

# Protecting the gains in rural child education

Indeed there are some gains to protect in regard to rural education. For example, there is an increase in enrolment, with more girls attending school. New school structures have been built across rural areas in the country.

However, amid the gains, challenges still abound. These challenges need to be prioritised so as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all by 2030.

A lot more needs to be done to firmly protect, strengthen and concretise the gains in rural child education.

We need to keep learners interested in learning by having the schools well facilitated and equipped. While there is an increase in enrolment, especially in primary schools, large disparities between rural and urban schools still remain. From poor school structures to under-resourced and ill equipped classrooms, children in rural schools are disadvantaged.

**All children deserve an inclusive and quality education...**



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Education



Many are discouraged and end up losing interest in school, ultimately dropping out.

Then, there is the issue of sanitation. Several rural schools are lacking in this area yet this is very critical, considering that learners are expected to spend long hours in school. Therefore, provision of separate toilets for teachers, boys and girls, as well as enough hand washing stations in the schools goes hand-in-hand with protecting the gains in rural child education.

School meals: While urban school going children are "suffering" with excess to eat and drink, their rural counterparts hardly have enough to take them through the school day. But who exactly has failed rural learners on this? The echoes could as well point to the government but no, school administrators, parents and the community can do better here.

Enough and qualified teaching staff in rural schools: Ironically, more and more teachers are graduating from the various universities every year. However, it's sad to note that many would rather choose to stay jobless than teach in rural schools. Now, this problem has been compounded with the salary increase for science teachers, while Arts teachers continue earning peanuts. As a policy, government should consider tangible incentives that can draw more teachers to work in rural schools. This will help to accelerate SDG 4, which calls for a substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers by 2030.

Surmounting cultural beliefs and norms that keep the girl child of school: For instance, home chores like fetching water from far away and tending to the farms during school time. Children have to help at homes, but rather at reasonable times, so that school isn't just a secondary thing when they are exhausted and can't concentrate. When children lag behind in school, they easily lose motivation and may eventually abandon it altogether.

For the girls, the consequences are dire, as they face an increased risk of being forced into early marriage and pregnancy. As a result, limited career opportunities mean they are at peril of living in poverty rendering them dependent on husbands or relatives. This makes it difficult for the girls to constructively build their own life and choices, hence stifling their potential and capabilities.

Introducing digital education in rural schools: Learners in rural areas don't have access to the same technology as their urban peers. Actually, many lack the basic knowledge of how to operate a computer. Technology is now a necessity in all areas of our lives, even more so to learners. With access to a computer and secure internet they can be able to significantly learn as they connect to the global world full of enormous opportunities.

Need to redesign policies that take advantage of rural cultural capital: Communities and policymakers could unlock untapped potential within rural schools and enhance educational outcomes for all learners regardless of where they live.

All children deserve an inclusive and quality education because it is one of the most powerful vehicles for attaining sustainable development.

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