

Launch of a Study on Female Secondary Schooling, Early Marriage and the Opportunities and Choices of Rural Bangladeshi Women

Bangladesh has made substantial progress in a number of human development indicators in the past two decades, including declines in fertility and child mortality and the achievement of gender parity in primary and secondary education. But there are important obstacles which constrain overall development, including the persistence of early marriage and childbirth for women, high rates of female secondary school dropout, gender inequality within the households and low female participation in formal employment. To address these issues, the University of Kent (UK) is undertaking a three-year study on female secondary education and the long-term opportunities of rural Bangladeshi women, funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

The study will focus specifically on the afore-mentioned issues, in an effort to understand how increased access to secondary schooling for girls affect these constraints and whether other types programmes – on adolescent development, employment skill training, etc., -- can complement the formal education the girls obtain in secondary schools. To address these questions, the study will make use of the Female Secondary School Subsidy Programme (FSSP), which was introduced throughout Bangladesh during the 1990's by the government and a number of donor organizations. The women who first benefitted from the scheme (entering secondary school in the mid-1990's) will at present be in their late 20's and early 30's. The timing of the FSSP provides a significant opportunity to explore how access to secondary schooling shaped the future lives of rural Bangladeshi women and provide insights regarding the issues highlighted above. The study will involve, in its first phase, a nationwide survey of households, with questions targeted specifically women who reached secondary school age during the years immediately before and after the launch of FSSP. The second phase of the project will involve a survey of secondary schools attended by the survey respondents. The research team will also conduct in-depth interviews with female pupils in 20 secondary schools and madrasas to understand how access to secondary schooling influence their aspirations and choices.



A series of seminars and workshops will be organised during the second and third year of the project with key stakeholders, development practitioners and policy makers to communicate findings from the study and take feedback which can be incorporated into the analysis.

The study is being led by development economists Dr Zaki Wahhaj (University of Kent) and Dr Niaz Asadullah (University of Reading) and will include a team of researchers and enumerators based in Bangladesh and the University of Kent. For further information, please contact



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