easing hardship for their parents. For girls, parents' aspirations more often included their daughters' becoming well-mannered as well as improvement of the home, community, and village. The ability to observe religious rituals was also more often associated with girls, and it was expected for them to transfer these practices to their own children. When asked about the number of years their children should study, parents specified lower maximum age for girls (age ranged from 10 to 18 years across respondents) compared to boys (16 years of age to no limit).

TABLE 3: Status of school and participation of children in the settlement

LOCATION NO.	DISTRICT	STATUS OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY	GOVERNMENT SCHOOL EDUCATION OFFERING	PARENTS SAFETY CONCERNS	REPORTED USE BY CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY
1	Thatta	Working	Primary; two rooms	Over-crowding	Few.
2	Thatta	Closed	NA	NA	NA
3	Tharparkar	Working	Primary; one room	Unsafe building and over-crowding	Some. Fewer girls than boys
4	Tharparkar	Working	Nursery to grade 8; 7 rooms	Over-crowding	Many. Fewer girls than boys
5	Kashmore	Not present	NA	NA	NA
6	Kashmore	Working	Primary; one room	Over-crowding	Few. Fewer girls than boys
7	Sanghar	Closed	NA	NA	NA
8	Sanghar	Closed	NA	NA	NA

Notes: "Closed" refers to buildings that previously operated as schools but have now been officially closed by the government. No children are enrolled nor any teachers are assigned to those buildings. "Working school" means here that children are enrolled and that teachers are assigned to the school. Quality of these schools is discussed in finding 3.

2. PARENTS' CONCERNS FOR SAFETY KEEP MANY CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

2a) Schools inside rural settlement are often overcrowded and not structurally safe

In half of the settlements that we visited, there was no working school. But even when a school building was present inside the settlement (local school), not all children were enrolled because the school either (i) had been closed, (ii) was open but the building structure was unsafe, or (iii) had limited capacity (see table 3). Overcrowding was a concern for parents across the board, and in one settlement, parents also highlighted that the school building needed repairs and was unsafe for their children.

> *"Have you not seen the condition of the school? We are talking about our own children! The teacher doesn't sit in the school because he also doesn't want to die there. . . . When the school building was built in 1985–86, it functioned well and children from the community completed five grades in the school. Over time with no repairs, the building has become unsafe for our children."* (PARENT, THARPARKAR DISTRICT)

In schools that had limited capacity, we found that parents enrolled boys over girls. The decision to choose boys over girls was associated with parents' gendered aspirations and expectations of fewer years of schooling for girls versus boys. This finding is similar to previous research that found that in the context of limited resources, parents invest in the child they believe is more like to succeed, at the expense of other children (Andrabi et al., 2010). Additionally, the decision to enroll a child, even at the primary level, may be driven in large part by the prospect of future schooling (Jacoby and Mansuri, 2011). When prospects are limited, there is reduced incentive to enroll children from the outset. We found limited prospects of future schooling for girls in all the settlements we visited except one, where a middle school was locally present and fewer girls were out of school here compared to other settlements.

> **"Have you not seen the condition of the school? . . . The teacher doesn't sit in the school because he also doesn't want to die there."**

For schooling interventions to be successful, it is not enough to build a school; special efforts must be in place to motivate parents and children to participate in schooling. Previous research on school enrollment suggests that a motivation gap exists between the willingness of parents to send their children to school and the supply of schools, especially in contexts where norms of schooling are weak (Gazdar, 1999). We were unable to address this as part of this field research, however, as all working schools in the settlements we visited were overcrowded. For primary schooling, then, there remains an unanswered question of whether parents will enroll all their children even when there is enough capacity in local primary schools.

2b) Schooling outside of settlements increases safety concerns, especially for young children and older girls

When parents consider sending their young children to a school outside of their settlement, it opens them up to a host of other challenges, which act as barriers to enrolling their children, especially in the early years (and again in adolescence for girls). In five settlements (out of eight), some parents reported sending their children to a school outside of the community (see table 4). With dirt tracks instead of roads, a lack of public transport, and adults busy with household chores and making ends meet, unsupervised walking was reported as the most prevalent mode of getting to school. For younger children, parents cited several risks, such as the danger of getting bitten by dogs,[3] fighting with other children, or being harmed by vehicular traffic (due to the absence of sidewalks on main roads). These road safety challenges caused actual physical harm to children and created a disincentive for children to be enrolled in school in the early years.

When parents accessed alternative primary schooling options outside of the settlement, they often reported sending boys over girls, especially if there was a cost associated with it. Of the 5 settlements where alternative options for boys were available, in only 2, parents reported sending girls to primary schools outside of the settlement. Parents mentioned the cost of private transport and school fees as reasons for not being able to afford to send all their children and making the choice to send sons over daughters. With boys expected to provide for their parents and girls to move in with their husbands' families after marriage, parents have a greater incentive to favor sons and invest more in them (Jayachandaran, 2015).

Parents maintained that as children get older, they learn to avoid some of the risks associated with traveling, and it becomes easier for unsupervised children to go outside of the

Details of access to school located outside the settlement

| LOCATION NO. | DISTRICT | ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING OPTIONS REPORTED | | WALKING DISTANCE | MODE OF TRANSPORT |
		GIRLS	BOYS		
1	Thatta	None	Public school run by Sindh Education Foundation (SEF)[4]	60 mins	Motorbike
2	Thatta	Government school outside of community	Government school outside of community	60 mins	Walking
3	Tharparkar	None	None	NA	NA
4	Tharparkar	None	None	NA	NA
5	Kashmore	None	Private school charging $3 a month	60 mins	Walking
6	Kashmore	None	None	NA	NA
7	Sanghar	Private, NGO-run, no-fee school	Private, NGO-run, no-fee school	120 mins	Walking
8	Sanghar	None	Public school run by SEF	60 mins	Motorbike

settlement. But for girls this "getting older" benefit has a much smaller window. Once a girl reaches puberty, if the school is outside the settlement, it is not possible for her to attend unsupervised, as limitations on her mobility come into play. This includes restrictions on studying with non-local, male teachers in schools, who are also more likely to belong to a different kin. As previous research elaborates, restrictions prevent girls from crossing settlement boundaries unchaperoned, so as not to invite any damage to their reputation, limit their exposure to men from other kin, or protect their safety and "purity" (Jayachandaran 2015; Jacoby and Mansuri, 2011). For this reason, the likelihood of girls continuing their education beyond primary is lower, as middle schools are most likely to be located outside of the settlement.

Therefore, both for younger children to be enrolled in schools on time and for older girls to continue with schooling beyond puberty, if the school is at a considerable distance more support needs to be provided, including but not limited to safe and free transport facilities and engagement with parents.

3. PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING CLASSROOM PRACTICES DISCOURAGE ENROLLMENT AND CONTINUATION

Parents' perceptions of education—whether they be based on their own experiences (especially for fathers) or on accounts shared by other parents of school-going children—contribute to the lack of motivation to enroll their children or to encourage them to continue with schooling.

> "We studied until Class 5, but none of us have knowledge about alphabets."

In all the communities we visited, parents expressed frustration with teaching quality and practices. They complained about high teacher absenteeism, insufficient time spent on teaching and learning activities in the classroom, inadequate attention being given to children in overcrowded, multi-grade classrooms, differential treatment of children based on caste or kin, corporal punishment, and promotion of children to the next grade regardless of their learning.

> *"To educate our children we send them to schools. There is no education in public schools. Our kids go to school and sit idle with no teacher in the classroom. We studied until Class 5, but no one has knowledge about alphabets."* (PARENT, KASHMORE DISTRICT)

Some parents highlighted the link between ineffective teaching practices and overall lapses in the management and accountability of the public education system by district-level administration and elected representatives.

> *"Elected representatives don't care about us at all. Otherwise, they would visit the area to see if there is a school, and if there is, then ask about the state of the school."* (PARENT, THARPARKAR DISTRICT)

There have been recent efforts by the government to improve teacher accountability by introducing biometric attendance checks in schools (World Bank, 2017), but such measures may have little bearing on student outcomes if teachers are not supported in classrooms. A key example is the lack of support for teaching in multi-grade classrooms, which, as stated above, make up 82 percent of public primary schools in Sindh. According to the Education Sector Analysis of Sindh (2019), the needs of multi-grade classrooms are not supported across the areas of curriculum, learning materials, or teacher preparedness through training and assessments. Previous research (Little, 2001) from other contexts points to government's inattentiveness to the needs of multi-grade schools, reflective of a more general and systemic problem of the "invisibility" of multi-grade teaching.

Low population density decades ago led to the creation of small schools in rural communities, but as seen above, many of these schools now have overcrowded classrooms, challenging the multi-grade model in many settlements. In some cases, as these challenges are further intensified due to the problem of "missing" teachers (absent or vacant teaching positions), which increases the class and student burden for any remaining teachers, as reported by parents.

The government also needs to provide training to teachers to minimize the fears and effects of social exclusion that permeate from wider society into the classroom. As summarized below, parents and children share experiences that reflect exclusion based on caste, kin, and language. Yet schools can become sites for exclusion if teachers (who are generally from more privileged backgrounds and enjoy a higher social status than many of the children they are teaching) exhibit or express negative biases, are unaware of the challenges faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds or are unable to support them (De and Malik, 2021).

Parents shared fears about their children getting less attention in the classroom because of their caste and kin. Importantly, these fears of social exclusion were noted even in situations where the parents and their children had not yet interacted with the school. These experiences were observed between Muslims of different kins, between Muslims and lower-caste Hindus, and between upper-caste and lower-caste Hindus. For instance, in Tharparkar, we spoke with families from a lower caste of Hindus living in the same community with those belonging to the upper caste. We were told by the teacher (from the upper caste) that the children from the lower caste were enrolled in the school, but their families denied this, indicating that the school was less inclusive than represented by the teacher.

From the early grades of schooling, Sindhi, the most widely spoken language in rural parts of the province, is the language of instruction in public schools. However, given the existence of other local languages, this can impede learning for children whose mother tongue is not Sindhi (World Bank, 2021). In 4 out of 8 communities, we observed children speaking languages other than Sindhi, including Dhatki, Parkari and Seraiki. A few of the respondents who had exposure to schooling mentioned that in the early grades, teachers would switch to their local language when needing to explain something, but this was not a prevalent practice.

Classroom observations further informed our findings, as we saw how gender biases played out in schools, with teachers paying more attention to boys and asking less of girls. We also observed that seating arrangements were such that boys got more focus than girls.

4. POVERTY CREATES A FORMIDABLE SET OF COMPETING PRIORITIES FOR PARENTS

4a) Competing priorities make it challenging for parents to enroll their children in early years

All four of the districts included in this research are amongst the poorest in Sindh, with high multi-dimensional poverty scores (Begum, 2015). Yet the effects of poverty varied. All the settlements we visited lacked access to basic services like piped water, sanitation, and electricity. However, we observed that the most adverse effects of poverty were in the settlements located in districts in upper and central Sindh, due to effects of landlessness and sharecropping.[5] In contrast, the settlements we visited in the lower and desert areas of Sindh had small landholdings and homes on land that families owned, which seemed to provide them with more security and placed relatively lower productivity pressure on entire families.

Previous research has argued that gender differences in school exclusion are an outcome of patriarchy and restrictive social norms, rather than of poverty itself (Colclough et al., 2000). We found that gender norms and poverty intersect in critical ways. Parents in our study reported that girls started working at earlier ages than boys, taking on responsibility for household chores and care of younger children as early as 6 to 9 years. These household and care burdens, especially for girls living in poverty, act as barriers to enrollment and learning. As we saw in figure 2, the gender gap in terms of access is the highest in the poorest income quintile.

In most of the communities in this study, both men and women work in the fields.[6] Additionally, women also take care of household chores and children. Children support parents both at home and in the fields. In a recent government survey, around 95 percent of parents whose children never begin school mentioned that school is too expensive (PAMS, 2021). When asked why children leave schools without completing it, 30 percent of parents reported that the "child is not willing" to continue school. (PAMS, 2021). With parents needing support to make ends meet, children often make that choice themselves due to the limited time and resources that parents have to enforce school attendance, build routines, or prepare their child to go to school each day. High burden of work also makes it harder for them to advocate for their children to ensure their inclusion in classrooms once they are in schools.

One government education official, interviewed as part of this research, acknowledged that socio-economic factors act as a barrier for children, especially girls, to engage with learning opportunities. For example, malnutrition indicators, such as the proportion of underweight children and/or with stunting, are worryingly high for children from the poorest families in Sindh (stunting: 61 percent; underweight: 57 percent) and more than double those of children in the richest quintile (UNICEF, 2020). [These figures are two standard deviations below the mean.] Yet government policy has focused primarily on providing school stipends and transportation for girls (on a selected basis); there is little evidence of other holistic support interventions, like in-school feeding programs or health services, in the past decade.

4b) Parents need support in determining school-readiness for their children to enroll them at the right age

Most of the parents that we interviewed did not know the exact age of their children. They reported that a child's age is often not recorded until initial school enrollment, when an estimate of their age and date of birth is made by the staff, which is then used for official government records. This aligns with previous research that found that only 17 percent of childbirths were registered in rural Sindh, compared to 55 percent in urban parts of the province (UNICEF, 2020).

When we asked parents if they knew the age at which their child should be enrolled in school, their responses ranged from 3 to 7 years. We found that parents used their own judgement in assessing if their child was school-ready, which had less to do with their estimate of the child's age and more to do with how they saw their child making sense of things in relation to their view of academic expectations in the grade of enrollment. In some communities, differences were also noted in desired

> **"I think daughters have limited time to study so she should start earlier, from 4 years. Boys from 6–7 years."**

age of enrollment of sons versus daughters; it was sometimes lower or higher, depending on the rationalizations of parents.

> *"He must be enrolled at 3 years, then he will be able to grasp things as he will learn gradually. At least he will recognize the path that he has to take for school. If we enroll him at age 5 then he will take two more years to understand. Our daughters will be enrolled at age 4."* (PARENT, KASHMORE DISTRICT)

> *"I think daughters have limited time to study so she should start earlier, from 4 years. Boys from 6–7 years."* (PARENT, SANGHAR DISTRICT)

When we asked parents if any effort had been made from the government to enroll their children, none of them was able share experiences of outreach activities. In almost all cases parents felt it was their responsibility to enroll their child.

5. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM BOTH IN ITS ABSENCE AND PRESENCE ALIENATES RURAL COMMUNITIES

The current education system in Pakistan is failing to create a strong sense of connection for rural populations, between people and their surroundings and histories. This is true whether formal education is absent or present.

In rural areas, it is not the mere absence of schools that causes discontent, but incomplete attempts to universalize education that have left behind the debris of dysfunctional or closed schools, which are currently strewn across rural Sindh. Parents pointed to these closed buildings as indicators that something had been taken away from them and perceived this as what they "deserved" from the government due to their poverty. In our research, parents shared self-beliefs that their manners or occupations were not good enough or not useful because of the lack of education in their own lives. We also heard parents holding themselves responsible for not "doing enough" when confronted with the challenges of accessing education for their children, while also struggling to overcome the formidable effects of structural poverty and systemic exclusion.

Yet when options for formal education are available, they do not recognize or incorporate rural realities, the interests of children and their families, or indigenous languages and local knowledge. This has effects on student engagement and outcomes within the classroom, as previous research highlights that integrating indigenous knowledge into all aspects of education improved student achievement scores and reduced dropout rates (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 1998). We also noted the non-representation of rural realities in formal education when parents shared their aspirations. They did not aspire, for example, preparation for traditional professions like agriculture or livestock management to feature in school-based learning. Getting a good education was most often envisioned as a departure from their traditional occupations, not just because of its non-representation but also because schooling was tied to an expectation of upward social mobility that would release their children from the conditions of hardship associated with their professions.

As part of this research, we noted that, in the case of men, it was more common for a community's highly educated men to have moved out of the settlement. It has been previously argued in research that young people who complete formal education frequently do not return to their communities. Seen in this light, far from contributing positively to local communities, higher education for rural populations is capacity-depleting (Ball, 2004). In the case of women, due to restrictions on their unchaperoned mobility, we noticed that there is limited access to jobs outside of the settlement. Nevertheless, even if they engage in home-based or other jobs, women continue to be held responsible for household chores and child care, which puts an inordinate burden on them. It has been argued that any effort toward girls' education must account for the entrenched and systemic subjugation of girls and women across multiple social spaces; otherwise, schooling and related benefits of participating in the labor force only add additional burdens to the lives of girls (Khoja-Moolji, 2018).

IV. How can education policy respond to aspirations and lived realities of excluded children?

Given the sense of alienation and frustration that parents in these rural communities expressed with formal education—and the bottlenecks that exist at progressive levels of education—one could argue for supplementing public schooling with alternative, non-formal learning options that may be more easily malleable to different realities. But with more privileged segments of the population continuing to benefit from formal schooling and the future pathways this opens, investment in alternatives, especially when those are not considered to be on an equal footing with the formal system—will not reduce existing disparities.

For this reason, the recommendations below focus on working within the formal education system to build connection with children and parents and include all children in the learning process. These recommendations respond to needs and aspirations identified as part of our research and are organized around core findings (see table 5).

TABLE 5: Recommendations responding to needs and aspirations of rural children and families from education

ACTIONS	DETAILS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
1. Education system needs to meet and shape parents' aspirations for schooling that can improve their children's lives		
Design a holistic rural education policy	Policymakers need to design a policy for rural education that addresses challenges with in-school learning experiences of children and pathways beyond schooling. The policy should also be informed by economic opportunities envisaged for children in rural areas once they complete schooling so that requisite skills can be incorporated in the schooling experience itself.	Member of Provincial Assembly
Integrate strategies for shaping more gender-equal aspirations from education, at different points of the schooling journey	For parents to prioritize school enrollment and retention for both daughters and sons, it is important to address gendered aspirations for schooling. Develop strategies to shape more gender-equal aspirations that parents have for education. Identify interaction points with parents for implementing these strategies throughout the schooling journey, beginning at the enrollment stage, during the school year, and at promotion to the next successive grade level, influencing both mothers and fathers in the process. According to research, mothers appear to be more influential in shaping children's gender views and fathers tend to have more say in household decisions affecting girls, such as how much to spend on their education (Dhar et al., 2014).	Secretariat of the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD)
Offer skills-based education to meet aspirations of parents and children	Given the strong interest of parents and children in traditional arts and crafts like ralli-making and embroidery, among others, these activities offer the opportunity for children to connect with their own culture. As these skills could potentially reinforce gendered aspirations, schools should couple these with interventions for shifting gender norms, giving both boys and girls opportunities to see these as an expansion of the choices available to them. It is also important for linking these skills with economic opportunities at the local level.	Secretariat of SELD and Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD)
2. The government needs to assure parents that their children, especially daughters, will be safe in schools and getting to/from schools.		
Expand capacity in local schools (catering to single settlement) through short-term measures to provide access to primary schooling (including preschool)	Cultivate relationships and enter into contracts with communities to use existing spaces in the settlements to enroll all children in primary schools (including preschools). Non-formal arrangements in the short term can ensure children do not lose out on early years of education. To staff non-formal arrangements at the local level, new types of teaching and administrative contracts may also need to be explored and developed.	Divisional Directorates (SELD)

ACTIONS	DETAILS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Upgrade existing and build new schools to support enrollment of children to provide access to all children	For the medium to long term, identify settlements where multi-grade primary schools are falling short of the current population size (and projected growth) and determine the feasibility of mo-no-grade schools. Also, identify locations currently without school buildings	Directorate of Planning Development and Research (SELD)
Develop a feasibility matrix to choose between bigger schools (catering to multiple settlements) vs. local schools to overcome barriers related to cost and supply of female teachers	Questions like cost of children getting to school, supply of local female teachers, supply of non-local female teachers, and cost of getting non-local female teachers to school can help determine if setting up a big school is a practical, feasible option compared to running local schools. These questions at the outset can help iden-tify bottlenecks in implementing scaled-up schools. For example, in locations where hiring local and non-female teachers is not possi-ble, the decision can be to continue with a local school that caters to a single settlement. Parents are comfortable with a male resident of the same settlement teaching their sons and daughters if a female teacher is not available. This is based on TCF's experience of running non-formal education programs within the settlement, where largely male residents were hired in absence of local women with prior exposure to schooling. Parents were responsive to enroll-ing older girls into the program.	Directorate of Planning Development and Research (SELD)
Provide transport for both young children and older girls if the school is not local to the settlement	Safer roads and transportation to schools is needed to ease restric-tions on girls' mobility. While cycling to schools for girls has been found effective in other contexts (Muralidharan and Prakash, 2017), this option may not work for older girls as it represents unchaper-oned mobility, which is restricted for young, single women as per the local norms in rural Sindh.	Directorate of Planning Development and Research (SELD)
3. Children (and their parents) need to feel included and school staff and teachers need support in promoting a strong culture and practice of inclusivity within the school		
Augment teacher training to include all children in learning:		
Setting goals for the class and engaging students and parents	To motivate children to learn, teachers must be trained to co-create goals for the classroom that are contextualized to the needs and aspirations of the children and engage children and parents in those goals (Farr, 2010).	Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)
Provide adequate support for multi-grade teaching	The training manual for teachers currently has a module on multi-grade teaching. Both the training design and implementation has to be assessed to understand effectiveness of the module. Teachers also need to be supported through classroom observations and coaching for multigrade teaching. Additionally, research suggests repackaging of teacher guides and student workbooks, and greater planning for teachers (Little, 2001) to support with multigrade teaching.	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD) and Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)
Classroom management	Teachers must be trained in classroom management to increase their effectiveness, encourage participation of all students and anticipate behaviors that could disrupt learning (Dibapile, 2012). Classroom management techniques should be covered as an alter-native to corporal punishment.	Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)
Inclusive teaching practices	For creating more inclusive classrooms, De and Malik (2021) propose introducing a training module for teachers to reflect on the social distance between themselves and the learners and to become aware how it can be bridged in the case of each learner. School staff (including teachers) must take the initiative of bridg-ing this gap, whether inside or outside the classroom. Training for teachers should cover examining gender bias in their expectations of achievement for all children, allowing for code-switching if chil-dren speak a different language, and making sure that children from all castes, especially lower castes, receive attention and that their learning and well-being needs are addressed.	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD) and Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)

ACTIONS	DETAILS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Assessments	Formative assessments, such as exit tickets, on a daily basis are essential for teachers to understand where children are in relation to the learning outcomes for the class. Data from such assessments informs teachers to differentiate their teaching based on children's learning and improves the effectiveness of teaching (Piper and Korda, 2011).	Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD) and Divisional Directorates (SELD)
Classroom observations and coaching	Hire and train individuals who can coach teachers, as research suggests that to improve teaching practices, classroom observations followed by coaching is effective, especially for teachers with fewer years of teaching experience (Popova et al., 2022)	Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)
Socio-emotional learning (SEL)	Develop teachers' socio-emotional skills to be able to teach lessons on SEL and embed it in other subject-specific lessons. Critically thinking about power structures (including patriarchy), covering oral traditions (poems, stories), regulating emotions, managing conflicts, and understanding social cues, are some of the areas that can be covered as part of SEL.	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD) and Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)
Parent engagement	To reduce social distance between schools and parents, train teachers to identify opportunities and develop strategies to engage parents in their children's learning. This is important as engaging families in children's learning has a positive influence on school attendance, behavior, and learning (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD) and Sindh Teacher Education (SELD) Development Authority
4. Families need holistic support from multiple public sector departments to offset the impacts of poverty, including support in determining school-readiness for their children		
Design a systematic strategy to enroll all children	In Turkey, a campaign to enroll girls in schools at the start of the school year offers a few lessons for enrolling both girls and boys. It highlights steps like coordination at the district level down to village level, mobilization of organizations at the village level, identification of children through databases and field inspection, and persuasion at different levels. Persuasion involves leveraging influencers at the local level and using conditional cash transfers (Yazan, 2014). Based on TCF's experience of enrolling children for non-formal education programs, it is important for mobilization teams to have representation of women and that targets are disaggregated by gender.	National Database and Registration Authority + Local Union Council + District and Area Education Offices
Expand the scope of the birth registration system and leverage this to track children's school enrollment	In view of low birth-registration numbers in rural Sindh, there is a need to undertake a field-based, door-to-door, annual campaign to register all children. Birth registration followed by a tracking mechanism and coordination with schools can support in enrolling and tracking children in schools.	National Database and Registration Authority and Local Union Council and District and Area Education Offices (SELD)
Introduce wrap around services like school feeding programs to support children and families dealing with the effects of poverty	In-school feeding programs not only support the nutrition needs of children, but also have positive effects on learning. While Sindh does not have a large-scale in-school feeding program in place, programs have been piloted over the years that have shown promising results. Evaluation of an in-school feeding program implemented in selected areas of Sindh with primary school girls showed improvement in learning (Hussain et al., 2013). Results of a "Food for Education" program implemented in KP showed that the intervention reduced incidence of child labor in treatment areas (Khan et al., 2020).	Secretariat of SELD + NGOs offering these services
Undertake (re)enrolment drives at the end of summer vacations	Drives to enroll children are not just needed at the start of school but after summer vacations as well to ensure that children continue with school, especially in contexts where schooling norms are weak.	District and Area Education Offices (SELD)

ACTIONS	DETAILS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Continue to offer cash transfers for enrollment and retention in schools and assess the efficacy of the program in Sindh	There is substantial evidence of the effectiveness of cash transfers in reducing cost of schooling and increasing enrollment (Evans and Yuan, 2022). Pakistan has a conditional cash transfer program linked to enrollment of children, from primary schooling to higher secondary education, which was expanded to all districts of the country in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). There is a need to assess the efficacy of the program in rural Sindh, especially for the most excluded children.	Benazir Income Support Programme Provincial, Divisional and Taluka offices and District and Area Education Offices (SELD)
Expand preschool access to set schooling norms and ease child-care burden of girls and women	Preschools, designed on a play-based model, can alleviate parent concerns about academic rigor at the entry point of school enrollment and aid in setting norms for children to attend schools. They would also help reduce care burden of mothers, young women and girls whose time is occupied in taking care of young children.	Divisional Directorates (SELD)
5. The education system needs to develop capacity to respond to rural realities and interests		
Design a matrix to assess community needs along with possible solutions to respond to those needs	Even after broader policy changes, local-level understanding of needs and contextualized responses is important due to differences across settlements based on their economic and social context. Based on this determination, some settlements may need additional support mechanisms for enrollment and continuity of children in schools. Additionally, there is a need to build capacity and delegate more at the local level to respond to contextual needs of communities.	Secretariat of SELD + District and Area Education Offices (SELD)
Train teachers to contextualize classroom teaching and learning activities for rural surroundings	For children to develop a connection between what they are learning in the classroom and their surroundings, train teachers in pedagogical practices that integrate local context into subject-specific teaching. This supports the education system to respond to different realities. Further, given that education needs across rural Sindh are not homogenous, it will be important that teachers are able to promote an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that draws from surroundings. To support teachers, supplementary learning material may also need to be designed to aid student learning.	Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (SELD) and Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (SELD)

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Endnotes

1. In 2015, Sindh adopted an Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, including children as young as 3 years old, with plans to include even younger children by 2030.
2. In the seventh five-year plan, the settlement size was 500 and was lowered to 300 in the eighth five-year plan.
3. In the absence of a public system of law and order, dogs are routinely kept by communities to protect their livestock and agri-produce.
4. Sindh Education Foundation is a public entity that oversees schools under public-private partnerships.
5. Families in these settlements did not have any landholdings. The security of their homes was dependent on the same landowner who owned the fields that they worked on. Compensation for work on the fields was dependent on their productivity and was in the form of a share in the crops.
6. While both men and women work on the fields, a share in the crops or compensation for work is paid to the men.

APPENDIX 1
Research Methodology

This policy brief presents findings from qualitative research conducted in July and August of 2022 that sought to answer the following research question: How can policy responses be improved to ensure the most-excluded children in Sindh (i.e. girls from low-income families residing in rural areas Sindh) enter and learn in school? In doing so, we were guided by three specific sub-questions:

1. What are the needs and aspirations of the children, especially girls, who are most excluded from schooling?

2. What barriers make it difficult for them to access learning opportunities?

3. How do current policies address the issue of school enrollment and learning in rural Sindh?

RESEARCH SETTING

To explore the research questions in a variety of geographical settings across Sindh, eight settlements (locations) in four districts were included in this study (see Table A.1). Given that Sindh has in all 30 districts, a set of criteria was applied to choose the four districts in order to capture as much diversity in the rural dis-

tricts as possible. Criteria for choosing the districts were based on the following parameters (see table A.1):

- Diversity of climate contexts across chosen districts within the province.

- Representation of religions other than Islam.

- Representation of mother tongue other than Sindhi.

- Variation in population density across districts.

- Above average proportion of out-of-school children, compared to that of the province (44 percent).

Once districts were selected, the settlements within these were chosen with the support of volunteer teachers running community-based informal education centers, under The Citizen Foundation's (TCF) Sujag program. To minimize effects from prior interactions, none of the settlements where TCF's non-formal education program was operational were chosen. Most of these settlements were accessible only via unpaved roads. Characteristics of districts and settlements selected as part of this study are listed in table A.1

TABLE A.1. **Characteristics of the district and settlements covered as part of the study**

No.	District	Location in Sindh	Population density (people per square km) (Census, 2017)	Proportion of out-of-school children (PSLM, 2020)	Proportion of rural population (Census, 2017)	Religion	Mother tongue	Population of settlement	Profession	Home on owned land	Women educated beyond primary
		CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISTRICT				**OTHER CHARACTERISTICS SPECIFIC TO THE SETTLEMENT**					
1	Thatta	Lower	115	71%	82%	Islam	Sindhi	300	Agriculture*	Yes, for majority	None
2	Thatta	Lower	115	71%	82%	Islam	Sindhi	1,750	Agriculture	Yes, for majority	Yes, few
3	Tharparkar	Desert area	84	56%	92%	Hinduism	Parkari	400	Agriculture + services	Yes, for majority	Yes, 1
4	Tharparkar	Desert area	84	56%	92%	Hinduism	Dhatki	4,500	Agriculture + services	Yes, for more than half	Yes, few
5	Kashmore	Upper	423	67%	77%	Islam	Seraiki	800	Agriculture	No	None
6	Kashmore	Upper	423	67%	77%	Islam	Seraiki	2,400	Agriculture	No	None
7	Sanghar	Central	191	49%	71%	Islam	Sindhi	250	Agriculture	No, with few exceptions	None
8	Sanghar	Central	191	49%	71%	Islam	Sindhi	550	Agriculture	Yes, for majority	None

*Agriculture here includes farming and livestock management

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The research questions were studied from multiple perspectives to have a better understanding of the lived realities of children and their communities in the rural context of Sindh. We spoke with parents (both fathers and mothers) and children who are at the front line and are not having their education needs and aspirations met. Additionally, we included children who are going to schools and men and women who were the most educated within the settlement,[1] in order to understand how they accessed schools and what their learning journey and future pathways had been in comparison to children and adults with no or limited exposure to schooling.

We also included government officials directly and tangentially involved in the design and administration of education policies that determine the future of millions of children. See table A.2 for details of research methods.

TABLE A.2. Summary of research instruments and participants covered in the study

Scope of research	Method	Type of participant	Female	Male	Total
			SAMPLE COVERED		
Background characteristics	One-on-one structured interviews	Children not in school: 5-7 years***	29	16	45
Background characteristics, schooling journey and learning outcomes*	One-on-one structured interviews	Children in school: 5 to 14 years	15	28	43
Education needs and aspirations	Visual-based Activity	Children not in school: 5-7 years***	29	16	45
	Visual-based Activity	Mothers and fathers of children not in school	25	17	42
	Visual-based Activity	Mothers and fathers of children not in school	25	17	42
Demographics of the settlement**	One-on-one structured interviews	Community Individuals	-	8	8
Schooling journey and future pathways of educated men and women**	One-on-one structured interviews	Most educated men and women (studied at least beyond primary)	3	7	10
Current policies and how they address disparities in school enrollment and learning in Sindh	One-on-one interviews	Government officials associated with education planning and development	1	3	4
	One-on-one interviews	Non-state actors	-	2	2

Note:
* This instrument was adapted from previously conducted research informing a forthcoming paper by Saeed and Saleem (2023)
** These two instruments were adapted from previously conducted, unpublished research by Budhani et al. (2016)
*** There may be variation between the actual and reported age of the child. Most of the parents that we interviewed did not know the exact age of their children; a child's age is often not recorded until initial school enrollment, if and when that happens.

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1. Education levels of the most-educated person were relative to the schooling levels of men and women within the settlement. For instance, in one settlement, the highest-educated male had completed twelve years of education and the highest-educated female had completed five years of education; both were interviewed as part of the research.

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The Echidna Global Scholars Program at the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings seeks to catalyze and amplify the impact of local leaders working to advance gender equality in and through education across the Global South.

During a six-month fellowship, Echidna Global Scholars conduct individual research focused on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls, young women, and gender non-conforming people, develop their leadership and evidence-based policy skills, build substantive knowledge on gender and global education issues, and expand their pathways for impact. Upon completion of the fellowship, scholars transition to the Echidna Alumni Network, a growing community of practice aimed at promoting their significant, sustained, and collective influence on gender-transformative education globally and locally.