

ZEF POLICY BRIEF NO 35

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S DECISION POWER FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The Sustainable Development Agenda defines gender equality (SDG 5) and education for all (SDG 4) as key goals for human development. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the linkages between gender equality and education.

To investigate how women's empowerment – understood here as women's control over their own lives – impacts gender equality in their children's education, ZEF conducted research on women's role in decision making in households in Pakistan. Pakistan is currently lagging in both gender equality and quality education of children. Poor infrastructure and limited households' resources often restrict access to schools. Girls are disproportionately affected by these limitations, as it is common for parents to invest more in boys' education. ZEF's new research analysed whether women's participation in households' decisions regarding children's education reduces gender inequality in households' expenditures for children's education, as well as investigating if women's awareness of gender equality in education reduces inequalities between boys and girls at the household level.

RESULTS

Fewer girls than boys attend school

The per child household expenditures on education are significantly lower for girls than for boys. For example, for children age 11 to 16, the expenditures per girl are 46% lower than those per boy. Moreover, more girls than boys do not attend school. In rural Pakistan, according to the data used for the purpose of this research, this applies to 60% of the girls age 5 to 16 but only to 40% of the boys of the same age range.

Women are not always involved in decision-making

Asked about the female participation in household decisions regarding children's education, more than half of the women (55%) reported not to partake in the process and similar ratios responded that they do not contribute to deciding how much education children should receive, independently of the children's gender. However, women seem to be more involved in deciding whether children should attend school or not as 60% of the women participate in this decision. Simultaneously, 67% of the women disagree with the statement that it is more important to send boys to school than girls and 51% would like their daughters to complete 10 years of schooling such that they receive education beyond mere reading and writing skills. While these attitudes may not reflect consciousness of

gender inequality per se, they do relate to the concept of education aspirations for children being gender-specific. For instance, some women may think that girls do not benefit from receiving education as their tasks are household activities and do not require formal schooling.

Women's influence on education expenditures for girls aged 11 to 16

ZEF's new research finds that, on average, the share of households' education expenditures for girls age 11 to 16 is only about 44% of household's average per child allocation. If women report to participate in decisions, the share is up to 64% higher. If consciousness towards gender equality is simultaneously regarded, women showing awareness of the issue and participating in decision-making report higher shares of education expenditures on girls age 11 to 16 of up to 63% compared to the average household.

When we specifically analyse those households which do send a girl age 11 to 16 to school, education expenditures for girls are up to 32% higher if women participated in decisions related to children's education. Interestingly, this relation is independent of women's consciousness of gender equality such that in households where women were more conscious of the issue, education expenditures remain higher for boys than for girls.

Women's influence on girls' school attendance aged 11 to 16

ZEF's recent research suggests that the larger the distance of a household is from a girls' primary school, the less likely will the household's children attend school. However, women's participation in decisions on children's education increases the likelihood that the household's children are enrolled in school. This also applies if women are conscious of gender equality. Our results indicate that the odds of being enrolled in school are eight times higher for girls in households where women are conscious of gender equality compared to households where women do not exhibit this consciousness. If women partake in the decisions on children's education, the odds of enrolment in school are five times higher for girls than if women do not report their involvement in these decisions.

Women's influence on school attendance of girls age 5 to 10

In contrast to the results on women empowerment and school attendance of girls age 11 to 16, households' education expenditures for girls age 5 to 10 years are neither significantly affected by women's participation in related decisions nor by their consciousness of gender equality.

However, looking specifically at those children who do attend school, girls appear to be more likely to be enrolled if women report greater consciousness of gender equality. Reasons for the different effect of women's empowerment on girls' school enrolment depending on the age group may be found in the cultural norms of girls' mobility restriction which are followed more strictly once a girl enters puberty. Thus, women's role in the decision-making process may be more important in the context of higher resistance to girls' education due to cultural norms.

- Efforts to raise awareness of the importance of girls' continued education aimed at families whose young children are already enrolled in schools may help prevent their daughters dropping out of school after puberty.

Source:

Saleemi S, Kofol C (2020) Choice without consciousness: Women's participation in household decisions and gender equality in children's education. ZEF–Discussion Papers on Development Policy No. 290, Center for Development Research, Bonn. https://www.zef.de/fileadmin/webfiles/downloads/zef_dp/ZEF_DP_290.pdf



College for girls in Islamabad.
Photo: Sundus Saleemi

Policy implications:

Women's role in household decisions and their consciousness of gender equality are important dimensions of women's empowerment as they increase the likelihood of girls' school attendance and the expenditures on their education. This becomes particularly visible in the case of adolescent girls. Here, women's participation in household decisions and their awareness of gender equality may together lead women to actively reduce gender inequalities in the subsequent generation by fostering girls' continued school attendance.

- Women's participation in household decisions needs to be accompanied by their consciousness of gender equality to be instrumental in reducing gender inequality in highly gender unequal societal contexts. One way to increase women's consciousness of gender equality may be to foster women's own literacy and schooling.
- Efforts to improve women's standing in society should be aimed at both genders, as women too can internalise traditional gender roles and bias.
- Given agency in their own households, empowered women can act as multipliers, improving children's school attendance and girls in achieving greater gender equality in education.

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