

## Persons with disabilities: Speakers urge for inclusive education practices

### ISLAMABAD:

Speakers at a forum have emphasised the need for incorporating inclusive education practices into the education to remove barriers for persons with disabilities to access education.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in collaboration with the UNICEF organized the event here on Wednesday for advocacy of “Education for All (EFA)” by stimulating a debate on Article 25-A of the Constitution and education sector financing in Pakistan.



UNESCO Director Dr Kozue Kay Nagata urged the government for realization of education for all particularly for persons with disabilities in Pakistan.

“An estimated 1.4 million persons with disabilities in Pakistan are children with school-going age and most of them do not have access to either inclusive or special schools due to limited capacity in existing facilities,” she said.

Nagata said that Pakistan was among the 145 countries which ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on July 5, 2011 and thus its implementation was the responsibility of the state and development organizations including disabled peoples organizations.

“The promulgation of Article 25-A under the 18th Amendment is a major hallmark. The same legislation followed by Sindh, Balochistan and the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Administration for free and compulsory education for the children of age 5-16 is a critical step forward,” she said. Similarly, she said, the incumbent government’s resolve to enhance education budget up to four per cent by 2018 was also encouraging.

UNICEF Education Specialist John Ekaju said that the EFA was a critical priority and the government’s commitment to increase budget allocations would go a long mile to access education for all including the disabled.

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Policy Science (I-SAPS) Ahmad Ali presented a presentation on legislative framework of Article 25-A and education sector financing.

While discussing the government's commitment to increase annual allocations from the current 2.1 per cent to 4 per cent by 2018, he said that capacity of provinces to use the funding will be a major challenge once it is in the loop.

Secretary Education of Ministry of Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education Muhammad Ahsan Raja said that the children with disabilities were important part of the society and it was the national obligation to take care of them through inclusive education.

He said that by working with the UN and other donor agencies, the educational status of children with disabilities could be improved.

Later, at a panel discussion on "EFA- education and disability", President, Special Talent Exchange Programme (STEP) Atif Sheikh said that there were policies but implementation had always been an issue due to lack of rights-based legislative framework. He further said that other institutions, besides social services departments, must be tasked to implement policies and programmes so that a comprehensive result could be achieved to advance inclusive education in the country.

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