



## **The low Female Literacy Trends: A Critical Challenge of Human Development in Pakistan (Major Obstacles and Way Forward)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study examines the current status of female literacy and its nexus with development in the context of Pakistan where more than sixty percent females are illiterate and illiterate females are more than that in its rural and far-flung areas. The study examines the key obstacles in the system and discusses possibilities to improve female literacy rate with enhancement in quality of education. It finds that development allocation fared poorly in the past for female education and human development in the region. The lower female literacy rate strengthens feudalism and contributing to unskilled- or semi-skilled women labour force which is spreading poverty and inequality in the country in the global age of the twenty-first Century. Above mentioned issues direly need to adopt an innovative approach to tackle all obstacles in decent manners and through coherent development planning, policies, and practices. It is also concluded that low female literacy trends affect inversely on growth and economic development of the region, so to bring quality educations for female literacy is need of the hour for sustainable economic growth and development.

**Keywords:** Female Literacy Trends, Public Policy, Quality Education, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Critical development Challenge

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education in symbolized as the key to success and ethically it teaches us the way of better life means how to live and compete in the global world with all the accessories of digital life. In another concept explained by the intellectuals that education is the delivery of knowledge, being an educated person means you have access to optimal states of mind regardless of the situation you are in. A nation cannot progress without having a sound, sustainable and also qualitative education system for all. Those developing nations who realize this earlier; works effectively for sustainable development of economy and society in long term human

development perspectives are economically prosper today in the global scenario. The most important resource of a nation is its human-capital for further development in the changing world. Cultured and wise men are the product of an effective education system as evidenced by human history. The ethical, moral, and educational facilities given to the children of today can help them in becoming a responsible citizen of tomorrow world. New ideas, concepts, effective and innovative ways to do things comes only when the education system is strong and benefiting the brilliant minds. Pakistan is a developing country and it is very densely populated. The observable factor is the women majority in the population of the country.

King, Elizabeth M., and M. Anne Hill (1998), It has been concluded in relevant/ empirical studies that there is a positive correlation with female literacy and economic development. According to a notable economist with reference to Lawrence Summers, a renowned economist that "investment in the education of girls may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world" [1].

Klasen, Stephan (2002), elaborates the role of literate females in the economic growth and development at large in emerging economies. "Women's education is one of the major explanatory variables behind the rates of social and economic development" [2].

(Husain et al, 2003), concludes that the Human capital is one of the essential factors for economic growth. Women, as half of the population, have a great impact on the development of the community and their participation in social fields are essential for Scio economic development [3].

(Praveen, 2008), concludes that Women literacy rate plays a vital role to enhance the economic development of the nationwide. The advancement of the society relies on the efficiency of its educational systems that provides the same prospects of getting an education to everyone. She emphasized the impact of female literacy on the development of the economy is essential for the rapid progress of society [4].

(Dauda, 2012), Female education plays a vital role in the reduction of poverty and contributes to sustainable growth in developing nations. So, the attention must be paid to the promotion of female education for structural transformation and economic growth. Women education also lessens the population growth rate and fertility growth rate. He aimed to find out that female education leads to economic growth in Nigeria during the time period 1975 to 2008. By employing co-integration and error correction techniques the results show that there is a long-run relationship equilibrium between variables. This study recommends that the government should focus on policies regarding the educational system, increase female enrollment and improve female contribution to economic growth [5].

Muktdair-Al-Mukit (2012), conducted a study on the long-run relationship between public spending on the education sector and economic growth in Bangladesh from the time period 1995 to 2009. By using Co-integration technique the results reveal that there is a significant and positive association between the variables in the long run. There is 1% increase in education expenditure leads to a 34% increase in economic growth in the long run. This study recommends that the government should increase its education expenditure and improves the quality of education [6].

Hussin et al., (2012), checked the causality between expenditure on the education system and economic growth in Malaysia during the time period 1970 to 2010. By using Vector Auto Regression (VAR) method the results show that education expenditure and economic growth is

positively cointegrated in a long run time period. This study concludes that human capital plays a significant role in prompting Malaysian GDP [7].

Mallick et al., (2016), aimed to examine the relationship between education expenditure and economic growth for 14 Asian countries during the time period 1973 to 2012. By using FMOLS and Pedroni co-integration, the results show that there is long-run positive and a significant relationship between education expenditure and economic growth. Education is a key variable for economic growth so that the government of each country should be prior education sector and increases its spending on a share of the budget. Moreover, the government spends for each sector of education including technical educations for the long-term economic benefits [8].

Nowak and Dahal (2016) attempted to examine the association between education and economic growth in Nepal for the time period 1995 to 2013. By employing the OLS and Johansen Co-integration technique the results reveal that there is a significant and positive relationship between education and economic growth in the long run. This study recommends that policymakers must pay serious attention to the development of the education system and make efforts for improvement of the quality of primary, secondary and higher education level that further leads to economic growth [9].

Afridi, (2016), investigates the relationship between human capital and economic growth in Pakistan during the time period 1972 to 2013. The results of the study suggest that there is an effective need to invest for better outcomes in the long run for the bright future of Pakistan. More expenditure on health and education make sure the people to serve the nation efficiently [10].

Syeda Anam Hassan & Nazish Rafaz (2016), study was conducted to find the role of female education in the process of economic growth by using OLS regression method over the time period 1990-2016 and suggested that there should be a low fertility rate in the economy that can contribute efficiently for economic progress and only Female education will reduce the level of fertility rate. This study suggested that there is a fundamental need for investment in female education. The government needs to subsidies' the student as well as teachers that will increase the quality of education. In the concluding the section of the study, it is significantly suggested to policy elites of the country that "Government of Pakistan should increase its public spending on education and pay more attention towards improving the quality of education at primary, secondary and high schools. Technical and vocational institutes would develop that help to increase the female labour force participation. Policymakers should make policies regarding less developed areas and make education less costly for them. Funds are appropriately allocated for each region across the country and have efficiently utilized without any corrupt and fraudulent practice" [11]. The female literacy rate in Pakistan is considerably low as compared to male literacy rate and it is even lower in rural areas of Pakistan. One other notable factor of the Pakistani population is that Pakistan is called the youngest country of the world, a major portion of its population is young. Therefore, a young population with a major portion of females is a very important resource that if used wisely can help to bring benefits to the country in all terms. The new government, elected in July 2018, stated in their manifesto that nearly 22.5 million children are out of school. Girls are particularly affected. Thirty-two percent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan, compared to 21 percent of boys. By grade six, 59 percent of girls are out of school, versus 49 percent of boys. Only 13 percent of girls are still in school by ninth grade. This Paper has been written in the above context to evaluate the school education system of Pakistan in details and suggests a recommendation for improvement in schools in public interest.

## Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. A strategic review of Pakistan performance in female literacy.
- ii. Assess the major obstacles in female literacy of the region and its nexus with growth and development of the country.
- iii. Formulate sustainable development plan to increase female literacy in the region to empowerments of the women in the society.

## Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- I. what is the present status of the country in female education?
- II. How have country planned girl's schools' infrastructural improvements at large?
- III. What is a sustainable development strategy to bring improvement to female literacy to reach the destination of sustainable human development?

## Significance of the Study

The study examines female literacy problems and proposes a coherent mid-term plan that can be used by the policy makers and implementers to improve the ratio of enrollment and quality of educations for females in the broader concept of SDGs.

## METHODOLOGY& DATA

The qualitative/descriptive statistics strategy has been adopted to identify empirical issues. Personal observations of the author as an education expert, the outcome of specific and targets groups, primary and secondary data of some individuals and organizations have been used to strengthen the hypothesis. Evidence from Economic Survey of Pakistan, Secondary data of Federal Bureau of Statistics Sindh Bureau of statistic, Sindh Education management information system (SEMIS) National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) Alif Alan annual publication are also used.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

i. The study of female literacy tends examines literacy rate of female since 1951 to 2015, it seems that in the year 1951 in the group of all ages literacy rate of both sexes was 17.9% and a literacy rate of female was 13.9%. In the year 1961 in the age group of 5 and above the literacy rate of both sexes has an increase in urban that was 24.8% and in rural, the percentage was 10.6. Whereas the female literacy rate is 21.3 in urban and 2.2 in rural. There is a considerable increase in the year 1972 in the age group of 10 and above the literacy rate of both sexes in urban is 41.5 and 14.3 in the rural. Although the female literacy rate in urban is 30.9 and 4.7 in the rural. The age group of 10 and above in the year 1981 the literacy rate has slightly increased to 47.1 in urban and 17.3 in rural for both sexes and the literacy rate of female in urban is 37.3 while the percentage of rural is missing in the table, There is a significant increase in the year 1998 in the age group of 10 and above the percentage of both sexes in urban is 63.08 and 33.64 in rural. The literacy rate of female in urban has increased from 37.3 to 55.16 and in the rural, the percentage is 20.09. The female literacy rate in the year 2004 in urban is 44 and in the rural, it shows 29 percent, whereas the literacy rate of both sexes in urban is 71 and in rural, the percentage is 62. Table 01 below mentioned the details of female literacy time trends in Pakistan from 1951to 2015 in depth.

**Table-01**  
**Female Literacy Trends of Pakistan Since 1951**

Year of Census	Age Group	Literacy rate (%)			
			Total	Urban	Rural
1951	All Ages	Both Sexes	17.9		
		Female	13.9		
1961	Age 5 and above	Both Sexes	16.9	34.8	10.6
		Female	6.7	21.3	2.2
1972	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	21.7	41.5	14.3
		Female	11.6	30.9	4.7
1981	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	26.2	47.1	17.3
		Female	16.0	37.3	
1998	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	43.92	63.08	33.64
		Female	32.02	55.16	20.09
2004	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	53	71	62
		Female	40	44	29
2010	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	58	74	49
		Female	46	67	35
2014	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	60	76	51
		Female	49	69	38
2015	Age 10 and Above	Both Sexes	58	74	49
		Female	48	68	36

[12] Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey Reports, and [13] Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17.

A minimal increase can be seen in the year 2010 in both sexes from 71 to 74 percent has increased in urban though there is major decrease in rural from 62 to 49 and in the female literacy rate there is utmost increase in urban from 44 to 67 percent and in the rural it has increased from 29 to 35 percent. In the year 2014, the literacy rate of both sexes in urban is 76 and 51 percent in rural. Relatively the literacy rate of female in urban is 67 and in rural, the percentage is 38. The literacy rate in 2015 there is a marginal decrease in both sexes, the literacy rate in urban is 74 and 49 in rural. The female literacy rate is 68 percent in urban and 36 percent in rural. In the above figure, the historical literacy rates in Pakistan is portrayed. In 1950, the female rate was 16.40% and it was 16.30% in 1961. It increased in 1972, with a total rate of 21.70%, including urban and rural areas. It was 26.30% in 1981, with urban areas 47.10% and rural areas 17.30%. In 1998, the total was 43.90%, with rates of urban and rural areas of 63.08% and 33.64%. In 2004 and 2009, it was 54% and 57%, including urban and rural areas, and in 2012, it was 57%, the same as in 2014.

**ii. Female Literacy Trends in Pakistan and Provinces:** Punjab is Pakistan's most popular province, with 56% of the country's population and a number of important cities, as well as over 3.8 million illiterates. This means that millions of people over the age of 15 can neither read nor write. The literacy rate of Punjab in 1972 was 20.07% and 46.60% in 1998. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, the rate was 71%, 62%, and 61%. Most of the improvements were made in elementary schools, but much work remains to bring further changes i.e. enhancement in the quality education provided in the public sector schools and to tackle challenges of out of school children to bring them in schools to literate.

Sindh is Pakistan's most populated province, with a population of over 25 million people. Its literacy rate is below 50% in rural areas. In 1972 and 1998, it was 30.20% and 45.30%. Similarly, in 2010, 2013 and 2014, it was 69%, 60%, and 56%. Overall, many children are deprived of education, as evidenced by the greater percentage of child labour.

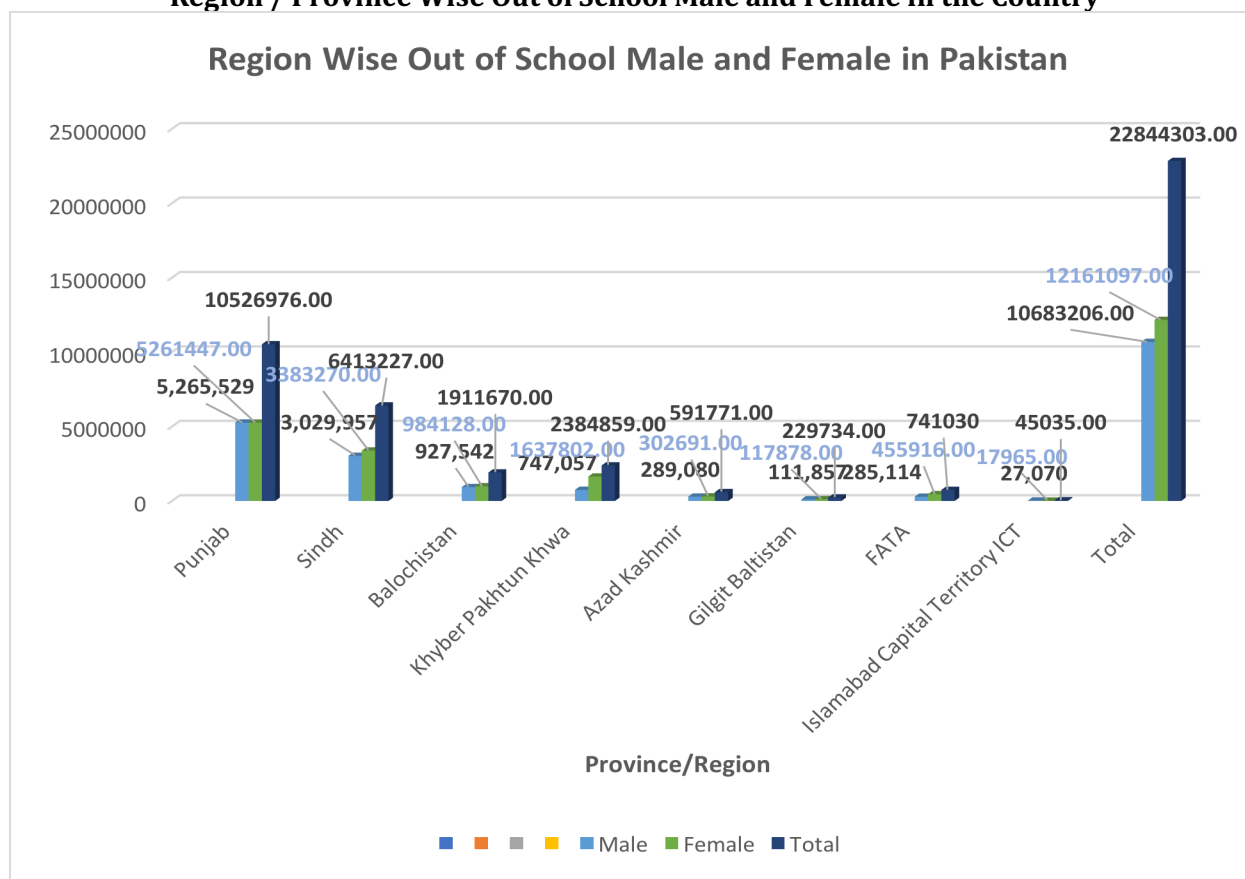
In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to the growing number of security threats, families are always concerned about sending their children to school. In 1972 and 1998, the literacy rate of KPK was 15.50% and 35.40%, and in 2012, 2013 and 2014, it was 60%, 52%, and 53%. According to recent reports, KPK's literacy rate is 50%.

Baluchistan province contains a desert and a mountainous region; thus, it has always been problematic to build school-based amenities. 28% of its population is literate, with males at 39% and females at 16%. The literacy rates of Baluchistan in 1972 and 1998 were 10.10% and 26.60% in urban and rural areas. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, the rates were 50%, 44%, and 43%, respectively. Children are the most valuable asset in any country; it is a challenge for Pakistan to improve its literacy rate.

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir girls' education is quite better than other region but an earthquake of 2004 destroyed their schooling infrastructures and usual border clashes also harm their literacy growth at large. The Gilgit Baltistan has declared separate province in the recent past but due to difficult geographical location and poverty affected their literacy growth in the past. The community development network of Agha Khan spreads overall and particularly female literacy in the region which is appreciable and example for other communities to learn and follow this path in universal human development interest. The literacy rate of the tribal area mostly known in Pakistan as the FATA region is also not satisfactory due to its backwardness and lower investment in the infrastructure of the region. It's totally a traditional society and remained under control of Islamic extremist they are still not in favour of female literacy due to their time-barred notions.

The female literacy situation in Islamabad capital territory is improving but its surrounding rural communities are still in age. The region wise male, female and total enrollment is also given in details in table 02 for further understandings of the readers as evidenced by the data of Pakistan education statistics of 2016-2017.

**Table-02**  
**Region / Province Wise Out of School Male and Female in the Country**



[14] Source: The data of Pakistan education statistics of 2016-2017.

Note: The figure is some total of Primary, Middle, Secondary and Higher secondary of the regions.

### Major obstacles in increasing female literacy trends in the country:

**Feudal structure of the country:** The Feudal system in Pakistan is largely found in Rural/remote areas of Pakistan. The politically and powerful landowners are not in favor of education, particularly to the education of women. For their power, arrogance, and entitlement they don't allow anyone to open a school in their specific areas, as they fear if girls got educated they will have to suffer for their power and dominance. If one girl is educated, in future she will educate her whole families, this fear in feudal landowners is highly toxic for the society. The whole feudal structure in the country is responsible for the girls deprived of education. Due to the impact of Feudal, tribal and capitalist mindset, women's status is divided and it also has damaged women's lives. Lack of democracy and feudalistic practices are to be blamed for the widening gender gap in the educational system and increasing female labor force in Country. This also leads to gender disparities and due to this school going girls are at risk.

**Insecurity of girls:** The lack of a secure environment is also one of the reasons for low female literacy in Pakistan. In the rural cities, the female school doesn't have proper infrastructure, nearly every female school in the remote area have damaged boundary wall or even have no boundary wall. So, the parents avoid taking their children to the schools. One important factor is the lack of female teachers in the girl's schools. Also, there is a lack of schools for girls. Social insecurity and poverty are additional to the constraints in the promotion of education. Adding to that there is no proper transportation for girls. As there are very few schools for girls, it is

very difficult for parents to leave children on their own. Political insecurities also have made parents reluctant to allow girls to travel without any transportation outside of the community to attend school.

**Socio cultural taboos:** It is also important how socio-cultural taboos impact on female education in Pakistan. As a socio-cultural environment in Pakistan women suffer from gender discrimination. In Pakistan, there is an important variety in the status of women across classes, region and the rural/urban divide due to uneven socio-economic development. In villages, most of the parents do not allow girls to go outside of their community or family and even they are of the view that education for girls is useless and pointless. In Rural setups of Pakistan religious, social and cultural grounds for female education are very rigid, where female education is extremely prohibited. It is very dark and depressing due to the many socio-cultural issues. The mindset of the male dominant society, misinterpretation of Islam and lack of seriousness in government towards female education are major causes. There are also some typical tribal societies where girls are limited inside the boundary wall and have very rare mobility to schools. Gender disparity

**Missing facilities in female schools:** Children have the right to have the basic facilities in schools such as toilets, safe drinking water, safe and clean environment and basic information on hygiene and sanitation almost every school in the remote area suffer from depriving of these basic facilities. There is no safe drinking water for children, the children are not given basic information about hygiene and sanitation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report of 2017 indicates the government's poor policy and apparent failure to provide high-quality education in Pakistan. Almost one third of the female schools have no water or any basic sanitation or toilets. Only half of all government schools have proper usable toilets. Due to these missing facilities, the majority of the girls leave schools only in a month every year. Every year proposal to provide basic facilities in the female schools are included in ADP but they are dropped by higher authorities. The schools have no proper infrastructure and the schools have no proper furniture for the students, so they sit on the floor to attend classes even in the rainy and winter seasons.

**Male Teachers' Domination in Female Schools:** Teacher's gender is one of the causes in student's learning. It dominates their learning. There are several issues that can be best taught by their own gender rather than the opposite gender. There are more than 80% of female students who are shy, and not confident enough due to socio-cultural taboos and religious norms in Pakistani society. They are flexible in learning from a female teacher because they can share their issues with her. In the case of a male teacher, mostly parents of lower areas do not allow the female child to study if the teacher is male. In a government school, mostly there are female teachers if the school is only for girls. But there are a number of schools where there is a lack of teachers, so the government hires male teachers which leads to female student's illiteracy as parents make them leave the education and sit back home.

**Low incentives for girls in public schools:** Children always need some motivation or a thing that encourage them to anything, also in education students need some impactful motivation and uplifting to keep their attachment with the schools. But there is a very low inducement for girls. The stipend is one good incentive for girls in public schools, they can keep saving of this stipend when they need something like a book or dictionary they can easily utilize it without asking their parents. Furthermore, this initiative can be a good motivational force to improve girl's enrollment in schools. Public-Private Partnership is also a significant incentive for improving girl's enrollment.



**Poverty and child labour nexus:** there is a great impact of poverty and child labor on female literacy. It is a very common belief in Pakistani society that the education of the male child is more important than the female child. Most importantly when there is poverty. Poverty leads to child labour and if there is female and male both children at home, parents tend to make a female child do labour and the male child gets to study. So, poverty leads to child labour, and child labour leads to female illiteracy. The 10 million male and 12 million female are out schools in Pakistan majority of them are serving as child labour and needs the attention of policymakers for their future carrier.

**Mothers' illiteracy:** Mother's illiteracy is a very important and supreme factor that leads towards low female literacy in any country, as it is understandable that an educated woman has all the skills, courage and self-confidence to be a better parent. We know that women's education is the most impactful way to address global poverty. There is a very common issue highlighted almost everywhere that if mothers are not literate then it has a great impact on a child's education. Female literacy gets affected more because females tend to be like their mothers. And if mothers are not educated, female child mostly gets a refusal for studying more by the family. Mother's education can steer towards lower fertility, population growth. It is also affiliated with the opportunities for improved income and family wellbeing. Moreover, educated mothers have a more positive influence on girl's academic achievements, also educated mother can help girls with their daily homework and help them with understanding concepts. Illiterate mothers lack in understanding conceptual things and they lack self-confidence. Mothers involvement plays a vital role in shaping a girl's future if the mother is illiterate it will lead the girl's life to a very wrong direction and girls will drop out of school. Research suggests that mothers who are educated up to secondary level are more likely to improve school retention Three times relative to those who had no education.

**Conclusions and way forward:** Female literacy is a major indicator of economic development of countries where illiteracy has slowed down economic activities and socio-economic growth and development. Recently, many nations have managed to reach a 100% literacy rate and now successfully compete in the global economy. In Pakistan, the literacy rate is far from satisfactory and compares critically with many nations because more ten half of its female is out of schools in the digital age of the 2nd century. Pakistan's economy is undergoing many economic and non-economic problems, including large increases in population and poverty, both of which continue to have a negative impact on the country's literacy rate. The government alone cannot create reforms required in the time-barred education system it needs the partnership of communities for rapid growth in female literacy. Private sector and collaboratively formal and non-formal partnership approach can bring rapid change. The population of Pakistan consists of more women than the men and women can build up the nation if literate with quality education to make them skilled labour force for robust economic growth. It is also found that the female literacy rate of Pakistan remained very low even after many endeavors by the governments of different times. Education is considered as the responsibility by law in the currently implemented constitution. The responsibility, however, is now distributed between the federal and provincial government after the 18th amendment. The provincial government with the help of the federal government is working to increase the rate of literacy in the country by providing differential incentives. The government yet need to promote education in girls as they will raise a generation and will build a strong nation. School infrastructure facilities effects positively on health, behavior, engagement and learning outcome of girl's students. The wide and clean classrooms with ample space are more conducive to providing appropriate learning environments as evident globally. The Classrooms creating private study areas as well as smaller learning centers reduces visual and auditory

interruptions and related to quality education. A comprehensive and coherent strategy is needed to provide basic facilities to girl's schools on war foot basis in the greater public interest. It is research-based evident that the most out of school's girls are found in hard area of Pakistan i.e. desert and hilly area of Sindh and Punjab tribal and arid regions and hilly range of northern /western regions including Dusht desert area of Baluchistan province which cover the millions square kilometers respectively is less privileged arid areas with very low literacy rates of females. The parents of these illiterate girls are nomadic tribesman with scattered population traditionally been livestock producers they engaged their girls to manage cattle's in farm and fields. Their communities may be supported to open their girls' schools on subsidy-based and un-attractive area incentives for female ' students may be given for supports to promote female literacy with the participation of the community's elder's to managed day to day affairs of the girls education in their tertiary in their own welfare and interest. A coherent communications strategy is needed to aware of those regarding sustainable benefits of female literacy with attractive incentives to overcome the issue of child labour among them. Community participation is imperative to achieve success in the promotion of education at a grassroots level in the backward regions. It would be a very useful and timely approach to review the organizational framework of community awareness, mobilization, and participation which has to be more flexible and less prescriptive in nature to promote the cause of female literacy at large in the best interest of tomorrow people. There should be a separate coherent planning and educational development strategy for reaching to the out-reach girls and disadvantage female groups to enhance their capacity and capabilities with more focus on survival rates of already enrolled females in the schools and to minimizing the dropout from female schools due to the above discussed major obstacles prevail in Pakistani society.

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