

In the face of scant resources, the boys get schooling priority. The common thinking is that girls will be mere home-makers anyway. Emima Ruth Zafra writes

If education equips one for a better life—greater ability to earn an income, feed one's family, fight for one's rights, get on in the world—then women are losing out early in the game by not getting much or any schooling.

Figures tell the story. At least in Asia, considerably more boys than girls go to school and stay there.

Data on gross enrolment rates in nine countries in the region show that at the first level of education boys outnumber girls by as high as 98 percentage points or at an average of 33 percentage points in 1982.

Reviewed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for enrolment data were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Thailand. (The gross enrolment ratio for a level of education was obtained by dividing the total enrolment, regardless of age, by the population which according to national regulations should be enrolled at that level.)

It was only in Thailand where enrolment rates high for both boys and girls. Rates for boys and girls were 98 per cent and 93 per cent, respectively.

The biggest disparity was found in Nepal, at 141 per cent gross enrolment for boys and 43 per cent for girls.

Figures for the other countries are as follows: Afghanistan, 57 per cent gross enrolment rates for males and 14 per cent for females; Bangladesh, 78 per cent and 12 per cent; Bhutan, 19 per cent and 10 per cent; China, 127 per cent and 104 per cent; India, 100 per cent and 70 per cent; Pakistan, 81 per cent and 33 per cent; and Papua New Guinea, 73 per cent and 58 per cent.

One thing is apparent. In countries where large number of children are unable to go to school, it is the girls who are even more deprived.

The UNESCO report also gathered data showing how the enrolment rates could be

even lower if based on specific age groups. For example the participation rate of primary age school girls was 24.7 per cent in Bangladesh and 51.1 per cent in India in 1982. In contrast, "almost all boys of corresponding age are now enrolled in India and Nepal," said the report.

Further illustrating the inequality in educational opportunity is the total primary school enrolment in which girls composed only 28 per cent in Nepal, and between 30 and 40 per cent in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Pakistan.

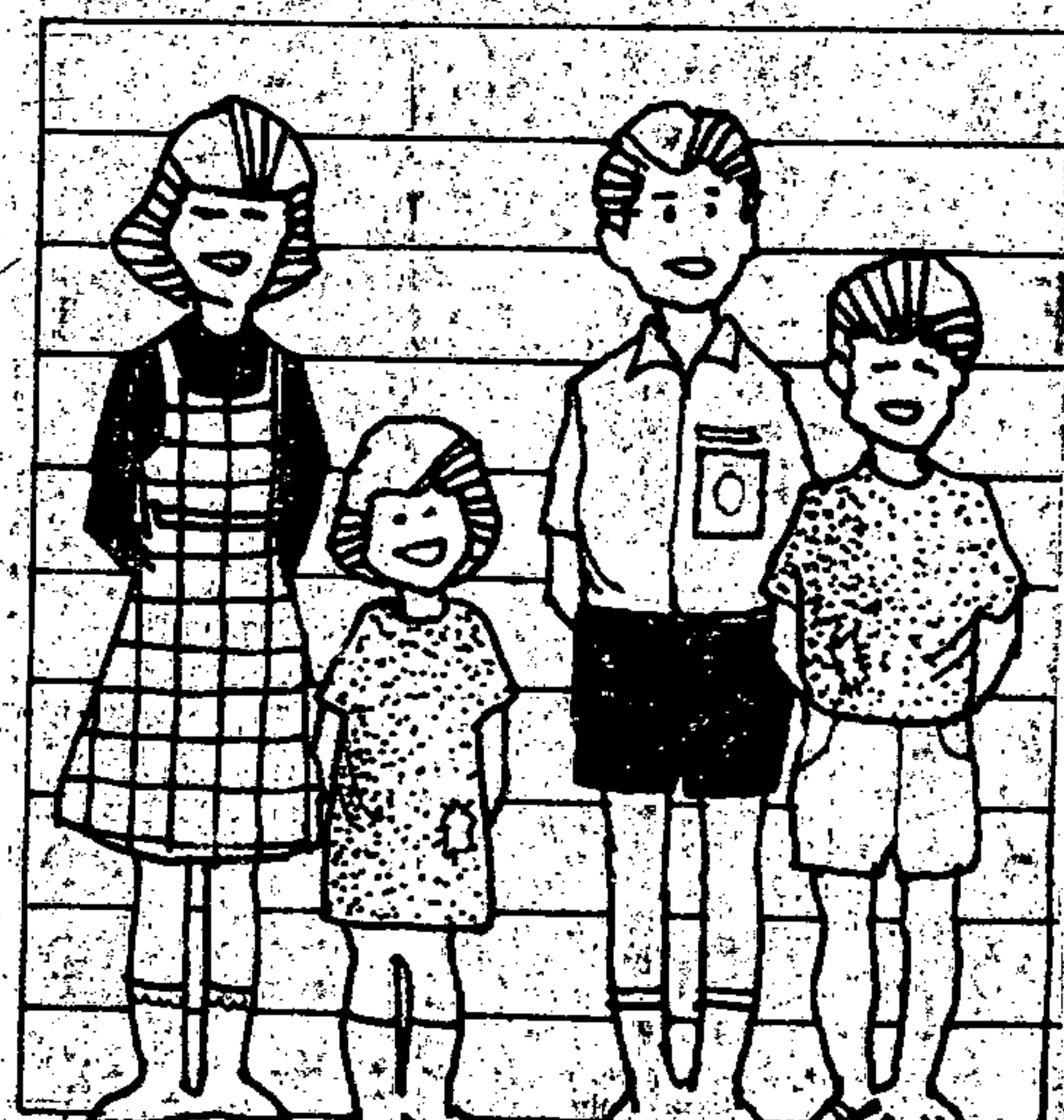
Also, despite improved enrolment rates in recent years, the gap between the enrolment rates in recent years, the gap between the enrolment of the sexes has widened since 1970 in Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan. This is because increases in the participation rates of boys have been higher.

"The concept of educational opportunity extends beyond access to schools to retention in schools till the end of primary education and to outcomes or educational achievement," the report noted.

Based on 1982 figures, the meeting found that of the girls who enrol in the primary level, only 19.9 per cent in Bhutan, 21 per cent in Bangladesh, 27 per cent in Nepal and 33.8 per cent in India finish the final grade. For some districts or regions in these countries, the survival figures

Sex discrimination in

Educating Women



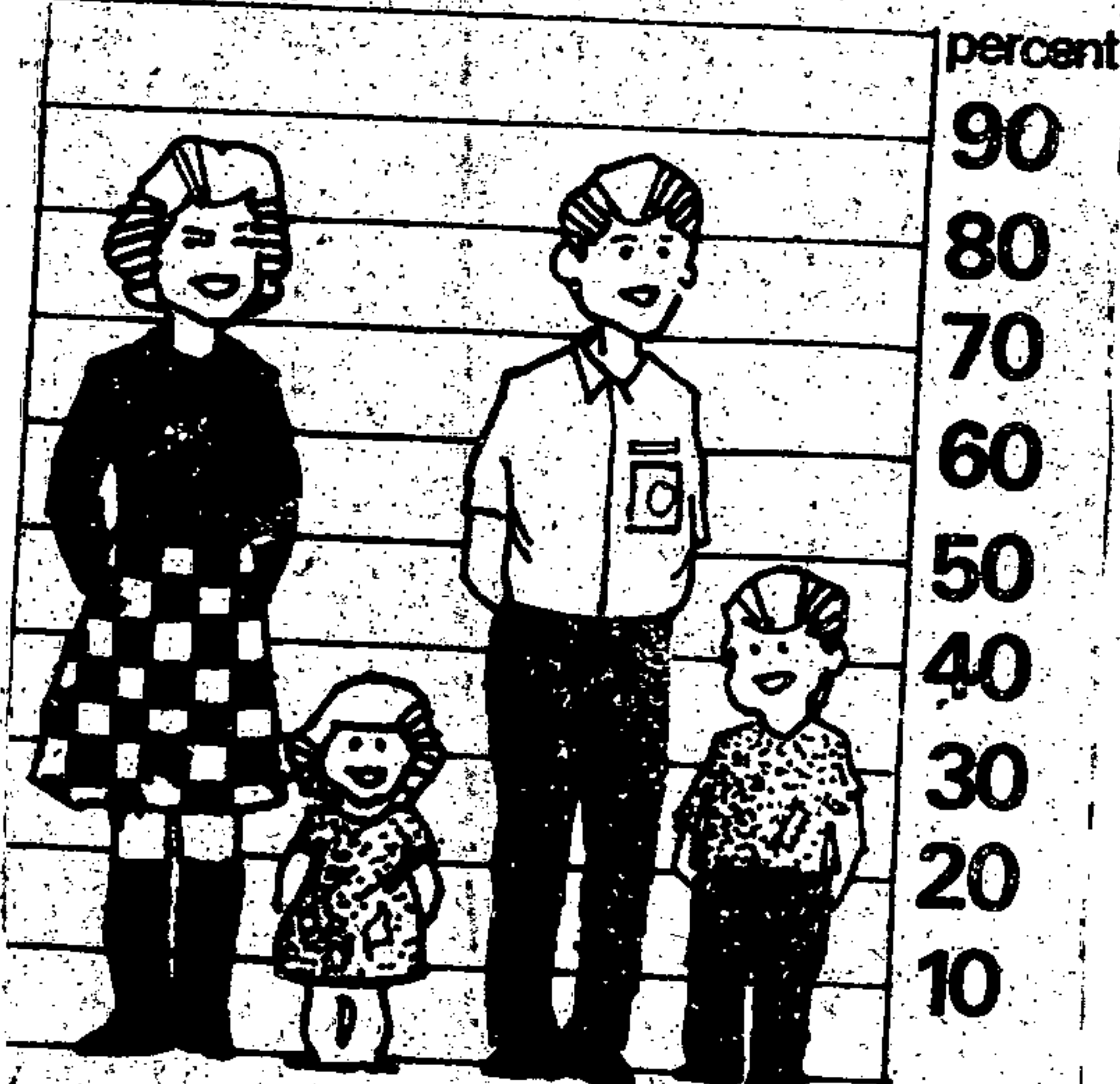
Primary School



dip to as low as 10 percent. The report traces such a phenomenon to the travails of economically developing societies, the cultural norms of traditional societies and the shortcomings of educational systems.

Even if free education is available, children are prevented from going if they can help at home or in the farm. In the case of girls, their household and economic activities as documented in studies include collecting water,

literacy campaign



Secondary School

Source: Earthwatch

firewood and fodder, looking after cattle, helping in the farm and shouldering household and childcare responsibilities. Their working day is even reported to be equal to that of an adult male, thereby precluding them from en-

rolling in formal schools," says the report.

Secondly, parents may not be exactly averse to sending their daughters to school. But in the face of scant resources it is the boys who get schooling priority because of the common thinking that girls will become mere home-makers anyway.

"These norms of domesticity overshadow the reality of women's lives as economic producers in Asian societies. In the perceptions of parents and often of policy and decision-makers," the report said.

The third set of barriers to education include lack of schools and women teachers, overcrowding, poor classroom facilities and ill-qualified teachers. Inaccessibility of schools because of roads and transport lack, uniform and rigid school schedules and gender bias in the curriculum.

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