

Education for all?

Anjum Altaf Published September 16, 2022

The writer is the author of What We Get Wrong About Education in Pakistan (Folio Books 2022) and Pakistan ka Matlab Kya (Aks Publications 2022).

PAKISTAN is a **signatory** دستخط کنندہ فریق معاہدہ to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**), one of which **obligates** پابند کرنا the country to provide inclusive جامع and **equitable** مساوی education for all. Once again, the question has been asked: is Pakistan moving towards that goal?

An inclusive education does not **discriminate** امتیاز رکھنا یا تفریق by gender, language, religion, etc. On gender, **discrimination** امتیازی سلوک is **manifest** ظاہر ہونا at the **outset** آغاز when income **constrained** محدود یا پابند families spend more to educate sons than daughters. **The bias** تعصب is **reaffirmed** تصدیق ہوتی ہے when textbooks offer limited role models for girls. It is **argued** دلیل دینا that Pakistan is a socially **conservative** قدامت پسند, انقلاب کا مخالف country and most women **subscribe** تسلیم یا قبول کرنا to the models **prescribed** تجویز کردہ for them. This is an **assertion** دعویٰ made by men speaking on behalf of women who have not been independently asked or **consulted** مشورہ لینا. Even if this is **conceded** مان لینا, we know that there is a subset of women with different **aspirations** خواہشات. At the very least کم از کم

کم, the Pakistani **curriculum** نصاب has no place for them, **reportedly** طور پر مبینہ not even for someone as **culturally** ثقافتی طور پر **acceptable** قابل قبول as Malala Yousafzai. It remains an open question whether it is right to exclude them and who is to make that **determination** فیصلہ.

There is a forgotten **dimension** جہت to this discrimination. People who are old enough remember a time in the 1960s when girls in cities commonly cycled to their schools and colleges. No more. Once again, it is argued that this was an **inappropriate** نامناسب **legacy** میراث of British rule that has been **rightly** بجا طور پر **done away with** ختم کیا گیا . School education **reaffirms** پابندیاں such **limitations** تصدیق کرتی ہے on the choices of women without much public debate.

On language, the discrimination is more **subtle** سمجھ سے باہر . Children whose home language is not English or Urdu cannot **acquire** حاصل کرنا elementary education in their own language even if their parents want, despite the global **consensus** اتفاق رائے supporting its advantages. Outside of Sindh, this aspect is neither fully recognised nor debated. The **exclusion** خارج ہونا of such languages means not only their slow death but also the **withering** مٹ جانا, مر جھا جانا, of their associated cultures and identities.

To **inhibit** روکنا free expression is a form of exclusion that **disproportionately** طور پر غیر متناسب impacts those who do not belong to the majority.

On religion the exclusions are more obvious. A curriculum نصاب cannot be inclusive when religious content مواد of one religion is diffused پھیلانا throughout textbooks prescribed تجویز کردہ for secular subjects.

This practice is justified by the argument دلیل that Pakistan is overwhelmingly سے اکثریت سے Muslim (97.5 per cent), which makes it alright درست to propagate پرچار کرنا predominantly طور پر بنیادی Islamic content. The difficulty with this justification is that Pakistan was not so overwhelmingly Muslim when it was created. It is a consequence نتیجہ of religious discrimination that non-Muslims feel unsafe in the country and many who were or are able to leave have done so. This includes Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, Parsis, and Christians. A justification of majoritarian اکثریتی values اقدار is incompatible جوڑے with the goal of inclusion.

Instead of addressing this issue, the proposed solution is to have non-Muslim students leave the class when Islamic religious content is discussed in secular subjects. But this constitutes شکل ہونا the most extreme form of exclusion, one that embeds سرایت کر جانا othering دیگر right from early childhood.

One example should suffice کافی to highlight the kinds of avoidable گریز قابل issues that have been created. The Single National Curriculum textbook for Grade 4 English has an exercise in creative writing on page 12 in which students are asked to write a paragraph about a religious subject particular to Islam. What is to be gained by choosing a religious subject in an exercise of creative writing in a class meant to teach

English? It would be more **inclusive** جامع to have a **neutral** غیر جانبدار subject for the essay in which all children are equally **equipped** تیار یا تیار to express themselves. **Creativity** تخلیقی would also be **enhanced** ہونا اضافہ if every student could write something personal, instead of reproducing an approved text from which even **inadvertent** نادانستہ deviation انحراف could be considered risky. To **inhibit** روکنا the free expression of views is a form of exclusion that **disproportionately** غیر متناسب impacts those who do not belong to the numerical **majority** عددی اکثریت. The obligation ذمہ داری to be inclusive **calls for** مطالبہ کرتی ہے **reconsidering** کرنا the content of all textbooks for subjects other than religion.

Is education in Pakistan **equitable** مساوی, even if it is not inclusive? This question is easier to answer. To start with, how can it be equitable if 40pc of school-age children are not in school to begin with? The Constitution guarantees them a free education, but no attention has been paid to the **exclusion** عمل . If a country does not honour its Constitution, will it pay heed to the goals of the UN?

What about the children who are actually in school? **It stands to reason** اس کی وجہ یہ ہے that when education is offered as a **commodity** شے in the market, those with more money are able to buy a better quality of the product. How can education be equitable in such a **scenario** حالات? A natural **outcome** نتیجہ is that there are a limited number of high-quality schools to reproduce the ruling **classes** حکمران طبقہ and a huge number of

low-quality schools to reproduce the masses عوام to be ruled.

Unsurprisingly حیرت کی بات نہیں, it is also preferred ترجیح دینا that in the face of نظر کے پیش نظر such inequity عدم مساوات, the latter do not question the legitimacy جواز of the unequal distribution. This in turn اس کے نتیجے میں drives آگے بڑھایا جاتا ہے the content of public school education, whose primary aim becomes to sustain برقرار رکھنا the status quo جمود, پرانا نظام. Hence its mind-numbing دماغی بے حسی quality. Anyone claiming that a mere محض curriculum can yield حاصل کرنا equitable education in Pakistan cannot be taken seriously.

Pakistan's school education is neither inclusive جامع، جس میں nor equitable منصفانہ and is departing دور ہونا further from these objectives مقاصد. Is this because Pakistan's ruling elite اشرافیہ is just playing along with the UN? The SDGs were preceded پہلے سے by the MDGs for 15 years. None were attained حاصل کی گئی in Pakistan without any analysis تجزیہ of the reasons for the failure. Instead, the country signed on to a new set of goals with a fresh lease معاہدہ، ٹھیکہ of 15 years during which officials would continue to hold meetings and participate in conferences. Meanwhile, the people in whose name پر عمل میں لانا the exercise is being conducted are largely excluded from the conversation. In fact, there aren't even comprehensible قابلِ فہم terms for MDG or SDG in any of their local languages.

It is a surreal حقیقی غیر situation where rhetoric بیان بازی

masquerades ہے روپ دھارتی for reality, which all but ensures that **innocuous** معصوم questions (Are we there yet?) will continue to be asked while difficult answers (We are going in the wrong direction) would continue to be ignored.

The writer is the author of What We Get Wrong About Education in Pakistan (Folio Books 2022) and Pakistan ka Matlab Kya (Aks Publications 2022).

Published in Dawn,

Women in peril میں خطرے

WhatsApp 03166364928

Editorial Published September 16, 2022

IT is highly **likely** ہے امکان that when the **cumulative** مجموعی human cost caused by the floods is added up a few months **down the line**, the **toll** تعداد would be higher for women than for men. Evidence gathered in the **aftermath** بعد کے of a number of natural disasters around the world clearly shows that women bear a **disproportionate** غیر متناسب burden of loss in terms of death, disease and emotional **trauma** صدمہ. In fact, according to the UN, "when disaster strikes, women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die". Take, for example, the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that claimed around 230,000 **lives**. A **staggering** 70pc of them were women. The **disparity** فرق، تفاوت between the impact of disasters on men and women was also observed during the Covid-19 **pandemic** وبا, when deaths and injuries from

domestic abuse گھریلو زیادتیوں spiked اضافہ ہوا because women, although ironically طور پر more resilient برداشت کرنے بدسلوکی abusive against the virus, were locked in with partners. والے کرنے والے

In this context اسے تناظر میں, while the flood may have seriously impacted پاکستان's economy, agricultural output پیداوار and created serious food insecurity among other things, the cumulative material مادی, physical and psychological impact being felt by millions of women cannot even be measured. Having lost their homes and the privacy that afforded, they are faced with challenges others can scarcely شاید ہی، بمشکل imagine. In a patriarchal خاندان جس کا سربراہ مرد ہو society where women's needs are often not taken seriously even by their own family members, it is safe to assume that in these circumstances the general and specific physiological and even medical requirements of affected women (such as washrooms, sanitary and childbirth kits) are far from being met پورے ہونا. Around 8.2m women of reproductive age have been affected by the floods, out of which around 650,000 are pregnant: 73,000 are reportedly due this month. The health of the infants شیر خوار بچے being born during this calamity آفت is also inherently linked to their mothers' health. Women and children must be at the core مرکز of the authorities' relief and medical responses and a coherent مربوط strategy developed with international aid organisations to address their immediate and short-term needs.

Published in Dawn, September 16th, 2022

SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future". The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by 2030.

Secular subjects means any course which is presented in the curriculum of a private and independent institution of higher education which is not hobby or recreational **تفريحي** in nature or which does not advocate the religious teachings or the morals or forms of worship of any sect **فرقه** .

Bahais

The Bahá'í Faith is a relatively new religion teaching the essential worth of all religions and the unity of all people. Established by Bahá'u'lláh in the 19th century, it initially developed in Iran and parts of the Middle East, where it has faced ongoing persecution since its inception.

Parsis) or Parsees are an ethnoreligious group of the Indian subcontinent adhering to Zoroastrianism. They are descended from Persians who migrated to Medieval India during and after the Arab conquest of Iran (part of the early Muslim conquests)

in order to escape persecution by Muslims and preserve their Zoroastrian identity. The Parsi people comprise the oldest of the Indian subcontinent's two Zoroastrian communities vis-à-vis the Iranis, whose ancestors migrated to British-ruled India from Qajar-era Iran.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were eight international development goals for the year 2015 that had been established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. These were based on the OECD DAC International Development Goals agreed by Development Ministers in the "Shaping the 21st Century Strategy". The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeeded the MDGs in 2016.

1. If something happens **down the line**, it happens at a later stage of a situation or activity