



Education: South Asia's foundation for the future

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

Benjamin Franklin

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ABSTRACT

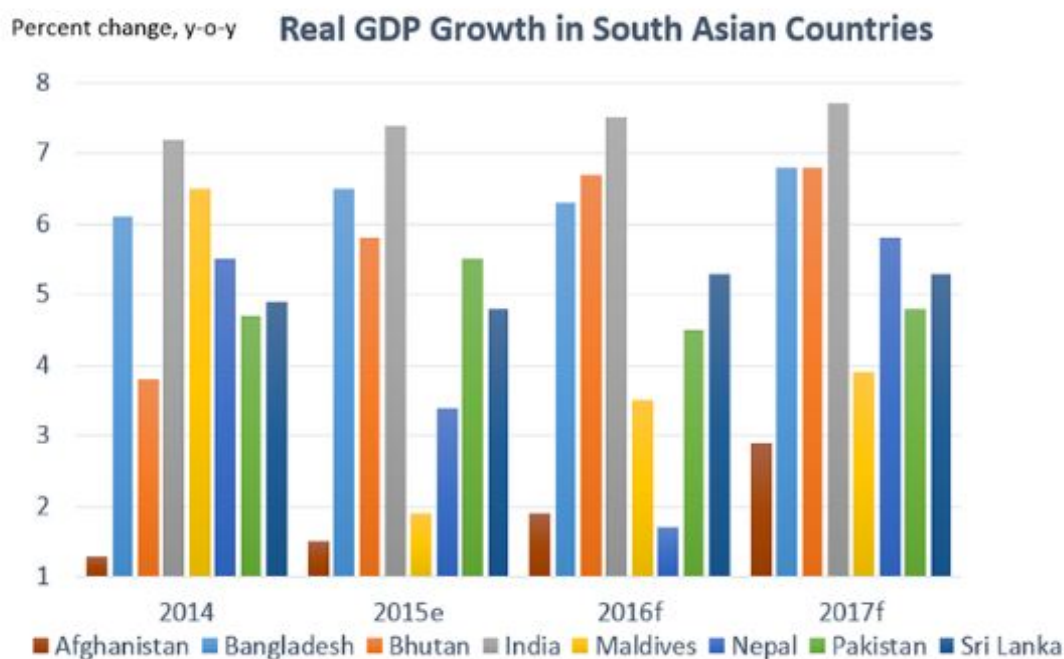
This policy brief analyses the current state of basic education in South Asia and the different areas that require attention to improve it. This study focuses in particular in three key areas: the impediments to school inscription and attendance; the teachers' role for quality education; the ideology in education, in particular religion and nationalism. The policy brief argues that the quality of schools rather than attendance is the main issue to be addressed. For this, teachers are fundamental. Likewise, the content of what is being taught must also be revised in order to promote a tolerant and inclusive world vision.

1. Introduction

Education has been the fundamental pillar of development all over the world, and South Asia¹ is not an exception. According to the World Bank, South Asia is the fastest growing region in the World as of 2015, and is projected to stay at the top of the ranking in 2016 as well. Its biggest country, India, has led the growth rate in the region.²

Graphic1³:

Factsheet: Most South Asian Countries Show Potential to Accelerate Growth



This is an area where improvements have taken place in the last few years but there is still high potential for improvement, particularly in light of concerns regarding the sustainability of the region's growth which can only happen if the countries invest in their youth through education.

Looking at the European case, it can be observed that education definitively had an important role in its evolution. Education evolved and rose slowly but surely from the Modern Era. The first big leap came with the printing press invention in the 15th century. Much like the internet in the past decades, it revolutionised the ability to share knowledge and is often considered the greatest technological advancement, not because of its intricate science but of its larger ramifications.⁴ Prior to this, books were rare, expensive and available only to the elite. Printing touched on key elements: it democratised books, increased literacy rates and allowed

¹ SADF defines South Asia according to the SAARC member state list: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

² World Bank, "South Asia Economic Focus, Spring 2016 : Fading Tailwinds", World Bank, 2016, p.19-20. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24016>

³ World Bank, "South Asia Remains World's Fastest Growing Region, but Should Be Vigilant to Fading Tailwinds", press release, World Bank, 10 April 2016. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/04/09/south-asia-fastest-growing-region-world-vigilant-fading-tailwinds>

⁴ Dewar, James A., "The Information Age and the Printing Press: Looking Backward to See Ahead", Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 1998. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P8014/index2.html>

people to share knowledge and ideas. Moreover, there was an increase in the quantity of published works, research and studies and their ideas reached larger audiences, allowing counterparts to build on each other's research.⁵

In our time, education plays a significant role in fostering cooperation between European countries. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) underlines precisely this point in article 14:

“Article 14 - Right to education

1. Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training. [...]”⁶

In 2007, the importance of education was once again emphasised as an EU shared competence in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, both in the Preamble and in Article 6:

“Preamble [...] Determined to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating [...]

Article 6 - The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be: [...] education, vocational training, youth and sport; [...]”⁷

Nonetheless, the European Union's most recognisable work in the field of education is the Erasmus Programme, a student exchange programme that started in 1987. Since then, the Programme grew to include also non-EU countries and was expanded to other fields with Erasmus+. The Universities and students foster innovation and share good practices in the context of this Programme whilst improving job prospects for the students and promoting inclusion as well as sustainable development.⁸

On a global scale, very few dispute the importance of education. Considered a cornerstone of our societies, it is reflected in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Article 26

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

⁵ Lauer, Josh, *The Birth of Print Culture: The Invention of the Printing Press in Western Europe*, in Schager, Neil (Ed.), “Science and Its Times”, Vol. 3. Detroit, Gale, 2001.

⁶ “The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”, 2000. www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

⁷ “Consolidated Version Of The Treaty On The Functioning Of The European Union”, 2007. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016E/TXT&from=EN>

⁸ European Commission, “Erasmus+: About”, European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en#tab-1-0

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”⁹

Another example of the importance given to education is the “Dakar Framework for Action” adopted at the World Education Forum in 2000 according to which “*All children must have the opportunity to fulfil their right to quality education in schools or alternative programmes at whatever level of education is considered ‘basic’.*”¹⁰

Most notably, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals recognised the global importance of universal education, and in particular primary education, the second goal being “*Achieve universal primary education (...) Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling*”¹¹. On a global level, the improvements between 2000 and 2015 have been widely reported and praised with primary school enrolment rate going from 83 percent to 91 percent and the number of out-of-school children dropping from 100 million to 57 million.¹² UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia last records of 2012 indicate 10,1 million primary school aged out-of-school children and estimates a total of 33 million school aged children (according to their definition this includes all children between 5 and 14 years old).¹³

More recently, the Millennium Development Goals were followed by the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4 aims to “*Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning*”¹⁴. The quality element that was added shows that enrolment is not the only front on which we should be working. There is an understanding that beyond the school enrolment, what is most important is what the child will actually learn.

Furthermore, there is now an understanding that education is not limited to literacy and numerical skills. Education includes all the essential knowledge that gives the tools to develop citizens and allows them to be able to exercise their citizenship and participate as active members of society. This means it is also important to see the context of what is being taught regarding worldwide views. This is essential to face global challenges such as extremism and fanaticism. Studies have shown that education has an important role in diminishing violence, being one of the few areas that aggregates consensus regarding its positive impact in mitigating violence in the long-term.¹⁵

The “World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs” from 1990 shows a clear understanding of this:

“Meeting basic learning needs

⁹ “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, United Nations, 1948. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

¹⁰ “Dakar Framework for Action”, World Education Forum, 2000.

https://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiT0cyXq_TPAhXhAMAKHcqCDN4QFggeMAA&url=http%2F%2Funesdoc.unesco.org%2Fimages%2F0012%2F001211%2F121147e.pdf&usq=AFQjCNFhxEpGpVWlfZ3DO8g8Lxnc6ij-kg

¹¹ United Nations, “Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education”, United Nations Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>

¹² United Nations, “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015”, United Nations, New York, 2015. [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%2015\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%2015).pdf)

¹³ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, “Educate all Boys and Girls – South Asia Headline Results – 2016 Progress Report”, UNICEF ROSA, 2016. <http://www.unicefrosa-progressreport.org/childeducation.html>

¹⁴ United Nations, “Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”, United Nations. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

¹⁵ Winthrop, Rebecca; Graff, Corinne, “Beyond Madrasas Assessing The Links Between Education And Militancy In Pakistan”, Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Working Paper 2, June 2010, p.25. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1629254

1. *Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem-solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. [...]*
2. *The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world.*
3. *[...] transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values. [...]*
4. *Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training.*¹⁶

The present study will start by looking at the national, regional and interregional efforts to improve education in South Asia as well as where basic education currently stands in the region as a whole and in each country. It will be followed by an analysis divided into three parts: the impediments to school inscription and attendance; the teachers' role in quality education; and ideology in education, in particular religion and nationalism.

2. Regional views and joint efforts for education: South Asian countries, the EU and international organisations

The main problems in the education field in South Asia are the difficult access and excellence in general. At the regional level, South Asian countries vary quite a lot regarding enrolment of primary school-aged children but some have troubling numbers. This problem is compounded by high dropout rates. At the secondary and tertiary levels, similar problems are consistent. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that South Asia is strengthening its educational systems. Most countries have recognized the importance of the role of education and the quintessential need to prioritise education in order to sustain development.¹⁷

There have been initiatives to address education problems at the regional level through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It was established in 1985 to unite the governments of its Member States¹⁸ to join the forces and promote their mutual progress and development. In 1998, education was included in agreed areas of cooperation

¹⁶ “World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1”, World Conference on Education for All, Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990, New York, Inter-Agency Commission (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank) for the World Conference on Education for All, 1990. <http://www.un-documents.net/jomtien.htm>

¹⁷ Tilak, Jandhyala B. G., “South Asia - Education Development after Independence, Recent Policies and Approaches, Conclusion”, 2016. <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2434/South-Asia.html>

¹⁸ Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan joined in 2007.

and a Technical Committee was formed to deal with urgent issues in the region. In 1996, the Third Ministerial Conference on the Children of South Asia was held in Rawalpindi and concluded with the establishment of the “Decade of the Rights of the Child (2001-2010)”. In this context, at the Eleventh Summit, in January 2002, the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements on the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia was signed in Kathmandu. The Convention emphasized the need to facilitate the development of the full potential of South Asian children. South Asian leaders stressed the urgent need to focus on children. This Summit also agreed to mobilize the necessary resources and to intensify actions aimed at achieving a set of priority goals, including quality basic education. To monitor and assess the implementation of various provisions of the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangement for the Promotion of Child Welfare, a Regional Task Force was formed in all the Member States. The Regional Task Force met in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The First Meeting of the SAARC Ministers of Education was held in Colombo in 2009, preceded by the Meeting of the Senior Officials of the Ministries of Education. This Meeting considered issues relating to SAARC-UNESCO Cooperation. During the Twelfth Summit in Islamabad, the SAARC Social Charter, signed by the Heads of State, reaffirmed the importance of achieving free education to all children between 6 and 14 years old. The Member States agreed to share their respective experiences and technical expertise to achieve this goal.¹⁹

In parallel, the European Union has set up education programmes to connect both regions focusing particularly on higher education. One example is FUSION (Featured Europe and South Asia Mobility Network), an EU project aimed to foster partnerships between nine EU institutions and eleven Asian institutions from eight different countries, six of them South Asian (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and India, the other two being China and Thailand). The key objective of FUSION is to enhance the capacity for international cooperation between universities, organizing and facilitating transfer of people, know-how, culture, best practices, and training of the research and academic staff. The FUSION project aims to provide education, research and management in many areas in teaching, research and professional practice.²⁰ On a wider scale, the European Commission set up the Asia Link in 2002 with a focus on promotion of regional multilateral networking between European higher education institutions and countries in Asia.²¹ Most of these programmes are now part of Erasmus+.

The EU also had a bilateral approach with several countries, creating strategic partnerships. The EU started to work with India in 1994 with the goal of attaining universal elementary education, which included namely grassroots initiatives and teacher training.²² In more recent years, both sides signed the Joint Declaration in the field of Education & Training (2008)²³. This declaration focuses training and higher education rather than elementary education. Indeed there seems to be a higher proliferation of partnerships between the EU institutions and South Asia on higher education than at the elementary level. Once again, these are often linked to the Erasmus+ programme.

¹⁹ “South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation”, SAARC, 2009. <http://saarc-sec.org/>

²⁰ Fusion, « Fusion-edueu », Fusion, 2016. <http://fusion-edu.eu/FUSION/>

²¹ European Commission, “European Commission; International Cooperation and development; Building partnerships for change in developing countries”, European Commission, 2016. http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/asia/eu-support-education-and-science-collaboration-asia_en

²² European Union, “Knowledge Partnership EU India Cooperation in Education”, European External Action Service, 2012, p.5-11.

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/documents/publications/eu_education_brochure_20120209.pdf

²³ “Joint Declaration on Education”, 2008.

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/documents/project/declaration_on_education_en.pdf

Another very popular mechanism for the EU to support education projects in South Asian countries are initiatives funded through European mechanisms that are not actively ran by the EU. There is a wide number of successful projects such as the EU funded project “Improving the Quality of Elementary Education in Jammu & Kashmir” managed by Save the Children.²⁴ On this front, the EU has also provided grants to several NGOs with vocational training in mind, particularly in India.²⁵

There are other key initiatives that should also be taken in consideration such as the South Asia Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI²⁶), a joint initiative of UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Part of the larger global initiative which started in 2010, its main goals are to “*make significant and sustained reduction in the number of out-of-school children around the world by 1) developing comprehensive profiles of excluded children using consistent and innovative statistical methods; 2) linking these profiles to the barriers and bottlenecks that lead to exclusion; and 3) identifying, promoting and implementing sound policies that address exclusion from a multi-sectorial perspective*”.²⁷

These initiatives provide interesting information. According to UNICEF, South Asia report on Out-of-School Children Initiative, in 2015, 26,5 million lower secondary school-age children were out of school. The majority of out-of-school children can be found in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. For every 100 children who enrolled in primary education, 36 of them drop out from school, and this is the highest attrition rate in the world. It is known that 14,5 million children dropped out before reaching the last grade of primary school in 2012. Compared with the average time of formal schooling in developed countries from primary to tertiary education of 16,4 years, children in South Asia spend only 11,3 years.²⁸

However, benefits and progress are clear, including on the improvement of child nutrition; expansion of pre-school education (55 percent of children in South Asia were enrolled in preschools as of 2012) and getting more children to school (from 36,7 million children out-of-school in 1999 to 9,8 million in 2012, globally).²⁹

3. Education in South Asia: where do we stand?

The importance of education as well as its critical role in social, economic and political development has been widely recognized in South Asia.

India has one of the largest education systems in the world and its student population exceeds the total population of many countries. Nonetheless, this does not place India ahead of other countries of South Asia in educational development because it is still inadequately meeting the challenges of growth in the rapidly globalizing and competitive world.

²⁴ European Union, “Knowledge Partnership EU India Cooperation in Education”, European External Action Service, 2012, p.9.

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/documents/publications/eu_education_brochure_20120209.pdf

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11-13.

²⁶ Children of primary or lower secondary school age who are not enrolled in primary or secondary education. Out-of-school children can be categorized into those who have never enrolled in school and those who enrolled but left school before completing the full primary and lower secondary education cycle

²⁷ Helin, Leotes Lugo; Sarkar, Urmila, “Educate All Girls and Boys in South Asia; The Global Out-of-school Children Initiative”, UNICEF South Asia, Kathmandu, 2015, p.1.

http://www.unicef.org/rosa/EducateAllGirlsandBoys-UNICEF_ROSA.pdf

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3-7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

In literacy and basic education, Sri Lanka and the Maldives with more than 90 percent of the population that graduated from primary school obtained very good results from their investment in education.

South Asia has made an impressive progress in expanding access to basic education and the net enrolment rate, going from 75 percent in 2000 to around 89 percent in 2010 and primary completion rates from 65 percent in 1999 to 85 percent in 2009.³⁰

Table 1 Overview of education in South Asia³¹

Country	Legal guarantee of free education	Compulsory education (age group)	Primary school-age OUT-OF-SCHOOL children (latest available year; percentage)		Graduation Ratio from primary school (latest available year; percentage)	
Afghanistan	Yes	7-16	-	-	2014	61,79 percent
Pakistan	Yes	5-16	2014	27,02 percent	2014	58,9 percent
India	Yes	6-14	2013	2,26 percent		
Bangladesh	Yes	6-10	2010	5,48 percent	2011	60,23 percent
Nepal	Yes	-	2015	2,87 percent	2014	98,21 percent
Bhutan	Yes	-	2014	11,01 percent	2012	98,1 percent
Sri Lanka	Yes	5-14	2014	2,66 percent	2014	110,85 percent
Maldives	Yes	-	2009	3,47 percent	2014	96,91 percent

The progression from 2000 to 2014 with the available data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics can be seen in the graphic here below.

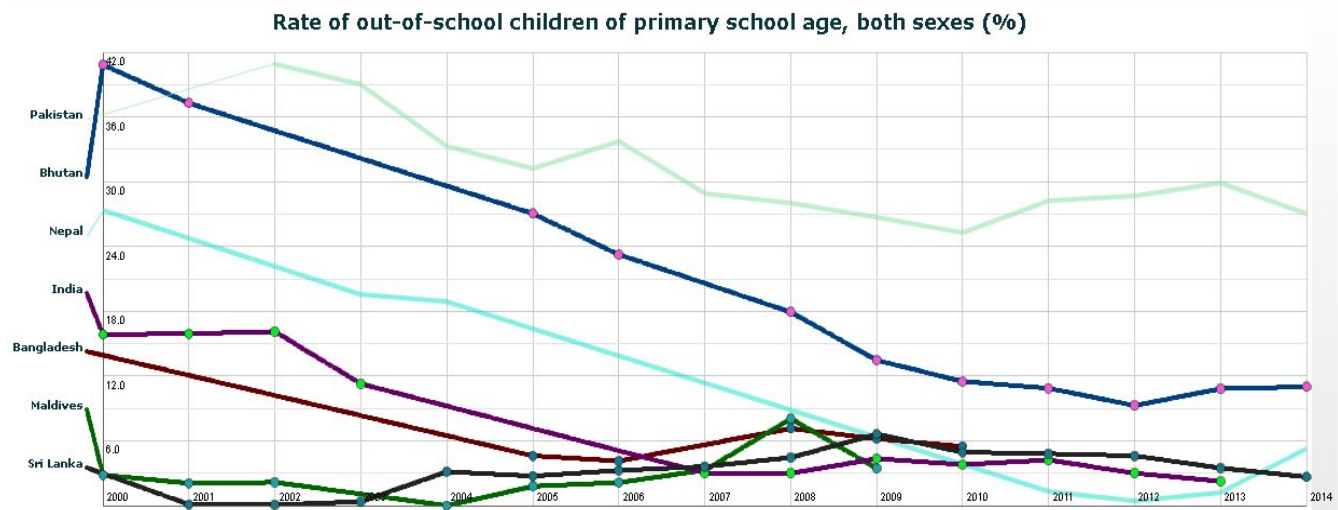
Graphic 2³²: Rate of out-of-school children age, both sexes (percent) from 2000 to 2014

³⁰ Dunder, Halil; Beteille, Tara; Riboud, Michelle; Deolalikar, Anil. “Student learning in South Asia: challenges, opportunities, and policy priorities”, Directions in development: human development, Washington DC, World Bank Group, 2014, p.9-11.

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/554381468294334286/Student-learning-in-South-Asia-challenges-opportunities-and-policy-priorities>

³¹ Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre,

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx> ; UNESCO, “Education for All global monitoring report, 2016: Education for people and planet: creating sustainable futures for all”, UNESCO, 2016, p. 403



All countries in South Asia have made progress; Sri Lanka has the smallest evolution due to its near universal primary education early on and the Maldives improved slightly despite their positive starting point. Data on Afghanistan does not allow an analysis of its progression regarding out-of-school children but it is worth mentioning that Afghanistan still ranks amongst the countries with lowest rates of adult literacy.³³ All the others countries had much progress to do. The most significant change among these countries happened in Bhutan, mostly due to its low starting point. Pakistan also made some significant progress although it still clearly stays behind the regional average. Nasir Amin, Head of National Education Management Information System in Pakistan, stressed the country's difficulties in keeping up with other South Asian countries in education, noting in particular the 24 million children out of school, the poor net enrolment rate and a high dropout rate.³⁴ Bangladesh, India and Nepal made progress by staying under the 6 percent out-of-school children threshold. It is also important to keep in mind that enrolment rates may vary within the countries. For example in India, out-of-school rates are significantly higher in the poor northern and eastern regions including the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh while in southern and western states such as Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are lower.³⁵

With 41 percent of the Indian population under 19 years and 70 percent of the students attending public schools, the challenge is enormous. The Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) by Pratham shows that reading has declined since 2008, in particular in public schools. Schools that do not meet the new infrastructure standards were forced to shut down despite often being low cost institutions, forcing students to move to lower quality/standard schools.³⁶

ASER results clearly show that more than half of the children in the 5th standard (10 years old) cannot read at 2nd standard level (7 years old). Out of these, 20 percent are not even able to read words. Numerical skills are also problematic with half of the 5th standard (10 years

³² UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data Centre, 2000 to 2014.

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/BrowseEducation.aspx>

³³ South Asia Democratic Forum, "Combating Jihadism in Afghanistan", Policy Brief, N. 2, 25 November 2015, p.5. <http://sadf.eu/new/blog/combating-jihadism-in-afghanistan/>

³⁴ Dawn, 'Pakistan lags behind South Asia in education' 20 September 2016. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1284872>

³⁵ Dunder, *op. cit.* p.11.

³⁶ Kingdon, Geeta, "Indian schools are failing their students", International New York Times, 16 December 2015, p.8.

old) students not being able to subtract. More worrisome, the trend in India from 2008 to 2014 has been negative with reading levels and number recognition decreasing and the gap between public and private schools widening.³⁷ Without this fundamental skill, it is difficult for a child to progress.

International comparisons of actual learning levels are difficult in South Asia since the countries do not participate in major international assessments. The only exception was the two Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh. Out of 74 countries, their 2009+ PISA³⁸ test results were second to last (the Kyrgyz Republic being the last one) in mathematics, reading and scientific literature. The two Indian states refused to participate in subsequent PISA assessments and other states or South Asian countries also kept their distances.³⁹ Nonetheless, these are essential to understand how the education policy is performing and the best way to move forward.

But while primary education enrolment targets have been met, secondary enrolment has been stuck at 59 percent.⁴⁰ In India, 43 percent of students drop-out before completing upper primary school (at 13 years old).⁴¹ The poor outcomes can be partly explained by the low public expenditure on education in relation to GDP. In South Asian countries the percentage of the GDP spent on education is far below the recommended threshold of 6 percent: 2 percent in Bangladesh, 3,8 percent in India, 2,5 percent in Pakistan and 1,6 percent in Sri Lanka.⁴²

4. Impediments in the access to schools/education

Despite fairly high rates of enrolment in primary schools in most of South Asian countries, there are still improvements to be made. Enrolment does not actually mean attending school and graduating. Furthermore, lower enrolment rates have been reported to be a risk factor for violence. In this line of thought, a recent study suggests that investment in education aimed at expanding access can potentially mitigate the risk of continued militancy.⁴³

In India, the government has shown motivation to reform its education policy, in particular with the momentum that came with the 2009 “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act”:

“Right to free and compulsory education.

3.(1) Every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education.”⁴⁴

³⁷ Pratham, “ASER 2014: Annual Status of Education Report”, Pratham, January 2015, p.10-17.

<http://www.asercentre.org/Keywords/p/234.html>

³⁸ Programme for International Student Assessment

³⁹ Mitra, Sumit, “India’s PISA Moment: Are we Turning into a Nation of Nitwits?”, The Quint, 2 July 2015.

<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2015/07/02/indias-pisa-moment-are-we-turning-into-a-nation-of-nitwits>

⁴⁰ Kumar, Nagesh; Hammil, Matthew; Raihan, Selim; Panda, Swayamsiddha, “Strategies for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in South Asia: Lessons from Policy Simulations”, Development Papers 1601, United Nations ESCAP, August 2016, p.14. <http://www.unescap.org/resources/development-paper-1601-strategies-achieving-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-south-asia>

⁴¹ Sahni, Urvashi, “Primary Education in India: Progress and Challenges”, Brookings, US-India Policy Memo, January 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/primary-education-in-india-progress-and-challenges/>

⁴² Kumar, Nagesh, *op. cit.*, p.14.

⁴³ Winthrop, *op. cit.*, p.51.

⁴⁴ “The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009”, The Gazette of India Extraordinary, No.35 of 2009. <https://www.nls.ac.in/ccl/cclmedia/ER/miles.pdf>

Nonetheless, according to ASER little improvement has been seen in enrolment rates and actual learning has declined. While India has a steady enrolment rate over 96 percent, only about 71 percent of children enrolled in public schools attend class on a given day.⁴⁵ The reasons behind the absence of the children in schools are varied and complex. This study will synthetically draw the attention to the factors, which are the most urgent to be tackled, as they have the most important impact on the access to school.

- Gender-related factors

In South Asia, the trend regarding girls' access to education shows that they continue to lag behind. In particular, girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, continue to have lower access to primary education.⁴⁶ Regarding primary education, the enrolment rate for girls is 4 percentage points lower than the rate for boys at 84 percent. At secondary level, the difference widens with 7 percentage points of difference, as the enrolment rate of girls is 68 percent while the one of boys is 75 percent.⁴⁷

The key reasons behind this are the traditional and religious views and the idea that the honour of the girl could be at stake if she attends school or if the school does not have proper sanitary conditions. In India, only 55,7 percent of school have useable girl's toilets.⁴⁸

In Afghanistan, on top of the Taliban influence, many schools are operating from houses, tents or under trees so there are honour and security concerns involved. Additionally, although the rate of girls entering schools has risen, the dropout rates are extremely high.⁴⁹

On a similar line of thought, Pakistan does not have the necessary infrastructure with 44 percent of the schools not having electricity supply, 34 percent not having drinkable water and 28 percent not having any bathroom facilities at all. On a security concern front, 30 percent of schools do not have boundaries. As it was shown by the Pakistani Taliban attack on Malala Yusufzai's, security of girls is a major concern.⁵⁰

Furthermore, the teacher element has also been proven to have a big impact. A 2013 study concluded that:

*“The presence of female teachers has an enormous positive influence on the enrolment and regular attendance of girls, especially in the upper primary onwards. Similarly, the effect of teachers belonging to the local communities can also have a very positive influence on enrolment and attendance, and restrict dropout.”*⁵¹

On a more positive note, the gender difference has also been seen regarding the learning results in the class XII examinations conducted by the Board of school education (Haryana) with 70,77 percent of the girls scoring passing grades against only 55,7 percent of the boys.⁵²

⁴⁵ Pratham, *op. cit.*, p.4.

⁴⁶ Kumar, *op. cit.*, p.14.

⁴⁷ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, “Gender Equality in Primary and Secondary Education”, UNICEF ROSA website. https://www.unicef.org/rosa/education_9744.html

⁴⁸ Pratham, *op. cit.*, p.8.

⁴⁹ South Asia Democratic Forum, *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁵⁰ Dawn, ‘Pakistan lags behind South Asia in education’ 20 September 2016.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1284872>

⁵¹ Pratichi Institute, “State of Elementary Education in Assam, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Odisha and Tripura”, Pratichi Institute, Kolkata, 2013, p.7. http://pratichi.org/sites/default/files/STATUS_percent20OF_percent20ELEMENTARY_percent20EDUCATION_percent20IN_percent20THE_percent20STATES_percent20OF_percent20ASSAM_percent20JHARKHAND_percent20MIZORAM_percent20ODHISHA_percent20AND_percent20TRIPURA.pdf

⁵² Singh, Sat, “Girls outshine boys by 15 percent”, The Tribune India, 19 May 2016. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/girls-outshine-boys-by-15/238817.html>

- Access to schools

Countries such as India or Bangladesh experiencing strong urbanisation in the last few years are having trouble keeping up with the urban demand for public schools. On the other hand, in countries such as Afghanistan and Bhutan, the majority of children who have trouble accessing schools live in rural areas.⁵³

On this front, India has made remarkable progress in the past few years. Currently, “98 percent of habitations have a primary school (class I-V) within one kilometre and 92 percent have an upper primary school (class VI-VIII) within a three-kilometre walking distance.”⁵⁴

- Discrimination and marginalisation

Discrimination and marginalisation take different forms in South Asian countries. The caste system is one of the most visible dynamics of exclusion in India and Nepal. In Bangladesh, there is evidence that children from ethnic minorities face discrimination.⁵⁵

A common factor of marginalisation of wide segments of children in some areas is linked to the language in which the teaching takes place. For children who belong to linguistic minorities, the fact that the classes do not take place in their mother tongue puts them in strong disadvantage. For example in Assam (India), Asomiya is the predominantly spoken language by the population but the teaching is in Hindi. This has a negative impact in the learning ability of the students in these communities and a Pratiche study concluded that these children become underachievers if forced to attend school in a language that is not their mother tongue.⁵⁶

- Financial considerations

Financial costs must also be taken into consideration when discussing the enrolment and attendance rate of children. A study in India found that the financial cost of child education was a significant deterrent for poor families.⁵⁷ These can take several forms such as fees, the cost of the material, transportation, among others.

There is also the case of children whose parents are seasonal workers who are forced to move from one location to the next according to the available work. In these cases, it is very difficult for the children to attend school on a systematic way.⁵⁸

Incentive initiatives such as the stipend programme in Bangladesh have been credited for achieving the boy-girls parity in schools. In India, the famous mid-day meal has been an important step in countering the costs and motivating families. In India, around 85 percent of public schools currently supply the mid-day meal on school days.⁵⁹

5. Key element for quality education: the teachers

⁵³ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, “Disparities In Education In South Asia: A Resource Tool Kit”, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu, 2011, p.16.
<http://www.schoolsandhealth.org/Shared%20Documents/Downloads/Disparities%20in%20Education%20in%20South%20East%20Asia-%20A%20Resource%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>

⁵⁴ Sahni, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *op. cit.* 2011, p.13, 31.

⁵⁶ Pratiche Institute, *op. cit.*, p.16, 29.

⁵⁷ Sharma, Rashmi; Ramachandran, Vimala (ed.), “The Elementary Education System in India: Exploring Institutional Structures, Processes and Dynamics”, Routledge, New Delhi, 2009, p.303.

⁵⁸ UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *op. cit.*, 2011, p.13

⁵⁹ Pratham, *op. cit.*, p.8.

In parallel, recent studies show that quality, and not quantity, of education is the key factor in explaining labour market outcomes and country growth rates.⁶⁰ Infrastructure and enrolment rates have reached high levels but quality remains a big problem. Plus, if the educational foundation is bad, there is little that can be built on it.⁶¹ Consequently, whilst the focus was for a long time on enrolment, quality is now in the centre stage of education policy.

With this in mind, South Asia has achieved a point where most of the region must focus on quality. One quarter to one third of children in South Asia who graduate from primary school lack basic literary and numeracy skills.⁶²

Teachers are the key element in making sure that South Asian children can receive a proper education. In the words of UNESCO Institute of Statistics Director Silvia Montoya, “*education systems are only as good as their teachers.*”⁶³ This statement has been backed up by studies, which have consistently shown that teachers are the single most important factor in student learning and the most effective way to improve school.⁶⁴

- Teacher availability and teacher-to-student ratio

A recent UNESCO report estimates that South Asia will need about 15 million new teachers in order to be able to meet the goal of universal education by 2030.⁶⁵ Teachers’ numbers are very low for the rapidly growing needs of South Asian countries. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the quantity of teachers.

The pupil-teacher ratio has been identified as essential to increase student achievement. India recognised how important it is by including this factor in the 2009 Right to Education Act, which mandates a maximum of 30:1 ratio.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, in 2014, according to ASER, 72,8 percent of schools complied with classroom-teacher ratio norms and less than 50 percent complied with pupil-teacher ratio norms. This severely undermines the teacher’s ability to transmit knowledge to the students.⁶⁷ Moreover, the geographic distribution of the teachers across the country is just as important and there is evidence of an uneven distribution. Even in rare cases where there is a surplus of teachers in states such as in Mizoram, they are poorly distributed.⁶⁸

- Teachers’ training

According to the World Bank, “*many South Asian teachers barely know more than their students.*”⁶⁹ This is a very worrisome state of affairs, which is backed up by studies in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Teacher training and pedagogy are poor, because they involve very short trainings that often do not even include practical teaching. In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, to become a teacher in primary school no university degree is

⁶⁰ Tazeen Fasih, “Linking Education Policy to Labor Market Outcomes”, The World Bank, Washington, 2008, p.2-5. http://adapt.it/adapt-indice-a-z/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/fasih_linking_education_labor_market_outcomes_2008.pdf

⁶¹ Banerji, Rukmini, *The challenges of basic education in India*, in: Godement, Francois (Ed.), “What Does India Think?”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, p.52-53.

⁶² Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.2

⁶³ The Indian Express, “South Asia needs 15 million new teachers by 2030: UNESCO”, 6 October 2016. <http://indianexpress.com/article/education/south-asia-needs-15-million-new-teachers-by-2030-unesco/>

⁶⁴ Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.22.

⁶⁵ The Indian Express, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Azim Premji Foundation, “Pupil-Teacher Ratios in Schools and their Implications”, Azim Premji Foundation, February 2014, p.2. http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/pdf/PTR_percent20report.pdf

⁶⁷ Pratham, *op. cit.*, p.8.

⁶⁸ Pratiche Institute, *op. cit.*, p.6.

⁶⁹ Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.23.

required, but one year training is a sufficient qualification.⁷⁰ One particularly worrying case is Afghanistan where only about half of the teachers meet the required educational standards.⁷¹

In India, the problem of the “*poor motivation and skills of the teachers and supervisors*”⁷² has been documented. On this line, in certain countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, there are reports of patronage-based recruitment.⁷³

While some teachers do not have the proper training that would allow them to be efficient at educating the children, others also lack motivation while at the same time the supervision system is not efficient enough to keep them accountable.⁷⁴ It is also important to note that big disparities can be found within each country in South Asia. Another issue is that there is poor coordination in developing a coherent training programme for teachers to be applied nationwide.⁷⁵

- Teachers’ absenteeism

High absenteeism rates are a serious problem and they come as a consequence of the lack of accountability of the teachers, as we mentioned beforehand. A survey reported in 2010 teacher absenteeism rate of 23,6 percent in rural India and another survey reported a rate of 11 percent in rural Punjab.⁷⁶ Due to low attendance many schools incur in the possibility of shutting down. In Pakistan, 13 percent of government schools in Punjab were closed either for non-availability of teachers or teacher absenteeism.⁷⁷

6. Ideology in education: Religion and Nation

After having considered if the children are attending school and if they are learning the basic necessary skills for their development, it is important to analyse the paradigms, the perspectives and the narratives that are offered to the children in their education and what becomes their own Weltanschauung.

In this context, textbooks play a crucial role in constructing the children’s views of others, stimulating tolerance and adhering to humanistic values and human rights principles.

Whilst several South Asian countries have rounded up critiques on their textbooks, the Pakistani public school material has been particularly controversial. The Pakistani curriculum has been pointed out as one of the main instigator of the sectarian and intolerant student views that have been reported.⁷⁸ Misinformation campaigns are very common and, in the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁷¹ South Asia Democratic Forum, *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁷² Sharma, Rashmi, *op. cit.*, p.3.

⁷³ Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.28.

⁷⁴ Sharma, Rashmi, *op. cit.*, p.301.

⁷⁵ Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.26.

⁷⁶ Dundar, *op. cit.*, p.27.

⁷⁷ Ali, Saleem H., “Pakistan’s Madrassas: The Need For Internal Reform And The Role Of International Assistance”, Brookings Doha Center, Policy Briefing, August 2009, p.3.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/pakistans-madrassas-the-need-for-internal-reform-and-the-role-of-international-assistance/>

⁷⁸ Nayyar, Abdul Hameed; Salim, Ahmad (eds.), “Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan”, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, 2004, p.77.

<http://unesco.org.pk/education/teachereducation/reports/rp22.pdf>

context of education, victimisation of the Muslims and conspiracy narratives are very spread-out and should not to be underestimated.⁷⁹

Education expert Pervez Hoodbhoy has been particularly vocal on this issue stating, “*please keep our students away from the rotten science textbooks published by the Sindh Textbook Board (STB), an entity operating under the Sindh Ministry of Education*”. Poor quality text books are a grim reality. Not only the language and the problems to be solved are poor but also the books are filled up with wrong facts. It is undeniable that this undermines the quality of children education.⁸⁰

The second problem with textbooks in Pakistan is that the distinction between religion and theology and other subjects is not always clear. In the words of Hoodbhoy,

*“When Pakistani students open a physics or biology textbook, it is sometimes unclear whether they are actually learning science or, instead, theology. The reason: every science textbook, published by a government-run textbook board in Pakistan, by law must contain in its first chapter how Allah made our world, as well as how Muslims and Pakistanis have created science.”*⁸¹

The way textbooks are written and the omnipresence of religious precepts comes as the heritage from the Zia period, which is known as the “*ideology of Pakistan*” and often described as a “*curriculum of hatred*”.⁸² Besides the “*ideology of Pakistan*” and strongly entrenched religious elements, the textbooks are also biased on other subjects, in particular regarding India and Hindus.⁸³ Historical facts are altered in order to strengthen Pakistani national identity and promote Indian bashing and stereotypes.⁸⁴ Beyond the dogmatic textbooks, teachers are a key component in the way the information in the textbook is interpreted by the students. Studies show that teachers do not manage to transmit the complexity of social, historical and religious issues to their students.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, India is no stranger to nationalism in its educational programme. Dinanath Batra, known to defend the Indianisation of education in the country, has been one of the Bharatiya Janata Party advisers on education policy.⁸⁶ Batra’s work has been said to “*highlight Indian thinking*” and geopolitical views of an undivided India according to which the map of India should include neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, among others. The inclusion of his books in the Gujarat primary school syllabus’ programme was not consensual due to their nationalistic views.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Ali, Saleem H., *op. cit.*, p.4-7.

⁸⁰ Hoodbhoy, Pervez, “Burn these books, please!”, Dawn, 21 December, 2015.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1225815>

⁸¹ Hoodbhoy, Pervez, “Is it science or theology?”, Dawn, May 07, 2016. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1256797>

⁸² Usmani, Maheen, “The Ideology of Thought Control in Pakistan”, Dawn, 1 August 2011.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/648524/the-ideology-of-thought-control>

⁸³ Mustafa, Xubeida, “The Continuing Biases in our Textbooks”, Policy Brief, Jinnah Institute, 30 April 2012.

<http://jinnah-institute.org/policy-brief-the-continuing-biases-in-our-textbooks/>

⁸⁴ Winthrop, *op. cit.*, p.42.

⁸⁵ Mustafa, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ Sharma, Navneet, “Dinanath Batra to guide Haryana on education”, Hindustan Times, Chandigarh, 13 November 2014. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/dinanath-batra-to-guide-haryana-on-education/story-gvD9sjUQcYTFONR3PnLDpK.html>

⁸⁷ First Post, “Birthday cakes bad, 'Undivided India': Dinanath Batra's works now in Guj schools”, 24 July 2014. <http://www.firstpost.com/living/dinanath-batra-to-saffronise-guj-syllabus-birthday-cakes-are-bad-burma-is-india-1633781.html>

Sectarianism and extremism has also been pinned down on religious education, more specifically on Madrassas. Historically, education has been closely linked to religion in every region. Just like in Europe, several religions in South Asia are “go-to” education providers for many children. Madrassas attract low-income families since they usually do not charge fees.⁸⁸ While families facing the conundrum between low standard public schools and unaffordable private schools, there are also an important number of families who prefer to have their children studying in Madrassas for religious reasons. Education can hardly be discussed in South Asia without acknowledging the role of religion. However, madrassas are controversial educational institutions in South Asia, making headlines in western news outlets on a regular basis.

It is necessary to understand that there are big differences from one madrasa to the next. There are different kinds of madrassas and it is not possible to put them all in one category. Different madrassas will teach differently and the theological approach and content vary widely. Nonetheless, “*there is a general fear that the influence of Wahhabism throughout South Asia will dilute moderate interpretations of Islam in South Asia.*”⁸⁹

The religious landscape in South Asia has been changing with the influence of Saudi Arabia since the late 1970s. Through funding of mosques and madrassas, Wahhabism gained growing influence and resulted in “*increase in Islamist violence in Pakistan, Indian Kashmir, and Bangladesh*”⁹⁰. During the days of the Cold War, this was backed up by the United States who saw a common interest in the fight against the atheist Soviet communist. Later, Pakistani security authorities took advantage of madrassas to influence its neighbourhood, in particular Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir.⁹¹ In fact, Ahl-e-Hadith, a Wahhabi Saudi Arabian organisation, claims membership of over 16 per cent of the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim population.⁹²

The problem with madrassas is less related to where they are located and more on the theological front they follow. Some countries such as Pakistan are reported to have many madrassas heavily financed by Saudi Arabia that have a more radical interpretation of the Quran – Salafist Madrassas /Wahhabism.

Foreign financial support to Pakistani Madrassas has had deep internal consequences by fuelling the internal conflicts in Pakistan and deepening the divide between Shias and Sunnis. Pakistan has been for a number of decades the stage for competition between the parties, in particular Saudi Arabia and Iran.⁹³ In fact, according to a recent report, 285 madrassas in

⁸⁸ Ali, Syed Mohammad, “Another Approach to Madrasa Reforms in Pakistan”, Policy Brief, Jinnah Institute, 22 October 2012. <http://jinnah-institute.org/policy-brief-another-approach-to-madrassa-reforms-in-pakistan/>

⁸⁹ Pillalamarri, Akhilesh, “The Radicalization of South Asian Islam: Saudi Money and the Spread of Wahhabism”, Georgetown Security Studies Review, 20 December 2014. <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2014/12/20/the-radicalization-of-south-asian-islam-saudi-money-and-the-spread-of-wahhabism/>

⁹⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁹¹ *Ibidem.*

⁹² Jolly, Asit, “The Wahhabi Invasion”, India Today, 23 December 2011.

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/saudi-charities-pump-in-funds-through-hawala-channels-to-radicalise-kashmir-valley/1/165660.html>

⁹³ Riedel, Bruce, “Why do Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for Pakistani support?”, Brookings, 11 January 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/01/11/why-do-saudi-arabia-and-iran-compete-for-pakistani-support/>

Pakistan are receiving funding and support from foreign Islamic countries.⁹⁴ Some of these schools have been considered “*breeding grounds for extremism and sectarian intolerance*”⁹⁵.

Indeed, there is evidence of correlation between large number of madrassas and sectarian violence in rural Punjab. Links have also been found between a few madrassas and international terrorism although it is not nearly as systematic as sectarianism - a much more widespread problem with international consequences.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, while students enrolled in Madrassas are a minority, their socio-political impact is disproportionately high since many Taliban leaders in neighbouring Afghanistan are the product of Pakistani Madrassas.⁹⁷

Part of the problem is linked to the fact that the oversight of the madrassas in Pakistan is very limited despite evidence of growing numbers both in rural and urban areas. Most madrassas are not even registered and, consequently, there is no tracking of their teaching neither regarding the ideological content or the performance or the student results.⁹⁸ Accountability would therefore be essential as education has an important role in mitigating violence.

Moreover, extreme doctrines pouring out Madrassas do not only influence its students, they also attain Mosques and “*contribute to spreading a xenophobic worldview*”.⁹⁹ There is evidence to support that this is already the case in Pakistan: Tariq Rahman’s study shows that intolerance and sectarianism is widely spread in Pakistan both in madrassas and public schools. It is in the elite English private schools that the students show the most tolerant worldviews.¹⁰⁰

While Pakistan’s issue of madrassas is the most documented and discussed, it is by no means limited to this country. “*The fundamentalist ideology of the Taliban is being spread through hundreds of madrassas*”¹⁰¹ in Afghanistan. According to the Afghani Government, in 2011 there were 700 madrassas registered. Nonetheless, there is evidence that the number of unregistered madrassas is much higher. According to the governor of the province of Herat in this province alone there are over 300 unregistered madrassas.¹⁰² “*The Taliban have managed to uphold and nurture their terrorist network through the constant influx of young men, brainwashed by fundamentalist mullahs in madrassas without any oversight.*”¹⁰³

The lack of oversight of madrassas is a recurring theme in South Asia. However, India has had a more “hands-on” approach by modernising the curriculum of the Madrassas, introducing disciplines such as Science, Mathematics, English and Social Studies in 1994. Nevertheless, these subjects can be studied only on a voluntary basis even if the government put in place incentives for the teachers and the madrassas during the 2000s to teach these disciplines. Although these steps were very small, over 90 percent of the Muslim community in the State of Bihar had a favourable attitude towards the modernisation of Madrassa education.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ The Nation, “285 Pakistani madrassas receiving foreign support: sources”, 20 December 2015,

<http://nation.com.pk/national/20-Dec-2015/285-pakistani-madrassas-receiving-foreign-support-sources>

⁹⁵ Riedel, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ Ali, Saleem H., *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁹⁷ Ali, Syed Mohammad, *op. cit.*

⁹⁸ Ali, Saleem H., *op. cit.*, p.3.

⁹⁹ Mustafa, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ Tariq Rahman, “Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality, and Polarization in Pakistan”, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p.80. www.tariqrahman.net/content/danizen1.pdf

¹⁰¹ South Asia Democratic Forum, *op. cit.*, p.39.

¹⁰² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.30-40.

¹⁰⁴ Kumar, Ravindra; Rout, Sarat Kumar, “A Study On The Attitude Of Muslim Community Towards Modernization Of Madarasa Education In The State Of Bihar”, Journal Of International Academic Research For

Another example of popular perception of the importance of adapting education is a study realised in Bangladesh, which found out that education is widely regarded as an important means to face the challenge of terrorism (91,2 percent of the population according to a study). This is particularly telling when taking into consideration that 71,6 percent also considered that “*terrorism, religious and ethnic intolerance are a problem*”¹⁰⁵ and 43,6 percent considered “*the National Education Policy (2010; Bangladesh) not adequate to face the challenges of terrorism, religious and ethnic intolerance*”¹⁰⁶ The same study concluded that “*the present education system of Bangladesh is not strong enough to counter terrorism, religious and ethnic intolerance.*”¹⁰⁷

This means that while a lot needs to be done in South Asian countries to counter the growth of sectarianism and extremism, there is also a perception of this need and the willingness to move forward at least among part of the population.

Beyond the ideological considerations, it is also worth mentioning that in madrassas, given their intrinsically different teaching style, which focuses on religion, the graduates are not moulded with the goal of producing competitive graduates adapted to the economic market and for employability. They are prepared mainly in view of religious social roles.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the economic argument in favour of reforming madrassas should also be kept in mind. This is also recognised by both madrassa teachers¹⁰⁹ and students¹¹⁰ who have stressed the limitations of the madrassa curriculum and the need for reforms in order to be adapted to the challenges and needs of the present world.

Multidisciplinary Impact Factor, Volume 2, Issue 12, January 2015, p.253.

<http://www.jiarm.com/JAN2015/paper19952.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Hoque, N. M. Sajjadul, “Reviewing Education Policy of Bangladesh: Is the Present Education Policy Adequate for Countering Terrorism, Religious and Ethnic Intolerance?”, South Asia Democratic Forum, September 2012, p.72. <http://sadf.eu/new/blog/reviewing-education-policy-of-bangladesh-is-the-present-education-policy-adequate-for-countering-terrorism-religious-and-ethnic-intolerance/>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁸ Dogar, Ashiq Hussain; Butt, Tahir Mahmood; Butt, Intzar Hussain; Qaisar, Shahzada, “Revisiting Pakistan’s Education System: Addressing the Key-Flaw” The Dialogue, Volume X Number 4, 2015, p.391.

http://www.qurtuba.edu.pk/thedialogue/The%20Dialogue/10_4/Dialogue_October_December2015_390-394.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Ali, Hakim; Mashhadi, Ahmad Farooq; Khan, Erum Aslam, “Role of Madrassa Education in Present Globalized Society: Perspectives of Religious Teachers of Southern Punjab”, Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS) Vol. 35, No. 2 (2015), pp. 609-618

¹¹⁰ Laghari et al., “Perceptions of students towards madrassa system of education in Pakistan”, The Sindh University Journal of Education, 41, 2011, pp.60-75.

7. Policy Recommendations

In light of the present analysis of education in South Asia, some recommendations should be taken into consideration

1. The transition from a quantitative approach to a qualitative approach in education must be the primary focus of education policy in most South Asian countries notwithstanding the importance of making sure that no child is left behind and everyone has access to basic education. This can already be seen namely with the UN Sustainable Development Goals but needs to be included in the EU foreign policy framework.
2. It is necessary to invest in training the teachers. With the current lack of professors and taking into consideration their limited knowledge, teachers' training is an absolute priority to guarantee growth and progress in South Asia.
3. Textbooks should be reviewed to guarantee "quality knowledge", tolerant views, inclusive citizenship of all religions, ethnicities and prevent any form of discrimination or fundamentalism.
4. The EU, UN and other international as well as national actors must be diligent and ensure that they do not fund any organisations, instruments or officials that are in any way involved in terrorism or promote blatant fundamentalist positions.
5. In particular, the EU must take into consideration its financial limitations and demand accountability whilst ensuring that the funds provided by European financial instruments linked to foreign cooperation and policy such as Horizon 2020 are well used.

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