

Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific

MYANMAR



“Myanmar is now on the cusp of initiating a series of new social and economic reform oriented initiatives. These reforms will set us upon a pathway toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, allowing us to address poverty in all its forms, and to sustain our forward momentum and positive development trajectory in a sustainable and inclusive manner”

H.E. Mr. U Set Aung, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Planning and Finance, Myanmar
74th Annual Session of UNESCAP

Country Background

53.4	million, total population	0.38	GINI coefficient (income inequality)
5,591	GDP per capita, 2011 PPP \$	0.26	D-index (inequality of opportunity)
32.1%	people in poverty (below the national poverty line)	67	years of life expectancy at birth
6.4%	people in extreme poverty (below \$1.90 a day)	8.6	expected years of schooling at birth

Source: ESCAP, World Bank Open Data, UNDP

Leaving no one behind by ensuring a level playing field

Inequality of opportunity refers to the unequal access to fundamental rights and services, required for individuals to sustain and improve their livelihoods.¹

In Myanmar, large gaps exist between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* groups in access to different opportunities. Access to electricity, professional help during childbirth and clean fuels are the most unequally distributed opportunities, with access gaps above 55 percentage points between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* groups. Less than 3 per cent of people in the *furthest behind* group have access to bank accounts and clean fuels, or have completed secondary or higher education.

Identifying the characteristics of the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* group in access to electricity reveals how almost all urban households belonging to the top 60 of the wealth distribution have access. This blue box represents the *best-off* group. The green box shows the *furthest behind* group with the lowest access to electricity: households in the bottom 40 with at most primary education, where 23 per cent have access.

Figure 1. How wide are the gaps in access to opportunities?

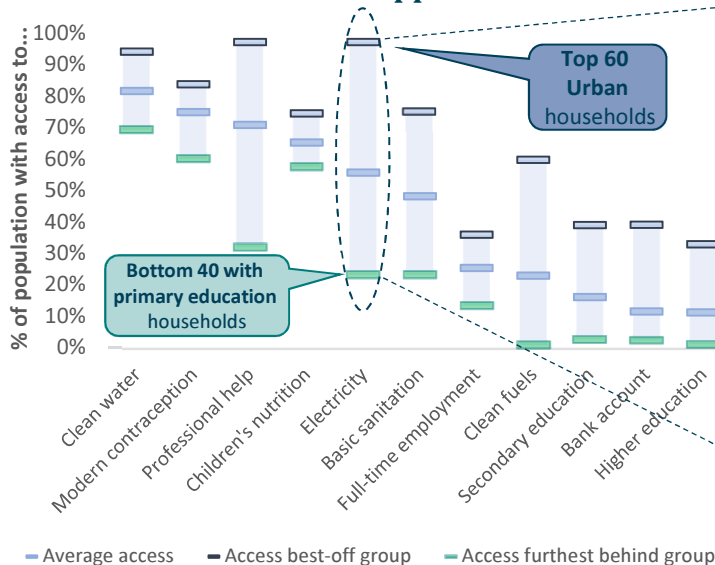
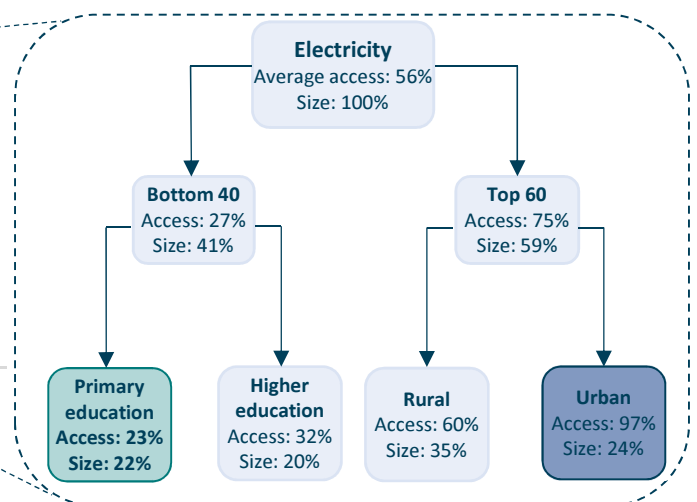


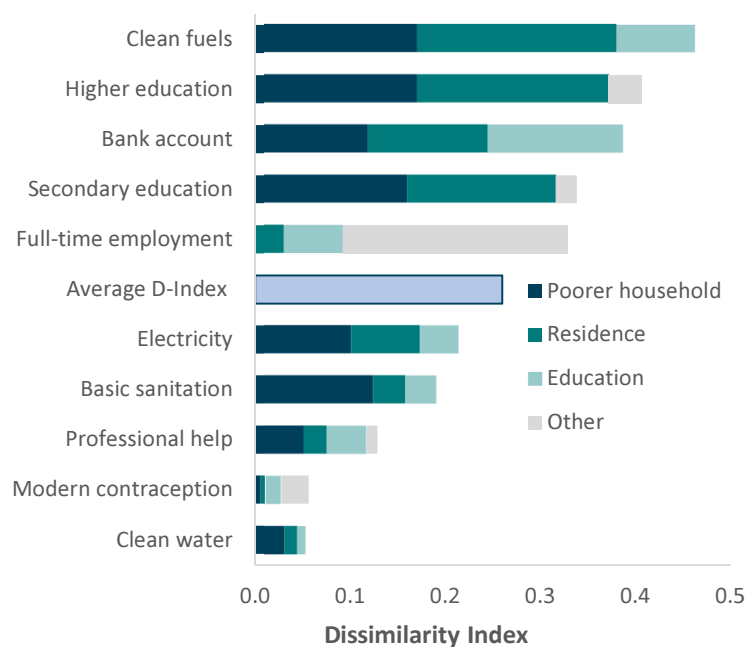
Figure 2. Who are the furthest behind?



Source: ESCAP calculations, using data from DHS 2016 and the Gallup World Poll

What drives unequal access to opportunities?

Figure 3: Drivers of inequality in access to different opportunities



Household wealth, the place of residence and educational level are behind most of the inequality in access to opportunities.

Other circumstances, however, also appear relevant in explaining unequal access to opportunities.

For example, women, people above the age of 50 or those with children under the age of 5 have limited access to full-time employment in Myanmar. Also, a woman's age and the number of children under 5 in the household explain unequal access to modern contraception and professional help during childbirth. Finally, inequality in secondary and higher education attainment is also driven by gender, particularly being a woman.

Source: ESCAP calculations, using data from DHS 2016 and the Gallup World Poll
Note: A Dissimilarity index (D- Index) is used to examine which circumstance contributes most to overall inequality among different population groups.

Key Takeaways

In Myanmar, the largest opportunity gap between the *best-off* and the *furthest behind* group is in access to electricity. While 97 per cent of households in the top 60 of the wealth distribution living in urban areas have access to electricity, only 23 per cent of households among the bottom 40 with at most primary education do. **Identifying the common circumstances shaping household choices in access to energy and improving national energy policies is paramount in addressing electricity inequalities.**

Less than 3 per cent of people in the *furthest behind* group have access to bank accounts and clean fuels in Myanmar. Similarly, less than 3 per cent of people in the *furthest behind* group have completed secondary or higher education. **Prioritizing universal education would reduce not only education inequalities, but would also allow development gains through sustained human capital accumulation.**

Among all groups, inequality of opportunity is explained by distinct circumstances. Household wealth appears as the most important circumstance shaping inequality in 5 out of 10 opportunities. **Since wealth is strongly linked to unequal outcomes in many development objectives and opportunities, leveling the playing field, including through the provision of social protection, is a must.**

¹ The opportunities considered in this country brief are education, women's health, children's nutrition, decent employment, basic water and sanitation, access to clean energy, and financial inclusion.

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For more information and thematic reports on these data and analysis, please visit: <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/poverty-and-inequality/resources>

Contact Info: escap-sdd@un.org