



# LEAPS and Youth Development in Pakistan



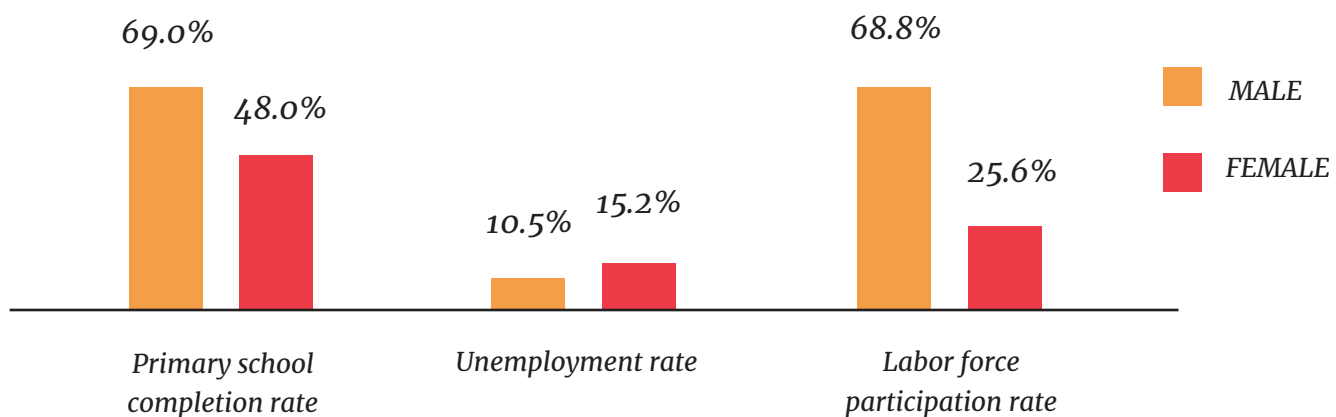
# LEAPS

Youth Leaders For Early Childhood

Assuring Children Are Prepared For School

**L**EAPS, a youth-led early childhood care and education (ECCE) programme, trains female youth in Sindh, Pakistan, aged 18 to 24 years with a minimum 10th grade education, to implement high-quality care and education to young children, aged 3 ½ to 5 ½ years. In doing so, this intergenerational program not only supports young children’s access to early childhood education, but also supports key targets of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for youth development.

In Pakistan, there is a high demand for youth opportunities in training, employment, and education. While 13% of youth are unemployed globally <sup>1</sup>, approximately 30% of youth in low- and middle-income countries are not enrolled in education, are not employed, or are not participating in training opportunities <sup>2</sup>. Throughout the country, there are significant disparities in males’ and females’ educational attainment and participation in the labor force. In rural Pakistan, the primary school completion rate for males is over 20% higher than that of females <sup>3</sup>. While 52.4% of males in Pakistan have completed lower secondary school, only 46.3% of females have done so <sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, for youth ages 20 to 24 years in rural Pakistan, the unemployment rate is 10.5% for males as compared to 15.2% for females, and the labor force participation rate for females is 43% lower than that of males <sup>3</sup>.



One approach that aims to address gaps in youth education and employment is positive youth development (PYD). Programmes that adopt a PYD framework support youth in building skills and competencies, foster agency, and provide youth with opportunities to meaningfully contribute to the community <sup>4</sup>. Investing in youth has also been shown to result in increased personal and national economic success and to play a role in sustainable development <sup>5</sup>.

*Figure 1: Gender disparities in Pakistan among youth aged 20 to 24.*

## SDG 4



**A greater percentage of youth who possess the necessary skills for employment.**

### LEAPS' Contribution

Vocational program through comprehensive workshops, continuous on-the-job coaching, and mentorship.

## SDG 5



**Gender equality and empowerment for females.**

### LEAPS' Contribution

Focus on economic empowerment of female youth through gender-responsive workforce development.

## SDG 8



**A call for youth development and employment.**

### LEAPS' Contribution

Fostering young professional and personal skill, in addition to training and employment in the ECCE workforce.

## LEAPS and Youth Development in Pakistan

LEAPS embraces a PYD approach to address youth workforce challenges by training females, 18 to 24 years old, to become Community Youth Leaders (CYLs). In this role, CYLs serve as both early childhood educators, delivering quality preschool programming to young children in LEAPS classrooms, and advocates for ECCE and PYD in their local communities. CYLs complete a comprehensive 12-day teacher training prior to entering the classroom, attend periodic in-service professional development workshops, and participate in an annual conference focusing on youth empowerment. CYLs also receive continuous on-the-job coaching and mentoring from supervisors who are trained in gender- and age-responsive communications. These capacity-building initiatives cultivate CYLs' professional and personal skills, while simultaneously benefiting the young children who attend LEAPS preschools.

Results from a pilot study of LEAPS indicated many benefits to CYLs' personal and professional development, including increased self-confidence, independence, empowerment, and critical thinking skills<sup>6</sup>. Notably, CYLs also expressed greater interest to pursue higher education and further employment following program completion<sup>6</sup>. An ongoing transition-to-scale trial will further explore LEAPS' impact on youth mental health, executive functioning skills (such as reasoning, problem-solving, and social skills), and personal and professional progress.

Intergenerational programs, such as LEAPS, address the needs of two age groups, young children and youth, at a time of great potential. By investing in opportunities for youth education, training, and employment, with a particular focus on female youth in rural communities, Pakistan can optimize the talents and capabilities of youth as well as take an important step in tackling workforce and education gaps. These initiatives will further the agenda of gender equity through empowerment and employment, leading to positive economic outcomes and overall improvements in the development of Pakistan's population.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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