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Structural Challenges in Education Equality: Hindering Prosperity in Merged Districts (Erstwhile FATA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

The erstwhile FATA – now Merged District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province – had been under severe turmoil due to decades-long marginalization, militancy, military operations, cultural patriarchy, and persistent poverty. The region has been suffering from chronic low literacy rate among adults and NER among the youth, predominantly girls. Education is among the least developed sectors because of being at the bottom of State's priority list. Considering education as key pillar of social progress and development, main objective of the study – Structural Challenges in Education Equality: Hindering Prosperity in Merged Districts (Erstwhile FATA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan – is to find out major structural challenges impeding region's progress. Adopting the methodological approach of content analysis, efforts were made to provide a holistic approach towards the issue by studying the female's educational status of all the seven Merged Districts together and carefully analysing secondary data provided by government and other entities. It took an account of the structural issues, such as structural gender-discrimination and supply side gaps, particularly regarding institutional support in the newly Merged Districts. The study concluded that thousands of young girls were out of schools; the ones who were currently enrolled, college and vocational and technical education was a dream. The dropout rate was significantly high because of limited access to schools, particularly after the primary levels. The analysed data established that there were several structural challenges and factors that barred girls from getting education. Some of the prominent ones included unavailability of schools, scarcity of female teachers and insufficient schools' facilities. The study recommends that if the State is serious and sincere to change the fate of the area, it must support educating the women of the region who make half of the population. This study is significant because for the first time it adopted a holistic approach by analysing the publicly available numeric secondary data from the entire region produced by the government sources, and empirical evidence was produced to help the academics, policy makers, government implementers and foreign donors to better and affectively plan educational development initiatives, focusing gender equality, in the Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in Pakistan.

Key words: *Girls' Education, Gender Discrimination, Educational Challenges, FATA, Merged District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan.*

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Introduction

The 25th Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan in May 2018 led to the merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The merger was a momentous legislation in the history of Pakistan facilitating the extension of basic human rights to the most neglected and marginalized over five million population of Pakistan. Before merger FATA was governed under the FCR (Frontier Crime Regulation) since the British Rule. FCR is regarded as 'Black Law' or 'Draconian Law' when judged by present-day international and human rights standards and principals (Khan, 2011). People from the region consider FCR as human rights violator and a major hindrance in development of the tribal areas, therefore, vast majority of the population supported FATA-KP merger. Moreover, the region being adjacent to Afghanistan – the country which has been in turmoil for decades – is severely affected by the political and economic changes in Afghanistan. Besides the weak administrative and political situation, the area remained under constant instability and foreign interference and have been suffering from various waves of religious extremism, militancy, military operations and population displacement for decades.

Due to sustained colossal marginalization, severe inequity, poor FCR governance and militancy in erstwhile FATA (now Merged Districts) resulted in a socioeconomic shortfall, and social and physical infrastructure deprivation (Khan-UN Women, 2020). Service delivery from the government has remained at a minimum, negatively impacting almost all HDI, women being the most affected (Khan-UN Women, 2020). These alarming figures portray a bleak picture of the region. For example, based on various statistical reports, due to limited means of livelihood, poverty is widespread in former FATA region. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), about 73.7% of the region's population live in multidimensional poverty – the highest in Pakistan[1]. According to the FATA Development Indicators Household Survey (FDIHS) figures, the literacy rate in FATA is around 33.3%, with male literacy rate at 36% (national 70%) and female literacy at only 13% (national 47%) (FDIHS-2013-14). According to the National Institute of Population Studies (DHS, 2017-18), the MMR is 395 per 100,000 live births compared to 275 in the province. Erstwhile FATA scores 20-30 percent lower when compared to country figures for some other health indicators, such as immunization, antenatal and postnatal care. Similarly, the same report reveals that women's access to world's information is almost non-existence – Less than 15% of women have nominal access to any kind of media sources (DHS, 2017-18), therefore, most women are unaware of their basic rights. Women's active political participation is almost non-existent. During the last two decades only 3 women (one for national assembly and two for provincial assembly) ever contested the direct elections in the region. All these low figures are direct or indirect consequences of the prevailing poor education status among the masses, particularly women.

Research Problem and Objectives

Nelson Mandela once said that "education is the most important weapon you can use to change the world". No country can achieve the dream of sustainable development without educating its young generation indiscriminately. Like other global covenants, right to free education is also recognized by the constitution of Pakistan without any gender, color, religion, social status' discrimination (Constitution of Pakistan). Unfortunately, various structural and cultural factors existing in the Merged Districts (MDs) region obstruct girls' engagement in educational activities, hence the region present education statistics

[1] The MPI is calculated using PSLM survey and is a product of two components: i) incidence of poverty, and, ii) intensity of poverty. Source: UNDP, Multidisciplinary Poverty Index (MPI) in Pakistan. Available at http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/hiv_aids/Multidimentional-Poverty-in-Pakistan.html

portraying an ominous situation. Studies reveal that thousands of children, particularly girls, are out of school in the MDs. Furthermore, the girls' dropout ratio is vastly high specifically after primary stage at school (Khan-UN Women 2020). Statistics show that only 48% are girl students in primary school, while in middle schools they are merely 34% as compared to boys (FATA Development Advocate Journal, 2017). Among them almost 98% achieved only primary education & less than 2% were with secondary or higher education. Amongst the young generation the Net Attendance Ratio (NER) was only 18% among girls (FDIHS, 2017-18). Taking gender disparity into consideration, statistics show that NER at primary level among boys and girls was 55.7 and 41.9 respectively. Dropout rate for both boys and girls increased at higher level of schooling; however, the gender gap significantly widened, i.e., 14.7 and 4.9, meaning more girls dropped-out from schools than boys at the higher level (FDIHS, 2017-18). In MDs, total literacy was only 33.3%, while among women it stood at merely 13%. Availability of accessible schools is a major issue for all; for women and girls the situation is even worse. Access to technical and higher education as well as vocational training, is still a dream for thousands of girls. A large number of the available educational institutions lack female teachers, educational supplies and basic facilities, such as classrooms, clean drinking water, electricity, boundary walls and latrines. On the other hand, although recently the government has committed provision of financial resources, the educational structure on the ground does not have the capacity to properly utilize the funds.

Considering education as key pillar of social progress and development, this study on *'Structural Challenges in Education Equality: Hindering Prosperity in Merged Districts (Erstwhile FATA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan'* takes an account of the structural issues (including structural gender-discrimination and supply side gaps, particularly with regard to institutional support) that are the main obstacles in achieving gender equality in the newly MDs. The study primarily investigates the structural factors and provides a holistic approach towards the issue by studying MDs together (all seven districts of the erstwhile FATA region) and carefully analyzing secondary data provided by government and other entities.

Significance of the Study

Several researchers have concluded that due to lack of federal and provincial governments' attention in giving education its due priority, the educational uplift could not be achieved. Majority of the studies have been discussing the religious and cultural issues with a perspective that Pashtuns are unwilling to send their children, particularly girls to schools; however, the reality is yet to be discovered. This paper endeavors to empirically investigate the structural issues – policy, budgetary allocations and access to quality education – that cause the low literacy among the young girls of erstwhile FATA region. So far, there is a research gap with this regard which the study in hand has made efforts to significantly fill in.

Furthermore, although government and private sectors produce numeric data regularly but there is lack of analysis of the produced numeric data. This study will fill in the same existing gaps. Findings of the study and its subsequent doable recommendations will add to the literature for better understanding of the situation and making efficient and effective gender-sensitive planning for broader inclusion of women in the overall development process through education.

Theoretical Framework

In the prevailing situation of newly MDs, where the overall, particularly female, literacy is very low owing to the existing limited educational opportunities, women's ability to achieve equal rights is minimum. Women are subordinate to men and possess no agency to decide for themselves and participate in any

civic affairs. Considering the situation and status of the erstwhile FATA women, this study is guided by the Feminist theory. The theory helps us to understand the mechanisms and backgrounds of gender imbalances in education and pursues to promote women's rights to equal education. It is a critical theory that identifies the causes of women subordination and inequality and attempts to devise strategies to overcome this situation. The theory has a variety of concepts however, for the present study, liberal feminism is considered as the suitable theoretical framework as it attempts to promote women's rights to equal education across the world.

Liberal feminism's founders largely focus on eradicating discriminatory practices such as denying education, full citizenship, and the right to vote. They believe that women possess same rational human nature as men do, so should be provided similar educational opportunities that are available to men. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) the author the famous book, 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' published in 1792, argues that considering female inferiority due to her physique and/or intelligence in irrational, rather the existing societal injustices, formal and informal rules and insufficient schooling makes her more vulnerable. She reiterates that when girls and boys receive equal advantages through an existing educational system, women would not only become extraordinary wives and mothers but also capable workers in many professions (Wollstonecraft, 1792), quoted by Berges (2016). Liberal theorists are specifically concerned with providing both men and women equal opportunities in every sphere of life, including education. The deteriorated educational situation in MDs exists since inception of Pakistan or even before that. As extensively discussed in this study, opportunities of education in the erstwhile FATA region are not equal. The study at hand can best be understood under the liberal feminism theoretical lenses which provides a framework for knowledge and strategies in order to improve female education in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa MDs' region.

Methodology

The study combines findings from multiple datasets of secondary sources. Relevant information was collected from various government departments and private development sector sources, including various policy and research papers, surveys, publications, development reports and newspapers; however, almost all the statistical figures were extracted from the government sources, i.e. reports generated by the bureau of statistics, education department, social welfare department and planning and development department and private sector, such as Asar-Pakistan. The content of the study was further supplemented by content analysis of the views presented in plethora of literature produced by the academia. The reviewed documents painted the prominent topographies of the MDs in terms of available services and infrastructural landscape.

Literature Review

Education is globally recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) chartered in article 26, which calls for free and compulsory education at elementary level, while demanding enabling environment for higher and technical education. The UDHR further endorses that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"[2]. Moreover, Pakistan is a signatory to various international covenants, including the CRC, CEDAW, EFA, and SDGs, and they all demand from the States

[2] Retrieved on August 1, 2020, from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

to comply with actions for gender equality in every sphere of life including education. However, the progress reports from Pakistan yet to show a sign of achieving the gender equality.

Numerous studies have highlighted a deep relationship between education and better socioeconomic development of a society. Nargiza Sakmurzaeva (2018) while carrying out a two-state (South Korea and Kyrgyzstan) comparative study, assert that education is a major and compulsory tool for the development of the society, and has considered educated human capital as an important national and personal investment. Hence, human capital is provided by family which becomes foundation of a society. The study confirms that families that promote education in their children have a positive impact in producing educated men and women who ultimately contribute to the progress of society.

While emphasizing upon the education's economic importance, an OECD report indicates, that providing every child with access to education and the skills required to fully participate in society, would boost GDP by an average 28% per year in lower-income countries and 16% per year in high-income countries for the next 80 years (Brende, 2015). The empirical evidence shows that there is no difference between male and female in this regard; investment in female education would result in the same outcomes as that of males.

Multiple studies have been conducted in order to trace the factors and reasons of low literacy among women and girls. A recent quantitative study focusing Bajaur agency (Kefayat Ullah, et al, 2021) highlighted some factors responsible for low female education. The study discussed structural barriers, such as lack of educational institution and teaching staff, issues related to transport, low quality of education and ineffective policies of the government regarding female education. According to the study, some social issues like early marriages, patriarchy social norms and religious influence are also playing role in lowering the ratio of female education in Bajaur. However, the scope of this study remained only to District Bajuar of the MDs.

A policy paper by Sumbal Naveed (2018), focusing on government led education activities, identified some barriers to women and girls' education in Khyber and Mohmand districts of the erstwhile FATA region. The policy paper specifically provided an analysis of Education Sector Plane (ESP) for the mentioned two Merged Districts. The study also highlighted factors like militancy, military operations, and displacement of local residents that resulted poor condition of education in the area.

In her study, Rana (2008) focused the role of militancy, instability and overall unfavorable environment adversely affecting female access to education and schooling. She presented various figures of schools' destruction by the Taliban militancy in the erstwhile FATA. The author argues that due to the unfavorable environment for education, the female literacy rate in the former FATA had remained low; hence, resulting in lack of female teachers in the region. She added, that due to the religious, patriarchal and tribal structure of the society, people were reluctant to send their girls to a school with male teacher. Author argues that lack of basic facilities like toilets and school boundary walls also played a role in barring parents from sending their girls to schools.

Another study by Nazakat Awan (2013) has also discussed the deteriorated situation of education in the erstwhile FATA region. According to the author, since the inception of Pakistan allocation of education budget has been consistently low for the region (as low as Rs.1.5 billion rupees until 2001, which was raised to Rs.2.7 billion for 2004-05). The study provided an account of pathetic literacy rate situation (for 2005) of former FATA generally and of female education specifically. According to the study, at the time, total literacy rate of the erstwhile FATA region was only 17.42% - 30% and 3% for male and female respectively. While discussing availability of resources and structural issues; for example, lack of schools at

primary and middle level, inconvenient location of school, lack of teaching staff and lake of qualified teachers, have remained huge challenges since long, resulting in poor condition of the overall education. Few other studies also concluded the same results; for example, Malik et al. (2015) state that some prominent barriers to restricting females' education include shortage of nearby schools, lack of the teaching staff and absenteeism and their poor quality of teaching, the poor schooling environment, weak governance of the schools, and lack of community participation.

A recent quantitative study by *Khan, S., Khan, M. H., & Gul, D.- e-N. (2020)* targeted comparing the public sector educational reforms introduced by two previous governments, one elected in 2008 and the other in 2013. The study concluded that availability of institutions and number and regular presence of teachers in those schools had great impact on student's enrollment. The study remained limited to comparing two regimes within a specific period.

The study conducted in Hafizabad, Punjab, (Iqbal et al. 2013), and another study from the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mehran, 2003) primarily focusing female education with religio-cultural perspectives, found huge gaps in female education particularly at the secondary school level, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, and the South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The most common identified reasons included traditions, cultures and religion making girls quitting their education as soon as they arrive their puberty age.

A comprehensive 5-district research conducted by Rehman Khan, (2020) commissioned by the UN Women in Pakistan, has thoroughly discussed the factors hindering gender equality of 5 districts of the Merged Areas. Along-with education, the study also elaborated upon few other indicators, such as females' health, economic and political participation, and gender-based violence. Major components of the research were based on qualitative research; however, it also pinpointed some important quantitative aspects derived from primary research carried out in the region. The study, however, focused only five of the seven MDs.

Development is a multidimensional process overlapping with infrastructure as explained by Majumder and Rajarsh (2004). The study explains regional aspects of accessibility to infrastructural facilities in India at districts level and its effect on development. The author divided development and infrastructure into several components and further subdivided into constituents of infrastructure where education infrastructure is also a part of that whole. Like Majumder and Rajarsh (2004), several other studies have also emphasized upon the significance and positive relationship of development and infrastructural facilities and considered them a crucial part of development process.

A detail review of previous literature depicts that the gender equality issues have been discussed partially in terms of geography and/or sector, as some studies discussed one or two districts and another five districts from the entire region and discussed one or two parts from the entire education sector. However, this study provides extended analysis of the structural issues encompassing education in all seven newly MDs based on most recent data from the available documents. The study has also analyzed the compartmentalized approach of development with reference to education in the region utilizing gender lenses.

Results and Discussion

The discussion presented in the following revolves around the analysis of the gender disparities with respect to government's education related legislation, policies, financial allocations and existence of the infrastructure and its response to masses' needs and demands. The paper also presents some gender disparity analyses of the data produced by the government departments regarding presence of educational institutions, availability of teachers, students' enrollment, and the availability of basic facilities, such as, school boundary walls, clean drinking water, toilets, and electricity. The carried-out exercise has explored some general and mostly education-specific gender disparities and marginalization caused by structural discrimination.

Legislative and Policy Framework

Right after the creation of Pakistan, education has historically featured prominently in the constitutional frameworks of the country. According to the Article 37-B of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), "the State shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period." Furthermore, the Article 38-D states, "the State shall provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief, for all citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race. (The Constitution of Pakistan – 1973). In 2010, the importance of education provision, after the insertion of Article 25-A in the 18th Amendment, under the heading Right to Education, *'the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law*,' further became significant and turned-out to be an enforceable right (Mustafa, 2012). Mustafa (2012) further reiterates that after the enactment of the 18th amendment, subordinate legislation had to be enacted by the respective provincial legislatures. Although the provinces were required to frame their respective provincial legislations; the challenge of the quantum and capacity to take on the delegated roles with existing provincial institutional arrangements, remained an obstacle for the provincial governments. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was only able after almost seven years to pass the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free and Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act in 2017[3]. According to the Act, "Government shall provide free compulsory primary and secondary education to all the children from the age of five to sixteen years in the Province of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa".

However, despite of government's legislative and policy efforts, access to education remained a huge challenge particularly in the erstwhile FATA across the primary, secondary and vocational and higher education levels. Along-with the access, quality of education is also under severe criticism. According to various academics and researchers, one of the major causes of low quality is the lack of proper governance, including availability of funds, political will and better monitoring and evaluation of the educational interventions (Mustafa, 2012). In response to uplift educational access and quality, the KP provincial government established an Education Sector Reform Unit (ESRU) within the department of education with an aim to better plan, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the ongoing reform activities/programs (Department of Education-ESRU Website[4]).

Budgetary Allocations

[3] First published after having received the assent of the Governor of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the Gazette of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, (Extraordinary), dated the 26th April, 2017

[4] Information extracted on August 07, 2021. http://ese.kp.gov.pk/page/education_sector_reforms_unit_esru

After merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, the federal and provincial governments allocated a significant amount of budget[5] for the development of war-affected and lop-sided area with an aim to bring it at par with other regions of country. However, the results are yet to be seen by the marginalized population of the MDs. According to provincial political representatives' media reports, under the Accelerated Implementation Plan (AIP 2019-20) the government approved Rs.142 billion for the development of 127 projects in the Merged Districts. However, the government could only utilize around Rs. 24 billion (16.9 %) of the available money. The report further reveals that the government disbursed around Rs2.9 billion on different primary and secondary level school projects – uplifting infrastructure, provision of school-student bags, books and stationery, and building play areas – in the MDs[6].

According to various government officials and elected public representatives, the budgeted amount (Rs. 100 billion a year) for the overall development of the erstwhile FATA region could not be utilized due to insufficient capacity of the respective departments, including the department of education, on the ground (Khan-UN Women, 2020). Khan-UN Women (2020) further reveals that although, under the AIP 2019-20, education department's budgetary allocations were the highest, but the department could spend in less than a double-digit figure.

Facts and Figures - Presence on the Ground

There is a universal agreement on the fact that education shapes social realities and helps in producing beneficial generations in the world (Khan-UN Women, 2020). Various statistics show that the number of educational facilities for MD children are insufficient to meet their educational needs. In case of girls, the situation is even worse, particularly at the middle and high school levels (Khan-UN Women, 2020). The following deliberations give and in-depth review of the district-wise government's educational institutions presence, students' enrollment, male-female teachers ratio, and availability of basic facilities in the existing schools in all the seven districts. Also, efforts have been made to present the data in a way that gender disparity is evident.

Overall Literacy

The overall literacy rate among the MD region is very low as compared to the national and international standards. As per the FDIHS (2013-14) figures, only a quarter of the population (10 years and above) was literate as compared to 53% literacy in KP and 58% nation-wide. Adult female literacy was merely 13%, significantly low as compared to females of the province and Pakistan - 36% and 47% respectively. The entire MD region falls way below the provincial (overall 72% and female 36%) and national literacy average, i.e. overall 70% and female 47% respectively (Khan-UN Women, 2020).

Availability of Functional Schools

According to the Statistical Report 2017-18 of Government Educational Institutions, EMIS Directorate of Newly Merged Tribal Districts, (shown in the table-1 below), there were 4,464 government schools (primary, middle, high and higher secondary) in the seven MDs. Although, the male-female population ratio is almost half, but out of all the existing schools only a little over one-third were girls' school (1710).

[5] One trillion rupees for the next ten years – 100 billion a year – TDS 2020-2030

[6] The daily Express Tribune, September 15, 2020 - K-P spends Rs24b for AIP projects in NMTDs: Substantial amount is spent on relief work in FY 2019-20) https://tribune.com.pk/story/2264006/k-p-spends-rs24b-for-aip-projects-in-nmtds extracted on August 07, 2021.

At primary level the institutional gender gap was comparatively low (male=2256 vs female=1492), however, at upper level the gaps widened as the ladder goes up to the middle (male=284 vs female=145), high (male=200 vs female=69) and higher secondary (male=14 vs female=04) level. Some of the districts, for instance, Bajuar, Orakzai, North Waziristan and South Waziristan did not have even a single higher secondary school, though higher secondary schools for boys did exist. The figures available in the below table illustrate significant gender disparity in terms of schools' availability at all levels, across the seven districts.

Table-1: Functional Government Educational Institutions in Seven Merged Districts

Level/Districts		**Primary Schools**	**Middle Schools**	**High Schools**	**Higher Secondary**
Bajaur	Boys	350	30	33	01
	Girls	187	21	11	00
	Total	**537**	**51**	**44**	**01**
Mohmand	Boys	294	36	23	02
	Girls	165	19	12	01
	Total	**459**	**55**	**35**	**03**
Khyber	Boys	279	27	32	02
	Girls	257	23	07	02
	Total	**536**	**50**	**39**	**04**
Kurram	Boys	290	34	39	0 3
	Girls	163	17	12	0 1
	Total	**453**	**51**	**51**	**04**
Orakzai	Boys	227	16	18	03
	Girls	123	09	07	00
	Total	**350**	**25**	**25**	**3**
North Waziristan	Boys	377	49	29	01
	Girls	366	35	11	00
	Total	**743**	**84**	**40**	**01**
South Waziristan	Boys	339	56	26	02
	Girls	231	21	09	00
	Total	**570**	**77**	**35**	**02**

Source: Statistical Report (2017-18). Government Educational Institutions EMIS. Directorate of Newly Merged Tribal Districts. Peshawar, Pakistan.

It is worth-nothing that according to Education Management Information System (EMIS), Statistical Report (2017-18) of Government Educational Institutions, there were more than 300 non-functional schools – 271 primary, 24 middle and 12 high schools in the MDs.

Student Enrolment

In total, 503,534 students were enrolled at the primary level, majority being the boys (above 61%) and girls making less than 39% of the primary school population in the seven MDs. Researchers argue that with an increase in the age of the female students, the drop out rate increases. At the high and higher secondary school level the enrollment of girl students drops drastically. For example, at the high school level only one-fifth were girls and higher secondary level, out of the total 6,253 enrolled students, only 773 were girls, making merely 14% of the total enrolled students in erstwhile FATA.

Making a district-wise analysis, the table below shows that the highest percentage of female enrolment was in district Khyber, followed by North Waziristan, Kurram, South Waziristan and Orakzai, while Bajuar and Mohmand at the lowest among the MDs. It has generally been witnessed that female enrolment has always been low compared to that of boys at various educational levels.

Table-2: Student Enrollment in Seven Merged Districts

Level/Districts		Primary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools	Higher Secondary
Bajaur	Boys	88416	3532	13410	344
	Girls	42781	1309	2268	00
	Total	**131197**	**4841**	**15678**	**344**
Mohmand	Boys	37000	1821	4511	733
	Girls	18728	426	939	117
	Total	**55728**	**2247**	**5450**	**850**
Khyber	Boys	47141	1705	6043	1772
	Girls	44465	720	1408	502
	Total	**91606**	**2425**	**7451**	**2274**
Kurram	Boys	42271	1267	6099	729
	Girls	24815	566	4048	154
	Total	**67086**	**1833**	**10147**	**883**
Orakzai	Boys	19061	544	2035	934
	Girls	10809	357	905	0
	Total	**29870**	**901**	**2940**	**934**
North Waziristan	Boys	45684	2123	4034	776
	Girls	35574	1393	1024	0
	Total	**81258**	**3516**	**5058**	**776**
South Waziristan	Boys	28089	976	1447	192
	Girls	18702	486	596	0
	Total	**47791**	**1462**	**2043**	**192**

Source: Statistical Report (2017-18). Government Educational Institutions EMIS. Directorate of Newly Merged Tribal Districts. Peshawar, Pakistan.

Teachers' Availability

The disproportion that exists in the number of male-female schools as well as the male and female students' enrollment figures translate into the disparity in the availability of female teachers as well. While analysing the figures given in the table below, it was observed that at all the school levels significant disparity occurred – in majority cases, the number of male teachers was two to three-fold higher than the number of female teachers appointed in the public schools. Overall population of the government appointed male and female primary school teachers in the MDs was 9,110; female being 3,380 (37% of the total). Like in the case of schools' availability and students' enrollment, the number of female teachers significantly dropped at the higher and higher secondary level – for instance, at the high level there were only 568 female teachers as compared to 2,498 males (female being only 18.5% of the total 3066 high school teachers). The Inter-district comparison showed that some districts suffered from a wider gap than the others; for example, regarding the teachers' availability in primary schools, the table below shows that the highest gap was found in Bajuar district – 462 more male teachers, followed by Kurram district – 432

more male teachers, and Mohmand – 336 more male teachers, while Khyber with 207 fewer female teachers was doing better among the seven districts.

Table-3: School-wise Teaching Staff in Seven Merged Districts

Level/Districts		Primary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools	Higher Secondary
Bajaur	Male	848	128	400	14
	Female	386	37	67	00
	Total	**1234**	**201**	**467**	**14**
Mohmand	Male	757	184	279	41
	Female	421	94	100	22
	Total	**1178**	**278**	**379**	**63**
Khyber	Male	732	161	405	70
	Female	525	76	63	29
	Total	**1257**	**237**	**468**	**99**
Kurram	Male	847	183	454	51
	Female	415	66	120	12
	Total	**1262**	**249**	**574**	**63**
Orakzai	Male	600	94	202	47
	Female	325	41	62	0
	Total	**925**	**135**	**264**	**47**
North Waziristan	Male	1098	370	433	28
	Female	764	125	77	0
	Total	**1862**	**495**	**510**	**28**
South Waziristan	Male	848	324	325	48
	Female	544	98	79	00
	Total	**1392**	**422**	**404**	**48**

Source: Statistical Report (2017-18). Government Educational Institutions EMIS. Directorate of Newly Merged Tribal Districts. Peshawar, Pakistan.

On the other hand, the non-availability of teachers impacts the student-teacher ratio as well. Overall, there were 576,679 students enrolled in the schools, and 14,519 male and female teachers available to teach these students – making an overall 1:40 teacher-student ratio in the region. While keeping in view the gender-disparity, the analyses show that the female student-teacher ratio stood at 1:49. While for their male counterparts it was 1:36. At the primary school level the female teacher-student ratio was even higher, i.e., 1:58. Keeping in view the empirical evidence, it can easily be implied that the classes in girls' schools are significantly over-crowded. Across the districts the ratio of girls/teacher was higher than boys. UNESCO's Institute for Statistics[7] reveals, the average student-teacher ratio at the primary schools' level in Pakistan remained at 44.3:1 (2018). The average student-teacher ratio for primary level education in KP (excluding the MDs) was 35:1 for boys and 51:1 for girls.

[7] Retrieved on November 17, 2021, from the UNESCO website https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/pakistan/pupil-teacher-ratio

Non-availability of Basic Facilities in Girls' Schools

According to the First Monitoring Report of Elementary and Secondary Education Department on "State of Education in the Merged Districts", 82% schools were without boundary walls, 49% could not provide clean drinking water to students, 30% with no washrooms, and 45% of the schools had no electricity at all. The situation regarding the availability of latrines and clean drinking water was nominal throughout the public schools in the region. Some districts presented even a grimmer picture, for example, in Orakzai the situation was much grimmer than the other six districts of the region. Non-availability of electricity was an issue throughout the regional canvas.

Table-4: Girls Schools without Basic Facilities in Seven Merged Districts

Level/District		**Primary Schools**		**Middle Schools**		**High Schools**		**Higher Secondary**	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Bajaur	Boundary Wall	80	14	4	1	0	1	0	0
	Drinking Water	171	91	10	8	5	1	0	0
	Electricity	223	115	15	10	6	0	0	0
	Latrine	148	49	4	2	4	0	0	0
Mohmand	Boundary Wall	76	13	6	1	2	0	1	0
	Drinking Water	199	83	18	9	7	2	1	0
	Electricity	190	70	21	6	5	2	0	0
	Latrine	166	61	19	6	7	2	0	0
Khyber	Boundary Wall	63	43	7	3	6	1	0	0
	Drinking Water	159	142	12	8	11	1	0	0
	Electricity	180	168	15	14	9	3	0	0
	Latrine	135	77	13	4	13	1	0	0
Kurram	Boundary Wall	75	4	3	0	0	0	1	0
	Drinking Water	116	37	12	4	6	0	0	0
	Electricity	129	34	9	6	3	0	1	0
	Latrine	151	40	14	2	9	0	1	0
Orakzai	Boundary Wall	175	4	3	1	5	1	0	0
	Drinking Water	200	105	11	9	10	4	0	0
	Electricity	208	97	12	8	12	3	0	0
	Latrine	219	99	14	8	11	3	2	0
North Waziristan	Boundary Wall	137	49	5	3	2	2	1	0
	Drinking Water	194	104	24	7	9	2	0	0
	Electricity	147	86	23	12	8	2	0	0
	Latrine	213	93	22	7	8	2	0	0
South Waziristan	Boundary Wall	34	4	3	0	2	0	0	0
	Drinking Water	54	14	8	0	2	0	0	0
	Electricity	95	62	13	4	7	3	0	0
	Latrine	87	20	11	0	4	0	0	0

Source: Statistical Report (2017-18). Government Educational Institutions EMIS. Directorate of Newly Merged Tribal Districts. Peshawar, Pakistan.

Limitations

Major source of the collected data was particularly the government departments and Bureau of Statistics. Access to reliable and sufficient sex disaggregated data for the MDs was challenging from other sources to triangulate. However, this study assumes that the available MDs education data is reliable and comparable. Moreover, this study only investigated and analyzed the secondary and numeric data, not the qualitative aspects of field primary data on the factors hindering female education in the region. Nonetheless, as a second step, after this secondary data analysis, we would endeavor to investigate the qualitative aspects and collect primary data to include voices from the field and present a holistic approach to the issues of female education in the MDs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan has mandated the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the age of 6 and 16 without discrimination. However, currently in the MDs thousands of children are out of schools, majority being girls. This study suggests that along-with the several cultural challenges, structural barriers play substantial role in obstructing females from attending schools. The findings of this research concluded that education for erstwhile FATA girls did not appear to be an urgency for ruling elites throughout the history of Pakistan. Girls' education is also sternly affected by the nonavailability of public educational institutions, especially in rural and remote parts of the region. Where schools do exist, they are faced with insufficient basic services, supplies and facilities, such school classrooms, stationary, books, qualified female teachers, toilets, boundary walls, drinking water, and electricity. The NER is low, while the dropout ratio is extremely high among girls, particularly after primary level schooling. Access to higher education, and technical and vocational training, is still a dream for MDs' women and girls. Unfortunately, the presented statistics present a bleak picture of structural gender discrimination in the region.

Pakistan has sufficient legislation and policy frameworks that can enhance accountability of the responsible individuals and institutions if adopted in their true spirits. After the 18th constitutional amendment and subsequently the KP-FATA merger, educational enhancement and enforcement became the responsibility of the KP provincial government. The KP-FATA merger has shifted attention of federal and provincial governments to uplift the MDs' development. A handsome budget amount has already been allocated for the education sector; however, in the initial years due to lack of institutional capacity on the ground, spending of the budget is limited. Keeping in view the current opportunities, the study recommends the following doable actions, particularly addressing structural and institutional aspects, to enhance female education and overcome the gender disparity in the region.

First and the foremost is Improving girls access to education – It is recommended:

- To formulate an effective and efficient medium-term community mobilization plan/strategy to facilitate communities' understanding regarding the importance of modern education, particularly female education. The objective can be achieved through mass mobilization of the civil society organizations and media.
- Sufficient funds need to be allocated for enhancing the primary, middle and high school network in the districts, with a special focus on increasing the number of schools in the rural and far-flung remote areas of the region.
- The overall deteriorated security situation is highly restricting girls' mobility. The State needs to revisit its intervention policy for sustainable piece in the region.

The second important aspect is to enhance girls' enrollment and retention in the available schools. To meet the objective, the study recommends the following:

- All schools-going girls should be provided with free school supplies, including books, bags, stationery and unform. Girls with good academic results at primary and secondary levels should be provided stipends/scholarships. All college and university going females should be provided with free financial support. This will ease the financial burden over the parents.
- Research shows that children are better groomed when parents and teachers combine their skills for training of children. Therefore, establishment of a Parent-Teacher connectivity mechanism and strengthening them with skills to identify and prioritize girls' enrolment and retention. Parents and teachers should be capacity-built to provide girls with enabling environment at the house, community and school levels.
- All the female schools should be provided with female-friendly toilets so that the girls feel comfortable in spending their whole day at schools. Furthermore, they and their parents should feel secure by constructing school boundary walls. This will ensure traditional purdah compliance as well as security in the troubled areas of the region.
- Introduce healthy activities, such as sports and productive extracurricular activities in schools, so that students find it interesting to attend schools.
- Unfortunately, corporal punishment is very common in schools, particularly in the rural areas. Teacher training should be provided on healthy class management and corporal punishment should be completely banned.

The third component to help enhance female education and narrow the existing gender gap is to overcome institutional limitations affecting service delivery. To achieve this objective, the study recommends:

- Recruit and train fresh graduate female teachers (even with matric education) from the local or the nearest vicinity of the district. Provide them with regular on-job training and opportunities to continue their higher education as private candidates. Also, educated females should be encouraged by provision of incentives, such as allowances and free housing and transportation. This strategy is expected to fill in the vacuum of female teachers' availability as well as overcoming the chronic teacher absenteeism.
- Accurate and constant availability of education data is a huge issue in the MDs. Hence, there is a dire need to improve data collection system and strengthen Education Department's staff skills on regularly collecting sex-disaggregated data, and effectively document, analyze and report to the policy and program formulation forums. There is a dire need to extent the scope of work of the ESRU to the MDs to achieve tangible, efficient and effective results from the recent educational interventions under the Tribal Decade Strategy 2020-2030. This will help not only in better planning but also in effective M&E of the schools.

Private sector engagement can improve female education. It is recommended that:

- A large population, including girls, attend Madrasah and mosques for religious education. They are available in almost all the villages; therefore, the religious seminaries should be extensively assessed in terms of curriculum, teaching capacity and available services. If needed, they should be provided financial support to teach primary modern subjects along-with the religious education. This will, to some extent, ensure access to at least some education – which is better than none.

- All possible efforts be made to facilitate transportation for female students and teachers. Private sector transportation could be engaged, and the costs can be subsidized by the government. This will help in ensuring females safe mobility between home and schools and gaining trust of the family members over safety of their females.

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