

PRESS RELEASE

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Government - UNESCO Girls' Right to Education Programme worth USD 7 million launched in Islamabad

UNESCO will be working with the Government of Pakistan over the next three years to improve access to quality learning opportunities for primary girls in the hardest-to-reach areas of the country

Islamabad: 08 October 2015: To support better access, improved quality and safe learning environments for girls in the hardest-to-reach areas of the country, UNESCO and the Government of Pakistan officially launched in Islamabad the "Girls' Right to Education Programme in Pakistan". Mr. Muhammad Baligh Ur Rehman, Minister of State for Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and Chief Guest on the occasion delivered the key note speech.

It is pertinent to mention here that the programme is funded under the Malala Funds-in-Trust agreement signed in 2014 by Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO and Mr. Baligh Ur Rehman, Pakistan's Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by officials and representatives of the federal, provincial and area Governments of Pakistan, Parliamentarians, United Nations, Civil Society Organizations, Academia, Press and Development Partners.

In her video statement Ms. Irina Bokova, DG UNESCO highlighted that despite tremendous progress in access to education worldwide since 2000, there is still a long way to go. She said that approximately 31 million (55 %) girls are out of primary schools worldwide including 3 million girls in Pakistan. She said the new sustainable development goals that were recently agreed fully recognize access to education as a basic human right which is essential for sustainable development. She said that our girls and women are strong agents of change and our world will be a better place in 2030, *only*, if they have equitable access to quality education - today.

UNESCO Representative to Pakistan, Ms. Vibeke Jensen in her welcome remarks expressed sincere thanks to the Government of Pakistan and the State Minister for Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training on this occasion. She said that the programme will be implemented over the next three years in twelve districts representing all the provinces and areas of Pakistan. The aim is to get 50,000 more girls enrolled in primary schools, increase their retention and improve learning outcomes.

The Girls' Right to Education programme which will be implemented through civil society organizations aims at supporting the government's efforts in increasing access and improving the quality of girls' education in remote districts of Pakistan with low enrollment and poor retention rate of girls at primary level. Hence, the programme will be implemented in selected areas of the province of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh and four federal areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Islamabad Capital Territory and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Minister of State for Ministry of Education and Professional Training, Mr. Baligh Ur Rehman expressed his gratitude to UNESCO Islamabad for its hard efforts in finalization of the programme and selection of the targeted districts together with the Ministry. He stated that Girls' Right to Education Program, a joint initiative of Government of Pakistan and UNESCO is intended to promote girls

access and retention to education. He said that despite of many challenges, we are committed to improve the standards of education including the girl's primary education.

Minister of State said that there is a 10% gender gap of net enrollment rate between girls and boys in our country and we have vowed to eliminate this gap while targeting 100% net enrollment rate in the coming years.

"We envision standardizing the education system in Pakistan in terms of curriculum, teaching, classroom environment and school facilities. Realizing the growing need and demands of modern education system the Government is aimed to introduce ICT in all schools in the country", Baligh Ur Rehman said.

The programme implementation involve community mobilization and advocacy; improvement in school physical and learning environment with focus areas of renovating WASH and boundary walls; mobilizing and energizing school management committees; supporting teachers to be more effective in multi grade teaching situations and improving girls' learning through activity based learning and strengthening the capacities of provincial/area and district education officials to plan and implement programmes aimed at closing the gender gap.

The inaugural session was followed by the panel discussion in which female representatives of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial assemblies and representative of civil society and academia shared their perspective on girls' education and highlighted the existing policies and programmes for improvement in girls' education. Ms. Maki Hayashikawa from UNESCO headquarters presented the global perspective on post-2015 sustainable development goals focusing on targets and indicators for SDG 4. At the end of the discussion, participants raised questions, which were responded by the distinguished panelists.

Four thematic group discussions on the following areas were also part of the programme, which were moderated by the experts in the relevant field:

1. Identification of policy and advocacy areas needed for improvement in girls education;
2. Knowledge gap and identification of future research agenda for girls education;
3. Capacity gaps- financial and human at provincial and area levels;
4. Teaching – learning in primary schools.

The objective of the working group exercise was to identify some of the areas of improvement in girls education, which will be dealt by the Girls Right to Education Programme and some other areas, which will be picked up by the other development partners and/ or respective provincial/ area governments. At the end, each group presented its findings and recommendations in plenary session and responded to the questions raised by the participants.

The programme was concluded with vote of thanks by Ms. Vibeke Jensen, Representative/ Director UNESCO Islamabad Office.

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