



DEPRIVED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

PAKISTAN



Afke de Groot

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Afke de Groot, December 2007



Boys practising their writing skills at school

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Abbreviations

DEO	District Education Officer
ECCD	Early Childhood, Care and Development
ESR	Education Sector Reforms
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HPI	Human Poverty Index
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
NCHD	National Commission for Human Development
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PFF	Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum
PILER	Pakistan Institute for Labour and Education Research
PKR	Pakistani Rupee (\$1 is approximately 60 rupees)
PSLM	Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SDPI	Social Development and Policy Institute
SEF	Sindh Education Foundation
SMC	School Management Committee
SPARC	Society for Protection and Child Rights
SPDC	Social Policy and Development Centre

Glossary

Basti	Part of village
Bhurgri	Caste; Bhurgri households found in Badin, often landowning
Deh	Administrative unit
Dera	Part of village
Kohli	Hindu-caste living in Sindh
Naukri	Government job
Numberdar	Government-appointed head of the village
Parho	Caste; Parho households found in Badin, often landless
Tehsil	Subdivision of a district
Teluka	Subdivision of a district



Taking care of her siblings

Executive Summary

The research in Pakistan was conducted in 2006 in a fishermen's village in Sindh, and in two villages in Sindh and Punjab provinces where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Although the government has committed itself to provide all its children with basic necessities, such as education, ever since its founding in 1947, and more specifically in the 1973 Constitution, the current state of education in the country is characterised by low enrolment, a high dropout rate, and a significant gender gap. UNICEF estimates that out of approximately 27 million children of primary-school-age (5-10 years), there are almost 13 million out-of-school children [International Crisis Group 2004:7; Attiq-ur-Rahman 2005:9].

As per the current education system in Pakistan, children are expected to enrol in primary school at the age of five. Primary school consists of five grades, after which children can continue their education at middle school (grades VI-VIII), secondary (grades IX and X) and higher-secondary school (grades XI and XII). Presently there are still 24% of all boys and 44% of all girls of primary-school-age in Pakistan not enrolled [UNICEF 2007:120]. And even though more households have started to send their daughters to school, the share of girls of the total number of children enrolled has more or less remained the same (38-39%) over the past decade [SPARC 2004:85]. Moreover, girls in particular drop out before completing five years of schooling, and the gender gap continues to rise at middle and higher level. Nevertheless, enrolment rates of both boys and girls at primary level have shown a steady increase over the past three years.

This summary will first discuss the main motivating factors behind enrolment, before dealing with the obstacles that still prevent many children from going to school.

Why children go to school

The main actors behind the increasing numbers of children going to school are, according to respondents, government and NGO-incentives as well as persons from their surroundings who have evidently been able to improve their lifestyle through education. In the sampled villages, NGOs are engaged in setting up small schools to decrease both the physical and social distance between community and school, as well as introducing incentives to decrease the costs of schooling. They are also involved in organising awareness campaigns aimed at stimulating school enrolment and attendance. Some respondents questioned the sustainability of such programmes and they argued that these incentives only marginally increase people's awareness about the importance of schools, whilst stimulating greediness in many. There were also complaints of these incentives only reaching relatives and friends of the powerful few within a community instead of the genuinely poor and needy. The fact remains, however, that an increasing number of households are finding their way into the schools, which was perceived as a positive trend.

Government and NGO slogans about the importance of education alone, however, are often not enough to convince the parents. A stronger motivating factor is the example of educated others in their surroundings, those who have been able to improve their lives significantly compared to

uneducated families. The most successful examples are of those persons with whom the respondent can identify in terms of class, caste and/or gender. Such examples are essential and necessary to set the trend of sending children to school. This is especially true for those communities in which educating all children is a new concept, and where schools, for a long time, were accessible to upper-class households only.

The importance of school

Due to awareness campaigns, and because an increasing number of households send at least some of their children to school, everyone has ideas about how school can benefit the lives of their children. General knowledge and communication skills are perceived as useful for everyone. In addition, gaining knowledge about the world outside the confinements of their village is believed to result in a better understanding of things around them, which would be beneficial for both boys and girls. Households believe that school can provide their children with particular skills that will benefit them when they follow their parents' footsteps and become fishermen, housewives, farmers, etcetera. The reading, writing and communication skills learnt in school will enable them to increase knowledge about new technologies and increase their profits from agriculture, fishing, or any type of livelihood on which the household is dependent. Despite the gender gap, many perceive education as also relevant for girls, because it can benefit her entire future household. In school, girls learn basic hygiene rules as well as etiquette and manners, which will help her to behave decently and to properly socialise her future children. Respondents argued that whatever knowledge girls gain in school, it will trickle down to her children and thus will benefit the household as a whole.

Nevertheless, the main pull-factor of schooling remains the possibility to become independent. Basic skills will let children be less dependent on others than their parents currently are, and will make it less likely for them to be cheated. This is especially true in areas where labourers are dependent on landlords for their livelihood. Thus, according to the majority of the respondents, education will enable their children to improve the quality of their lives.

In addition to these perceived benefits, in communities where threats to traditional occupations exist, education is seen as increasingly crucial, because children will need to find different ways to survive. But also where such threats do not exist, people hope that children can escape poor living standards by finding other work. Children stated that they do not want to do the same heavy and difficult work that their fathers do, and fathers likewise want something else for their sons. They express the hope that their children do not have to be dependent on others like they themselves are. Within the context of their work, parents have examples of educated others who have better positions than they have. Such independent alternatives may be in store for their own children if they go to school and do well.

The most often-heard expectation of schooling remains the prospect to be able to find *naukri*, or an official "white-collar" government-job. These jobs, however, for many literate young people are still out of reach. One reason is that in order to obtain such a much-desired government job, one requires more than only primary education. For the majority of households in rural areas, however, higher education is not accessible. A common belief is that one needs bribe money as well as the right contacts to be able to get such a desired job. At present, the examples of educated men who

have been able to improve their lifestyles significantly have to compete with examples of those who are left without a job and who now work with their fathers in a traditional occupation, something they could also have done without having gone to school for so many years.

Providing children with basic education is considered an investment, which people are reluctant to make when the economic returns on education are uncertain. The ideas about how education can be relevant for their children's future do not always weigh up to the investments required from them. Only when returns are clear and quick, do households find sending children to school a wiser and more sensible decision than keeping them at home. Calculations are part of the decision-making process. Thus, more than only the awareness of the significance of education will be required in order to bring about action and actual enrolment.

Why children are out of school: quality and accessibility

The household's perception of quality is often the reason for non-attendance; as long as the schools available to them do not live up to the community's expectations, education as such will not be given much credit. First of all, respondents regularly complained that the curriculum does not meet the needs of communities in rural areas, because there is little attention given to practical skills. Another major concern of the villagers is the number of teachers and their qualifications. They argued that it would be impossible for a small number of teachers to maintain discipline in classrooms with an increasing number of students. In addition to a lack of sufficient (female) qualified teachers in some schools, the regular absence and lack of motivation of teachers poses a real problem. Furthermore, some children expressed a fear of the teachers. A new government slogan in the schools in Punjab - "Do not beat, but love" - has led to a debate about the use of corporal punishment, with caregivers and children disapproving of teachers beating the children. However, there seemed to be a general consent that some basic punishment is needed to discipline children and to encourage them to pay attention in class.

The geographical distance from the schools to the community influences accessibility. A large distance discourages the households living on the outskirts of the village from sending their girls to school. For girls, distance becomes an issue especially at a later age when, due to their sexual vulnerability, their mobility is restricted by social norms and values. People also argued that due to distance, they cannot check whether their child actually goes to school or changes his/her mind on the way. This distance, however, is not the main reason for non-enrolment. Many people in the villages stressed that if children are really keen on going to school, and their parents on sending them, distance will not keep them from doing so. On the other hand, if children do not want to go, and parents are not willing to make an effort, then it does not matter if a school is near to their homes or not. It is thus more important to increase the demand and the quality of schooling, rather than to decrease distances to school. Decreasing distances will only marginally increase enrolments, but will probably not substantially affect current trends.

A more significant factor pertaining to accessibility and leading to non-enrolment is the social proximity of teachers and the school to the community and to the children, often typified by caste, class and gender. A large social distance can lead to feelings of exclusion of entire households and of individual children in the classroom itself, which is thus not conducive for learning and might lead to non-attendance and dropout.

Getting households involved in the schools can reduce this social distance. Establishing sound community involvement is crucial for improving the quality of schooling as well as levels of enrolment and attendance. SMCs and PTAs have been established at every school, in accordance with government policies, to motivate the involvement of parents and the community as a whole. However, the reality is that such committees are far from effective; they exist on paper, but barely function in practice. Most of the respondents in the villages had never heard of the groups, and there were committee members who were not even aware of their role. School management remains in the hands of the powerful few, and decision-making is often left up to the headmaster. While many parents blame the teachers for not giving them any opportunities for involvement, teachers blame the community for not being interested in discussing school issues, and not making the time to visit the school because of their workload at home, in the field or at sea.

Often, however, feelings of inadequacy prevent certain communities from getting involved. Many respondents expressed a fear of taking action or getting involved with school-related matters, because they feel inferior to the upper-class teachers who are often from powerful households with political links.

Poverty and social values

Other reasons for parents keeping children at home, besides the school-related aspects that influence the perceived relevance and value of the school, are related to the circumstances of the household. Teachers blame parents for not being interested in getting involved in the school; such involvement, in addition to a home-environment that is conducive to learning, is indeed as important as a positive school-environment. These household-related arguments for out-of-school children relate to the poverty of households, as well as to social values and customs.

Poverty remains a central argument for non-attendance. Even if primary education is affordable, higher education continues to be beyond the reach for most people. Consequently, many people questioned the significance of primary education if higher education and many job opportunities are unattainable anyway.

At primary-school-age children are also required to help out at home, which affects their performance in school and often leads to dropout. Their help may at times involve bringing in an additional income for the household, but includes at least the responsibility for certain household chores, such as caring for siblings and tending to the animals. The amount of work expected from children in poorer and larger families is substantially heavier than in more well-to-do households, and thus especially in those poorer families, work interferes with children's schooling. Both direct and opportunity costs of education become impeding factors, especially after class V. It is then that households are not able to afford these costs for all their children; in addition, children have then reached an age at which they are able to contribute significantly to the household's income.

In addition to the demand for help in the household, local social customs and values affect enrolment as well, that of girls in particular. When girls reach their teenage years and are considered grown-up, social constraints restrict their mobility. In some communities, girls are not allowed to travel alone, and many households do not want them to be in the same school as boys or in a house where they can come into contact with non-related men. In other communities the practice of early marriage still exists, and thus girls are married in their early teens. After marriage

it is the decision of the husband's family whether girls are allowed to continue their education, which is in most cases not the case.

In some communities people from all social layers are worried about loss of respect and status if a girl would attend school together with boys. Gossip from neighbours and other social pressures make households reluctant to send their girls to school, and, especially in large families, there are enough household chores to be done instead of going to school. The conformation to social norms and the practical utility of keeping daughters at home thus combine to discourage enrolment.

For many households, the economic returns on education for girls are uncertain, since they are expected to leave the household after marriage, which in itself already bears major costs in the form of a dowry. The prospect of daughters living in the husband's household does not make their education a logical and sensible investment, in comparison to the education of sons.

Furthermore, in the sampled villages, the trend of sending girls to school was a new one, which is why these areas do not have many educated women who can serve as role models and examples of why girls should be sent to school. The presence of female teachers or a separate girls' school, as well as female peers, would make school more attractive for girls.

The child's will

The character of the child and what he or she wants is often a decisive factor for enrolment. Because sending children to school is, for many households, not (yet) a routine practice, parents often take on a passive attitude and are unconcerned with the supervision of their children's school attendance, either because of the pressure from work and/or poverty, or due to disinterest. In general, they enrol their children and leave attendance up to the child. Once the child becomes older and school attendance increasingly competes with alternative activities, the child's own desire for education becomes crucial.

To have both school- and home environments that are conducive to learning is essential for a child to keep a positive attitude towards education. If the home environment does not stimulate school attendance and studying, then it is crucial that the school offers the children an appealing and non-discriminatory environment that is more attractive compared to activities such as roaming around with friends in the village, tending to cattle in the fields, or fishing. To aid in this balance of preferences it is also important that peers, and thus the social environment, do not distract a child from schooling. The more children out of school, the more difficult it is for a child to maintain its focus on education. This fact tremendously increases the responsibility of the teacher: his or her repeated absence will make truancy of the child more likely.

Conclusion

People perceive education as an investment rather than a basic right or need of the child. In order to stimulate school enrolment and attendance, policy should be aimed at balancing the perceived benefits of education and the investments that families are required to make. The latter requires more than affordability incentives only.

Due to government- and NGO incentives and awareness campaigns, as well as through examples of others in the community who received an education, everyone is presently aware about how education can benefit the lives of children in rural areas.

Due to limited job opportunities and examples of educated young people who have not been able to visibly improve their lives, economic returns on education are still uncertain. Therefore, the awareness of the importance of education does not automatically lead to a change in mentality and behaviour. Often, the reasons that children are out of school still outweigh the reasons for enrolment.

Reasons to keep children out of school are both school-related and household-related. School-related factors include:

- The number, qualifications, caste, class, gender and commitment of teachers
- Relevance of what is learnt in school
- Location of the school
- Social proximity and community involvement

Household-related factors include:

- Poverty and children's work
- Social customs and values
- Perceived future perspectives

Household-related factors increasingly become an issue when education costs increase, which is at middle school, and when the child reaches an age at which it is old enough to work.

Most essential is to create, both at the home and in the school, an environment in which the child is able to develop its own aspiration to learn. Without a child's internal desire, dislike or fear of teachers and other children in school, and a lack of motivation from the home and peers, will lead to poor attendance and eventual dropout. This will remain the case even if affordability incentives make primary education accessible for all.

Introduction

International treaties have recognised free and compulsory elementary education as a human right for more than half a century now, and especially during the last decade the drive for universal (primary) education has gained momentum. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon in 2000, set 2015 as the year in which universal primary education (MDG-2) and gender equality (MDG-3) are to be achieved. Despite such efforts and their echoes in national policies, many children are still out of school. The mid-term results for MDG-2 suggest that big strides have been made in terms of universal enrolment, but also give reasons for concern.

The overall statistics are merely averages and tend to hide what happens to the most vulnerable and most excluded children. Various forms of deprivation continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 200 million. Successes in extending primary education have been unmistakable, but actual school attendance in most regions is still dramatically low, despite high gross enrolment figures (and fairly lower net enrolment figures).

Table 1: Out-of-School Children (millions)

	1998	2002	% Girls
Sub-Sahara Africa	45	40	55
Arab States	8	7	58
Eastern Asia	8	15	58
South & West Asia	36	30	59
Latin America	4	2	45
North America & Europe	2	2	53
Central & Eastern Europe	3	3	55

Source: UNESCO [2006:48]

Table 1 shows that the number of out-of-school children has generally decreased since 1998; unfortunately, the progress is slow and too many children have not yet found their way into the education system.

The current policy focus on education is not only based on the adherence to the “child’s right to develop its personality, talents, physical and mental abilities to its fullest potential” (CRC article 29). Education is also generally considered a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour and in promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development [UNICEF 2006]. Both approaches largely draw their attention away from the perspectives of parents and children themselves. Efforts have been directed instead towards sensitising uneducated masses of their “right to education” and the “importance of education”. Yet not much is known about how exactly uneducated people perceive education as a tool (or impediment) for their own family’s subsistence or advancement. What future expectations and aspirations do parents have for their children, or children for themselves? How

does (basic) education feature in these ideas? And does the quality of the education on offer influence such ideas? What are the perceived obstacles preventing access to education, and which changes should be made to remove these obstacles?

Repeatedly, there has been a summing up of relevant factors that form major barriers for achieving basic education for all. Sarkar [2004:12] has classified these factors into four groups:

- Accessibility - the physical and social distance to school, discrimination, the burden of household chores, and the burden faced by children combining work and schooling
- Affordability - direct, indirect, and opportunity costs
- Quality - the lack of infrastructure, facilities, materials, and support systems for children, inadequate conditions of work for teachers, low status of teachers, lack of adequate training, aids and materials for teachers, and the lack of sensitivity of education authorities and teachers to the needs of children at risk
- Relevance - curriculum detached from local needs, values and the aspirations of children at risk, curriculum inadequate to prepare students for gainful skilled employment

Quality issues have become a central theme in the education debate over the last few years. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define the purpose of education [UNESCO 2005a] and that quality can influence parents' choices to invest in education [Plan Netherlands 2006]. However, not much is known about the (lack of) intrinsic, social, cultural or economic benefits different parents and children may see in the education that is on offer to them, or in which way they feel school-attendance may influence their children's prospects. By collecting village case studies from seven developing countries, this study aimed to provide insights into local ideas about future expectations and aspirations of parents and children, and how (basic) education features in these ideas.

In periods of three to four months during 2006 and 2007, research was conducted in different areas of three South-Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) and four Sub-Saharan-African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries were selected on the basis of their enrolment and attendance data.

Figures for the selected regions for 2000-2005 show that in Sub-Saharan Africa only 61%, and in South Asia 74% [UNICEF 2007:105] of children of primary school age are enrolled. In certain countries within those regions figures are significantly lower. The selected countries, with the exception of Kenya, used to have adult literacy rates that were substantially below the average of developing countries, but have made substantial progress over the last decades. The exception is Kenya, where the youth literacy rates in 2004 were actually lower than in 1990. Table 2 shows that where the countries in Asia have done reasonably well (in Nepal, for example, female literacy increased from 27% in 1990 to 60% in 2004), the African countries have had mixed results. Burkina Faso still had, in the early years of this century, male and female youth literacy rates of only 25.5% and 14.0% respectively.

Table 2: Literacy in Selected Countries

	Adult & Youth Literacy				Share of Females in Illiteracy		Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate				Not enrolled (millions)
	1990		2002-4		1990	2002-4	1990		2002-4		2002-4
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	
Bangladesh	44.3	23.7	50.3	31.4	56	57	50.7	33.2	84.2	67.7	2.9
Nepal	47.4	14.0	62.7	34.9	63	65	67.0	27.3	80.6	60.1	0.9
Pakistan	49.3	20.1	61.7	35.2	62	63	62.5	30.6	74.8	53.9	8.1
Burkina			18.5	8.1					25.5	14.0	1.4
Ethiopia	37.6	19.8	49.2	33.8	57	57	51.5	34.1	63.0	51.8	5.7
Ghana	70.1	47.2	62.9	45.7	65	60	88.2	75.4			1.3
Kenya	80.9	60.8	77.7	70.2	68	58	92.9	86.7	79.8	80.0	2.0
Developing countries	75.9	57.9	83.2	69.5	63	64	85.8	75.8	85.0	88.7	

Aggregated from UNESCO [2006]

Access to the research areas was facilitated by local staff of Plan International and other NGOs, but they were not necessarily regions in which these NGOs worked. The long stay in each area, a minimum of three weeks, allowed the researcher to build up a relationship of trust and to distinguish official statements from reality.

This study was initiated to deepen the understanding of household and village level perception of education in rural areas, and to get an insight into the factors determining the continuation of non-enrolment and non-attendance despite the efforts made by governments and NGOs to facilitate education for everyone, including the poorest segments of society. A central, underlying theme is the perception of education in terms of relevance and quality by parents and children, and the way these perceptions influence decision-making with regard to school enrolment and attendance. The main question addressed is:

How does the perception, on household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out?

The research was qualitative in nature and the results cannot haphazardly be applied to any country at large. However, the research areas were selected in such a way that they covered the poorest families in the poorest areas where school-enrolment is low.

The research involved close contact with the various stakeholders, particularly with the parents and the children. Much attention was given to their perceptions, and thus to how their circumstances, ideas and experiences may explain non-enrolment, non-attendance and drop-out, or enrolment and attendance in the face of adversity. Such insights are needed in order to design education policies that respond well to the ideas and circumstances on a grass-roots level.

Country selection

The selection of South Asia as one of the regions for this project was based on its low development and education indicators. South Asia's figures are among the lowest in the world (Table 3).

Table 3: Global Development and Education Indicators

	Human Development Index*	Adult literacy rate (aged 15<)**	Net primary school enrolment/attendance (%) 2000-2005**
World	0.741	80	82
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.472	62	61
Eastern and Southern Africa		73	66
West and Central Africa		49	56
Middle East and North Africa	0.680	72	80
South Asia	0.599	59	74
East Asia and Pacific	0.760	91	96
Latin America and Caribbean	0.795	90	94

* [UNDP 2006] ** [UNICEF 2007:105]

Table 4 shows regional variations within South Asia; Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan present extremely low literacy rates in relation to other countries within the region. Nepal and Pakistan were selected for this project as they, in addition to poor literacy, also exhibit low enrolment and attendance rates. Bangladesh was included because, in contrast to its literacy rate, its enrolment and attendance performance has been impressive.

Table 4: Development and Education Indicators South Asian Countries

	Human Development Index*	Total adult literacy rate (aged 15<)**	Net primary school enrolment/attendance (%) 2000-2005***
Bangladesh	0.530	41.1	84
India	0.611	61	76
Nepal	0.527	48.6	78
Pakistan	0.539	48.7	56
Maldives	0.739	96.3	90
Sri Lanka	0.755	90.4	99

* [UNDP 2006] ** [UNESCO 2005b] *** [UNICEF 2007:102-104]

Pakistan ranks 134th out of 177 on the UN Human Development Index (HDI) list. Its HDI is 0.539. Compared to the other countries in the South Asian Region, Pakistan is 4th, with only Nepal and Bangladesh scoring less. According to Sharukh Rafi Khan [2005:x], a well-known name in development studies, this low ranking is due to Pakistan's poor performance in education.

Methodology and limitations

The data presented in this report is the result of anthropological research carried out in three villages in Pakistan, all with relatively similar population sizes. (The next chapter will present detailed description of the villages.) Anthropological fieldwork involves living in the villages, and participating with village life, which makes it possible to observe and interact from before sunrise until long after sunset. For this research, observations were made within households, on a community level, in an around the schools and in the fields. Most of the material was gathered through structured and unstructured interviews. The majority of these interviews were held individually with parents, children, government and NGO appointed teachers, NGO education officers, and government officials. Group discussions with community members also took place, either at locations where these members gather, such as small shops or other workplaces; sometimes they started spontaneously in a residential area.

The first phase of fieldwork was conducted in February 2006 in a fishing-village in Karachi-West district. Although the village is located relatively near Karachi, it was selected due to its lack of basic facilities such as electricity and water, and the significant number of children who are out of school. Interviews were held with community members, two government-appointed teachers, three NGO-appointed teachers, the headmaster, the head of the village, and a local community mobiliser working for a national NGO. A total of 34 households were involved in the study.

Plan Pakistan was consulted for selection of the second village, located in Vehari district of Punjab province. According to Plan Pakistan, it is one of the poorest, most remote, and educationally deprived of all their 32 programme-villages in the district. Fieldwork here took place in March 2006. The village is divided into three “colonies” separated from each other by cultivated land. In addition, many households live in *deras*¹, relatively isolated from the major colonies. All areas, including many *deras*, were involved in the study, but the majority of the interviews were held in the Main Colony (23 households). In addition, interviews were held with the headmaster of the school who also serves as the community leader, and with teachers of the girls’ school, in the school environment as well as at their homes. Visits were paid to the schools, to the mosque, and to the Imam at his home. In the second colony, ten households were interviewed, and so too was a teacher at the NFE-centre. In the third and smallest colony five households were included in the research. In addition, 14 families were visited in their *deras*, including that of the headmaster.

The third and final village selected for fieldwork is located in Sindh province, in Badin district. In addition to the main part of the village, surrounding *bastis*², and communities who live on the land they work on, were included. Fieldwork here took place in April 2006. 39 households from different strata of society (higher and lower castes, landlords and landless households) were visited. Observations were made both in the boys’ and girls’ schools, and the Imam was visited in the mosque while he was teaching children and young adults in the afternoon. In addition, five surrounding villages were visited covering a total of 28 households. A small school located in a nearby village and supported by the NCHD was visited, because many children from the researched

¹ A *dera* is a cluster of households located away from the main village; the households live on their own land, or the land they work on.

² A *basti* is a cluster of households belonging to the same community (e.g. of the same caste)

village were enrolled at this school, and the (only) teacher originates from the sampled village itself. The office of NCHD was visited as well. Interviews were held with the heads of the education departments of the District governments, in both Vehari and Badin. In Karachi, a short visit was paid to the district officer of the literacy department of the city government.

The use of interpreters created a few limitations that have to be taken into account. In the gender-sensitive context of Pakistan the researcher aimed to work with a female translator in order to enhance accessibility to women in the communities. However, a qualified female translator was found in only one area involved in the research and she was unfortunately not permitted, by her relatives, to travel to and stay in a different community. She thus had to return home every evening, which limited the time allowance of the research.

In the other two villages the interpreter was a young man. In the first location he was from the community itself, which made it possible to access most of the households within the village. However, the interpreter did express some hesitation, as he was not used to talk directly to the women, as he would usually communicate only with the men of the families. In the other village, where the interpreter came from outside the region, he was not allowed to live in the village and commuted daily to Badin city where he stayed. To overcome problems with access to female members of the community, the researcher was accompanied by a respected member of the village. Thanks to mediation by this person, access was granted to the researcher. However, the situation was often awkward for the families, which had consequences for their willingness to talk. Often they tended to repeat the same short answers, and talking freely with children was often hampered by shyness in the parents' presence. All these obstacles, however, were in most cases overcome by establishing a relationship of trust between the translator, the researcher and the respondents.

Outline of the report

The first chapter of this report provides a general background of the villages in which the research took place, and gives an overview of the education system in Pakistan. In chapter 2, the villagers' perception on relevance of education and its possible benefits are discussed, as well as the factors that have led to an increase in enrolment of both boys and girls. The third chapter deals with the various factors that keep children out of school. The report ends with a conclusion and a number of recommendations based on research findings.

It should be noted that names of individuals have been omitted or changed due to reasons of privacy.

Chapter 1

Background

Fieldwork for this report was conducted in three villages in the Pakistani provinces of Sindh and Punjab. This chapter first presents general background information about these three research settings, then continues with an introduction to the education system in Pakistan.

1.1 Sindh and Punjab: an introduction

Pakistan consists of four provinces and a number of federal units. In the West of Pakistan lie Balochistan and the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), the federal units of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Northern Areas (FANA). The provinces of Sindh and Punjab are in the East, bordering with India. The provinces are divided into districts, which are then divided into sub-districts called tehsils or telukas. Pakistan has 102 districts, and 380 sub-districts.

With a GNI per capita (US\$) of 690 [UNICEF 2007], a HDI of 0.539, and a HPI of 36.3% [UNDP 2006], Pakistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, and in the South Asian Region. It is estimated that 17% of Pakistan's population is living on less than US\$ 1 a day, while 73.6% lives on less than US\$2 a day [UNDP 2006]. Agriculture is the largest sector in Pakistan's national economy. It is the main source of livelihood for 66% of Pakistan's population. Main crops are wheat, sugarcane, rice, and maize. Other major components of the agricultural sector include livestock and fishing [Government of Pakistan 2007].

According to the 2003 Demographic Survey, Pakistan has a population of 139 million, with the majority living in Punjab and Sindh, primarily in the rural areas. The number of children in the age group 5-14 is 39.8 million, of whom 26.5 million can be found in the rural areas of Pakistan. Most of Pakistan's population lives in Punjab, which has a population of 79.4 million people, of whom 50.1 million live in rural areas. The number of children aged 5-14 is 22.1 million, with 14.5 million living in rural areas. Sindh has a population of 33 million people, of which 17.5 million live in the rural areas. There are 9.5 million children aged 5-14, of whom 5.4 million live in rural areas [Government of Pakistan 2003]. According to 2007 estimates by the CIA, Pakistan's total population has increased to 165 million³.

In terms of literacy rates, there is a huge gap between rural and urban areas in Pakistan as shown in Table 5.

³ Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>, last consulted on December 19, 2007

Table 5: Rural and Urban Literacy Rates

	Punjab	Sindh
Total	46	51
Urban	65	69
Rural	38	35

Source: [UNDP 2003]

The more recent Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey (PSLM) indicates a slight increase in literacy rate for both Sindh and Punjab. This data, outlined below in Table 6, also show that Pakistan deals with a significant gender gap in terms of literacy.

Table 6: Gender Gap in Literacy Rates

	Punjab	Sindh
Total	55	56
Male	65	68
Female	44	41

Source: [Government of Pakistan 2005]

Enrolment rates of both boys and girls have shown a steady increase for the whole of Pakistan over the past years. UNICEF [2007:104] estimates that 65% of all primary school-aged children are enrolled in school: 76% of all boys, and 56% of all girls [UNICEF 2007:120]. Although the number of girls enrolled in school has slightly improved, the share of girls out of the total number of children enrolled in schools has more or less remained the same (38-39%) over the passed decade [SPARC 2004:85]. There is thus still a considerable gender gap in school enrolment in Pakistan. Furthermore, girls in particular tend to drop out before completing five years of schooling. The gender gap at primary level, which increases at middle level, is more significant in rural areas than in urban areas.

According to Pakistan education statistics 2005-2006⁴ there are 11.5 million children enrolled in public schools at primary level: 6.6 million boys, and 4.9 million girls. Of all areas in Pakistan enrolment is highest in Punjab, where approximately 5.8 million children are enrolled in public primary schools. With 2.8 million children enrolled in public primary schools, Sindh ranks second. The gender gap is not improved by the fact that throughout Pakistan there are more primary boys' schools than girls' schools.

All three villages involved in the study are located in rural areas, and relatively near a larger town or city, often the district's headquarters. The following sections give a short introduction to these villages and the districts in which they are found.

⁴ Available from www.moe.gov.pk

1.1.1 A fishermen's village in Sindh

The first village selected for the fieldwork is a coastal village on the outskirts of Karachi in the province of Sindh near the border with Balochistan. The whole village is inhabited by a Balochi Zikri⁵-community, and their mother tongue is Balochi. Some people speak Urdu and/or Sindhi as a second language, which is often picked up through communication with people from Karachi. Although it is located in Sindh, the village resembles Balochistan more than Sindh in terms of family-relations, and in terms of employment.

The village is located in Karachi-West district, and is the largest village in the administrative unit (*deh*) of Mahn. According to the 1998 Census, Mahn has a population of 2534 (1368 men, 1166 women). In terms of educational attainment only 169 men and 61 women passed primary level, but remained below class 10. Only 55 men and 8 women passed class 10 or higher. Only one fourth of the population aged 10 and above is literate. According to figures accompanying a 2003/2004 map made by a local committee, the village has a population of 1306: 406 men, and 567 women.

There is a road leading all the way in to the village, connecting it with the main road that runs from Karachi into Balochistan province. There is limited public transport available for the residents. Two buses leave for Karachi at 8 and 8:30 in the morning, and come back at 5 and 6 in the afternoon. The bus that arrives at 5 pm continues to the town of Mauripur, west of Karachi, and then returns to the village at 10:30 pm. The fare for a one-way-trip to Karachi is PKR 20. Another way to get to the city is to hitch a ride with a truck to the main road, which takes approximately half an hour, and then catch a bus onwards from there. Villagers complained about the lack of transport: "when we want to go to the city, it takes us the whole day." There is no telephone line connection in the village. Some villagers (about 30 or 40) own a mobile phone, but the mobile network has limited reception at only a few locations in the village.

Farming is impossible in the arid soil around the village, and so the main source of income is fishery. Men are either "big" or "small" fishermen. A big fisherman is at sea on a large fishing boat for about 20 days at a time. When not in use, the boat is anchored in the harbour approximately 20 kilometres from the village. Small fishermen catch fish from a smaller fishing boat, and do not stay away longer than one day. These boats are anchored near the shore of the village.

Some men are drivers of either their own truck or someone else's. They are responsible for taking the fish from the boats to the market in Karachi. Some men (and adolescents) work on trucks in Balochistan. Villagers also get business from "tourists" from Karachi. They take them for a picnic on their boats, or take them fishing, and earn PKR 1500 per day. Some Karachiites own a boat, and pay a villager to take care of it. One man manages the car-park, which is full of cars from Karachi on Sundays when their owners are out at sea.

Life for women in the village is difficult. Most women are illiterate because education only became available for girls ten years ago. All women are housewives and burdened with lots of work; none of

⁵ The Zikri faith is related to Islam. There is only a small community of Zikri in Pakistan. According to Wikipedia there are approximately 750.000 Zikri's around the world. One difference with other villages is that the mosque does not call for prayer five times a day. The two Zikri mosques in the studied village are used only by older people to pray for well-being. For more information on Zikri's in Pakistan see Chapter 9 of [Titus 1996]

them do paid work, except for two young teachers who have been recently employed by NGOs. They are required to walk at least three or four hours away from their house to fetch wood or water. Girls start helping their mothers with these chores from the age of ten onwards. Some families have goats that need to be taken to the mountain for feeding, which is also one of the duties of women.

Besides fishing, there were six families that owned a shop, two men were appointed by the government as a teacher, and four men and two 16-year-old girls were appointed as teachers by organisations other than the government. In addition, there was an adult-man working as a community mobiliser for an NGO, one man working at a nearby power plant in Balochistan, and finally, there was a reporter working for an English newspaper in Karachi, whose family still resided in the village.

There is one government school in the village. There was a second government school building, which was supposed to be a government girls' school, but was not in session, due to an absence of teachers. The school, which is officially a government boys' school until class 8, has been open to co-education since 1997. At the time of research the headmaster also taught classes 9 and 10 to interested students. According to the attendance register there were 116 children enrolled in the school at primary level: 80 boys and only 36 girls. Some girls (younger than 15) preferred to attend an NGO-run literacy programme for women older than 15 rather than the government school. The NGO appointed a 16-year-old girl, who passed class 10, to teach here every afternoon.

The government school does not charge any fees, and books are provided either by the government or by the two NGOs active in the village. Books are free of charge for primary level education, but children do have to pay for the books for secondary education. A child in class 6 pays approximately PKR 500 per year for books. Children in classes 9 and 10 need to pay board exam fees of PKR 1000.

The government boys' school has a good school building, built by the government, with many facilities, including a computer. But at the time of fieldwork the government had only appointed a small number of teachers: one permanent teacher, who is a son of the village head, and one *peon*⁶ who has already been teaching at the school since the seventies. They are both from the village itself. The headmaster, who has been teaching at the school since 1985, is from elsewhere, but has been living at the school for many years. He goes home on Fridays, and comes back on Sundays. Thus, on Saturday he is absent from school. In addition, five teachers are employed by an NGO and the semi-autonomous Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and are all working for a salary of PKR 1500-2000 per month. The official language of the school is Urdu, but since all the children and teachers are Baloch, Balochi is the language in which they communicate. The books are in Urdu and English, but none of the teachers are able to communicate in English.

The villagers mentioned "lack of proper facilities for education" as one of the major problems of the village. Other issues included transportation, health facilities, drinking water- and electricity supply. The government provided the village with a health dispensary, but the building is not in use due to lack of a doctor, nurse and medicines.

⁶ A *peon* is a lowly paid government employee who functions as a caretaker, and who may sometimes also perform teacher's tasks in the absence of qualified teachers.

Clean drinking water is hardly available. There is one hand pump in the village, but it only works when the tide is high, and it gives salty water due to the closeness of the sea. Some richer families have constructed a water tank near their homes. The costs to fill this tank are PKR 1600. A full tank lasts 20-30 days for an average family. People who cannot afford their own tank have the opportunity to buy water from the families who do. They get approximately four gallons for PKR 10. The government installed one water tank for the village, which is now taken care of by the head of village. His son makes sure the tank is always filled with water. Although the tank is accessible to everyone, the head of the village charges a small amount for this water, because the government does not provide the diesel for the vehicle his son uses to fill the tank daily. Families who cannot afford to buy water have to walk 5-6 hours to reach the nearest well. The same goes for fetching wood. People who can afford it buy wood from others, which is approximately PKR 20 for enough wood for one day.

The majority of the households do not have electricity. The school, two shops, and a few families have electricity generated through a windmill. The two shops are located near the seashore. Both have a generator and use it to power a TV and refrigerator. Every evening they show old Urdu movies. During the night they switch the generator on for 3-4 hours. An additional five households have a TV in their home.

1.1.2 Landlords and labourers in Badin, Sindh

The other sampled village located in Sindh province is in Badin district. Badin is one of the poorest districts within Sindh. It is a predominantly agricultural state and due to environmental degradation, there are large social and economical problems. Rice is the main crop of the district. Other crops include cotton, jawar (sorghum), and barley. There is also a significant amount of livestock, including buffaloes, cows, camels, goats, asses and mules. Industries in Badin are all agro-based. There is a large production of sugar, and there are 12 rice husking mills. Some people in selected regions of Badin are engaged in the fishing occupation. The majority of the population in Badin is Muslim, but there are Hindu communities as well.

The visited village is located approximately 12 kilometres from Badin, the district's headquarters. There are plenty of opportunities to travel to and from the city. It is a ten-minute walk to the main road where buses regularly pass. Also, there are many rickshaws that transport people to and from the city. By rickshaw it takes approximately half an hour to get there. Some rickshaw-drivers are from the village or surrounding villages. In addition, people own donkey-carts or tractors. The rich landlord families own motorcycles or even a car. Contacts with the city are good because of its vicinity. Especially among Bhurgri-families there are many households with relatives who are high school teachers, doctors, engineers, police-officers or medical-store owners in Badin.

The village is located in the union council of Mohamed Khan Bhurgri, which lies in Badin Taluka, to the northeast of Badin city; it is part of the administrative unit of Bakho Khudi. According to the 1998 Census, Bakho Khudi has a population of 1372 (712 men, and 660 women). In terms of educational attainment only 80 men and 23 women passed primary, but remained below class 10. Only 19 women and 57 men finished class 10 or higher. Only 28.7% of the total population aged 10 and above is literate. The majority of the population is Muslim, but according to the 1998 Census, 16% have another religion. According to the NCHD village profile (2005) the total population of the

visited village is estimated at 1200 (500 men, and 700 women). The majority of the population is Muslim, but there are a number of Hindu-households as well.

The village population can roughly be divided into two groups: a large number of Bhurgri-households who have land and are generally educated, and the Parho-households who are landless and work as labourers. Most households here have only recently started to send their children to school. Besides these two groups there are other Muslim-castes (e.g. Sayyed, Soomro, and Notekani), and a significant number of Hindu-households (Kohli-communities, two Meghwar households, and a Sami-community) living at the outskirts of the village.

The main occupation here is farming. The village is inhabited by landlords and farmers, who are employed on their land. The landlords of the village belong mostly to the Bhurgri-caste, while the labourers are from the Parho- and the Hindu Kholi-community. Many families, especially Parho and Kholi, migrated to the village from arid areas of the Tharparker district, driven away by drought and the lack of daily-wage labour. This distinction between landlords and labourers, presents an obvious gap between the rich and the poorer households. Other occupations in the village are also agriculture-related. There is a sugar mill nearby, which provides employment to inhabitants of the village. People work at the sugar mill, or work as porters and transport sugarcane to the mill. In addition, a number of men from the village joined the army.

Most households in the village itself have an electricity connection, but others cannot afford the electricity bill. Also, in some smaller communities surrounding the village and for families who live on the land on which they work, electricity is not available. In the village, even poor households have a TV receiving two or three national channels. An increasing number of households also have a VCD-player that they use to watch movies. Some of the richer households have a digital dish, with which they are able to receive hundreds of channels from different parts of the world. Among communities living outside the village, however, electricity and water related problems are significant.

There is a boys' and a girls' government school, which go up to primary level (class 5). According to the registers of the schools there are 119 girls enrolled in the girl's school, while only 51 children are enrolled at the boys' school. There are a few children from surrounding villages enrolled here as well. Children have to go to a neighbouring village for education until class 8 and for further education they must travel to Badin. There are many Bhurgri-children who attend (both private and government) schools in Badin. In the girls' school the government appointed a headmaster and a teacher. A younger girl works for a salary of PKR 1500 per month paid by the NCHD. All three teachers belong to the powerful family of a rich landlord. The school building is surrounded by a compound wall and constitutes two rooms. Two classes are taught in the same room.

There has been a boys' school in the village since 1951. In 1998 the school was rebuilt into a small building of two rooms, both equipped with a blackboard, desks and chairs, and educative charts on the wall. It is located near the road but, unlike the girls' school, does not have a compound wall surrounding it. Two teachers are appointed who are both from outside the village. They work for a salary of PKR 6000 and PKR 7000. Officially there is no headmaster appointed, and thus the most senior teacher functions as one. NCHD runs small government schools in some neighbouring villages, and children from the studied village attend these schools as well. In addition, they run a female literacy programme, which appointed a young girl who passed class 8 (according to some sources

she only passed class 5) from the Parho-community to teach young women basic Sindhi literacy and numeracy skills, daily from 1 to 3 pm. Every afternoon the Imam gives Quran lessons to interested children and youths. These lessons take place in the Mosque. These educational facilities are all located in the village, but for some surrounding communities they are not easily accessible due to the distance.

1.1.3 An agricultural setting in Vehari, Punjab

The third village selected for the research is located in Vehari Tehsil in Vehari District of Punjab province, approximately 30 kilometres north of Vehari city, the district's headquarters. Transport to and from the village is possible by different means. Some households own a motorcycle, others a bicycle or a donkey-cart. Furthermore, there are several vans in the region providing public transportation to and from Vehari city, which pass the village on the main road, approximately 500 metres from the main part of the village. The main road to Vehari is a well-paved one. It takes approximately 45-60 minutes to reach Vehari city from the village by car.

The village is divided into three "colonies", which are separated from each other by cultivated land and a number of deras. Most people live in Main Colony. A two-kilometre-long unpaved road through the wheat-fields leads to West Colony. This is the poorest section of the village, where inhabitants are most deprived of facilities such as clean drinking water and education. It had, at the time of the research, only been six months since people were given access to electricity. An unpaved road leading south from Main Colony brings you to Akram Colony, where there are mostly landowning households with access to electricity. Most inhabitants here are educated.

The dera of the headmaster and numberdar (government appointed village head) is near Akram Colony. Approximately 10 households live here; they are all related to the numberdar. The dera has many facilities, including electricity, and a small mosque. There are several smaller deras, in which households live relatively isolated from the village colonies. Many of these deras do not have facilities such as electricity and only some have hand pumps for drinking water. An NGO working in the area estimates that 10-15% of all households in the village do not have access to electricity. Throughout the village drinking water is of poor quality, but it is worst in West Colony.

Main Colony and some deras have a limited mobile phone signal, but West Colony has no facilities for phone communication. Three households in Main Colony own a landline telephone, which are used as a Public Call Office. One of these households owns a megaphone, which is used to notify the villagers in Main Colony whenever there is a call for someone.

According to the 1998 Census, the village has a population of 1239 (660 men, and 579 women). In terms of educational attainment only 113 men and 16 women passed primary level, but have not been able to complete class 10. Only 18 men and 2 women attained class 10 or above. 24.9% of the total population aged 10 and above is literate. 94% of the population is Muslim. The remaining households are Christian. In general, caste and religion have no direct influence on village life or educational activity, and there is hardly any tension. A clearer distinction is the one between the landlords and others, the divide between rich and poor. Most landlords belong to Sial and Werak-households. The local languages spoken in the village are Punjabi and Seraiki.

The primary occupation of villagers in Main and Akram Colony, and in most of the deras, is agriculture. Wheat, cotton and sugarcane are the village's main crops. If people do not own land,

they lease land, or they work as daily wage labourers picking cotton and harvesting wheat for PKR 50 per day. Some are involved in construction work in the area, such as digging canals. Most landowners do not live in the village, but in cities like Islamabad and Rawalpindi (for example, army officials). It is thus the people who lease the land who are responsible for the seeds, the cultivation of crops, the sprays used, and so forth. Other occupations held by villagers include: shop owner, cattle trader, bakery-salesman, barber, and blacksmith.

In West Colony there are no landowning households. Here, most people, both adults and children, are employed as wage labourers in nearby brick-kilns. Some households lease land, and are involved in agricultural work. In addition, many households throughout the village have cattle to take care of; either their own or on lease. Children help their parents with all kinds of work in the house, in shops, in the fields, with taking care of animals and in brick-kilns.

The village has both a government boys' and a girls' primary school. The girls' primary school is located in Main Colony. The NGO-run ECCD-centre is located here as well. There are two female teachers appointed in the school. One, who lives in a nearby village, teaches classes 1, 3 and 5, while the other, who is from Vehari city, teaches nursery, class 2, and 4. There are 94 girls enrolled in the school. According to the teachers most of these girls come from the deras. Some girls have to travel a distance of up to two kilometres by foot. According to the same teachers there are only two girls from West Colony enrolled in their school. An NGO appointed a third woman to teach boys and girls in the age group 3-5 years in the ECCD-centre. She moved to the village when she got married, but had already passed class 10 in her parents' village. The government appointed a male gatekeeper as well. He is from a neighbouring village and does the paperwork, and looks after the property.

In the house opposite the girls' school a room is rented by an NGO to house the non-formal education centre. A twenty-year old girl, a relative of the village numberdar, teaches women basic literacy and numeracy skills. This NFE-programme started in August 2004 with 15 girls enrolled. Currently only six girls are enrolled, of whom five since August 2004. They are all studying at class 5-level now. The teacher's salary of PKR 1500 is paid by an NGO. The students are asked to pay a fee of PKR 15. Books and stationary is provided.

The boys' primary school is located in the middle of wheat fields, approximately 1-1.5 kilometres from Main Colony, and 500 meters from West Colony. From Main Colony boys have to walk approximately 20 minutes to reach the school. There are 129 boys enrolled according to the school register, with most boys coming from Main Colony and the deras. The numberdar is appointed as headmaster, and has been appointed at the school since 1985. As numberdar he functions as a mediator between the villagers and government officials. He deals with revenue collection, helps during election-time, and is responsible for the village's administration. He also deals with all communications between the village and NGOs active in the area. Due to all this work, he is unable to be present in the school regularly. In the school one other teacher is appointed; he lives in a nearby village. According to the Education Officer of an NGO, they had started to pay for a teacher at the NGO-rate of PKR 1500 per month. They stopped this because the government said that they would provide an additional teacher. However, at the time of research no new teacher had yet been appointed.

In West Colony only one woman has been educated until class 10. She was educated in her parent's village and moved to West Colony after her marriage. She teaches at a non-formal education centre set up by an NGO in September 2004. Currently there are 13 students enrolled here. During the time of research an adult literacy centre for women was opened in West Colony as well. A woman from Main Colony was appointed by an NGO to teach here. 14 women are enrolled.

If children want to continue their education after class 5 they have to travel to a neighbouring village. There are currently four girls from Main Colony who go to this school, which is approximately six kilometres away from their homes. For girls who go to classes 6 to 8 the government introduced a monthly scholarship of PKR 200. In order to receive this, girls are permitted no more than two absences. The scholarship is given to them every 3 months.

According to the Education Officer of the NGO working in the area, retention is a bigger problem than access to education. There is a good enrolment ratio, but many children in the village do not attend regularly. The NGO-run ECCD-centres, he mentioned, have given a positive boost to enrolment. Another motivation has been the government's policy of providing free textbooks to all children until class 5. The retention problem, however, remains. "There is a high drop-out rate, because children help in income generating activities. When a child grows up, he goes to the field with parents. They are interested in their livelihood, and do not think how education can be helpful. They live by the day, and do not think about tomorrow". One of the teachers in the girl's school addressed the retention problem as well: "The rule is that a child, after ten days of absence, should be expelled from the school, but if we follow that rule here, we can close our school altogether".

1.2 State of education in Pakistan

Education is universally recognised as a basic right for children. There is much debate, however, about whether the government of Pakistan is sincerely committed to provide its citizens with access to education. For example, much has been written about the government's high military and defence budget compared to its low expenditure on primary education [For example: Kazmi 2005; HRCP 2006:239]. It is argued that the low spending on education is an example of the low priority policy-makers give to education. In the words of an NGO-employee in an interview: "Apparently it is more important to defend our children than to educate them".

Ever since its founding in 1947, however, Pakistan has expressed a commitment to provide all its children with free and compulsory education. During the First National Educational Conference in 1947 Mohamed Ali Jinnah stated that "the importance of education and the type of education cannot be over-emphasised" and it was agreed that free and compulsory education would be achieved within a decade, and universal primary education (UPE) by 1967. Ever since, various governments have repeatedly come up with Education Policies that claim to be aimed at achieving universal primary education (UPE) within a decade or so from its implementation. In Articles 37 and 38 of the 1973 Constitution, which is still in force, the state commits itself to provide all its citizens with basic necessities such as education. Throughout the years, various commissions have been appointed to achieve this goal, such as the Commission on National Education in 1959, the Literacy and Mass Education Commission (LAMEC) in 1981, which was renamed the National Education and

Training Commission (NETCOM) in 1989, and again in 1992 into the Prime Minister's Literacy Commission (PMLC).

The National Education Policy 1992-2002 was aimed at providing compulsory and free education to every Pakistani child. Under the leadership of General Pervez Musharraf the government committed itself again to efforts to achieve this in the National Education Policy 1998-2010. This policy offers a framework for other current initiatives, including Pakistan's National Plan of Action (NPA) for Education for All, which was launched in April 2003. This NPA is based on the Dakar goals and objectives: to reach the disadvantaged population groups in rural and urban areas with emphasis on girls and women, to promote community participation and ownership of basic education programmes at the grassroots, and to improve relevance and quality of basic education through enhancing learning achievements of the children, youth and adults. In 2002 the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) were announced to implement the Ten-Year Perspective Development Plan (2001-2011). These reforms define the purpose of education as "developing human resources in Pakistan as a prerequisite for global peace, progress, and prosperity", and aims to produce "enlightened and skilled citizens". A special focus is on a national literacy campaign, reform of the national curriculum and the madrassas, and on achieving universal primary education. The government expects the UPE target for males to be achieved by the year 2010, and by 2015 for females. It is believed that the net participation rate will increase from the existing 66% to 100% by the last year of the Plan [Government of Pakistan:111]. The Plan also provides the enhancement of educational opportunities for child labourers and children with special needs through formal and non-formal literacy/education programs [Government of Pakistan:130]. At the end of 2004 the federal government of Pakistan declared that education is free until class 10 [HRCP 2006:241].

After 2001 processes of decentralisation took place in Pakistan's government structure. The Local Government Ordinance 2001 resulted in a transfer of a number of administrative and financial functions from the provincial governments to the district level governments. This devolution of power made district governments responsible for providing elementary education and literacy [Kazmi 2005:99].

Despite this self-professed commitment of the government, in 2006 the number of out-of-school children in Pakistan was still significantly high. UNICEF estimates there are almost 13 million out-of-school children out of about 27 million children of primary school age (5-10 years). More than half of them are girls [International Crisis Group 2004:7; Attiq-ur-Rahman 2005:9].

The International Crisis Group [2004:7-8] characterises the state of education in Pakistan by a low enrolment, high dropout rate, low adult literacy rate, urban-rural disparities, and gender disparities. Many institutions within Pakistan, including the government of Pakistan, recognise the poor state of Pakistan's education system. "Deplorable" is the opinion of the Social Policy and Development Centre (SDPC) on the state of education in Pakistan [Social Policy and Development Centre 2003:2]. The First Quarterly Report for Fiscal Year 2006 of the State Bank of Pakistan, deems the state of the education sector as unsatisfactory: "The illiteracy rate is high; gross and net enrolment rates, at all levels of education, are low; there are wide gender and regional disparities in opportunities to acquire education; dropout rates from schools are high; and quality of educational services is poor" [State Bank of Pakistan 2006:81].

How can this poor state of education in Pakistan be explained? According to SPDC the deplorable condition can be clarified by supply factors such as high population growth rates, and lack of sufficient financial commitment, as well as demand factors such as poverty and illiteracy. Small-scale efforts of private and non-government sectors have not been able to make significant improvements to the education sector [SPDC 2003:2]. According to the State Bank of Pakistan the blame for the current state of affairs is three-fold: (1) the high costs of education, (2) parental disapproval due to social and cultural norms (especially for girls), and (3) the low quality of education due to both unqualified teachers and lack of proper physical infrastructure [State Bank of Pakistan 2006:81].

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [2004a; HRCP 2004b] the major causes for low enrolment are to be found on the supply side: distance and lack of facilities in schools, poor conditions of schools, overcrowded classes, the harsh attitude of teachers, irrelevant curricula, teacher absenteeism, weak supervision and administration, lack of female teachers, non-operational school management committees, lack of schools in rural areas, appointment of teachers based on factors other than merit. Factors on the demand side include poverty of parents and household incomes, opportunity costs of having children working elsewhere, and the parents' lack of understanding of the value of education, as argued by HRCP. Kazmi [2005:100-101] identifies the major challenges in developing the education sector as follows: inadequate physical infrastructure and facilities, shortage of trained and motivated teachers, inadequacies related to quality and relevance of curricula, underinvestment in quality education resulting in poor supply of services and adversely impacting enrolment, retention, teacher quality, attendance and learning achievements.

1.3 The current school system

Within the education sector in Pakistan the Federal Ministry of Education is in charge of policy-making, planning and supervising programmes and plans, while implementation is done on provincial and district level. The education system in Pakistan is currently structured as follows:

Table 7: School class categorisation in Pakistan

Level	Grades	Age-group
Pre-primary	Kachi Pehli	3-4
Primary	1-5	5-9
Middle	6-8	10-12
Secondary	9-10	13-14
Higher Secondary/ Intermediate	11-12	15-16

Elementary education includes the first three stages: pre-primary until middle level. After class 10 children are required to pass their matric exams in order to obtain a certificate of secondary school, which gives access to education at intermediate level. After class 12 students can go for Higher education to receive a Bachelor's or Masters Degree [HRCP 2004a:19]. The focus of this report is mainly on primary level and to a lesser extent on middle education.

Exams take place every year to see whether students are able to progress into the next grade. The schools conduct these exams every year, except at the end of classes 5, 8, 10 and 12 when public examinations are conducted by the Education Department.

Curriculum Bureaus and Text Book Boards on provincial level develop the official curricula and textbooks, which are used by government schools in Pakistan. These provincial institutes are monitored by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education. While the contents of the curricula and books vary per province, the syllabus is the same in schools throughout Pakistan. In classes 1 and 2 only the subjects Urdu, English and mathematics are taught. In class 3, Islamic studies are added to the syllabus, and in class 4 general sciences. At middle level, age group 10-12, the syllabus is further expanded with the subjects geography and history.

The school year is from August until May, with a summer holiday from June 1 until July 31. In Vehari I was told they had a summer holiday starting early June, with the new school year starting at the end of August. The winter holiday is at the end of December and lasts 15 days. In addition there are numerous government holidays. There are 160 regular schooldays in a year. The exams take place at the end of the year in April and May. Official school hours in Sindh are from 8:30 am until 1:30 pm. Break time is from 11 until 11:30 am. In Punjab primary school hours are from 8:30 am until 2:15 pm. In winter, school hours change to 7:30 until 12:30 pm. On Fridays the schools close at noon for Friday-prayers. On Sundays the schools are closed.

This chapter provided a short overview of the education system in Pakistan, and the context of this fieldwork. The next chapter deals with findings of the fieldwork with regards to the perception of people in rural areas of the relevance of education for them and their children's daily lives.

Chapter 2

The Importance of Primary Education

Nowadays, everyone in Pakistan is able to sum up a few reasons why people should send their children to school. But the reality is that still many children do not attend school. Therefore, it is important to look at everyday realities of village life, and to listen to whether villagers believe education is relevant for their daily lives. Why is it that people send their children to school, what are the hopes and aspirations of children and their caregivers in rural areas, and which possibilities do they have? Does primary education offer an opportunity to achieve their goals and fulfil their dreams? This chapter deals with such questions. The first section covers the perception of villagers of why education may be important for them; the second deals with the factors that have resulted in an increasing number of people becoming interested in sending their children to school.

2.1 Villagers' perspectives on importance of education

Three main perspectives repeatedly occurred in discussions with villagers on why elementary education can be relevant for their lives. First of all, there is the recognition of the inherent value of learning general knowledge and communication skills. The second perception is that of school as a means by which children might be able to escape their current lifestyles. And third, the belief that education will provide their children with particular skills that will benefit them when they follow in their parents' footsteps and become fishermen, housewives, farmers etc.

2.1.1 Relevance to current occupations

In all three villages there were people who argue that education can be an asset for their traditional occupations. A fisherman in the coastal village in Sindh who passed class 10, for example, believes that because of his schooling he has an advantage over other fishermen who are illiterate: "When I take people from Karachi on the boat for a day-trip, I know how to behave, and respect them." Others emphasised the reading and writing skills that benefit them both in the environment of their homes, when they receive letters or want to write letters to their relatives, but also out at sea: "When we come across other boats, we are able to read what is written on them". Drivers from this village find knowledge of Urdu especially helpful, as they are able to read and understand their licenses and road signs on the way. And, in the words of a driver: "If I am violating traffic rules and the police catch me, I am able to communicate with him in Urdu". An uneducated truck-driver regretted that he never went to school: "As a driver I am responsible for the fish which I take to the market. It would have been helpful if I could count, and understand what is written on all the paperwork. Now I have to ask help from my brother who went to primary school until class 3".

Some farmers also see ways in which education could be helpful in their occupation. A farmer in Badin explained that it is crucial to be able to increase your knowledge about crops, how to

increase profits, and to calculate your fare share. “It is our responsibility to make sure that the land will bring enough profit. If it is a bad season, we are the only ones suffering. Our landlord has other sources through which he earns money”. Also in Vehari, the main source of income in the village is farming. Here, people consider education of some relevance for farmers in the sense that it helps in understanding techniques for improving profits, including good quality seeds, and the right kind of pesticides. For example, a 25-year old farmer in Vehari, who became the head of his household after his father died, passed the intermediate level (class 12) in Vehari where his whole family lived for ten years. He explained that he knows about superior seeds, and better machinery, which is why the crop-level on his land is high.

Throughout the three villages people believe that education helps to become less dependent on others. A fisherman explained that “educated men know how to take fish to the market and sell it; they can control all the counting, and are not dependent on others”. A local teacher, who was recently appointed by an NGO believes that “if everyone in the village were educated, the village environment would change for the better: fishermen would be able to sell their fish themselves. Now many fishermen are easily cheated by others in the city”. The headmaster in the coastal village observed that in the past the local fishermen would run away if they saw visitors from Karachi coming to the village. Nowadays, he argued, people had no trouble communicating with them. He also recalled that in the past many coast guards from the Pakistani Navy came to the village and snatched fish from the villagers. Out of fear these fishermen just let it happen; but not anymore. “Because of education the villagers now know their language, and they have become aware of their rights”.

Especially in an environment where labourers are dependent on landlords for their livelihood, “becoming independent” is a strong incentive for sending children to school. A government teacher in Badin emphasised: “these children might not get a job in the future, but they can work in fields. Because of school they are able to calculate the profits and loans themselves, which means that they will not be dependent on the landlords. This way, their lives will certainly improve”. A member of a Parho-community in Badin explained: “At the end of the year, after cutting the crops, when the landlord is calculating the profits, it would be helpful if I could calculate my profit myself. Uneducated people are like animals. We do not know what is going on around us”. In another Parho-household where educated sons are doing the same agricultural labour as their uneducated father, one of the sons exclaimed: “But I am educated! Father never knows how much loan he is taking. I know exactly how much the landlord is giving me and how much I have to pay. Education has also made me aware of things around me. I can read the signboards in the city, and I know what is being sold in which shop”. A father in the village in Badin explained how he expects the living style of the village to change tremendously if all children were to get an education, since it would empower the poorer households. He argued that some landlord families are afraid of this prospect, because it would become more difficult to find labourers for their land. This argument, however, was not shared by many respondents in the village.

2.1.2 Education as a way out of current lifestyle

Although many people see how education might improve their current lifestyle, even more people see education as a way out of their current livelihood; as a means by which they are able to take up a whole new occupation, and by doing so, escape their poor living standards.

In the coastal village people emphasised that life becomes harder for fishermen everyday. Villagers identify two major problems that make their profession, which has been passed down to them for generations, increasingly difficult. The first problem is how the large international vessels form a threat to local small-scale fishermen. These industrial deep-sea trawlers, which are mostly from East Asia, scoop up huge amounts of fish with their enormous nets, and contribute not only to the destruction of ocean life, but also to a decrease in fishing potential for the local fishermen. Their use of wire-nets, officially banned by the government, has threatened the numbers of small fish in particular. The local fishermen now have to remain at sea for much longer, in order to be able to return with a reasonable catch. While the large boats used to stay at sea for no more than 20 days, these fishermen now sometimes do not return for up to 30 days. The second problem mentioned by the villagers is the lower prices the fishermen are now receiving at the market for their fish. Considering the high cost of diesel, their income barely covers the cost of taking the boats out to sea.

Fishermen are worried about the future of their occupation, and some are convinced that it is coming to an end: "It is going to finish, because day by day the number of living things in the sea is decreasing". A retired fisherman explained that in the old days not many people were interested in education, because of the huge amount of fish in the sea: "Everyone was interested in fishing". Now, however, he believes that children should get an education instead of becoming fishermen.

In the context of these negative prospects, most fishermen hope for a different future for their sons. This is not only applicable to fishermen, but for drivers as well; as a truck-driver explained: "My driving job is not useful, and one day it will be gone. I do not have my own truck, and I am dependent on others. It is a difficult and a heavy job. I hope my son is able to do something else in the future". Even one of the shopkeepers sends his son to relatives in the city to get an education, so that he will be able to do something else with his life.

Also in Badin and Vehari, where agriculture is the main means of subsistence, many perceive education as a means through which children can get *naukri* (a government job) and thus improve their lives. When asked why education is important for their lives, the answer is more than often to get a job, or *naukri*. In a Hindu community in Badin a father explained why he recently enrolled his son in school: "We sent him to school, so he does not have to work for landlords, but can get a job in the future instead". An uneducated farmer from a Parho community in Badin was never interested in school, which he now regrets:

My father tried to send me to school, but I refused. I hated school. I was just roaming around and working in the fields. Even though my parents were uneducated, they were keen on educating me, but I was not interested. Now I know what education is all about, and I feel some regret. The work in the field is hard. If I had an education I could have had a better job, and make a better life. I could have been a government teacher or do some other *naukri*.

A 13-year-old boy from a Kholi household who worked for a Bhurgri-landlord in Badin, complained: "Cutting crops is difficult, that is why it is necessary to get an education. The work is heavy and affects our body".

A barber and father of nine children in Vehari received an education until class 5. His father was an agricultural labourer, but he chose to do something else. After class 5 he decided that he wanted to learn some vocational skills, and he went to the village barber who taught him the skills. He believes that the first five years in school certainly benefited him: “I know how to manage my income: counting the rupees, evaluating the expenses, I can read letters, and teach my children about money”. However, not all of his nine children are enrolled in school.

The headmaster of the boys’ school in Vehari emphasised that education is very important for the villagers’ future, because “it enables them to improve their financial condition through finding better work than just being a labourer”. He illustrated this by giving an example of two boys who passed primary education in his school. “They now work in a brick kiln as managers, earning PKR 2000 per month, and food and clothes”.

That education can lead to a better position within the work they are doing, is confirmed by a fifteen-year-old boy in a Sayyed-household who works as a labourer in a factory in Lahore. He used to go to school, but had to drop out, because his father was old, and could not work anymore. He is happy to work in the factory. According to him it is more enjoyable than working in a brick kiln, or as an agricultural labourer. Also for the work he does, education is helpful in many ways. “Illiterate workers are not able to read the instruction on the machines. Illiterate people can only work as a sweeper. But if I had more education, I could become the General Manager in the factory. Now this is impossible.”

It is important to note that finding a job or a way out of their current lifestyles requires more education than only primary and middle level (until class 8). For many households, however, only primary level education is realistic in terms of what is available and accessible to them. The oldest son in a Kholi-household in Badin who passed class 7, argued: “If I had more education, then I could have a good job, and live a more comfortable life. Now I do not apply for a job. It is hopeless. But my schooling has helped me with calculations and in communicating with others”.

2.1.3 Education provides general knowledge and skills

Education is seen by many as a means to escape their current lifestyles, but many see that education can be beneficial in many ways other than increasing chances for a job. First of all it is argued that it enables people to become aware of life surrounding them. An example is a Sayyed-household in Badin, where the sons attend school. The father could not continue his education after class 3, because his own father died. He believes that it is very difficult for poor people to find a job, even when they are educated, because they lack the resources needed for that. But despite that, he argued: “Parents should still send their children to school for the sake of knowledge, just to learn about what is happening in their surroundings. When I was young, I was not interested to go to school, but once my father told me that education is not about getting a job, but to gain knowledge about the world. From that day I was interested”. A member of the Parho-community shared his opinion. He works as a porter, loading and unloading sugarcane for transport to the sugar mills. Being the sole earner he has to provide for his wife and their nine children. He is uneducated himself, but, if he could afford it, would educate his children until class 10. He considers education to be necessary for both boys and girls:

It is very profitable, because you learn to think from various angles. Ways of thinking are different between educated and uneducated persons. Educated people learn to connect with the world, and to read newspapers in order to be able to learn what is going on in the country, for example in politics. This is also relevant for people in the villages. I am uneducated, so how can I read? Getting a job is not the main reason for receiving an education. Everyone should get an education to gain general knowledge.

Another uneducated man from the same community, who sends all his children to school, including his oldest son who is currently studying at intermediate level, added that he would never regret his investments in education: “Even if my son becomes a tractor driver like me. I am uneducated, so I do not know how to behave appropriately with other people. It is now possible for children to know these things and to live a better life”.

In Vehari people expressed that they found it difficult to communicate with the researcher and the translator. A farmer lamented: “You can see how illiterate I am. I cannot even understand your simple words! This is exactly why I want my children to get some education”. Just like in Badin, these people perceived primary education as helpful for their daily lives.

A fisherman explained how he is happy that he learned how to speak and read Urdu, which facilitates communications with others. He assists his uneducated brothers with their work, and is responsible for taking their children to the doctor in the city. “It is easy for them to go to Karachi, but they cannot communicate with the doctor”. During a group discussion on the beach with a group of fishermen who were preparing themselves for a short fishing trip it became clear that the men agreed that the skills learned in school are beneficial for the children of their village: “When one knows how to speak Urdu, it is easier to communicate with people from outside our Balochi village. Reading and writing will reduce their dependency on others, and help them to learn about the world. School teaches them to respect others.”

The ability of observing good manners is seen as a positive outcome of schooling. Learning etiquette and manners is considered especially important for girls who will be responsible for their household and raising their children after they get married. A mother in a Christian household in Vehari believes that girls can learn etiquette and manners in school, which is crucial for being mobile within society. She is uneducated, and does not know how to read or write. She explained that she sometimes wishes that she was literate; for example, when she receives a letter. One of her daughters-in-law, who both came to live in this village after their education, stated that she is able to differentiate between their behaviour due to her education: “If mother is angry, I know that it is better to keep silent. This is possibly due to my education. If I educate my daughter, she will then be able to observe manners in her husband’s home. She will be able to lead the household in a proper way”. The older sister of Meryem from the same village shares the same ideas. The ten-year-old Meryem is enrolled, but does not regularly attend, because of a lack of interest. Her sister never went to school because of household chores. She is not educated, but did learn how to read the Quran. Meryem’s sister is keen on sending her children to school and regrets that her younger sister does not attend regularly:

If children go to school they can learn our society’s etiquette. Also in communication with others, they can choose to speak Urdu, and English, and that way also have a

chance on a job. Nobody gives respect to illiterate persons. I am glad I can at least read the Quran, so I know how to properly pray for my ancestors.

Schooling is thus also considered relevant for women, who will be responsible for the household in the future. A neighbouring father believes that education is beneficial for girls and consequently for her own children in the future. He said: “Education is wealth. When a woman is educated, she can educate her children, and treat them in a well way”.

According to a mother of a Christian household in Vehari, education is of great importance, since it enables children to start a business, and for girls to be able to get a job such as schoolteacher, or nurse. However, even though many community members in Vehari seem to be aware of how education can benefit the lives of their daughters, it is most often seen in light of learning good manners, and becoming aware of basic rules of hygiene, in other words: how the girls will be well-behaved in their future husband’s house, and how to raise their children properly. Education for girls is not necessarily seen as a means to a job, but rather as a benefit to them in their lives as mothers and housewives after marriage.

In Badin, especially among land owning Bhurgri-households, the idea that girls would be able to get a job after education, has already started to gain more recognition. A mother in a Bhurgri-household in Badin explained that they started sending their children to school, because they themselves faced many problems and difficulties due to their illiteracy. Her husband explained that “working for landlords means that we are heavily dependent on them, and if they are angry, they can easily fire us. If I was educated, I would have had a nice job, and a nice house, and I would not have to worry about these things”. She would be very disappointed if her children would not be able to find a job in the future, but her daughter, who was studying in class 8 and at the same time appointed by an NGO to teach an adult literacy programme after school hours, did not agree with her: “If I do not get a job, education is still good for boys and girls because we can read the mail and invitations for wedding ceremonies. We will be able to have a better understanding of the things around us.” Her father agreed with her: “My parents never cared about sending me to school, and I faced many problems due to a lack of education. If my children are educated it is easier for them to visit places, and to calculate profits, things that I am unable to understand. I cannot say that our children will definitely get a job, but at least they will improve their life, because they are learning to understand these basic things in school”.

Many perceive education thus as beneficial for their daily lives, regardless of future perspectives. The ideas above about how education can be relevant for their children’s future, however, do not always weigh up to the investments required from people in order to give their children an education. More than just awareness of the importance of education is required for people to act and indeed enrol their children. The next paragraph deals with what has driven people to actually send their children to school.

2.2 Motivating factors

In order to be able to get a realistic idea of how to include everyone in school at least at primary level, we should look at what has motivated families to send their children to school in the recent past. This paragraph looks at what seem to be the main motivating factors.

2.2.1 Examples of others

A great motivating factor is the observation of other families in their surroundings being able to improve their lives through education. Members of the community who were able to find a decent job outside the village generally receive respect and pose as an example for children as well as their caregivers.

According to an uneducated father in a Parho-community in Badin, children in his community have only been going to school for the past two years: “Before that we had no sense about education. My father was uneducated and was like a blind man. He did not know about the value of education, so I was never sent to school. Now I see other villagers who went to school in the past and now have a job”. His youngest son is now in class 2, and his daughter in class 1. His older children are helping him in the field and with household chores. “But this work has never been the reason that I did not send my older children to school. I just did not have the concept”. In a Hindu-community in Badin it was argued that “in the future all children here will go to school. Once educated children get jobs and earn money, they will be an example for other households”. In the fishing community in Sindh examples included the man who received a job as a reporter at an English newspaper in Karachi, the one who worked at the power-plant in nearby Balochistan, and the people who received a job through a local NGO, including two sixteen-year old girls who were appointed as teachers.

In Badin many Parho-households explained that well-off Bhurgri households served as their examples. “We know education is important, because we have seen educated people doing jobs, being treated with respect, and earning lots of money”.

More often, however, more realistic examples are those people who belong to their own caste/community, and are perceived to have similar opportunities within the society they live in. An example is a school-teacher belonging to a Parho-community in Badin who was recently appointed by NCHD to teach at the school in a neighbouring village. He was able to convince many parents in the village to send their children to school, precisely because he himself comes from the same community and the parents can therefore identify with him. Interestingly, most of the village children joined him at his school in the neighbouring village on the other side of a busy road busy, rather than attend the government school in their own village.

There are government slogans aiming to make people aware about the importance of school, but according to a mother in a Christian family in Vehari, in the end it depends on the parents whether they want to send their children to school or not, and slogans alone are not sufficient to teach them the value of education. A woman whose husband is uneducated and does agricultural labour on leased land, explained that she never considered sending her children to school until the ECCD-teacher, a woman who came to live in the village after her marriage, and who became the only woman in the village who passed class 10, told her how education could help them in their lives. She added that she herself has no clue what education is.

In the fishing community, one of the girls who is now appointed by an NGO as a teacher and who is one of the few girls to have passed class 10 in the village, said that she was very keen to receive a lot of schooling. A younger brother of her father (a fisherman), is an educated man and works for an English newspaper in Karachi; he has been an inspiration to her. She explained how her uncle convinced her father to continue sending her to school.

Once one household in a particular community starts sending their children to school, it is likely that other households will follow their example. According to a senior research associate of PILER, a research institute in Pakistan, education works like an infection. “Once someone is aware of education, it generally does not take long before someone else ‘catches’ this awareness.”

2.2.2 NGOs and incentives

In order to involve more children with the schools, governments and NGOs have introduced a number of incentives to improve the quality of schooling and to remove the barriers that keep children out of school. NGOs have set up small schools to make both physical and social distance to schools smaller, and they have appointed teachers to existing government schools. Scholarship programmes were initiated and awareness raising events have been organised to teach people about the child’s right to education and how it can be beneficial for their children’s lives.

In both Badin and Vehari, NGOs are recognised as major motors behind creating awareness about the importance of education. In Badin it was argued that many households had only been sending their children to school in the past two years, especially as the result of efforts of NCHD. In the sampled village in Vehari, NGOs did a lot of work aimed at stimulating school enrolment, in the context of other programmes related to the development of the village. Community members pointed out that it was due to this that many households started sending their children to school, while they had never been interested in doing so before. In almost all discussions held with villagers regarding education issues, work done by NGOs was mentioned, and it emerged as being a main player in creating awareness about the value of sending children to school.

School enrolment programmes were organised at the school almost every month in order to create awareness. These functions are held during school hours at the girls’ school located in Main Colony. At these functions children participate in stage performances and games, while their parents and other villagers are invited to observe. During these functions villagers are not only encouraged to send their children to school, but are also made aware about issues related to health and hygiene. Participating children are rewarded with small presents such as pencils, erasers, sharpeners, slates and so forth. A mother who occasionally attends these functions explained: “During the functions children participate in reading poems, reciting holy verses, performing drama, and they receive a prize after participating. When I see these educated persons, my heart wants to educate girls. Since the NGO started working in this village, many children are going to school.”

According to a barber living in the village in Vehari, these events are a good source of motivation. He is convinced that if the government arranges programmes similar to those organised by NGOs, even more children would become interested in going to school.

Villagers agree that the NGOs helped to increase the number of children in school by encouraging the parents and the children, but also by making schooling affordable by providing items that are needed for going to school. This is illustrated by the following quotes from villagers:

Education is not expensive, because the government provides free education including books until class 8. Other things such as bags and uniforms are provided by the NGO. In the past we had to pay for everything, but nowadays everything is provided. (Mother in Main Colony)

Most children are now going to school due to these efforts. In the old days only two or three children from this colony were attending. Because the NGO started to encourage families to send their children to school, and because they also provide things, enrolment has increased. Education is not expensive, because they provide everything. There is only one thing required from us parents: to send our children to school.
(Father in West Colony)

Although this recognition is shared, some have a negative opinion of the incentives. An example is Aziz, who admitted that many people decided to send their children to school, because of what was provided to them. He explained: “Before the NGOs started their programmes here, it was only the educated parents who sent their children to school. Because they started to provide household with school necessities, families’ motivation to send their children to school increased”. However, he continued, “they only provide things to poor children, and only the headmaster gets to decide who these poor people are.” This opinion was shared by a landowner from the village, who had some complaints about the community members who are appointed by NGOs to see to the proper implementation of projects: “They make it impossible for the rest of the villagers to communicate directly with the NGO-workers from the city”. Furthermore, he fears that if NGOs ever stop with their incentives in the village, people would lose interest in education and in sending their children to school.

Just like in Vehari, respondents in Badin also complained that incentives do not reach the people who need them the most, but that subsidies and other facilities were only provided to people who already had some property such as land or a small shop, often to friends and relatives of the teachers and power-holders in the village. Many argued that it would only be possible to include everyone in education if everything would be free until class 10, including books, uniforms, and stationary.

Critics, however, argue that many parents are not sending their children to school out of a genuine interest in education, but rather for what they receive. They believe that these incentives only marginally increase people’s awareness of the value of education, and are a major cause of greediness. For example, families in Badin complained first about the fact that teachers did not provide them the promised cooking oil every month, and only then about the teachers’ performance in the school. Teachers in Vehari gave examples of students who only come to school during events, during which they receive small presents, or sometimes even a bag and uniform, but after that never show up at the school. A teacher also complained about the habit of some children to never use pencils that they receive during school functions. They keep them at home and then in the classroom they complain that they are unable to write anything down because they do not have a pen. This sense of greediness was also observed when two sisters, who hardly attend school, suddenly appeared in class while the researcher was present. According to the youngest girl: “My parents usually do not want to send us here, but today mother did, because she saw you were entering the school, she thought maybe you were going to give us things”. The teachers at the school used this example to argue that these incentives used by NGOs often do not create the correct awareness, nor do they increase enrolment or attendance: “Children only like to receive presents”. They question whether this is the right practice to increase enrolment. “NGOs provided this school a lot. But it is the responsibility of the government. It is impossible for an NGO to

provide all poor villages in Pakistan, where quality of schooling is bad, with everything, like they do here”.

Members of the community also question whether the achieved progress in education is sustainable. According to Rashid, sponsorship programmes have increased enrolment, but he is worried that things will go back to how they were if NGO-programmes were to end. A mother agreed with him: “If the NGO would leave the village, then parents will stop sending their children to school, because then nothing is provided to families anymore”. The female teacher of the NGO-sponsored NFE-classes added: “also before they began the NFE-centre here, people knew they could ask me to teach their children, but parents never showed any interest”. A father expressed his worry that he cannot send his children to school without help of the NGO, because he would not be able to afford it. He added: “before they came, we were not interested in education”. Despite the progress that the village has gone through in terms of enrolment rate, especially of girls, incentives have thus also unfortunately created a sense of dependency.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the perceptions of community members of the relevance of education for their children in the context of their daily lives. First of all, they appreciate the opportunity school gives to obtain general knowledge and skills that might be useful in everyday life. People argue that education makes them aware of life surrounding them and their community, and it enables them to communicate and behave appropriately with others. It serves as a means to look further than only their community. Learning manners is believed to be especially beneficial for girls, who look towards a future in the household where they will have to take care of children as well as their in-laws.

Secondly, according to many villagers the skills learned in school can be helpful in their current occupations, and thus improve their lives in general. This is believed mostly by fishermen, farmers, drivers, and labourers. A major benefit that is recognised among all, regardless of occupation, is that getting an education enables people to become less dependent on others.

Thirdly, the majority sees education as a means by which they are able to escape their current poor living standards; this is especially true for cases where modern ways pose a threat to traditional occupations, and children are compelled to find another means of survival in the future.

Observations of educated people whose lifestyles have significantly improved are a major encouragement to send children to school. People tend to follow by example and listen to words of others, especially when they belong to the same community, and therefore have the same opportunities as themselves.

Other motivating actors are the NGO and government incentives, which have proven to be a great source of motivation for many to send their children to school. However, besides making people aware about the value of education, these programmes have also created a sense of dependency. People have started to get used to the fact that others take responsibility for investing in their children’s education.

Despite the reasons outlined in this chapter, there are factors that overshadow these positive motives for education, and consequently factors that are preventing many children from enrolling and attending school. These will be discussed in the next chapter.



Collecting old fishing nets to sell



Waiting for the teacher at a boys' school in Punjab

Chapter 3

Why Children are Out of School

Many arguments have been given by households to clarify why it is important to send boys as well as girls to school. However, many of the children are still not enrolled in school or fail to attend school regularly. Sending all children to school seems less desirable when the short-term effects are taken into account: “Who will earn while we educate our children?” But the current state of poverty is only one of the reasons which were given for so many children still being out of school. These reasons include both school-related and household-related aspects, and are the subject of this chapter.

3.1 Quality of schools

Quality of education is an important aspect to look at, as caregivers will be less willing to invest in schooling if the school does not meet the standards of the community. It especially becomes an issue when education costs increase (secondary school) and the child becomes old enough to work. The fact that access to school is hindered by the quality of available schools has been dealt with by many other authors. Khan [2005:28], for example, writes that government schools are characterised by “very poor facilities, very high student and teacher absenteeism, gossiping and disinterested teachers and an unrestrained student body running wild”. The International Crisis Group [2004:8] argues that it is due to the poor quality of rural government schools that parents have few incentives to invest in education for their children, especially girls. This paragraph deals with the quality of schools available to the community, and looks at whether it is a prerequisite for attendance. Four topics of complaint repeatedly came up and will be discussed below: 1) the contents of education 2) the lack of qualified teachers 3) the lack of motivation of teachers 4) the use of corporal punishment in the classroom.

Children, parents, and teachers alike, complained about the contents of the curriculum. Jameel and Akhtar, who study in class 6 and 7 in the government school in the coastal village, wish that some attention would be given to practical skills. Jameel hopes to become a mechanic, and he would like technical skills to be taught at school. Akhtar is particularly interested in computers (one is available at school). But, he says, there is no teacher present who has sufficient knowledge about the computer to be able to teach the children. A teacher, however, commented that it is not possible to teach these skills in school: “The children will get bored. They need that time for playing”.

Some parents complained about the quality of the books and wonder what the children are actually able to learn from them: “They now introduced English books for class 1. But even a child of class 7 is not able to read an English book, so how can those small kids! The curriculum should improve a child’s ability to think and make his or own decision, but the books only provide simple lessons, and the teachers are not creative.”

Other parents complained that the curriculum is not relevant for people from rural areas: “Why don’t they make the curriculum suitable for villagers? The rural population in Pakistan is larger than the urban population, isn’t!” And:

Subjects should be relevant to children, whose lives revolve around the village. There is a computer locked up in one of the rooms in the school, and in the city even a five-year-old can operate a computer. Here most people have never seen a computer, so it is not necessary to have a computer in the school.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [2004a:23] has also pointed out that “the curriculum is mostly urban oriented and not relevant to the daily life of the rural children”. The International Crisis Group [2004:12] is similarly concerned about how the development of a centralised curriculum will lead to a more rigid education system, which is not able to cater to the diverse needs of communities.

Another complaint related to the quality of what schools offer, raised by villagers as well as by teachers, is that there are insufficient (qualified) teachers in the school. In the coastal village, where teaching staff consists of only three government appointed teachers, supported by four teachers paid by NGOs, people worry about the poor teacher-student ratio: “There is a shortage of teachers in the school, and so many children. Class 4 and 5 are in the same classroom with one teacher. How is it possible that they learn?” A related concern is the qualification of these teachers. Most of them have only completed class 10. People, including students, complain about the lack of teachers who are qualified to teach middle and secondary school: “The teachers here are not qualified and have no experience. They only passed class 10, they do not know how to teach, and do not realise the importance of educating children. (...) The headmaster himself has only passed class 10!”

A more general concern of community members is that teachers at selected schools do not take an interest in teaching the children. In the girls’ school in Badin teachers often do not show up before 11 am, while the school officially starts at 8:30. A few girls from influential households have for this reason enrolled in the boys’ school. A mother complained: “There is no education in the girls’ school. Teachers are always late and in the school they only chat with each other about personal matters. When the children fight with each other, the teachers do not care.” A girl from a landholding Bhurgri-household who studied in the boys’ school added: “The teachers in the girls’ school always come late. The only reason that my younger sisters are enrolled in that school is to receive cooking oil. My sister is in class 4, but she cannot even solve a simple mathematical problem. I teach them in the evenings. They learn more from me than from the teachers!” A father in the Parho-community pointed out:

The girls’ school is not a good school. Teachers are always late and spend only one and a half hours in the school. We cannot do anything to change that. We send our girls there, because it is the only option we have. Other schools are too far way. I do not tell my daughters to go every day. It is up to them, because I know that they do not learn anything there.

One parent here added that teachers do not recognise differences in the children's abilities, and thus no consideration is given to children with learning difficulties.

Not only in Badin, but also in the other villages, people complained about poor quality of the school due to the behaviour of the teachers. In both the fishing village in Sindh and in the village in Vehari the performance of teachers and the poor quality of education in general was traced back to the headmaster. A fisherman whose son passed class 10 at the school in the village argued:

The environment in the school is not good. Sometimes when the teachers want to teach, they teach. But when they do not want to teach, they beat the children and send them back home. The children here are interested in going to school, and the parents are interested in sending them, but the teachers are not good! The same headmaster has been here for 20 years!

The extensive power in the hands of the headmaster in this village is seen by many to impede the quality of the government schools, as is illustrated by the following quotes:

There is no point in sending our children to school, because the headmaster decides which children are allowed to learn in the school. They only teach the children of the rich and powerful households and of those parents who vote for the right political party. (...) The head of this village protects the headmaster. He gave him the authority to deal with all issues related to the school.

The headmaster is not from here, and lives in the school. He commands children to do work for him such as cleaning and sweeping the classrooms and fetching water. When he was younger he was fiercely beating students, which resulted in many children to drop out of school. Nowadays he is old and weak, so this does not happen anymore.

Similarly, in Vehari many villagers attributed the poor quality of education in the government boys' school to the headmaster, who held numerous other positions including numberdar, and politician. The workload that comes along with these different functions increased his power, but obviously also obstructed his teaching time. According to many villagers he was hardly ever present in the school:

The base for primary education is not good here due to the headmaster. He is never present in the school. At any time you can see him roaming around on his motorcycle. No boy has even been able to pass the class 5 exams since he has been in the school.

I am not against the man, he is like my brother, but he is not a good teacher. He does not know anything about teaching methods. He has been in this school for many years. It is not good for a teacher to be in school for such a long time. He also has many other works being the numberdar, being in politics, and being a member of NGO-committees which is why he never can be found teaching.

The students attend regularly, but the teachers do not. Students who are studying in class 5, and want to take admission in another school have to take admission in class 1, because they do not know any reading, writing and counting. The headmaster just opens the school, roams around a bit, and then goes away. Children from the different colonies fight with each other, sometimes even throwing stones. But when I ask the headmaster, he apologises that he was not present there due to some other work.

If the headmaster goes, the enrolment will increase. As long as he is there, there will not be any education in the school. We just want a hardworking teacher who teaches the children properly!

He does a good job encouraging parents to send their children to school. But he only instructs us to send the children to his school, not to any other school, because that would decrease the number of students on his enrolment list.

Parts of the community blame this headmaster for using nepotism; they argued that he only gives school necessities such as bags, uniforms and pens (provided by NGOs) to his friends and relatives: "People here are uneducated. They cannot deal with certain things, and the headmaster can easily cheat them. We are uneducated! How can we do something! Other people are more powerful than us".

An interesting discussion was the one pertaining to the use of corporal punishment by teachers in the schools. A recent government rule prohibits the use of corporal punishment in government and private schools, and in 2005 the government of Punjab ordered schools to display boards outside the schools saying "Maar nahin, Pyaar"⁷. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP 2006:202) has argued that corporal punishment, together with child labour, is the main reason for children to drop out of school. During the fieldwork there were many parents and children who gave the beating by teachers as a main reason for why the school environment was seen as unattractive to them: "My youngest children do not want to go to school, because they fear the headmaster. He beats the children. Small children need love. For the older children, it is not a problem." "I dropped out of school, because the headmaster beat me so hard, that my arm was broken. I was in class 7 at the time. After that, I did not want to return to school."

However, corporal punishment by teachers is believed to be crucial when trying to discipline a child [See for example HRCP 2006:204]. During the fieldwork, parents, teachers and schoolchildren agreed that children will not learn properly if the teacher is not allowed to punish them: "In Sindh there are many teachers who beat the children. Only a few know how to behave with children, and discipline them. And if a child does not fear his teachers, he will not give respect to him, and he will not come to school regularly".

The school in the neighbouring village is better than this school, because there the teachers beat the students when they attend irregularly. There is much more discipline

⁷ "Don't beat, but love"

in that school than here. Here teachers also punish students, but to a lesser extent. That is why the boys from that school are cleverer than us. If a child cannot understand through love, obviously the teachers have to beat them.

Thus, many parents and children did not agree with the new government rule prohibiting corporal punishment. One teacher in the boys' school in Badin, however, argued that "beating is not necessary for teaching. In order to achieve that the child fears the teacher, some basic (non-physical) punishment will suffice".

What happens in the school is an essential factor in assessing the quality of what the child learns. However, what should not be overlooked is the child's home environment. It is important that children are encouraged at home as well. Khan [2005:28] argues that teachers and parents blame each other for a lack of interest in the children's education. Khan argues that "reform needs to start in the school and filter out to the home". One of the interviewed teachers said: "Parents are not interested. They do not know what the children are doing in school and what they learn here. They never come to school to talk to us about these matters. But when I punish a child, parents immediately rush to the school to enquire why I punished them".

An example of a child with a home environment, in which school-going is supported, is a five-year-old from a Bhurgri household. He was often found on the government school premises, even though he was not yet officially enrolled in the school. His parents sent him there every day, however, so that he would get used to going to school. Once he turns six years old, his parents want to try and enrol him in a private school in Badin.

However, teachers in the boys' school in Badin argue that in the case of many children "there is no atmosphere at home conducive to learning. They only spend four to five hours in the school every day, after which they are busy with many things except education". They argue that only some parents who received an education themselves (such as in the case of the five-year-old son in the Bhurgri-household), put some effort in motivating the children to go to school. The female teachers in the girls' school who, we have seen, receive a lot of criticism for being late every day, explained that they first do their household works at home before coming to the school:

I get bored, because there are no students at the school when I come early. I asked parents many times why they do not send their daughters earlier, but they all say that they have to help out in the household first before they can come to school. Parents do not give priority to their daughters' education.

While the latter is true for some households, fieldwork observations revealed that there are many girls waiting around the school premises for the gates to open, and girls from households who live near the school wait until they see the teachers arriving before walking to the school themselves.

3.2 Accessibility of schools

Accessibility of the schools is, besides quality, another school-related aspect relevant to attendance. Accessibility can be approached both in terms of the geographical location of the school (physical distance) as well as its social proximity to the community (characterised by caste, class and gender of the teachers and that of the children).

The caste and class to which teachers of a particular school belong has an influence on whether households are inclined to send their children there. A good example of this is the sampled village of Badin where a boys' government school is available in the centre of the village near the Parho-community. Many children of this community, however, attend a small NCHD-run school in the nearby village where a teacher from their own community teaches. Every day they join this teacher on his walk to school. In order to reach the school, the children have to cross a busy road. One of the parents explained that he does not like his boys to go to the school in his own village, and prefers them to go to the school in the nearby village, despite the distance, because "the children are scared of the teachers here. They are upper-class landlords from another village". He said that he would not have a problem with upper-class teachers who belong to his own village. "We have lived with Bhurgri-families all our lives. We know them. We only have a problem with landlords from outside our village". The children are more comfortable with teachers whom they know and whom belong to their own community.

A significant number of Hindu communities live at the outskirts of the village in Badin. Only a minority of the children from these communities are enrolled in the government school. The attention given to Islamic studies in the curriculum, as well as the absence of Hindu teachers in the schools, influences school-going behaviour in these communities. In one of the Kholi-communities it was repeatedly argued that "it is not a problem to learn about Islam in the school, but we would prefer if there were Hindu teachers in the school as well".

It was argued that the teachers employed at the local school should represent all classes within the society, and not only the upper layers. A social distance between school and the community is not conducive for a good learning environment and can even lead to feelings of exclusion:

The teachers do not allow me to enter the school. They ask: 'why are you coming here? You are uneducated! There is nothing here for you!' So I do not know what is going on in the school. We do not ask questions anymore. (Mother from Parho-community in Badin about girls' school)

There is no communication between teachers and people from our community. Teachers do not come here. Maybe if they did, then more people will start sending their children. I never visit the school. My children are not there, so what should I do there? (Father from Kholi community in Badin)

Teachers should be from lower-middle-class families. Now teachers do not care about teaching, and even the DEO cannot do anything against them, because they belong to families who are very powerful in this area. (Father from Parho-community in Badin about teachers in general)

In the fishing village there is an absence of a separate girls' school. Thanks to NGO-efforts a 16-year-old girl who passed class 10 has been teaching in the boys' school for two years, but she is the only female teacher at the school. Furthermore, boys and girls are taught together, which is considered a problem for some households, especially for girls in their teenage years. However, a

few households do allow their daughters to receive an education: during the time of fieldwork there were 15 girls enrolled at middle and secondary levels.

In West Colony of the village in Vehari there were also complaints about the lack of a girls' school in their part of the village: "there is no normal school for girls here, only an informal home-school supported by a NGO." Watkins [2000:194] notes that even though many parents have been willing to send their girls to mixed schools, "gender segregation in an environment marked by chronic shortages of schools for girls is a prescription for exclusion".

The physical distance to the school is also recognised as an obstacle for children. HRCP [2004a:23], for example, argues that large distances of schools from homes is one of the major causes for low enrolment. And Watkins [2000:193] points out that the distance to school adds to the hours that children are away from the home, and thus the hours that they are not able to help out with household-related chores. He argues that a large distance to school often results in late enrolment of children due to security fears, or early drop-out, especially in the case of girls.

As is found in the literature, problems with distance were also mentioned by respondents in this fieldwork, especially those in communities who lived further out in the field, away from the main village. First of all, people argued that their children, especially when they are still very young, are afraid to walk the distance every morning. These children fear dogs or the bullying of older children. According to a father from the Parho-community very small children cannot go to school, because "they are scared of the traffic, and the dogs!" Among the fishing community in Sindh as well, many households complained that the school is too far away for them. Others mentioned this to not be a problem, because it is still located within their own community, and "relatives live near and on the way to school". People said, however, that "young children are scared of the dogs or of the crazy guy in the village". In one community in Badin, children had been taken out of school after a row with another community, living nearer to the school, had gotten out of hand, and the parents were afraid their children would be in danger if they had to walk to the school alone. Previously, however, distance to the school had never been an issue for them.

The Hindu Saami-community, who is totally illiterate and lives far out in the fields, believes that there is no school available to them. They cannot relate to the school in any way, and do not show any interest in sending their children to the school far away in the village. The head of the community did argue that "if a school would be built here near our houses, we would definitely send all our children. Now they are just playing around. Education is important for them".

Distance especially becomes an issue for girls at a later age when, due to their sexual vulnerability, their mobility is restricted by social norms and values. Parents do not allow their daughters to walk the distance out of fear that something might happen to them on the way. In Badin, for example, where children from the studied village have to go to another village on the other side of the main road to attend middle school, and to Badin City for a secondary school, this distance becomes a significant obstacle, especially for girls. The cheapest means of transportation to Badin city is the bus. A member of the Bhurgri-community said: "There should be proper conveniences to allow girls to go to school in Badin. Now, girls have to wait for the bus at the roadside, and often, when the bus is full, they have to wait a long time for the next bus". For this reason, many villagers in Badin

feel that the government should open a middle school in their village, facilitating more children, girls in particular, to continue their education beyond class 5.

Furthermore, parents complained that the distance to the school does not give them the opportunity to check what is happening in the school or whether their children indeed went to school, or perhaps went to play in the village instead. A father in a Kholi-community in Badin complained that his children were not willing to go to school themselves, and were therefore not attending daily: "If the school was nearer, I could take them to school myself. But I have to go the field early, so now this is impossible". Also in the relatively small coastal village it was argued that the school is too far away to be able to check whether the child is present: "When the school is far away then the mother might think that her child is in school, while in fact he is playing on the beach. If the school is near, then the mother can check if her child is present in the school or not".

However, distance is not the main reason for non-enrolment. Many people in the villages stressed that if children are really keen on going to school, and their parents on sending them, then distance will not keep them from doing so. On the other hand, if children do not want to go, and parents are not willing to make an effort to send them, then it does not matter if a school is near their homes or not. Some commentators therefore argued [e.g. Filmer 2004:22] that interventions should be aimed at increasing the demand for schooling or the quality of schooling. It is expected that decreasing distances to school will only marginally increase enrolments, but will not have a substantial effect.

In the Punjabi village, where the government boys' school is located further away from the village compared to the schools in the two sampled villages in Sindh, distance was never mentioned as the reason for non-enrolment. Within the village, the school is located nearer to West Colony than to the Main Colony. However, more boys from Main Colony than from West Colony attend the school. As mentioned earlier, in Badin some Parho-households prefer to send their children to a school further away from their homes, because the teacher belongs to the same community as them. Distance thus appears to constitute a problem only at a stage at which education has not yet become the norm.

3.3 Community involvement

The previous paragraph dealt with accessibility of communities to schools. The further a household is distanced from the school (geographically and socially), the less likely it is that the children will be sent there. It is thus important to not overlook the extent to which communities are involved with school-related matters. Community involvement and a sense of ownership can stimulate improvement of the quality of schools, as well as increase the enrolment and attendance of children. In rural Pakistan, local power-holders within a village often send their children to a nearby private school. This means that there is no direct incentive for them to improve the government schools in their village, which thus caters only the children of the poor. Poorer families, however, might not be in the position to effectively complain about the quality of education [See also: Khan 2005]. This paragraph looks at the functioning of School Management Committees (SMCs), the instrument with which the government attempts to increase involvement of the whole community. It further discusses whether community members feel they can participate and have a say regarding school-related matters, through, for example, the PTA (Parent Teacher Association).

SMCs and PTAs are the most vital instruments for establishing the involvement of parents and the community as a whole in education [See also: Khan 2005:57]. Officially, SMCs and PTAs have existed since 1994 when the government issued a formal notification to form SMCs and PTAs in all the provinces in Pakistan. Establishing such committees was perceived as a critical step for ensuring community participation [Khan 2005:61]. SMCs are committees that represent the teachers, parents and local notables, and are given administrative and financial powers. HRCP [2004a:31] summarises their role as follows:

- To meet regularly to discuss issues and progress, and to find solutions to pending problems;
- To help maintain discipline, improve academic performance, monitor teachers' attendance, and so forth;
- To oversee/manage the utilization of funds and generate funds for curricular and extra curricular activities and receive all funds, donations and grants through lawful sources on the school's behalf.

The reality, however, is that SMCs are far from effective. Khan argues that even though their existence is mandatory, such committees often do not function [Khan 2005:75]. According to HRCP [2004a:30] more than 90% of the committees only exist on paper. Often SMCs are not clear about their roles and responsibilities, and are sometimes only involved in school finances. Reasons behind the non-functioning of SMCs include lack of communication and correspondence between members, and the irregularity and infrequency of meetings. HRCP concluded, based on a survey conducted in Multan district of Punjab, that in some cases members, especially parents, are even unaware about the tasks of the committee and about their own role in it [HRCP 2004a:32]. According to Khan the problem is that the committees were established overnight, with the members not having any idea what a SMC or PTA is [Khan 2005:73].

Stories encountered in the field accurately reflect the conclusions of Khan and HRCP. In all three villages community involvement with the schools was limited. Most respondents had never heard of the existence of an SMC or PTA. In Badin, for example, a father complained about the lack of inspection on teachers: "In other villages there are committees who check on the school and the teachers. But here such a committee does not exist". Another villager: "a school committee where parents are included should be present here. Now it is not, but I think it would improve the quality of education for sure."

In all three villages SMCs apparently only existed on paper. In the coastal village some of the committee members were not even aware that they were a member, and others argued that there were never meetings. Management of the school seemed to be entirely in the hands of the headmaster and the head of the village. Although the law requires meetings to take place at least once a month, other teachers and parents, including the son of the village head, all officially members of the SMC, said that meetings never took place, and that nobody knows about allocation of government and other funding. The headmaster himself argued that meetings do take place, but admitted that they only discuss matters related to the development of the schools, and that they "only make plans, we never put them into practice".

Also in Vehari, education committees exist for both the boys' and girls' schools. But here as well, the headmaster was one of the very few people who were able to sum up the expected duties of these committees: "To increase enrolment, to decrease dropout, to take care of the development in the schools, to see to appropriate use of funds, and to assure presence of both teachers and

children". Most of the community members were not aware of such a committee in their village, and the same was true in Badin. Here a teacher in the boys' school explained that an SMC existed, but that it was not functioning as it should. The SMC officially consisted of seven members, including five parents from Bhurgri-households, one parent from the Parho-community, and the headmaster. According to a teacher, they were only meeting once every three or four months.

Although most villagers were positive about the idea of a committee offering a platform where parents and teachers could discuss school-related issues, many teachers and community members who did appear to have a say in the running of the school, blamed poor and illiterate parents for not being interested. According to them this would explain why SMCs did not work in their village. A teacher in the coastal village: "It is not possible to have a well-functioning SMC in this village, since everyone in this village is involved in fishery-work. Often they are out at sea, so they have no time to participate." A teacher in Badin added:

It is a government rule to have an SMC so villagers and teachers meet each other regularly to discuss the school, but it only exists on paper. I tried to gather villagers many times, but most of them are farmers busy with their work on the field, and they tell me they are not interested and that I should manage everything.

The same people argued as well that illiterate persons would not be able to participate in discussions, which is why it would be useless to involve them in committees. A teacher argued: "Most people here are illiterate. Parents do not know what is going on in the school, and they are not interested. They do not know anything about education". Interestingly, due to feelings of inferiority this worry was shared by some of the villagers themselves. A respondent from a Bhurgri-household argued that there should be more communication between parents and teachers not only about the performance of the school, but also about the development and behaviour of the children. He wondered, however, how he could contribute to such a committee: "I am uneducated. What do I know about school? I do not even know what to ask my children about their homework".

Feelings of inferiority were given as a main reason why certain communities do not get involved. In Badin, for example, there were many complaints in the community regarding the performance of the girls' school. An old man in the Parho-community complained:

The teachers in the school do not teach the children, and they also take the cooking oil from them. The government should punish them, because this is injustice! But what can I do? I am poor! We cannot afford to fight against people with money and power. It is not possible to take any action against them.

One of his neighbours added: "You see what time they arrive at school everyday. But they threaten the children if they say anything against them when the DEO is visiting. The teachers belong to landlord families, so what can we do?" Even a parent in a Bhurgri-household complained: "The school will not change as long as the teachers are relatives of the rich and powerful landlords. If we complain, they will have the police come and arrest us and then we will receive different kinds of punishment".

In all three villages most villagers are not involved with school management, and decision-making is largely left up to a few power-holders in the villages. In the coastal village even teachers said to be

oblivious of any SMC or board of directors: “The headmaster is the only one here who decides about things in school. There is no communication between teachers and parents here”. We saw above that, in Vehari as well, decision-making is largely left to the headmaster; and in Badin the teachers in the girls’ school complained about the fact that the headmaster appointed her own husband to be chairman of the SMC, after she could not get along with the previous chairman. “There should be a change of members every year, and we should also be appointed. She only appoints members who are convenient to her”.

Khan [2005:61] rightly points out that if the SMC is chaired by head teachers, the committee will be reluctant to pass on complaints from parents regarding the functioning of the schools. He argues that a (head-) teacher should not function as the chairperson of the committee, because of the emerging conflict of interests. He points to the complex role of notables in the Committee, who have no direct interest in the schools concerned, but who cannot be left out of the committee due to their status within society [Khan 2005:59]. A parent in the coastal village, who was officially an SMC-member, argued that:

If you ask parents to participate in such a committee they would definitely come, but they are not given the opportunity nowadays. The management of the school is in control of the headmaster and the head of the village. Villagers should stand up for their rights. Parents should regularly visit the school and complain if they are unhappy. And the DEO should check if the parents here are able to get involved. As long as parents are not involved, then the situation will never change!

According to Khan [2005:74] change can only be possible if teachers change their attitude and view parents as partners in the education of their children, rather than their intellectual and social inferiors.

3.4 Poverty and children’s work

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [2004a:23] considers poverty of parents among the major causes for low enrolment. Khan [2005:16] similarly argues that low household income prevents them from being able to send the children to school.

The government of Pakistan has decided that education provided by government schools at primary and middle level should be free. There are no school fees, books are provided by the school, and at many primary government schools uniforms are not required. Thus, direct costs of education, especially at primary level, are limited to costs of stationary, fees for admission and exams, pocket money for children, and in some cases transportation costs. We saw in chapter 2 that the government and NGOs try to involve as many children as possible in primary level education through various incentives. At middle and secondary level, however, the costs of education start to rise. At these levels, households are required to purchase books and uniforms become compulsory. Especially beyond primary level, education is still considered to be too expensive by many households [See also: Khan 2005:9].

During the fieldwork, a significant number of respondents explained that poverty, more than quality, is the main cause for people being unable to send their children to school. According to a farmer in Vehari, it all depends on the financial condition of households: “If people have money,

then anything is possible and children will be sent to school. Now I have enough money, so I can send my children to school". In Badin many parents complained about the costs involved with schooling especially after class 5 when children have to travel to another village or town to receive further education, and transportation costs are added to the other expenses. In the coastal village people complained about exam fees of PKR 1000 for classes 9 and 10: "How can poor people like us afford this!" The prospect that children cannot continue studying after class 5, leads some people to wonder about the relevance of sending them to school in the first place.

In addition to looking at the direct costs of education, the issue of poverty should also be approached in terms of opportunity costs: the opportunity for children to work instead of going to school so they can supplement the household's income with their earnings. During the fieldwork many households were encountered who considered the poverty argument in this context. For example, in West Colony in Vehari, where poverty seemed more widespread than in Main colony, and where many children were involved in brick kiln work, a mother wondered: "If our children do not work, then how can we survive? Every day they are able to earn a small amount of money. We cannot even renovate our house, which is full of cracks and about to collapse. How can we afford to educate the children?" Many children in West Colony are involved in labour, especially in the surrounding brick kilns. The reason given for drop out was that parents asked their children to earn money. The majority of the villagers have no property of their own, and they need children to work. The headmaster reaffirmed this: "So they need their children to work with them to earn more money."

Due to incentives, and because nowadays there is a general realisation that education can be relevant for their children at least in some way or another (discussed in chapter 2), households like to send at least one of their children to school. In the studied villages, there were only a few households, a minority, where none of the children were enrolled in school. Normally, some children work or help out with household-related activities allowing siblings to go to school. An example is Akhbar from the coastal village in Sindh who dropped out of school in class 8 to work with a mechanic so his younger brothers can continue going to school. He does hope to make enough money so he will be able to attend secondary school one day. Another example is a household in Badin with three sons, of which the oldest and youngest sons both passed class 3. They both started working in the field of a landlord at the age of 13. That way the family could afford their brother's education until class 10. Their father admitted that his two other sons were very interested in continuing their schooling as well, "but I did not allow them to do that. I was not interested to continue their education; I needed them to work". His second son was extremely keen on his studies, which is why he allowed him to go to school. He refused to drop out in order to work. The significance of the will of the child to go to school will be further dealt with in paragraph 3.6.

In many households where people cannot afford to send all children to school, the child who is allowed to go is often a boy. In Badin, a father of six daughters, of whom four had never gone to school: "How could I afford that if I was not even able to pay for all my sons' education?" His two youngest girls are currently enrolled in the girls' primary school: "It is possible, because nowadays the school is free". Reasons behind this gender bias will be discussed in paragraph 3.5.

The amount of work of poor households in the villages often requires the children to help out. This is recognised by teachers who have observed that the attendance of children decreases during labour-intensive seasons, such as the crop-cutting season. According to them, it also affects the

children's performance in school: "Parents need the children's help outside school hours. This definitely affects their results. They are not able to do any homework, because of their chores". In a Parho-community, 1.5 kilometres from the main village, parents pointed out that there were households with only a small number of cattle and no land who were able to send their children to school due to their relatively small workload.

In the fishing village many children are found outside the school premises during school hours. These children include boys and girls who are not enrolled in school due to a necessity to contribute to the household's income, or in the case of girls, to help out in the household. Most of these children once had higher aspirations, but have realised that, in the case of boys, they would become fishermen in the future anyway, and have come to terms with the fact that school is not an option for them. This is illustrated by the cases of Ali and Saleem, who both live in the coastal village in Sindh:

Ali

Ten-year-old Ali lives together with his mother, his thirteen-year-old brother Amir and his younger sister in a small hut near the coast. His father had been sick for a long time and Ali was asked to earn some money. He left school to work with a truck driver. He had to clean the truck, help with loading and look after the truck when the driver had to go somewhere else. Per trip he earned up to 100 rupees, which went towards his father's medical expenses. His father passed away a few months ago.

Ali's thirteen-year-old brother Amir also worked on a truck during his father's illness. But he had been weak since childhood and when he worked as a truck-driver, this got worse. Now he was too weak to work or to go to school. "If I had the money, I would go to school", Amir said, but Ali corrected him: "If he had the money he would first go to the doctor to get treatment, and then think about school". Ali has not been able to go back to school, because he had to catch fish to provide the household with food:

"How is it possible for me to go to school? Then I need money to buy books and stationary, while there is nothing to eat at home. Because I do not go to school, I can arrange to eat something. I would like to go to school again, so I become a teacher in the future, but I cannot go. I do not even have money to eat. I hope I can send my sister to school in the future, but now she is too young."

Ali regretted that he could not go to school:

"I need to speak the Urdu language, when I want to go to the city, but nobody in my family speaks Urdu. In school they also help you with reading and writing. Yes, education is most important. Sometimes I go to the market and sell the fish. If you have studied in school it will be easier to go outside the village. I would like to send my younger sister to go to school, but now she is too young, and she is afraid that other children will beat her."

Saleem

The twelve-year-old Saleem never went to school, but did attend a few home-school classes given by NGO-teacher Ramzaan. His father asked him to make some money for the family through fishing. He said that he would like to become an educated man, but that they cannot afford to buy notebooks or other things he needs for school. He does various activities to make a little money: collecting fishing nets, collecting sea-shells, minding the cars of city-people at the parking lot, and every now and then he joins a small fishing boat to catch fish. Saleem said that he does not want to become a fisherman in the future, because he finds the work hard. His friends go to school, and join him after school hours to play. They usually go swimming in the sea. "If I had a notebook, I would join my friends in the school, but now I have nothing: no schoolbooks, no pens, so I cannot go to school".

Also in Vehari, many community members consider a household's financial condition to be the cause of many children being out of school. According to a farmer who owns a small plot of land, many children want to study, but are not allowed, because the financial condition of their families is not good: "Here people are poor. If children do not work, the households will have many problems".

While some households have to struggle for a meal every day, others do not, but nevertheless use poverty as an excuse for not sending their children to school. Their children are working either at home or elsewhere, and parents seem unwilling to allocate any money to education. Despite the perceived benefits discussed in chapter 2, some households are not ready yet to invest their money in the schooling of their children. This matter was brought up by a member of staff of an NGO, who had years of experience with education issues in the field. Rather than lack of money, she argued:

It is the lack of knowledge about managing their finances, which makes people believe they cannot afford their children's education. They say that they have no money for books, but schooling is not all that expensive, and you see them smoking all day. Also, they put a huge amount of milk in their tea. They also could sell that milk, and use the money to educate their children instead. They have no idea of managing finances. At the same time, people use money-excuses all the time for everything.

There is a link with the awareness of people regarding the importance of education. Nowadays everyone knows about education, but for many people it is still not one of their priorities. She continued making her point: "you will see them wearing gold, and embroidered dresses, and spending huge amounts of money for wedding ceremonies. I am also not rich, but I know the importance of sending my children to a good school, so you will not see me wearing gold and expensive clothes." She believes that once people observe how education can improve a person's life, people will start managing their money, and make sure they can afford education.

Indeed, it was observed in Badin that people prefer to spend their money on a TV or a VCD-player than on education. A father from the Parho-community, who was working as a driver in Hyderabad, did not agree with the Parho-households who argue that poverty keeps them from sending their children to school. He even raised his voice in a group discussion, and said:

It is not poverty! It is the responsibility of the parents to send their children to school. My child is going to class 5. It is not possible for the government to provide everything. They already provide books! Why do these people wait for the government to provide everything? Parents should also do something themselves. Parents are not sincere with their children's life. They are careless about their children. But it is also the children who are themselves not interested. My daughter refuses to go to school, so I cannot do anything. I punish her for not going to school, but she is not willing to go. Now what can I do? But the point is that it is the responsibility of the parents as well, and not only that of the government. And these facilities such as free cooking oil, and free books, should only be provided to those children who are going to school regularly. I do not blame the government. It is our own fault. In places like Hyderabad and Karachi people spend much more money on their children's education. Here there are no fees, and parents are still not sending their children!

The International Crisis Group has also pointed out that households, especially in rural areas, perceive education as an economic investment rather than a basic need [2004:8]. An explanation for not giving priority to education might well lie in the fact that for many households the trend to send children to school is a relatively new one, and the expected returns of an investment in education are not yet visible and still uncertain. It is thus questionable for households whether the perceived benefits, as discussed in chapter 2, weigh up to the investment.

In all three villages the lack of available jobs for students who completed an education seemed to keep households from enrolling their children. This observation is supported by the case of a farmer in a Parho-community in Badin, who is head of one of the few households in the main village where none of the children go to school, even though they can afford to send at least one of them. Instead, all his children help him and his wife in the household and with agricultural work. He realises that education could improve his children's life, but only if they were able to get a job in the future. However, he is worried that there will be no jobs available, and that his son will end up becoming a labourer instead. "Then the investment would be a waste! The government should provide everything, including the full course of books, notebooks, other expenditure, and they should provide cooking oil every month!" He denied that he needs his children to work at home. "If my children get an education, I will not depend on my children's work. Obviously I can take care of all the work together with my wife, but since my children are not going to school, they can help us out". In the end, he admitted that he had sent his daughter to school for only a few months. He withdrew her because, according to him, the school was not providing him with the promised cooking oil: "in five months we only received cooking oil once. What about five months of expenses we had to pay to be able to send her to school?"

In Vehari there was also a reluctance to invest in education due to the lack of available jobs. "Especially for poor people it is not possible to get a job, even if they are educated, because there are not any government posts existing in the village except for the post of numberdar". People complained that the government does not provide jobs to educated people. "They do not even support educated people with looking for a job". It was argued that educated people could only find work if they were willing to leave the village. A son of a farmer, who passed class 8 and was unemployed, observed: "It is only young people from upper-class families who leave the village in

search of work. Lower class and very poor families stay in the village. They work for property-holders who live elsewhere in the country, getting paid only very little money”.

In the coastal village a father regretted that his son passed class 10, and was now working as a fisherman. “But it is his only option. The teachers who are appointed by NGOs earn a mere PKR 1600 per month. That is not sufficient to support an entire household”.

A related argument mentioned in all three villages was that the few existing jobs are not available to them. The only way to get a job is by knowing the right people and by having enough money and resources. In both villages in Sindh people argued that officers asked amounts of about PKR 50,000 if people wanted to be appointed as a teacher or as any other official, and in many cases the jobs were given to relatives instead of according to merit.

The many examples of unemployed educated young men have led many people in the fishing community to lose their interest in education. As a fisherman’s wife explained: “Many boys in this village passed class 10, but there are no jobs available to them. In this way education is not good.” She referred to Ramzaan, who was so keen to get an education, that he even went to Karachi to finish his bachelor’s degree. Now he is back in the village where an NGO pays him a monthly salary of PKR 1500 to teach in the government school. “Fishermen remind him they make more money than him despite his education. The government does not provide him anything, no permanent job, nothing!”

Many boys who completed class 10 have ended up without a job, or are working as fishermen, for which, in their eyes, going to school for so many years was not necessary. Ramzaan said, “I would throw my bag in the sea, if I had a chance to repeat my life. I have nothing in this village. For rich men it is no problem to get a job. I am not jobless, I am working hard, but my salary is not enough to meet my family’s needs.”

Not all graduates are “lucky” like Ramzaan and have a job. The 18-year-old Qasim passed class 10, and is now jobless. He regrets that he ever went to school. “If I would not have gone to school, I would have been a good captain of a boat. So in the future when I am married and have children, I will definitely not send them to school. The school should close, because there is no need for education here.” Qasim’s father also feels some sadness: “Qasim is the only son who passed class 10, but he is also the only son without a job”.

Some boys choose to become a fisherman after having completed their education: “It is better to fish, than to be jobless!” The 17-year-old Salman passed class 10 in 2004. Since then he has been fishing on a small fishing boat. He has not tried to get another job. His brother passed class 10 as well, and he tried very hard to get a job elsewhere, without any results. Both now work as fishermen. Salman said he regrets all the work he put into passing class 10: “I worked very hard to finish school. When I was in school I always wanted to get a ‘suitable job’, which basically meant any job except that of a fisherman. But now I work as a fisherman. We are from a poor family, so we cannot afford to go to the city for further education.”

In terms of future prospects, it is noteworthy that children displayed little knowledge about their options. Beyond government official, teacher, doctor, and engineer, children were not aware of other job options. In Badin children also mentioned that they wish to become a soldier (*fauji*) or policeman, as there were some examples from the Bhurgri-households keeping such posts.

Thus, there is a general belief that education *should* release them from poverty, but reality has not yet been able to confirm that it necessarily will. Because the trend for many households to send children to school is new, people first need to be convinced that they can expect positive returns on the required investment.

3.5 The girl child

Chapter 1 already showed that Pakistan has a gender gap in school enrolment at primary level. According to UNICEF, of the 13 million children not enrolled in primary school, 7 million are girls [SPARC 2004:84]. The difference in the number of girls in school compared to the number of boys increases considerably at middle and secondary level. In the studied villages as well the number of educated women in the village was small, and only a few girls were enrolled at middle and secondary schools. According to Watkins [2000:193] and HRCP [2006:252], Pakistan's gender gap in education is one of the largest in the world. HRCP argues that girls have limited access to secondary schools. The amount of household work required from girls contributes to the high drop-out rates for girls [HRCP 2006:253].

We saw in chapter 2 that people are aware that education could be useful for their daughters. Illiterate women expressed that it would be useful if women learned how to read and write and speak Urdu, since it, for example, would make them less dependent on others when they go to the city for the hospital or for shopping. Some girls expressed the wish to have a different life than their mothers, who have a difficult life with a huge workload. In the coastal village, for example, girls were recently encouraged by two local 16-year-girls who had been appointed by NGOs as teachers. The prevailing conception, however, among households in all three villages was that it would not be possible for girls to work outside the household after education. Especially in rural areas, people said there would not be any jobs available, or it was argued that social constraints in their community would not allow it. A mother in a household who lived off fisheries compared their life to life of women in nearby Karachi: "City life is very different from life here in the village. Here it is not allowed for women to work outside the household, but in the city women do!" One of the boys who recently passed class 10 explained: "According to rules of Balochi culture, girls have to stop going to school after class 5. Once girls grow up, it is not appropriate for them to be in school anymore". The trend to educate girls in the Balochi community in the coastal village started with a teacher educating his own daughters. Slowly girls from other households joined them. "The only reason behind villagers allowing their daughters to go to him, is that he is a respectful man in the village, and parents trust him with their daughters".

Due to incentives and efforts by the government and NGOs the school enrolment registers of the visited schools did not necessarily show a gender gap at primary level. In Badin, for example, the girls outnumber the boys in primary school enrolment. However, many households, especially landowning households, choose to send their boys to schools in the nearby town Badin instead of to the government school in the village.

Respondents also attributed the high enrolment in the girls' school to the distribution of cooking oil, among other incentives. Households can afford to send their younger daughters to school because it is free, and the children are too young to help in the household anyway. Furthermore, by sending the daughters to school at least for a few years, they are able to learn some of the basic skills

believed to be relevant for a girls' life as outlined above and in chapter 2. After a few years, when the child is in class 3 or 4, girls are commonly withdrawn from school.

The main explanation for girls being out of school is the household work they are expected to do. Especially in the fishing village and in West-Colony in Vehari many girls were said to be kept at home so they could help out in the household or, in some cases in Vehari, to help their parents in the brick kilns so as to contribute to the household's income. An example is the 13-year-old Sameera from the coastal village:

Sameera

From six in the morning until after sunset Sameera is busy with household chores such as cooking food, washing clothes and dishes, and sewing clothes (which she also does for others to make some money). Once a week she goes to a nearby hill to fetch water and wood, which takes her a whole day. When she was young she went to school, but only for one year. "My mother was alone, so I quit school to help her out. Some of my friends still go to school and I would like to join them, but there is no one besides me to help my mother out in the household. It is important that my younger sisters go to school, so it will be easy for them to go to Karachi when one of us is ill".

Many children in this village were taken out of school in class 3 or 4 so they could take care of their younger siblings. Households are large, with the number of children in a household ranging from six to eleven. A mother explained: "I was giving birth, and could not do any household work. My daughter had to help out." Her daughter concurred: "When mother is giving birth, she needs rest. So how can I go to school then? I need to help her." According to Zareena, the sixteen-year-old teacher at the NFE-centre for girls, she always had been able to go to school, because her older sister never went to school and helped her mother with household chores. Zareena now teaches her older sister, as well as other young women, basic literacy and numeracy skills. She explained that many of them had never been allowed to go to school, because they had to take care of their younger siblings until they got married and had children of their own.

A farmer in Vehari argued that having large families was the main reason behind many children being out of school:

In large families children have many responsibilities. A friend of mine from this village was from a very poor, but a very small family. He was able to receive education until intermediate level in Vehari. My friend went to Multan to receive a Masters Degree and works as an engineer in Islamabad. The whole family has moved there now.

However, in most households, especially in Badin and in Vehari Main Colony, household work is not the decisive motive for girls being kept out of school. In some cases, if girls are interested, going to school can be combined with helping out with household chores after school time. In most other cases, girls are involved in household work only because they do not go to school anyway, and are therefore free to help out their mother. Other factors are thus making it near impossible for them to attend school.

Among these factors is the limited amount of facilities available to girls in school. In Pakistan many parents, especially in poor households, worry about the loss of status and respect when girls are in school together with boys. Throughout Pakistan there are separate girls' schools, but their number is smaller than the number of boys' schools in the country. In many areas separate girls' schools are not available. An example is the coastal village, where the girls' school building never opened due to a lack of staff.

The boys' school has been open for girls to enrol for the past 11 years, but, especially for grown-up girls, this system of co-education is still considered inappropriate by many people. An old fisherman expressed that there is a demand for a separate girls' school: "In Balochi culture there are not many girls going to school, and it is certainly inappropriate for girls to go to school together with boys. If my granddaughters want to go to school, we need a separate school for girls." Another villager observed that the mentality of the community members has slowly started to change, ever since the first three girls from the village passed their class 10-exams, and two of them were appointed as teachers in the government school and the NFE-centre. "Now more people are interested in sending their girls to school to learn something".

The presence of female teachers in the schools would also make a positive difference. Aikman and Unterhalter [2005:41] argue that the appointment of female teachers makes schools more girl-friendly and provides role-models for girls. Respondents in the coastal village agreed that "there should be female teachers appointed to teach our children. In our culture it is not possible for girls to talk about personal matters with men. With female teachers girls do not have to be shy and they can talk freely about their personal lives". For some households the presence of so many male teachers in the school was reason to send their younger children to the NFE-centre instead, where a 16-year-old girl was appointed by a NGO to teach basic literacy and numeracy skills to women of 15-years and older. Girls themselves also expressed a fear to attend a school where there were many boys. Sumitra from a land-owning household in Badin said that she did not want to go to a private school in the city, even though her family offered to pay for all the expenses required: "I do not know how to behave with older boys and male teachers when they tell me 'I love you'. I do not have this problem now, because in the government school in Badin there are only girls and female teachers".

Girls have limited access to education in Vehari West Colony as well. The girls' government school is located in Main Colony, and no girls from West-Colony are enrolled. In West-Colony two (one of which opened during time of research) NFE-centres were opened with support from a NGO. These NFE/adult-literacy classes are held within someone's home, which is cause for some households to not send their grown-up daughters there. For some it was considered against their customs to send their daughters to another man's household, or to a strange building where men from other communities might visit. In the adult-literacy centre in Main Colony, the mother of the household in which the classes are held, reassured everyone that strange men cannot enter her compound, and that there is only one adult man living in her household who is out in the field every day, especially during the hours the classes are held.

Another crucial aspect of rural society that explains high dropout rates is the practice of (early) marriage. Aikman and Unterhalter [2005:39] have argued that in Pakistan the necessity to pay a

dowry impedes education, because many families have to choose between saving money for their daughters' dowry and spending it on their education. During the fieldwork many other aspects related to marriage came up, which hampered girls being able to go to school. Some households are not willing to invest in a girls' education because they know she will leave the household after marriage. The economic returns from investing in a girls' education are thus likely to be much lower compared to those of investing in their sons' schooling. A member of the Parho-community in Badin explained that not many girls are able to pass class 5, because they are married before that:

In our families it is custom to marry girls at a very young age, sometimes to a man who is much older. This is wrong in these modern times, but habits are changing very slowly. As soon as girls are mature⁸, they have to get married, so they cannot get involved in bad practices such as getting involved in free sexual relationships or becoming pregnant before marriage.

The 12-year-old Chandni from a Hindu household in Badin was in class 5 at the time of this research. According to her mother, she was still at school only because she was very keen herself. Her parents were never planning on allowing her to continue her education beyond class 5, because, her mother explained: "She will get married within one year. She is already engaged to someone in Mirpurkhas".

The practice of early marriage does not only occur in poor households, but also in landlord-families. A young lady from a Bhurgri-household in Badin explained:

Even in our family girls marry when they are 12-13 years. Some people are very strict with the rules of our religion. As soon as girls are able to carry a bundle of grass, she is able to get married, they believe. It is then considered a shame if she still lives in her parents' house. Now this trend is slowly changing, because more and more people are becoming educated. The practice is wrong, because girls who marry early get old very early as well.

Particular social beliefs keep girls out of school as well, again especially at middle and secondary level. The International Crisis Group [2004:8] argued that instead of social traditions opposing girls' education in rural areas, only economical constraints and the quality of schools keep girls from going to school. However, respondents in all villages claimed that middle and secondary level schooling is undesirable for girls because of traditional social beliefs and the pressures that arise from these. For example, in a Christian household in Vehari, where daughters were enrolled at primary school, the mother expressed that she did not want her son to marry an educated girl. In another household it was argued: "We are from Jat-caste: we do not allow our girls to get an education!" In Vehari, parents expressed a fear that girls would start behaving "badly" after education, like wanting to decide themselves which boy they would marry. Some believed that if girls remained uneducated, and stayed bound to the house, there would be no risk of them harming the honour and pride of their families. During a group discussion in Badin, villagers admitted:

⁸ Having their first menstruation

We Sindhis are very narrow-minded. Our society does not allow us to send our girls outside the household. Because of the women living in our house, we also do not allow strange men to enter our homes. It is the culture of entire interior Sindh. But gradually things are changing and more and more households send their girls outside the house to go to school.

In Vehari, the female teacher in the adult-literacy centre in Main Colony had passed her intermediate levels, and now wished to start studying for a Bachelor's Degree. Her parents had already told her to end her education when she passed class 10, but she insisted in pursuing further education. Young women are often very interested in studying, though sometimes kept from doing so by male members in their family. During one of the classes in the adult-literacy centre the women, all in their late teens/early twenties, agreed that "everyone here wants to read and write. We wholeheartedly want to receive an education, so we can read letters". One girl added that "actually villagers are really against girls being able to read letters". These girls, who also have to perform a lot of household-related activities at home, all agreed that it is difficult to combine school and work. Another girl who was present in the room had recently dropped out of these NFE-classes. She dropped out when she was studying at class 4-level (this particular class was now studying at class 5-level). Her brother ordered her to end her education, but she was very happy that she at least had been able to learn how to read and write.

It appeared that women were more eager to educate their daughters than men. Brothers and husbands are even more conservative towards their sisters and wives, than fathers are towards their daughters. Still, many women blame their husbands for not sending their children to school. A woman from the Parho-community explained that her husband took her daughter out of school during class 4 out of fear that she would join fellow-classmates into middle school in the neighbouring village once she had passed class 5. Her mother complained: "Our husbands are very narrow-minded. They are afraid to send our daughters to school for too many years. They think it is not good to send girls outside the village for education. They believe that girls should become a housewife, and fear that through education they become too independent".

In the coastal village, this research also found that it is often the father who allows his daughters to go to school only until class 3 or 4, at which point they are considered grown-up. For example, the 15-year-old Nadia attended school until class 3 and then the NFE-centre, which is nearer to her house. She dropped out after her father came back from a long fishing trip and did not allow her to go there any longer. He told her to help her mother doing household chores. "He said that I am grown up now and I have no time anymore to be in school from 8 am until 1:30 pm."

Parents and children are also under pressure from other members of their community. Tazeen, a 13-year-old girl from Vehari is one of the only five girls enrolled in the upper primary school in a neighbouring village. She was in class 6 at the time of research. Villagers often tell her and her parents that she should stop her education. They argue that it is shameful and unsafe that she goes to the neighbouring village everyday, and that girls should do domestic work instead of going to school. But she is determined to continue her education just like her cousins in her mother's family (in another village), who also go to middle and secondary school. Her mother's younger sister even studies at intermediate level. But villagers here continue to put pressure on them and say that higher education is neither necessary nor appropriate for girls.

In many communities in rural areas, sending girls to school is a relatively new phenomenon. In the past people were not aware that education might be important for girls, and often there were no facilities that enabled them to do so under the unlikely circumstances that they were interested. According to a farmer, and father of two daughters, in Badin:

When my daughters were young, people here were not aware that education was also meant for girls. Girls grow up, get married, and leave the house. Boys on the other hand might get a job and stay with the parents. But now everything has changed and there are also other activities for women. This change is good.

Although some households remain reluctant to send their girls to school, the trend is slowly changing, mainly because there are increasingly more examples of educated girls. Girls have always taken up the role as a mother and housewife, and there are still only a few examples of educated girls present in the villages. Once the rewards of educating girls become evident, more parents will send their daughters to school. Among the studied fishing community, for example, the first girls passed class 10 in 2004. They are now appointed as teachers in the school and serve as a role-model for other girls, but also for parents who can observe how it is possible for girls from their own community to take up a role outside their own household.

Also in Vehari, the number of women who passed class 10 could be counted on one hand and had all only been living in the village since they had married an inhabitant. The majority of the villagers were still relatively conservative towards educating their children. Nowadays, people seem comfortable sending their girls to school up to class 5, which is available in the village itself. For an education beyond primary level, however, girls as well as boys, have to go to a neighbouring village, which is perceived as unsafe for girls, but moreover shameful. Due to social pressures, the few girls who have decided to go to the school have had to cope with other community members' gossip.

A general feeling throughout the villages was that the trend to send girls to school will continue and expand as the girls who are currently enrolled experience the usefulness of an education and consequently send their own daughters to school. Moreover, these girls will serve as an example to others. An uneducated woman from Vehari said: "Our hearts want to educate girls when we see educated persons".

3.6 What the child wants

What has already become clear from the previous chapter is that the perspective of the child should not be ignored. The child is the most important stakeholder, as the issue discussed here first and foremost concerns the child's life. The character of the child and what he or she wants is often a decisive factor in whether the child goes to school or not. Earlier in this report it was made clear that parents are generally aware of the importance of schooling, and are able to give a set of reasons why they believe this. However, because sending children to school is, for many households, not (yet) a routine practice, parents often take on a passive attitude. They enrol their children, but attendance is generally left up to the child. And once the child becomes older and going to school increasingly competes with alternative activities, the child's own desire for education becomes crucial.

According to a 16-year-old son from a household in Badin in which no-one else went to school, it is not only about the quality of school, but also about the home environment of children: “Also in my household parents did not care about the children’s education. My father never told me to go to school, but I was keen to study myself, so I never obeyed him when he asked me to work”. It should be added that circumstances allowed him to go to school, because he had brothers who could help his father in his place.

In the coastal village the importance of the child’s own determination was seen by one of the teachers as one of the main reasons that many children are out of school: “Children are not interested to come to school. Parents want their children to go to school, but in the end they acquiesce in their decision.” It was also expressed during a group discussion on the beach of this village when a father said: “It depends on the children if they want to go to school or not. Sometimes I send them, but then they just throw the bags and go play. What can I do?” And in Badin a mother exclaimed: “I am concerned about my children’s education, but I am uneducated myself and I do not know what happens in the school. What can I do when my children say they are not interested to go there?” A teacher agreed that children are not interested in going to school: “It is the children’s own decision to come or not. Many girls choose to take care of their siblings, and the boys want to catch fish instead”.

An example from Badin is the 16-year-old Danibux who never went to school. His father believes that “children only go to school when they want to go themselves. If my children are interested, I allow them to go there.” Danibux thus said his parents never sent him to school, but that he never had been interested in education either: “When I was young I just wanted to take care of animals.” Danibux has been a shepherd ever since he was a young child, and now he takes care of a large herd of goats and buffaloes for a landlord. He makes PKR 1500 per month. According to him “school is only important if you want to get *naukri*. In the future I want to purchase my own animals and some land to cultivate crops. My father will teach me how to cultivate crops. It is not something that you can learn in school.”

Parents mostly lack the determination to make sure the children are in school, or they are not able to do so: “I send my child in the morning, but when he decides not to go, what can I do?” This uneducated mother and wife of a fisherman admitted indifference concerning her children’s attendance. Another parent complained: “How is it possible for me to check? I tell my child in the morning to go to school then I go to the field, so I do not know if he goes or not”. In her village many men are out at sea, sometimes for more than 20 days at a time, and if women need to fetch water or wood it can take them a whole day. They might send their children to school in the morning, but with the parents absent from the village the whole day, there is nobody to tell the child to go to school if he instead decides to roam around on the beach, showing more interest in finding sea-shells, old fishing nets, or catching fish. One villager explained:

Some parents give their children money for going to school. These children leave their homes with the books, but hide them on the way. After school time they return to their houses without having gone to school. Nobody in this village is checking. Some children like to learn something in school; other children prefer to do something else. Fishermen are always busy with their job, so they cannot check.

Many boys in the village were found to be more interested in learning how to be a good fisherman than going to school, even if that was against the will of their parents. Examples are the three sons from a relatively well-off household, who were involved in fishing, even though economic circumstances of the household did not require them to do work:

The family owns two boats, and is one of the few households to have electricity in the village. Their living room is equipped with several electrical appliances such as a huge music installation, which is unusual in the village. The father is a fisherman, and has good contacts in Karachi. The oldest son, who is 15, operates one of his boats. The father never went to school, but during his lifetime learned to speak Urdu fluently. His oldest son takes the boat out to sea in the mornings, and uses the afternoons to do reparations. He hopes to become a good fisherman in the future, and just like his father, he learned Urdu by communicating with people from Karachi. He has never been to school to learn how to read and write, but realises that it is important. Because his father had lots of work to do and needed someone to help him, he never asked his father if he could go to school instead.

He is sad though that his brothers are not going either. According to the oldest brother they are simply not interested despite efforts from their parents to send them. The youngest boy, who is seven years old, wishes to become a fisherman in the future as well. He spends most of his time playing, and helping others to repair their fishing nets. Sometimes he tries to catch some fish from the beach. "I do not like school, I like fishing!" The mother said that they are unable to make him interested in school. His brother, who is eleven, claimed he was enrolled in class 1, but never went, because the teachers would only beat him. He is afraid to go now. Every morning he can be found on the beach trying to catch fish, or sorting out his fishing net, work that is difficult, but which he likes doing. He knows that his father actually wants him to go to school, and said that his father even promised to get him a job through his contacts in Karachi, if he would complete school. But instead of going to school he is on the beach everyday, which is his own decision:

"Once you are educated and know how to speak Urdu, you can go everywhere without any problems. If someone cannot speak Urdu, then that person should not go to the city. But I speak Urdu, because I talk with people from Karachi who come here every now and then. And sometimes I go with father to Karachi."

Many children share the belief that they do not need to go to school in order to learn Urdu. There are enough other opportunities for them to pick up this language, which is recognised as being important for travel outside the village.

Abdullah Khoso [2005] as well showed that in these fishermen villages children get involved with fishery work due to poverty. When boys start helping their father with the work, it eventually becomes a means of recreation for them. The excitement of catching fish is perceived as more enjoyable for the children, and they become reluctant to go to school, even when their parents ask them to do so.

Also in Vehari and Badin there were children who seemed more interested in learning the work their father did, than to go to school. An example is Kashif, son of a blacksmith in Vehari. He decided to

drop out in class 3 to learn the work of blacksmith in the workshop of his father and uncle. Every morning he goes to the Imam in the mosque to learn about the Quran. “In the workshop I learn the skills of the work my father does. I want to do the same work as he does in the future”. His father is disappointed, and still hopes that he changes his mind: “This work is heavy and difficult. Maybe my son is able to pursue another career in engineering or do mechanic work in one of the workshops in Vehari (city)”.

For some children the school is undesirable because of caste and class differences (as discussed in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2). It is thus important that the schools provide an environment that is welcoming to children, even when competing with surroundings such as the beach, fields, or jungle. SPDC [2003:127] argued that “there is need to change the learning culture of schools, where a child-friendly teaching process replaces rote learning, coercion or corporal punishment”. An unattractive school environment does not induce a child’s motivation to learn. A child is likely to prefer a day with its buffaloes in the field or on the beach trying to catch fish from the shore, than a day of being afraid of being scolded by teachers or other children. For example, the two friends Sharukh and Abdul from the fishing community were found playing on the beach at ten in the morning. Abdul said that he is afraid of the headmaster and another teacher, “so I prefer to play on the beach”. Sharukh added: “None of my friends are going to school, so I do not know what children learn in school. I just want to be a fisherman. The only thing I need to learn is how to be a good captain”.

So, like Sharukh mentioned, if peers do not attend school then there is little motivation to go to school. However, if many children in a child’s environment do attend, he or she will probably want to do the same. In the coastal village, where many girls drop out of school once they reach their teenage years, one of them said: “Even if I do not have household work and I am free to go to school, I do not want to go, because none of my friends go”. The same was true in Vehari where girls had a number of arguments for not wanting to go to school including the fear of scolding by teachers or older children, and the fact that their friends were not going either. Chandni, from Badin, goes to primary school. She said: “I was interested, because my friends go there as well. So I also want to go, and become a good teacher”. However, she will not be able to continue school after class 5, due to a lack of money. Although her mother is happy that she is learning some skills in school, Chandni is not able to do school work at home. Her mother asked: “If she does that, then who will take care of the household chores?” Even at middle and secondary level, behaviour of peers plays a role. The oldest daughter from a Bhurgri household in Badin is in class 10, but she says she does not attend regularly anymore. She has lost her interest, because “some of my friends have dropped out of school”.

The careers of neighbours who went to school in the past are examples for others, including children. This seems to have both negative and positive outcomes for school enrolment. On the one hand, children are often encouraged by educated others who have become successful in their own environment. These “others” are people with whom children can identify. In Badin, for example, children from the Parho-community are motivated by relatives and neighbours who have an interesting job, often teachers appointed by NGOs. The villager from the coastal village who works for an English newspaper is one of the examples for boys in the village, who now also express the wish to become a reporter in the future. The two girls who were appointed as teachers by NGOs after they passed class 10 are a motivation for girls. The 11-year-old Fareen, who is enrolled in class

4, said: “I go to school so I can become like Miss⁹. I do not want to become like my mother. She has to do hard work every day. Her life is not good. There is no water here; there is nothing in this village. That is why my mother’s life is difficult”.

On the other hand, however, educated others, whose lives have not changed for the better, are used as examples by children of why schooling is unnecessary. Especially in the coastal village there were many incidences of youths who spent at least 10 years in school, and who were left without a job, while their uneducated siblings ended up being successful fishermen or truck drivers. Because of them, many boys believe that jobs in the city are beyond their reach. They expect they will become fishermen or drivers, like their uneducated fathers.

Another example, for non-attendance, is that of the educated women who became housewives after their marriage, just like their uneducated mothers. Girls in all three villages mentioned that “cooking, stitching, cleaning, and washing skills can be taught by mother.” They were not interested in school and said: “My heart did not want to go to school”. This is not surprising because they only had a few examples of educated girls from their own community. Their mothers had never been to school, so why should they? They would much rather stay near the house to play. Some of these girls did go to school once in a while, but perceived the school compound as a playground where they went to play with their girlfriends who were enrolled in the school.

3.7 Conclusion

The reasons that children are out of school can thus be found both in the environment of their homes, and in the schools. This chapter started with factors pertaining to the latter. A child’s access to school is impeded by its quality. What is learnt in school does not meet the expected benefits from schooling, and respondents complained that the contents of the curriculum do not meet the needs of rural communities. Another major concern of villagers was that the schools were not staffed by sufficient qualified teachers. In some schools, the regular absence and lack of motivation of teachers posed a real problem. The use of corporal punishment was subject for debate, but there seemed to be a general consent that some basic punishment is needed to discipline children and to encourage them to pay attention in class.

Access to school is also influenced by its location and its social proximity to the community. The caste, class and gender of teachers play a role here. Some communities feel excluded from the school depending on their relationship with the teachers. The distance to the school is mentioned by communities living at the outskirts of the village and households who are reluctant to send their girls to school. Distance, however, is never the main reason for children’s non-attendance.

In order to improve quality of schooling and increase children’s enrolment, establishing sound community involvement with the schools is crucial. School Management Committees are established at every school, but with members not even aware of their role, in practice they barely function. Decision-making is left solely in the hands of the headmaster. Parents blame the teachers for not giving them any space for involvement, and many communities even fear to take action or get involved with school-related matters, because they look up to the upper-class teachers who are

⁹ The teacher

often from powerful households with political links. Teachers, however, blame parents for not being interested in discussing school issues, and not making the time to visit the school because of their workload at home, in the field or at sea.

The home-environment of the child also provides factors that keep children out of school. Poverty is most often given as an explanation for low school-enrolment. Especially after class 5 both direct and opportunity costs are impeding factors, as households are not able to afford these for all their children. Children are required to do household chores, which affects their performance in school and sometimes leads to drop-out.

In many households the financial condition does indeed keep children out of school, but in quite a few cases it is more a matter of *allocation* of money. Education is perceived as an investment, which parents are reluctant to make due to the uncertainty of the economic returns of education. Jobs are believed to be out of reach for many communities. They need to know the right people, and have sufficient money to be able to have a chance of a government position. This is exacerbated by examples of educated young people who are left without a job and who now work with their fathers, which they could also have done without having gone to school for so many years. Especially in the case of girls, the economic returns are vague, since they are expected to leave the household after marriage, which in itself already requires a major investment from households in the form of a dowry.

Pakistan's education system deals with a large gender gap. Many communities are still not familiar with the idea of sending girls to school. Due to various NGO and government incentives, enrolment of girls has increased, but there are still a number of obstacles for girls. Once a girl reaches her teenage years, her mobility is restricted due to social constraints. Social pressures make households reluctant to send their girls to school and, especially in large families, there are many household chores to be done instead, including caring for younger siblings. Often, due to the absence of female teachers or a girls' school, and a lack of female peers in school, the school is not an attractive environment. In addition, educating girls is a new trend, and thus rural areas do not provide many educated women who can serve as role-models and examples of why girls should go to school. An important obstacle remains the practice of early marriage. Nowadays, some households still marry their daughters when they are in their early teens. After marriage, it is up to the husband's family whether girls are allowed to continue their education, which is normally not the case.

Finally, the child's own determination and interest in schooling must be taken into account. Parents are mostly unconcerned with the supervision of their children's school attendance, either because of the pressure from work and/or poverty, or simply due to a disinterest in education. If the home environment does not motivate attendance and study, then it is crucial that the school offers the children an environment preferable to alternative activities (such as roaming around with friends, tending to cattle in the fields, or fishing). To aid in this balance of preference it is also important that peers, and thus the social environment, do not distract a child from schooling - the more children out of school, the more difficult it is for a child to maintain its focus on education.



Walking home after school

Conclusion

This report is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in three villages in Sindh and Punjab provinces in Pakistan. The purpose of this research was to get an insight into how the perception, on a household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out. During the fieldwork the focus was on the views from below. Therefore most interviews were held with children, their parents and other members of the community.

Research was carried out in villages where primary education was available. In two villages children had to go to nearby towns and villages for education beyond class 5. In one of the villages the school provided education until class 10, but there was no separate girls' school present. There were far more boys than girls enrolled in the school here. This was also the case in another village, where a separate girls' school was present, but where the trend of sending girls to school was not yet incorporated in local social customs and beliefs. In the third village, enrolment at the girls' school outnumbered that of the boys' school by far, which can possibly be explained by the distribution of cooking oil by an NGO to attract girls to the school, and the fact that many boys, especially from households with better financial conditions, are sent to other schools (including private institutions) in neighbouring towns and villages. In all three villages schools had problems with children attending irregularly and eventually dropping out.

Pakistan has seen an increase in enrolment figures, but there is still a large number of children out of school, especially girls. For many households it has become common to send at least a few of their children to school. Therefore, most of the respondents, including parents whose children do not attend or who are not enrolled, could explain why education would be relevant in the context of their daily lives. Most of them argued that education would help children get a job, by which they could change their current lifestyles, especially when traditional occupations have become increasingly difficult and less profitable.

For many households, however, higher education, which is necessary for obtaining a job, is beyond their reach. Thus, other reasons for sending children to school were mentioned as well. For some, the skills taught at primary and middle level are perceived as helpful for their current daily lives. These skills include becoming aware about the world beyond one's own village and improving calculation and communication skills, which make people more independent. To be able to become more independent is a major pull-factor of schools, especially in areas where many households are dependent on landlords for their survival. In the case of girls, education is rarely believed to lead to increasing job opportunities; instead, school is more frequently perceived as an institute where girls can learn manners and etiquette, which is helpful for their future roles as mothers and housewives.

Main motivating factors for schooling include the examples set by educated people in the village, especially those belonging to the same community, and economic incentives introduced by NGOs and the government, such as the provision of scholarships, cooking oil, notebooks and pens. Although these incentives prove to be effective, they must be continually monitored and evaluated.

Respondents indicated that these incentives only reach certain parts of the community (often those that are not the most deprived and needy) and were concerned that these incentives lead to increased dependence. This dependence has in turn led to a concern about the sustainability of the incentives; after all, people should eventually be able, and willing, to afford the expenses of educating their children themselves. Despite these incentives that facilitate schooling by making it more affordable, many other obstacles continue to keep children from going to school.

First of all, accessibility and quality of schools influence the choice for education, whereby access should be seen as a matter of both geographical and social distance. Problems with the geographical distance from the schools to the community were given as an explanation for not sending children to school, especially by households living further out in the field. Age and gender are decisive factors here. Often children are found too young to cover the distance to school, whereas for girls distance becomes a problem at a later age when, due to their sexual vulnerability, their mobility is restricted due to social norms and values. Moreover, it is the social proximity of the school to the community that leads to exclusion of households and entire communities from schools. This is influenced by caste, class, and gender of the teachers in relation to that of the pupils.

Quality of schools is believed to suffer from a lack of sufficient number of teachers, from poorly trained teachers, and from the fact that control of the school lies mostly in the hands of a few powerful figures, and thus excludes the majority of the community (despite avid attempts to increase community involvement). In addition, respondents complained that the curriculum of government schools does not meet the needs of communities in rural areas, and only really caters to people living in urban areas.

Besides quality and accessibility of schools, poverty remains the main argument for not enrolling children. Even if primary school is affordable, or even free, higher education continues to lie beyond the reach for most people, and so many people question the significance of primary education if further education is unattainable anyway. Education is perceived as an investment rather than a basic right or need of the child. And because economic returns on this particular investment are not always clear to families, due to a lack of job opportunities, or educated others not visibly improving their lives, the awareness of the importance of education does not automatically lead to a change in mentality and behaviour. This seemed especially true when these educated (and unemployed) men expressed that they regret their investment in schooling. According to them, they had been better off if they, for example, had acquired fishing skills instead, just like their age-mates who are now earning more money as fishermen. An increasing number of households attempt to spread the risk by sending not all, but a few of their children to school, keeping the rest at home to help out. In most cases, households opt to send their sons rather than daughters to school. Part of the explanation for this is marriage, which for some girls already takes place in their early teens. The prospect of living in the husband's household does not make a girl's education a logical and sensible investment.

The fact that children are required to help out at home comes hand in hand with poverty. This may involve earning an additional income for the household, but more often the work involves household chores, such as caring for siblings and tending to the animals. The amount of work expected from children in poorer and larger families is substantially greater than in richer households. Furthermore, the demand for help in the household affects girls in particular. In the coastal village

in Sindh and Vehari West-Colony, respondents specifically mentioned household work as the main reason for girls being out school.

Limited facilities affect the enrolment of girls in these two areas. It is likely that enrolment of girls would increase here if separate primary schools for girls were opened. In all the researched areas, rules and customs of society tend to be very strict regarding girls' mobility, especially once girls reach their early teens and are considered grown-up. They are not allowed to travel alone, and many households do not want them to be in the same school as boys or in a house of men who do not belong to the same family. However, this is truer for some communities more than others.

In addition to the aforementioned obstacles that keep children out of school, the child's determination and desire for education should not be ignored. Many parents are illiterate and their involvement rarely reaches beyond initial enrolment. Even when parents are resolute that the child should study, their own work often prohibits them from supervision and from being actively involved. Without a child's internal desire, children tend to drop out of school due to a fear/dislike of teachers and older children, lack of motivation from home, and distraction from peers who have made alternative choices (such as roaming around, fishing, tending to cattle etc.). In addition to a policy aimed at balancing the investments that families are required to make and the perceived benefits of education, it is thus most essential to create an environment at home and in school in which the child himself is inspired to learn.



Herding the buffaloes

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