Press Release  Part I

Youth, Parliamentarians and Activists Demand Urgent Action for Girls and Women’s Education: A Public Dialogue on Global Action Week for EFA 2011

Over 130 Youth champions, Parliamentarians and rights activists demanded urgent action for scaling up girls’ and women’s education in Pakistan as a fundamental Rights issue, backed by Article 25 A under the Constitution. The Right must be backed by law in all provinces so that it is an actionable right. Voices were heard unequivocally about the efficacy of female education as the largest and most potent multiplier for Pakistani society to secure economic, social and democratic rights in the country

The world is celebrating Global Action Week for Education For All(EFA) 2011 from May 2-8. This year’s theme is "It is a Right, Make it Right! Education for Girls and Women NOW!" On May 3, 2011 Idara-e-Taleem-o_Aagahi (ITA) Public Trust organized a Public Dialogue for Global Action Week –for EFA 2011 in Islamabad in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF, National Commission For Human Development (NCHD) and the Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE). Many Big Stories of transformation through education were heard from parliamentarians, youth leaders and social activists. The dialogue was also a kick off for the signature and petition campaign through stamped post cards and signature sheets to the highest decision makers of Pakistan demanding Education as a Right for Girls and Women NOW!

Pakistan continues to face challenges of : a low overall literacy rate 57% (for girls/women’s 45%); the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) for Primary level (5-9years) is 57% and only 54% for girls and 36 % for girls in Balochistan; and the overall NER for middle level (6-8 grades) is 20%, but for girls it is 18 % and for sisters in Balochistan only 8%! Mr. Arshad Saeed Khan of UNESCO and Ms. Muqaddisa Mehreen of UNICEF set the context with national and regional facts and figures of girls and women’s education.

The panelists shared their Big Stories in the public forum from their real lives. The panelists who shared their insights and struggles included: Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar MNA PML N from Punjab, Mrs. Farhana Azim Chairperson Pakistan Girl Guides Association (PGGA), Maryam Bibi the brave CEO of Khwendo Kor in Khyber Pakhtoonwa, Tahira Abdullah a human rights activist, Zehra Arshad heading Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) . The Young champions from the Rawalpindi Grammar School; Girl Guides of Pakistan, and Quaid e Azam University spoke forcefully. Gul Andaam, Fatima Imam and Syed Qaiser Mujeeb have represented Pakistan in national and international forums. They shared their own unique stories of commitment as young citizens and pledged to participate in the promotion of girls and boys education as the fundamental pillar for social, economic and political reform for Education For All.

Ms. Kozue Kay Nagata has is the Country Director of UNESCO forcefully argued for making girls and women’s education a reality in Pakistan. She endorsed all the suggestions made during the dialogue for empowering women through high quality education for social justice and sustained development with a human face. She said that there is no better investment with high returns for education as men have a lower impact but a women’s impact is like a multiplier in society. Women are also the front line peace bearers in society. On the demand side the social norms can be challenged through dialogue for advocacy and partnerships. The partnerships must be both at the grass roots level and the highest
levels. The 18th Amendment of the Constitution and Article 25 A that guarantees for the first time education as a fundamental right for girls and boys. But this is only the first step from the demand side. Quantity matters. The current declining GDP for education in Pakistan (2%) in face of the promised 7% for education by the Govt. of Pakistan must be honored. Education without quality is of little value. Teachers are the pivot of quality who can make learning more relevant, flexible and innovative so that it can lead to higher returns. Supply side cannot be sustained if the demand side is not matched with the right attitudes towards education. Mass media has a big role to perform for the promotion of girls and women’s education as the first pillar for social change in a globalized world. Both, the state parties and parents need to comply with Article 25 A of the Constitution. Education is deeply linked to poverty alleviation which is becoming a critical barrier with rising vulnerability. Education must be matched to market demands blended with technical vocational education for livelihoods. All forms of education and skills must lead to higher confidence and self esteem. It is not the degrees per se, that lead to our first liberation but life’s milestones such as obtaining a driving license, a passport, the first income, the first job that makes pathways to the next one providing right attitudes to access equal opportunities.

Dr. Nafisa Shah, Chairperson NCHD spoke eloquently about the nexus of terrorism and illiteracy. She appreciated that the Global Week for EFA is being observed to gain the attention of the government demanding girls and women’s right to education. “Today as we celebrate and mobilize for the Global Action Week for EFA 2011, we know we are competing with the death of a global terrorist. But simply eliminating a master terrorist does not mean that terrorism will go away, or extremism will disappear. It must not surprise us that terrorism finds its greatest supporters where illiteracy flourishes and education levels remain low. The pleas from FATA today that we heard are very well taken as it is a region that has been deprived and marginalized for too long; where the education of girls and women and indeed boys and men has never been a priority. Master Ayub a brave teacher from Islamabad working with marginalized groups, or Zubair Torwali from Bahrain, Swat promoting girls education in the mountains or Seema Shuja from FATA are testimonies of what is possible. We need to walk the talk for EFA and MDGs with our extraordinary citizens who can and do stand TALL. Education must be seen as a social and economic equalizer. The NCHD is making all out efforts across the 140 districts with multiple partners, the government, ITA, UNESCO, UNGEI/UNICEF and many others to make the strategic links for action. Baela Raza Jamil’s call to making Global Action Week for EFA 2011 the beginning of a movement for five years up to 2015 is fully endorsed. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009 and the Constitution seeks to positively address the gender gaps and equity issues. Now with education devolved, the provinces, will have to make all out effort to identify the gaps and bridge them with urgency, the right infrastructure and resources ensuring hiring of adequate local female teachers.

Addressing the youth in the audience Dr. Shah reminded them” that the Big Stories of struggle for education and empowerment of parliamentarians and activists that we heard were of yesterday’s young girls. Like you today, these were the ‘pehli kirans’ (first rays). They shared their first liberation, such as completing matric, graduation or a PhD, getting a driving licence, an identity card, first pay perhaps greater than one’s brother or husband. The narratives are many. But we need to remember that you are the citizens who must demand your justiceable right to Article 25 A as a fundamental right. I hope you
will have the courage to take the state to court if need be, if this right is not granted. You will be the trail blazers for turning the tide of illiteracy in Pakistan for girls and boys, for women and men”.

**Part II**

The final declaration of the Dialogue for GAW 2011 in Pakistan on May 3 read as follows:

**Welcoming article 25 A as a Constitutional & Fundamental Right to Education for all children/citizens 5-16 years of age**

Recognizing that an equity focused approach must engage with groups affected by poverty, marginalization and displacement, belonging to the bottom quintile income groups (where women/girls are disproportionately affected);

Expressing highest concern for continued destruction of girls and boys schools /colleges at the hands of terrorists in conflict and post conflict zones

We demand urgent action to address the above by:

**Addressing household poverty through** stipends to girls up to grade X and school feeding programmes encouraging families to send their girl-children to school and improve completion rates¹.

**Build and equip more schools and reduce distance between school and home.** In many rural regions and urban unrecognized slums children /girls are prevented from attending is simply due to distance between home and school; urgently ensuring targeted prioritized placement of schools directly by the government or through PPPs

**Rebuild and equip schools affected by emergencies** (natural Disasters and conflicts) urgently with government allocating specific budget lines in annual development and recurrent budgets for education in emergencies (rebuilding and capacity enhancing services).

**Hire women teachers at all levels of education** The presence of a female teacher can help girls and parents feel more confident in sending their daughters to school. Having female teachers provides girls with role models.² Increasing the female teachers has also been shown to increase enrolment.³

**Make education free and compulsory.** ‘Making education free and compulsory is the keystone of any national plan to eliminate gender disparity in education and achieve universal education. Faced with an economically driven choice between sending sons or daughters to school, poor families often send their

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Countries have demonstrated dramatic rise in enrolments with the introduction of free primary education especially for the poorest fifth households (Uganda: 63% to 83% & poorest from 46% to 82%).

**Support for indirect fees.** Even when education is theoretically free, there are often considerable indirect fees and costs. These can include transport fees; other charges to parents like firogh-e-taleem funds for having their children attend school; paying for escorts for girls to get to school; or finding secure housing for female teachers to stay in rural communities to teach girls.

**Provide basic supplies.** Continued and timely supply of sufficient textbooks with some to spare at primary levels.

**Eliminate gender bias from textbooks.** Eliminating gender bias from textbooks and learning materials is imperative.

**Teach in the local language.** Mother tongue and indigenous language instruction is vital particualry at the primary level and girls are often more disadvantaged as they are less likely to be exposed to social environments outside their immediate family.

**Allow young mothers to come back to school.** Girls who become pregnant are often prevented from going back to school after the birth of their child. There is need for policy change to re-admit girls, alongside challenging the stigma and associated bullying which also prevents girls from coming back to school.

**Protect from abuse in school.** Schools cannot remain sites of violence and abuse. Schools must be seen as zones of peace and security; making parents comfortable sending their children/daughters to school.

**Provide a national policy framework.** All of the above must be part of provincial and national policy framework recognizing the challenges that girls face in getting into and staying in school.

**Good practice in adult literacy programmes for women**

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8 UNICEF 2004. Strategies for girls’ education
**Target older people.** Too often literacy initiatives are focused on youth and young adults, whereas the bulk of illiterate women are over 30 in many contexts.

**Invest enough in literacy.** Good quality literacy programmes are inexpensive, yet even so governments spend shockingly low amounts on literacy. At least 3% of the education budget must be reserved for literacy initiatives.

**Work cross-sectorally.** Helping women access literacy opportunities may require a multi-faced effort across different Ministries, to ensure outreach to women and effective targeting of efforts.

**Ensure relevance.** Focusing on women’s own literacy objectives, motivation and skills is known to have strong positive effects on outcomes. Recruiting female literacy facilitators from the community also helps motivate women to participate.

**Literacy is a long term and lifelong** Acquiring and using literacy skills is not a one-off activity but requires sustained learning and application. To prevent learners’ skills from degrading over time, policies and programmes must be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progress.