



Education and Poverty in South Asia

Presented at the Bristol Poverty Institute, April 29, 2021

Dr. Arif Naveed

Department of Education, University of Bath

State of poverty in the region

Proportion of poor population		
Country	National poverty line	Multidimensional Poverty Index
Bangladesh	24.3 (2016)	41.1
Bhutan	8.2 (2017)	37.3
India	21.9 (2011)	27.5
Maldives	15.7 (2009)	1.9
Nepal	25.2 (2010)	35.3
Pakistan	24.3 (2015)	43.9

Source: OPHI (2018); Various cited in Naveed and Sutoris (2020)

Wealth based educational inequality in SA

Country	Primary completion parity by wealth (2010-15)			Lower secondary completion parity by wealth (2010-15)			Upper secondary completion parity by wealth (2010-15)		
	Wealth	Poorest	Poorest	Wealth	Poorest	Poorest	Wealth	Poorest	Poorest
	parity index	males %	females %	parity index	males %	females	parity index	males %	females %
Bangladesh	0.70	57	68	0.40	30	27	0.10	4	3
Bhutan	0.47	41	44	0.21	22	9	0.11	10	2
India	0.87	86	82	0.76	73	67	0.39	28	21
Nepal	0.62	65	54	0.40	49	26	-	-	-
Pakistan	0.27	30	16	0.14	18	5	0.07	6	1

Source: GEMR 2017

Impact of education on poverty



Evidence from quantitative studies

- Poverty higher amongst households with illiterate heads in Bangladesh (Ali & Talukdar 2010).
- Longitudinal analysis (1988–2004) in Bangladesh (Nargis and Hossain 2006).
 - Households that fell into poverty at one point were the ones who could not invest in the education of their children.
 - Improvement in households' educational levels was one of the five factors associated with breaking out of poverty.
- Longitudinal analysis (2001, 2004, 2010) in Pakistan (Arif and Farooq 2014).
 - The lack of education was associated with the persistence of poverty as well as falling into poverty.
 - Schooling of household head significantly reduced the probability of chronic poverty as well as moving into poverty.
- Long-range (1986-2013) , household-level returns to schooling in rural Pakistan (Naveed 2019).
 - Increasing returns, differentiated across measures; higher returns on women's schooling;
 - Positive returns on the money spent on schooling over and above levels of schooling.

Evidence from quantitative studies

Evidence from India

- During 1993-2005, secondary and above levels of schooling of household heads associated with lower probability of falling into poverty (Krishna and Shariff 2011).
 - Once poor, HHH schooling had no effect in breaking out of poverty.
- During 2004-05 to 2011-12: Middle education had 45% chances of upward mobility in first period and 58% in second period (Dang & Lanjouw 2018).
- During 2005-12, even primary schooling helped reduce the odds of falling into poverty, but **only college degree or above** had significant effects on escaping poverty (Thorat et al. 2017).
- Odhisa – Universal educational expansion benefited non-poor; need for targeting the poor (Mohanty 2016).
- A wider conducive environment for schooling to disrupt the transmission of poverty over time in Andhra Pradesh (Krishna 2005).

Making sense of the statistical patterns

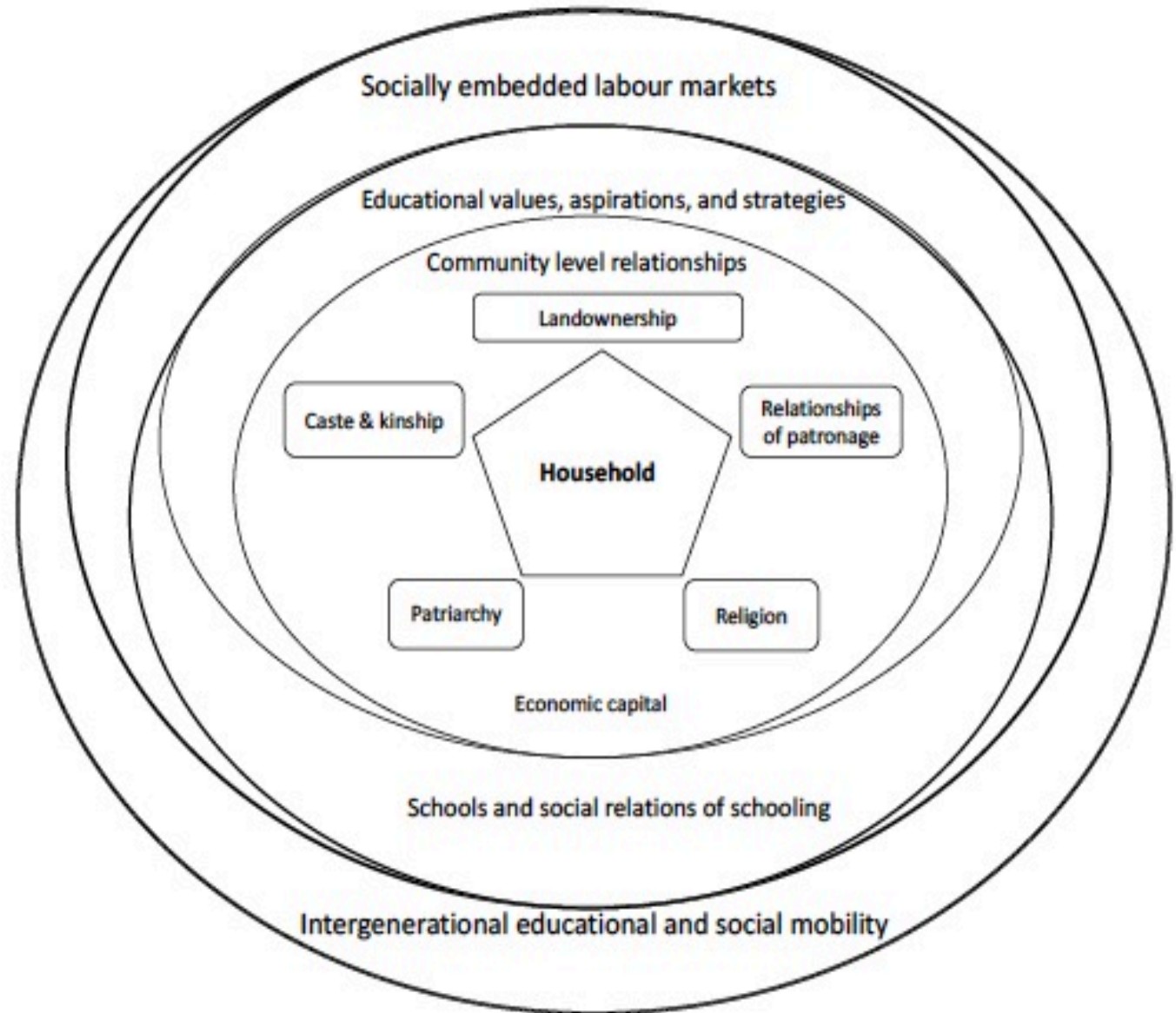
- Statistical evidence is varied, context and time specific.
 - Wider social, cultural, institutional, and economic factors in shaping the transformative potential of schooling.
- **Low levels** of schooling may have a significant role in **preventing** families from falling into poverty by offering them necessary resources, opportunities and strategies to ensure the minimum standards of living.
- **Once under poverty**, education either did not help at all, or **higher levels** of education were required to break out of poverty.
- Considering the patterns of educational attainment for the poor, an overwhelming majority could not attain higher levels of schooling and are thus likely to remain poor.
- Unless educational systems in South Asia demonstrate parity at all levels, schooling is not very likely to be a viable strategy for the poor to improve their living conditions.

Making sense of the statistical patterns

- Non-economic pathways out of poverty (Colclough 2012)
 - Health, nutrition and fertility; youth transitions; gender relations; citizenship
- Changing/increasing marginal returns to schooling ?
- Increased supply of labour with primary schooling?
- Educational expansion and low per-capita spending?
- Increased years of schooling but poor learning levels?

Listening to the voices of the poor

- Recognising the collective, relational social life where the conditions of poverty are reproduced or challenged (Naveed and Arnot 2019).
- Hierarchical position in the social(power) structure gives different values and meaning to people. These further give them a differentiated cultural capacity to aspire thus widening inequality in and through education, over the long run. (Naveed 2021):



A Pentagonal rural social structure in Punjab (Naveed 2021)

Schooling within the social structure

- Schooling an integral part of *taraqqi* – social mobility for rural families.
- Great desires for achieving a good life but the *pentagonal* social structure differentiates meanings, values, aspirations and strategies for social mobility and the role of schooling in it (Naveed 2021).
- A non-linear role of schooling in poverty reduction – creates opportunities for upward mobility for some but also creates new inequalities for others (Arnot and Naveed 2014)
- Intense power struggles over scarce resources and opportunities, and a sense of exclusionary social closure enacted by those in the positions of privilege, with weaker counter strategies of the dominated (Naveed 2019; forthcoming).
- The complex interplay between structure and agency, and between cultural, economic and social resources can leave schooling as a mechanism for social reproduction, capable of perpetuating poverty and existing inequalities rather than encouraging social mobility.

Concluding remarks

- Education is significant in the lives of the poor. However, there is a limit to what schooling alone could achieve in poverty reduction.
- Educational expansion in the highly unequal contexts can exacerbate educational, social and economic inequalities. Without creating a level-playing field, as a precondition, there is a little that schooling alone can achieve in reducing inequality and eradicating poverty in contexts such as rural Pakistan.
- The struggle for educational inclusion and equality has to be pursued outside the education systems at least as much as the inside of these systems. There is a need for wider social and economic transformation for schooling to play an equalizing and pro-poor role.

References

- Ali, E., & Talukder, D. (2010). Analysis of poverty dynamics: Bangladesh perspective. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 27(1), 273.
- Arif, G. M., & Farooq, S. (2014). Rural poverty dynamics in Pakistan: Evidence from three ways of the panel survey. *Pakistan Development Review*, 53(2), 71–98.
- Arnot, M., & Naveed, A. (2014). Educational outcomes across the generational and gender divide: The rural family habitus of Pakistani families living in poverty. *Gender and Education*, 26(5), 505–523.
- Krishna, A. (2006). Pathways out of and into poverty in 36 villages of Andhra Pradesh, India. *World Development*, 34(2), 271–288.
- Krishna, A., & Shariff, A. (2011). The irrelevance of national strategies? Rural poverty dynamics in states and regions of India, 1993–2005. *World Development*, 39(4), 533–549.
- Mohanty, A. C. (2016). Education, income distribution and intergenerational mobility: Findings from field data. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 13(1), 33–56.
- Nargis, N., & Hossain, M. (2006). Income dynamics and pathways out of rural poverty in Bangladesh, 1988–2004. *Agricultural Economics*, 35, 425–435.
- Naveed, M. A. (2021). Overriding social inequality? Educational aspirations versus the material realities of the rural families in Pakistan. In Rose, et al. (Ed.). *Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts: Research and policy in international development* (Pp.123-43). London: Routledge.
- Naveed, M.A. (2019). Reconceptualising the role of schooling in intergenerational social mobility: Patterns, perspectives and experiences from rural Pakistan. PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.41890>
- Naveed, A., & Arnot, M. (2018). Exploring educational and social inequality through the polyphonic voices of the poor: A habitus listening guide for the analysis of family-schooling relations. *Comparative Education*, 1–22.
- Thorat, A., Vanneman, R., Desai, S., & Dubey, A. (2017). Escaping and falling into poverty in India today. *World Development*, 93, 413–426.