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Institutionalization and better education governance for mainstreaming girl's access to education in RAHA Community urged

Provision of quality education with quality delivery through well trained teachers for youth and children particularly the girls with improved educational facilities in Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) community are equally important for achieving universal goal of every child having access to education.

Dr. Gwang-jo Kim, Chief Guest and Director, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in his four day visit to Pakistan delivered these remarks during a forum on Gender and Education in RAHA community organised by UNESCO Islamabad.

With return of 3.7 million Afghan refugees in the last ten years, Pakistan is still hosting an estimated 1.74 million refugees population including 50 % of age 14 and 70 % of age 18, out of these, only 5 % (55, 000) refugee with proof of registration card (PoR) has completed the primary education.

“Preparing girls to protect themselves and manage their lives, especially in risk environments, education lays the foundation for girls to aspire for and acquire leadership positions and participate in decision-making”, Dr. Kim pointed out this while highlighting the urgent need and significance of girls education. He reminded that many girls and women amongst refugee populations were isolated even from their own nationals and did not have well-developed community structures and as such it was critical for the girls to be able to hear and add their voices on issues that concern them.

The event was attended by Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Director and Country Representative, UNESCO Islamabad; Yoshimi Saita, UNHCR's Assistant Representative (Operations) in Pakistan, Tracy Vienings, Deputy Country Director Programme UNDP; Naoaki Kamoshida, Economic and Development Counsellor of the Embassy of Japan and representative of the Government, civil society organizations and youth and women IDPs participants from RAHA community.

Speaking on the occasion, Country Director/Representative, UNESCO Pakistan, Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata said that the United Nations in Pakistan under One UN Programme had positively responded to the issue and contributed to the joint efforts for refugee girls access to education. She said the collaboration between UNESCO and UNHCR reflects UNs shared vision of sustainable and long lasting solutions ensuring that girls from Afghanistan and displaced groups have equitable access to education, science, free flow of information, cultural activities and social services during the span of their current status. The partnership between these two UN agencies would further enhance advocacy efforts and inclusion of displaced and Afghan children, youth and adults in the government's policies and programmes, she added.

Speaking on the occasion, UNHCR's Assistant Representative (Operations) in Pakistan, Yoshimi Saita said that the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative is an important component of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) that was endorsed by the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. He said that the RAHA initiative, launched in 2009, is designed to help communities in Pakistan that have hosted millions of Afghan refugees for more than three decades. UNHCR acts as a Convening Agency for the initiative and under the sector of education, he said, 128 projects were implemented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh included construction and rehabilitation of school infrastructure, provision of water and sanitation facilities, furniture and books, establishment of computer labs and capacity building of the Government officials.

He lauded the generous contribution to the RAHA initiative from the government of Japan, which provided USD35 million for RAHA projects in two phases. In addition, major contributions have been received from the European Union, Germany, USA, Denmark, Australia and Pakistan. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan also contributed USD one million when the RAHA initiative started in 2009.

Under the RAHA Joint Programme which aims to improve education delivery system and rehabilitation of the education infrastructure for restoration of education services for both the Afghan and Pakistani communities, UNESCO provides its services in conducting of capacity building workshops for teachers, managers, civil society, educational planners, and female CLC facilitators, adults and youth and out of school children along with providing technical sessions on disaster reduction for stake-holders in refugee hosting areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. UNESCO strives to promote science education through trainings specifically designed for teachers on imparting quality science education. Introducing innovating ways of promoting science education UNESCO has organized of Science Caravans, specialized vehicles designed for promoting science education in FATA and KPK.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the global **Education First** initiative in 2012 to accelerate progress in getting every child into school, especially girls. He rightly pointed out: "We are aiming to teach more than reading and counting; we are striving to raise global citizens who can rise to the complex challenges of the twenty-first century."

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