



THE IMPACT OF LIFE-SKILLS BLENDED GIRLS SECONDARY EDUCATION ON GIRLS, THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
The District of Chakwal	2
Literature Review (Some other Examples of supporting girls' education)	3
Methodology	5
Data Analysis	5
Reasons for Termination of Schooling	7
Limitations of the Intervention	8
Conclusion	9

Introduction

Girls' access to secondary education is a serious challenge, especially in remote rural areas of Pakistan. At the primary level, 32 per cent of girls are out of school, by grade six the ratio of out-of-school-girls reaches 59 per cent and only 13 per cent make it to the 9th grade¹. It has a very serious bearing on their capacities to realize their full potential, claim their basic human rights and to attain an acceptable standard of living.

Bedari, a women and girls' rights civil society organization in Pakistan has supported 787 girls from rural areas of district Chakwal, Pakistan to complete their secondary education. The support included three things;

- i. Financial incentives for girls to bear a portion of the schooling expenditures
- ii. Training of these girls on life skills and basic human rights and
- iii. Community mobilization including the training of parents and community volunteers on human rights with special focus on girls' secondary education

Bedari implemented these projects during the last 12 years. It is high time to evaluate the impact of this intervention. This research aims to see the impact of these innovative efforts on the lives of girls, their families and communities.

The District of Chakwal

The geographic and social context of the project is that Chakwal is, predominantly, a rural district. Its population is one and half million people of which 42 percent, 627,000 persons, are 19 years or below². The social indicators of Chakwal are relatively good, better than many other areas of Pakistan. The literacy rate of Chakwal is 74 percent³ as compared to the national rate of 62 percent⁴. The primary school enrolment rate is also impressive by Pakistani Standard. The following table⁵ gives a good picture of gender-wise enrolment. It is 2015 data, a little old, but that was the latest available.

The data given in the table is of 2015. It shows that girls' enrollment including Madrasah is 84.2 percent whereas the boys' enrollment is 89.1 percent. The dropout rate in both cases is almost equal and less than two percent. However, the ratio of never-enrolled girls is 14 percent and it is significantly higher than that of never-enrolled boys', which is nine percent.

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/11/12/shall-i-feed-my-daughter-or-educate-her/barriers-girls-education-pakistan>

² https://www.citypopulation.de/en/pakistan/distr/admin/705_chakwal/

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakwal_District#:~:text=to%20travel%20over.-,Demography,The%20literacy%20rate%20was%2074.64%25

⁴ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan
<http://mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/NjQ4ZTg2NjltOWM2NC00Y2IxLTkzMDgtMjU2OTFhMjA4NzNh#:~:text=The%20current%20literacy%20rate%20of,is%20illiterate%20in%20the%20country.>

⁵ http://aserpakistan.org/index.php?func=data_statistics

Enrollment (Gender Wise)							
% Children in different types of schools					% Out-of-school		Total
Gender	Govt.	Non-state providers			Never enrolled	Drop-out	
		Pvt.	Madrasah	Others			
Female	46.1	37.9	0.2	0	14	1.8	100
Male	47.9	40.5	0.4	0.3	9	1.9	100

The challenges for post primary level education for girls are still significant in Pakistan and Chakwal is no exception to it. This is despite the fact that topography of Chakwal is easy to travel, mostly plains. The roads network is good and all the partner villages are accessible through roads. All the partner villages have primary schools for girls whereas the secondary schools are available at a distance of 10 to 20 kilometers. Low quality cheap vehicles are also available. It takes travelling expenses to attend the secondary schools; therefore, the girls from un-affording families were not attending.

All the beneficiaries of the projects were the girls from the families who cannot afford the secondary education of their daughters. It could be lack of money and not-giving-importance-to-girls-education or both. Bedari supported these girls and their families financially to meet their schooling expenditures. In addition to the financial support, Bedari trained them on (1) Life-Skills and Self-Growth, (2) Personal Hygiene, (3) Sexual and Reproductive Health, (4) Impact of Child Marriages, (5) Gender, (6) Gender Based Violence, (7) Women Rights, (8) Sexual Harassment and (9) Self-defense. The parents and community volunteers were trained on human rights with particular focus on the rights of women and girls and their education.

Various international partners/donors including COL have supported the intervention financially and technically, during the last 12 years.

Main objective of the evaluation research study is to assess the positive and negative impact of secondary level girls' education blended with life-skill training at individual, family and community levels. A review of challenges of implementing such projects is also part of the study. This is the precise report of the study. It contains a brief context and methodology, literature review, data analysis and the conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review (Some other Examples of supporting girls' education)

Increasing secondary school enrolment rates of children particularly girls has been a challenge for developing countries and they have introduced various schemes to achieve this target.

As per World Bank report, the ratio of female enrollment in secondary education in Pakistan is half as compared to that of males. In 2018, the net enrollment rate of girls at secondary level was 34.2 % whereas, for boys it was 65.65%. (World Bank Report, 2020)⁶

⁶Syeda Noor ul Ain Amjad: The low enrollment rate dilemma for girls in secondary level education
<https://page.org.pk/the-low-enrolment-rate-dilemma-for-girls-in-secondary-level-education/>

Support grants in different developing countries have been used by governments and NGOs to motivate girls to pursue secondary education. The idea is to financially help the girls who drop out of schools after primary level due to poverty.

One such example is Bangladesh. The country promoted female secondary education through its female secondary school stipend project launched in early 1980s, a time when the country ranked among the lowest in female secondary education. The government decided to support female secondary education with assistance from its development partners. As a result, the attendance of girls compared to boys started to grow at a record rate after the government decided to exempt fees and give cash incentives for girl students. The program helped the country make impressive progress in enrolment rates for female students at secondary level that surpassed male enrolment rates (Female 53 % to male 47 %) in the first decade of 21st century.⁷

In India, government has initiated schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Parhao (protect and educate daughters) encouraging parents to maintain funds for the education of their daughters. In the state of Assam, a scheme of awarding scooters to deserving girl students was initiated in order to make their travel to school safer in the year 2020 after it was analyzed that unsafe travel was the main reason for girls to discontinue their education post primary.⁸

The provincial government of Punjab, Pakistan, initiated a stipend scheme in 2013 by offering Rupees. 600/- per quarter to each girl of secondary school age. For this purpose, 12 low performing districts across South Punjab were selected. The government later increased the stipend amount to Rs. 1000. The stipend scheme was reported to have increased enrolment to some extent particularly in districts Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh but overall no significant change was observed.⁹ Government does not know the reasons.

There was a stipend program for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as well. A case study in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) of the impact of stipend program shows no significant increase in the rate of enrolment of female students at secondary level exposing cultural barriers to be the main obstacle in the way of female education and not the lack of financial resources.¹⁰

Most recently, the Ehsaas Education Stipends program has been launched by the government of Pakistan. With higher incentive for girls, the program intends to encourage parents to send their children, particularly girls to schools. The program is operational nationwide in 160 districts. Under this scheme, primary school children are granted Ehsaas Education Stipends of Rs. 2000 for girls and Rs. 1500 for boys per quarter; Secondary school children are given Rs. 3000 for girls and Rs. 2500 for boys, quarterly. Higher secondary school children are awarded Rs. 4000 for girls and Rs. 3500 for boys. Since, it is a newly launched scholarship program, its impact has not been evaluated yet.¹¹

⁷<http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00811/WEB/OTHER/711B108C.HTM?OpenDocument>

⁸<https://www.bbau.ac.in/Docs/FoundationCourse/TM/MPDC405/Women%20Empowerment%20Schemes.pdf>

⁹<https://www.sparcpk.org/images/Pubs-Thumb/DAI%20English%20School%20Stipend%20Report.pdf>

¹⁰https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343126056_Female_School_Stipend_Programs_in_Pakistan_A_Case_Study_of_Khyber_Pakhtunkhwa_Region

¹¹<https://dailytimes.com.pk/810760/incentives-for-girls-under-ehsaas-stipends-to-increase-enrolment/>

Methodology

The field research was conducted through participatory methodologies. Qualitative information was collected through focus group discussions with girls, their parents and community leaders, separately. The qualitative information collected through FGDs is verified through in-depth interviews of girls. The secondary data is also used. It is in the shape of reports and other communication, available in Bedari archives.

Bedari supported 787 girls from 16 villages of district Chakwal. It enabled them to start and/or continue their secondary education in a nearest public secondary school.

For in-depth interviews of girls, the researcher used two stage random sampling methodology. At first stage, five villages were selected randomly. At the second stage, eight girls from each of the sampled village were selected randomly for in-depth interviews. Fifteen FGDs were conducted in total; five with girls, one in each village, five with parents one in each village and five with the community leaders/volunteers, one in each village. The project staff is also interviewed in detail to know their assessment and the point of view. Three school teachers were also interviewed.

The indicators include the role of girls in decision-making at individual, family and community levels, SRHR status, age at marriage, opinion about family size and birth spacing, income and wellbeing of the family.

A special feature of the research methodology is the triangulation of data. There are three independent groups of respondents, girls, parents and community volunteers. The data are collected through three methods, in-depth groups and the review of secondary data.

Case studies and success stories are also collected to see how the lives of individual girls and families have changed.

Data Analysis

Bedari gave financial support to 787 girls to meet their secondary school expenditure. Seventy-five percent of the scholarship holders completed the process and were able to achieve some milestone in their schooling. Six percent of the girls, 47 students, completed only the elementary school education. A good number that is 60 percent, 465 students, completed their secondary education. Nine percent, 71 girls, completed their higher secondary and one percent, just seven girls, completed their graduation.

During the detailed discussions with various groups of communities, they talked about the following benefits they got from this intervention, supporting the secondary education for girls.

Future looks Bright to Me

Mehvish lives in Sadiq Abad and is the eldest daughter of the family. Her father is a small-level salesperson. There was one elementary school in her village. Her father let her complete her elementary schooling after which he could not afford to pay her school expenses for secondary education. This led her to drop out of school. She was also forced to enter into early marriage as she was engaged with her cousin since birth.

“Imagine you are a girl who went to school, loved her lessons, enjoyed playing with her classmates but when it was time for secondary education, she had to drop out of school. It was a breaking moment for

me. Bedari's help came at the right time and I could continue my education. Now I am an advocate of girls' rights and future looks bright for me , empowered by education."

The respondents told the researcher that secondary school education has helped female students to escape child marriage. The community leaders think that it has not only helped the participating girls, but other girls too. The child marriage was significantly reduced in partner villages due to this intervention. The quantitative data also showed that only nine, out of 787 girls, were married before the age of 18. The community, especially women and girls, knew that escaping child marriage has the potential to give a whole host of benefits to the girls.

- i. The girls who completed their secondary education have much more self-confidence than the ones who could not pursue their secondary education. It is evident from the way they carry themselves in the life in general. Over 77 percent of girls interviewed for the research also said that they felt more self-confident than their peers who could not get secondary education. This self-confidence has helped them in their negotiations with various stakeholders including their families.
- ii. Communication skills of girls have improved significantly. The quantitative data showed that 77 percent of the girls felt that their communication skills have improved significantly. They said that they have learned new techniques of listening and weighing (thinking twice before uttering a word) their response to any situation. This is especially important because they have to face unreasonable questions and taunts from certain quarters of the community, all the time. Good communication and self-confidence has helped them in reaching a win-win situation more often. Many girls said that due to good communication they have much better relationships with their male relatives such as fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins. It seems worth mentioning here that it is a semi-tribal culture and women have a very fragile position. They have to keep the traditions and bear the burden of the "honor" of extended family. The girls who have completed their secondary education think that they are able to navigate their way around the traditions in a much better manner.
- iii. "We learned to say no". Many girls were excited to tell that they have learned to say no without inviting a lot of trouble. The quantitative data showed that 40 percent of the respondents mentioned during the interviews. They said that self-growth training has helped them, particularly on this aspect.
- iv. Many girls were the first in their families to complete secondary education. Their families are also quite happy about it. This is a huge advantage for girls. They have more say in the decision-making at individual and family levels. Sixty-five percent girls said that they are more empowered to make decisions at individual level. Ten percent of women said that they have a significant say in the family decisions. The data shows that girls do not have any say in the decision-making at community level. The community members in FGDs confirmed the same.
- v. Having an educated young woman at home has improved the domestic environment and made it pro-women, more than before. As an instance, the participants of the FGDs asserted that odds of taking a patient, particularly women, to the hospital have risen significantly. In

- the same way, the chances that other siblings would continue schooling to secondary level have also increased.
- vi. The quantitative data shows that, a small number of girls, 12 percent, were able to pursue their studies to degree level. That is a huge plus for the girls as well as for the family and community.
 - vii. Some 15 percent of girls got paid jobs due to their secondary and higher secondary education. There was more excitement seen, about this, during the FGDs. The community thinks that the number of girls doing paid jobs are about 25 percent.
 - viii. The question about the girls' knowledge regarding sexual and reproductive health and family planning was asked only from girls and women and not from male community volunteers or fathers. The girls and women asserted that they know a lot about SRH and family planning, however talking about it to men is still not accepted. Girls said that they help their elder sisters and other women who are married and needs this information. It is about making the lives of women better. In the individual interviews, over 80 percent girls said that their menstrual health has improved due to cleanliness and better management.
 - ix. The secondary data, projects' progress reports, show that Bedari Help line and project staff and schoolteachers have received complaints of sexual harassment, child sexual abuse and even of incest. This completely new for these rural areas. This tells that the training package and the secondary education for girls have helped in addressing, child sexual abuse, incest and sexual harassment.
 - x. The girls have also helped their mothers in cases of domestic violence. Mothers have confirmed it in particular.
 - xi. Over thirty percent girls said that they could travel, indecently, through public transport.

Learning to lead

Kishwar is a 21 years old girl. She was unable to continue her schooling after elementary education without Bedari's financial support. She completed her higher secondary and left village to complete her graduation. She returned to her village and is now teaching at a local school. She said that she wanted to use her experience to champion for girls' education.

"I want to act as a role model for my community," she added. "I want to be a teacher to empower the next generation of girls. I am running a home coaching center taking extra classes in the evening. I am also helping the parents understand that education is critical in tackling harmful gender norms and empowering girls to bring the change. It gives girls the skills to become leaders, innovators and change makers, and to tackle future challenges."

Reasons for Termination of Schooling

An astonishing number i.e. 197 students, 25 percent of the total, dropped out from schools. This happened despite the fact that Bedari was making intensive mobilization efforts in the partner

communities and schools. In the focus group discussions (FGDs) the community gave the following reasons for the dropout of girls.

- i. End of Project: The project ended. There was no money available to continue the scholarships. The schooling of 45 girls terminated. This is 23 percent of total terminations.
- ii. Temporary Migration of the Family: The schooling of 30 girls terminated as the family has to migrate to some other areas, mostly for economic reasons.
- iii. Not Interested in Education: Forty-four girls, 22 percent, left schools either due to lack of interest or failing the annual examination.
- iv. Charity Not Acceptable: Ten girls, five percent of the total, left because their parents thought that they do not want to accept charity.
- v. Security Concerns of families: Nineteen girls, about ten percent, left due to security related concerns of families. Two girls did elope marriages and that had an adverse impact on the thinking of parents.
- vi. Madrassah Education: Fifteen girls left schools to join Madrassah for religious education.
- vii. Child Marriage: Eleven girls, five percent, married in this childhood and had to leave school. Two of these marriages were elope marriages. These elope marriage cases worsen the security concerns of parents.
- viii. Health Issues and Death: This was the reason for 23 girls, 12 percent of the total dropped out girls. For instance five girls died, one honor killing, one suicide and three natural deaths. In two cases both parents died. The remaining 16 girls seriously ill and had to leave the schools.

Ray of Light

Ayesha is a nine-year old girl studying in class three and is very fond of education. She belongs to a small village in Chakwal. Her father was a daily wage labor with meager income.

Ayesha's dhok (hamlet) had a primary school but it was in bad condition the Government closed it down. Ayesha with her two friends Muqadas and Naila continued their study through home schooling. They completed primary school education as external students. Beyond primary education, Ayesha and her friends did not have any chance to continue their studies.

Bedari support reached in time and they were very happy. Ayesha's parents were reluctant initially, but felt convinced soon. All the four girls completed their secondary education. They have already started a home tuition center for village kids. They are helping as well as earning a small amount.

"I hope to support other vulnerable girls to access education." said Muqadas

Limitations of the Intervention

Every project has its limitations and the interventions to support secondary education or girls in rural areas is no exception. The project can support only to girls who have already completed their primary school education. The financial situation of families whose girls have completed their primary school education is relatively better than the ones whose girls could not completed even their primary school education. Many community volunteers genuinely think and assert that any such support should include

those families and girls who have not attended school at all. This created some discomfort; however, there was not much that could be done about it. The projects and private funding has its own limitations. It cannot reach out to everybody therefore, you have to include some and exclude others.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, it can be safely concluded that;

- i. The intervention was highly successful as an overwhelming 60 percent of girls completed either secondary education or higher. Another 15 percent completed elementary education, meaning thereby that 75 percent achieved some educational milestone.
 - ii. Supporting girls' secondary education through financial assistance and life-skill training has a significant positive impact on the lives of girls and their families. It has empowered them, boosted their self-confidence, and improved their communication and negotiation skills. This as a result improved their status and the relationships within the family. It capacitated them to have a say in the decision-making at individual and family level.
 - iii. Financial assistance to support girls' schooling expenditures work. Many girls would not have been able to achieve their secondary education without stipends by Bedari.
 - iv. Girls' secondary education helps in reducing the child marriage. The child marriage rate among the participating girls was only five percent whereas the child marriage rate in the area is about 25 percent.
 - v. The girls were able to remember much of what they learned during the training. They were very happy to learn these new things and they call them very useful.
 - vi. Secondary education helps in addressing the child sexual abuse and domestic violence.
 - vii. The secondary education of girls is a challenging job in Pakistan, especially in rural areas. It needs intensive community mobilization work with parents and community volunteers. Otherwise, just the financial assistance may not give desired results. The program by government of Punjab, Pakistan to give financial assistance could not have the desired results because the government projects usually lack quality community mobilization.
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