

# How Community Engagement and Local Community Organisations Contribute to Equitable Participation of Out-of-School Girls Affected by CEFM?

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## **Abstract: 00364**

Child marriage denies a girl her childhood, disrupts her education, limits her opportunities...” (Government of Canada – UNICEF, 2014). Millions of girls are forced into early marriage for economic and cultural reasons and denied the opportunity to education. If resource-poor families are to invest in the education of their children, boys receive priority. However, if education is both affordable and flexible, girls too can have the opportunity to participate without disrupting their responsibilities in the home and the family. If girls are taught the skills necessary for livelihoods, they can be a major source of supplementing the family income. CEFM is a deep-rooted problem, and it is therefore imperative to mobilize communities with its deep-rooted cultures, traditions and practices, to demonstrate the benefits of education for girls. Within the context of sustainable development, it is critical to raise awareness among the communities that child marriage has wide ranging negative consequences for development and that allowing girls having education and training can add enormous value to the society as well as their personal and family lives. The study aims at identifying the role of community engagement and local organisations to ensure equitable access of marginalised and out-of-school girls to education and training and will explore: (1) Cross-country variation in the causes, such as CEFM, that leads to girls drop out of school. (2)The role of community engagement to ensure equitable participation and access of the girls to learning; and(3)The role of local organisations to decrease girls’ vulnerability to CEFM and improve equitable access to relevant and quality education and learning. The study will be based on data collected from surveys which will be administered on 209out of school girls, affected by CEFM in both urban and rural areas of - Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. A structured questionnaire will be used for data collection.

## **1. Introduction and overview**

A growing number of young adolescents are out of school, with the global total reaching almost 65 million in 2013. Adolescents of lower secondary school age (typically 12 to 15 years) are almost twice as likely to be out of school as primary school-age children, with 1 out of 6 (17%) not enrolled. (UIS, 2015). The hardest to reach children are still out of school. They are poor, rural and often girls (UNESCO, I., & UNICEF, 2015).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 states: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, which emphasises the need to “Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large” (UN, 2015) Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but it is also an imperative, for peace and sustainable development. With Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), the international community has pledged to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning

opportunities for all.” (UNESCO, 2015) The onus is on all stakeholders to make a contribution in realising the SDGs in its entirety.

The following factors are raised in literature as some of the significant causes for girls not attending school:

- *Early marriages:* According to the Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005-2006 (International Institute for Population Sciences and Macro International 2007), 47 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before they were 18 years of age. (ICRW, 2013) The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Reports (BBS, 2013) that nearly 50% of adolescent girls are married by the age of 15 and that 60% of them become mothers by the age of 20.
- *Distance to school and security concerns:* Distance from schools has been a security issue for many countries. It is a very real and relevant barrier to girls in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh according to various studies. In a recent Population Council study in Pakistan suggested that if a middle school is within one kilometre the predicted attendance is 65%; however if it is more than four kilometers away the probability of attendance falls to 54% (Zaidi et. Al, 2011). Girls living at a distance of 500 meters or more from a school are 15% less likely to attend school compared to those living next door to the school. *Cultural values:* Culturally it is not desired that girls travel unaccompanied for long distances. The issue of distance from school is not only linked to security, but also to cultural and social values (Siddhu, 2011).
- *Cost of schooling:* Direct cost and opportunity costs. In most cases parents cannot afford to send girls to school and prefer that they rather find a job to contribute to the family’s income.

For the purpose of this study the authors will only focus on one of the causes, namely early marriage because of its direct relevance to the GIRLS Inspire project, for girls not attending school. While being in school is not enough to prevent marriage, being out of school certainly accelerates the likelihood of it. Child marriage is not only a painful reality, but it also is a grave violation of the rights of children. Globally 720 million women alive today were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Every year, they are joined by another 15 million child brides – the equivalent to the entire population of Mali or Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2014). The picture of child marriage is more alarming in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South East Asian countries. Although there are slight variation in the reasons, child marriage impacts negatively on the socio economic progress of these countries.

“Child marriage denies a girl her childhood, disrupts her education, limits her opportunities...” (Government of Canada – UNICEF, 2014). Millions of girls are forced into early marriage for economic and cultural reasons and denied the opportunity to education. If resource-poor families are to invest in the education of their children, boys receive priority. However, if education is both affordable and flexible, girls too can have the opportunity to participate without disrupting their responsibilities in the home and the family. Furthermore, if girls are taught the skills necessary for livelihoods, they can be a major source of supplementing the family income.

“Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality; and can be sustained through entrenched discriminatory social norms, poverty, and lack of education or even due to misplaced perceptions of providing protection for girls during a time of increased instability when girls are at a higher risk of physical or sexual abuse” (World Vision UK, 2016)<sup>11</sup>. Within the context of sustainable development, it is critical to raise awareness among the communities that child marriage has wide ranging negative consequences for development and that allowing girls having education and training can add enormous value to the society as well as their personal and family lives. The GIRLS Inspire project of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is working towards “Enabling conditions for sustainable livelihoods for women & girls that will break the cycle of child, early and forced marriage.”(COL, 2016)

Through this initiative, COL aims to contribute to break the cycle of CEFM and create an enabling environment for unmarried and already married girls to achieve the following results:

- enhanced economic leadership role in the family and community for 45,000 girls and women who will be able to take and exercise greater control over decisions that influence their lives, including getting married and having children at a time of their choice;
- increased equitable participation in quality open and distance learning (ODL) to girls and women in disadvantaged communities; and

- increased access to safe, quality and gender-sensitive Open, Distance and Technology-based learning opportunities for girls and women in rural communities of the selected countries.

## 2. Objectives

The study aims at identifying the cross-country variation in the causes, such as CEFM, that leads to girls' dropout of school. The study also explores the role of community engagement to ensure equitable participation and access of the girls to learning. The role of local organisations to decrease girls' vulnerability to CEFM and improve equitable access to relevant and quality education and learning is also scrutinised in the study.

## 3. Methodology

The study is based on data collected from surveys which has been administered on 209 out of school girls, affected by CEFM in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. A structured questionnaire used for data collection. The data used in this research are mostly baseline data. While the study is aimed at identifying the existing status of the girls who dropped out of school and the structure of the community engagement in favor of their learning, the impact of COL's intervention for mainstreaming girls' education and skill training can be investigated at a later stage comparing with the baseline findings.

The data collected in the study was analyzed with the use of strata (statistical package for the Social Sciences) software. Sampling for the qualitative research was purposive (rather than random). Table 1 below shows the distribution of the respondents in the study. A total of 209 girls of different age groups in three neighboring countries have been interviewed. Also 24 organisation members and 42 community leaders have also been interviewed to investigate their existing engagement in girls' education.

*Table 1*

Country	Girls (Age-wise)					Organisation members	Community leaders
	15-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	Total		
Bangladesh	20	33	16	1	70	9	6
India	15	39	15	1	70	9	18
Pakistan	19	48	2	0	69	6	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>42</b>

## 4. An Overview of the Study Countries

**4.1** Bangladesh and India features among the top 10 countries where the highest rates of child marriage prevails. In South Asia approximately 1 in 2 girls are married off before the age of 18, making South Asia the region with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in the region (52%), followed by India (47%), Nepal (37%) and Afghanistan (33%). In a study "Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal" (ICRW, Plan, 2013)<sup>13</sup> it is highlighted that the causes of child marriage include normative and structural factors as listed below:

- Tradition and the role of the family in child marriage
- Poverty and child marriage
- Education and child marriage
- Role of children in child marriage
- Engagement in paid work and child marriage
- Context-specific factors: demographic shifts

The same report reflects on Community leaders' response to child marriage as follows: "Community leaders and government officers felt that there has been positive change in the situation regarding child marriage, and that there are fewer child marriages. They credited the work of the government and NGOs in increasing awareness about the issue. They also mentioned the availability of education, which makes it easier for girls to stay in school longer. Some also mentioned the need to eradicate poverty as a means of eliminating child marriage. However, they felt that there was a need for greater awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage and better implementation of legislation. They also mentioned the need for cooperation between the government and NGOs and the critical role of parents and families." (ICRW, Plan, 2013)<sup>13</sup>

## 4.2 Brief country profiles

The survey countries are almost similar in their profiles. However, there are significant variations in terms of poverty levels and female literacy rates. Table 2 depicts the basic country profiles of three study countries. It is noticed that illiteracy rate among females is still a big challenge. Although other indicators are encouraging, Pakistan seems lagging behind in terms of female literacy compared to India and Bangladesh..

**Table 2**

Country	Population	GNI per capita (US\$)	Poverty head count	Literacy rate		
				All	Female	Male
Bangladesh	160 million	1,190	31.5 (2010)	61.5%	58.5%	64.6%
India	1.311 billion	1,590	21.9 (2011)	72.1%	62.8%	80.9%
Pakistan	189 million	1,440	29.5 (2013)	56.4%	42.7%	69.6%

Sources: <sup>14</sup>World Bank database, 2015; <sup>15</sup>UNESCO database, 2015

## 4.3 Child marriage scenarios

Table 3 shows that child marriage is much higher in Bangladesh followed by India and Pakistan respectively.

**Table 3**

Country	Legal marriage age		Child marriage (Female) Among 20-24 years old who married before 18 years
	Male	Female	
Bangladesh	21	18	59%
India	21	18	47%
Pakistan	18	16	18%

Sources: World Bank database, 2015; UNESCO database 2015

## 5. Findings and Analysis

### 5.1 Findings from surveys from women and girls

#### 5.1.1 Dropout grade level

Dropout of girls and women in the study countries happen mostly at secondary education level. However, there is a variation of the dropout grade levels in the three countries.

**Table 4**

Country	Grade 7 or before	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	I did not study	Total
Bangladesh	25	4	11	5	4	19	1	70
%	35.71	5.71	15.71	7.14	5.71	27.14	1.43	100
India	16	3	8	6	3	9	25	70
%	22.86	4.29	11.43	8.57	4.29	12.86	35.71	100

Pakistan	4	5	2	5	5	6	42	69
%	5.8	7.25	2.9	7.25	7.25	8.7	60.87	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>209</b>
%	<b>21.53</b>	<b>5.74</b>	<b>10.05</b>	<b>7.66</b>	<b>5.74</b>	<b>16.27</b>	<b>32.54</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

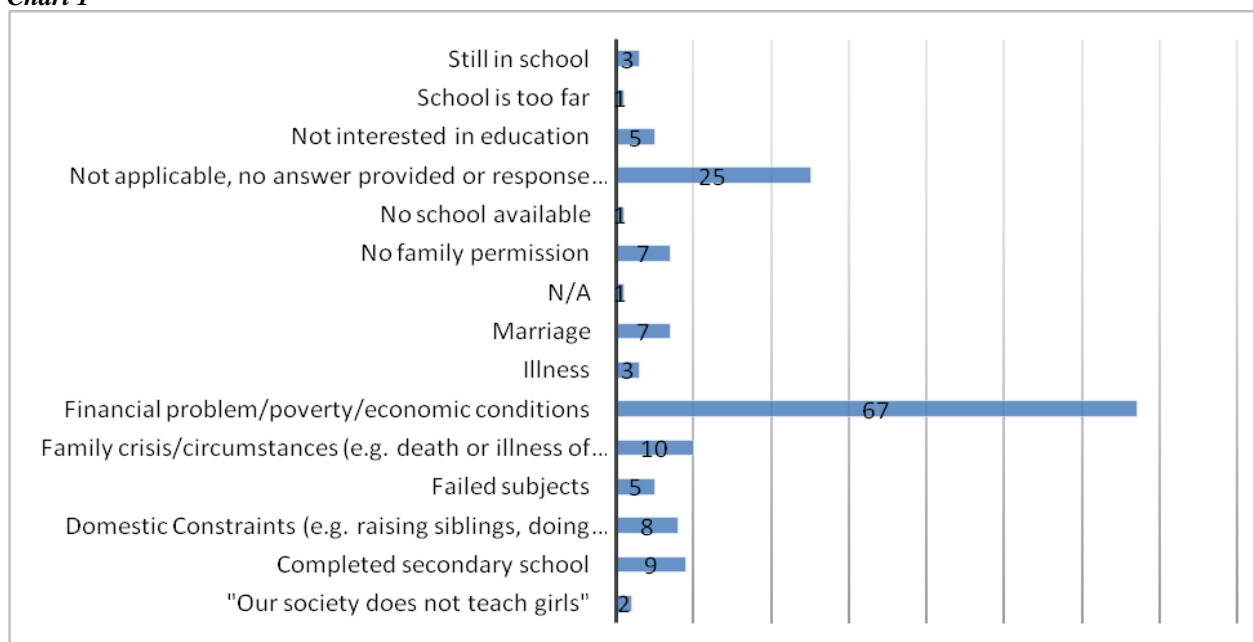
Table 4 shows the dropout rates against the grade levels. It also shows that the respondent girls mostly didn't continue their study up to secondary grades. Among the girls who continued their study at post-primary levels, most of them dropped out before completion of their secondary education. The data shows that overall, the highest dropout rate happens in grade 7. An alarming fact is that almost 47% of the respondent girls didn't attend school. Although the rates varies from one country to another, girls' dropout is still a big problem in the survey countries.

### 5.1.2 Reasons for dropout from education

Although there are several reasons for the girls to dropout at an early stage of their education, the root cause of all these reasons is poverty and lack of family and community support for girls' education.

Chart 1 below shows that poverty is the main reason for the respondent girls to dropout from education. However, there are lot of other reasons behind the girls' dropout including family crisis like father/mother's death, social restrictions, early marriage, illness, distance between school and home, no permission from family, in availability of school, etc. Among the survey countries, India is most vulnerable in terms of girls' dropout due to poverty or other economic and financial reasons. The dropout rate for this reason is almost 89% in India compared to 60% in Bangladesh and 62% in Pakistan (Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015).

Chart 1



Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

### 5.1.3 Limited economic opportunities for the girls

Economic opportunities for the respondent girls seem to be very limited. Their skill or freedom to work is not enough for them to be engaged in economic activities. They are mostly engaged in the household activities to support the parents. Table 5 shows that the respondent girls either don't find any opportunity to work or they are not even aware of the economic opportunities they may exploit. Among other reasons, lack of education and skills are the key barriers for these girls for lower engagement in the economic activities.

**Table 5**

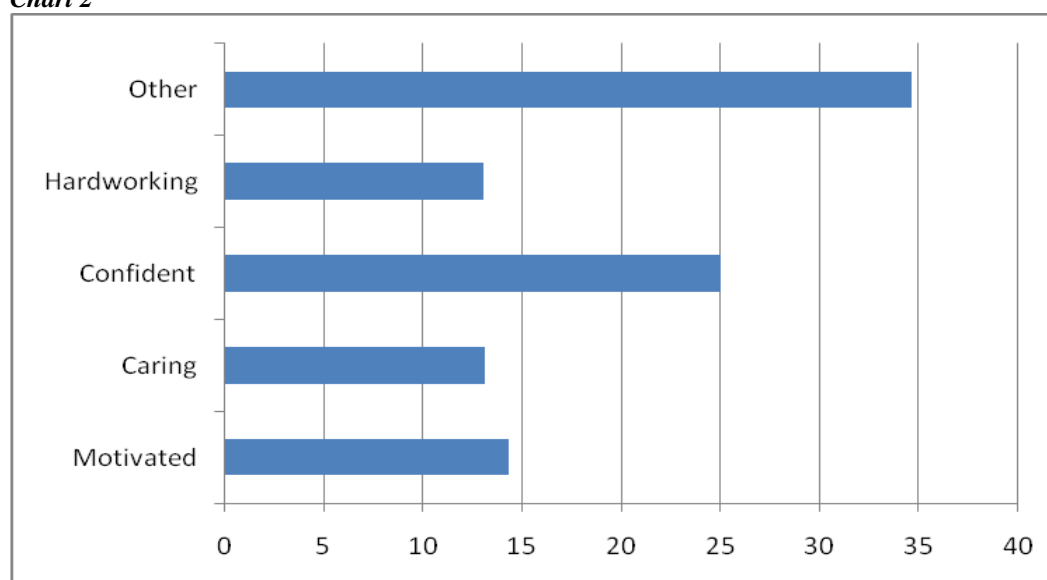
Country	Economic opportunity				Total
	Good	Neutral	Poor	Very poor	
Bangladesh	3	2	52	13	70
%	4.29	2.86	74.29	18.57	100
India	10	46	11	3	70
%	14.29	65.71	15.71	4.29	100
Pakistan	7	30	29	3	69
%	10.14	43.48	42.03	4.35	100
Total	<b>20</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>209</b>
%	<b>9.57</b>	<b>37.32</b>	<b>44.02</b>	<b>9.09</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

#### 5.1.4 Girls' perception about their qualities

It seems that the girls are fully aware of their qualities. Chart 2 summaries the perceptions of the respondent girls about their qualities. It also shows the most of the girls are highly confident, hardworking and motivated.

**Chart 2**



Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

#### 5.1.5 Ability to contribute family decision making

Ability to contribute to the family decision making for the girls and women is a big challenge. In a male dominated society, ignoring girls and women in the decision making process has become a norm. Table 6 summarises the perceptions of the respondent girls and women regarding their contribution in family decision making process. It also shows that the respondent girls are somewhat disempowered in the family decision making process. A bigger portion of the respondents remained neutral as they may not have an opinion on any role they may have in the family decision making process. Pakistan came out stronger than Bangladesh and India with fewer girls neutral, while 18.84% felt somewhat empowered compared to 24.64% who felt somewhat disempowered.

**Table 6**

Country	Neutral	Somewhat disempowered	Somewhat empowered	Very disempowered	Very empowered	Total
Bangladesh	3	32	23	11	1	70
%	4.29	45.71	32.86	15.71	1.43	100
India	51	5	5	6	3	70
%	72.86	7.14	7.14	8.57	4.29	100
Pakistan	29	17	13	5	5	69
%	42.03	24.64	18.84	7.25	7.25	100
Total	83	54	41	22	9	209
%	39.71	25.84	19.62	10.53	4.31	100.00

Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

### 5.1.6 Desire to have education

The majority of the girls indicated their desire to have an education. Table 7 shows that most of the girls showed strong desire to have education for their empowerment and better livelihood.

**Table 7**

Country	No	Yes	Total
Bangladesh	5	65	70
%	7.14	92.86	100
India	20	50	70
%	28.57	71.43	100
Pakistan	7	62	69
%	10.14	89.86	100
Total	32	177	209
%	15.31	84.69	100.00

Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

## 5.2 Organisational readiness for girls education

Organisational arrangements are important for girls' equitable access to education. Table 8 summarises the organisational arrangement for girls' education in the survey countries. It shows that organisational/institutional arrangements for girls' education are promising at its current stage. Most of the surveyed organizations in Bangladesh and Pakistan do have gender policy whereas the organizations in India do not have gender policy. In terms of quality assurance, Bangladesh and Pakistan are well ahead whereas the organizations in India do not have any quality assurance policy. In all three countries, the organisations seem to be lagging behind in using technologies in their learning support and resource sharing. They do not use ODL. The training programmes they provide are mostly face-to-face.

**Table 8**

	Gender policy			QA policy			Protection by tutors		Flexibility in learning access	
	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Yes	No	F2F	ODL
Pakistan (%)	0	90	10	20	40	40	90	10	100	0
India (%)	8.33	0	91.67	8.33	0	91.67	100	0	91.66	8.33
Bangladesh (%)	0	100	0	0	100	0	100	0	100	0

Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

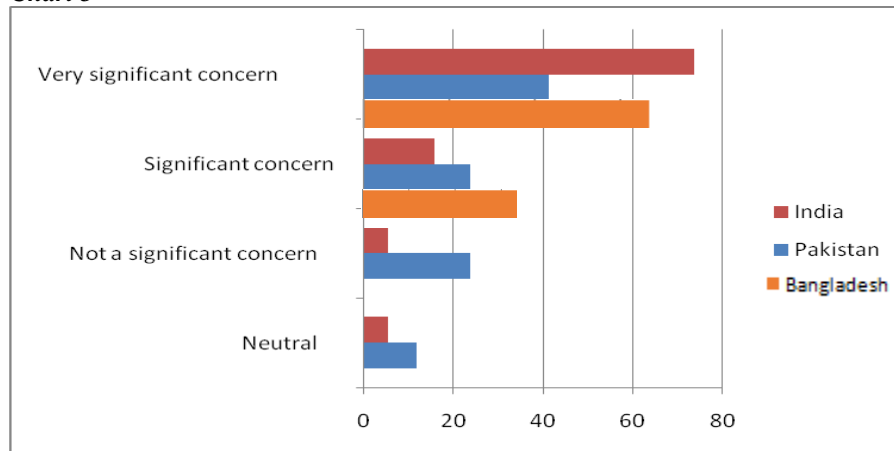
### 5.3 Community engagement in girls' education (This section reflects on the responses from Community Leaders)

Community support is always thought as an important enabler for girls' education. In most of the cases, lack of community engagement makes girls education more difficult.

#### 5.3.1 Community concern about CEFM

In Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, it has been observed that community leaders are significantly concerned about CEFM and its impact. In India and Bangladesh, community leaders seem to be more concerned about the consequence of CEFM compared to the same in Pakistan. Chart 3 summarises the concerns of community leaders in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh regarding CEFM and its impact.

Chart 3

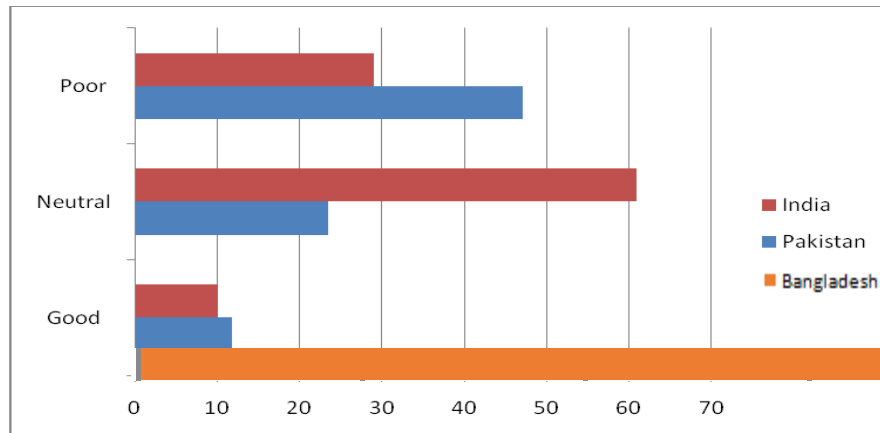


Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

#### 5.3.2 Employment opportunities

According to community leaders, the girls are in a disadvantaged position in terms of employment opportunities. Chart 4 shows that, employment opportunities for the girls in the communities are poor both in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. It is interesting to note that few of the community leaders remained neutral in sharing their views about the girls' employment scope in the communities in India and Pakistan. It is possible, that indirectly, it supports their reluctance about securing girls' employment opportunities in the communities. However, the response of the community leaders in Bangladesh were very much high and they endorsed that employment opportunities for girls in Bangladesh is good.

Chart 4



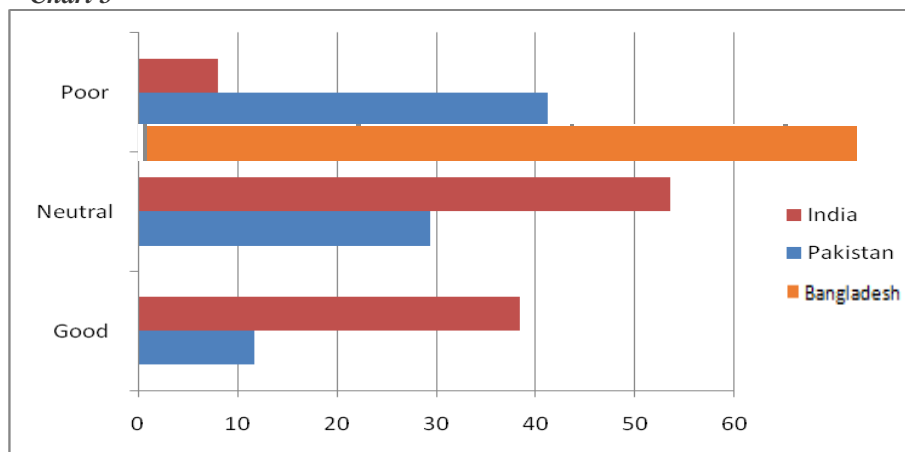
Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015



### 5.3.3 Community support toward girls education

Community support toward girls education seems to be very weak in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Whereas, community support is good in India. Again, a significant number of respondent community leaders were reluctant to speak about the essentiality of the community support for girls education. Chart 5 shows the comparative figures on community support to girls education in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Chart 5



Source: Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015

## 6. Discussion

Although girls' education has multiple impacts on the socio-economic development of a nation, there are still a number of structural and economic reasons that blocks the girls' education to be the mainstreamed. Based on the data from COL's Girls Inspire Baseline Survey 2015, the paper addresses a triangular focus on the reasons of the girls' dropout from education.

- i. Cross-country variation in the causes, such as poverty and CEFM, that leads to girls drop out of school. It has been observed that girls' dropout was caused mostly by widespread poverty in the survey countries. The reasons behind girls' dropout are similar in all three countries where the project has been implemented
- ii. The role of local organizations to decrease girls' vulnerability to CEFM and improve equitable access to relevant and quality education and learning: Organizational/institutional arrangements for girls education are not that much promising. Most of the surveyed organizations do not have any gender policy though most of them got quality assurance policy of their own. Interestingly, the learning support by the tutors/teacher to the girls is satisfactory. The organizations seem to be lagging behind in using technologies in their learning supports and resource sharing; however, some of them meaningfully use the technologies in monitoring and evaluation of their implementation process of their girl's skill development projects, and
- iii. The role of community engagement to ensure equitable participation and access of the girls to learning: In terms of community concerns and supports for girls' education, the surveyed community leaders found less concerned on average about the barriers to girls' education. Also the employment opportunities for the girls in the communities are poor and the existing community supports seem to be weak toward girls' education.

## **7. Conclusion and recommendations**

The findings justifies the scope for interventions to enhance the opportunities for girls' education and empowerment to ensure sustainable livelihoods. This study recommends the following steps for girls' education to contribute towards ending the cycle of CEFM and improving girls' participation in education as it pertains to the role of the community and local organisations:

- Community engagement in the campaign for girls' education: Community leaders are most powerful local agents who have influence on the communities' decision making process. Therefore, community engagement has an important role in promoting girls' education through; Awareness raising on the benefits of education and training using ODL conducted with the whole community (parents and community leaders and women and girls); the Establishment of safe learning environment for teaching and learning of the women and girls and agreements to support women and girls' education between the community and the project teams in countries.
- Data matters: Measuring achievement of results for women and girls, is critical for advocacy and progress. Concerted efforts should be made to involve community leaders in monitoring progress.
- Equal employment opportunities for the girls at community levels: Local governments or community groups should create equal employment opportunities for the girls at community levels and work with educational institutions to engage the girls.
- Positions in community leadership structure: There should be assigned positions for the women in the leadership structures of the communities. It will encourage the girls/women to come forward and take control of their livelihood and lifestyle.

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