

**Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Pakistan (2007)**  
by  
**UNESCO Islamabad**

**Summary**

This submission focuses on the provision of **Right to Education** in Pakistan, and equal opportunities and treatment (elimination of discrimination) in public sector schools.

**Submitting organization**

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established in 1945, has been mandated to work in the areas of education, science, culture, social and human sciences, and communication; UNESCO is working in Pakistan since 1958.

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**Context: Basic information about Pakistan:**

Pakistan has a population of over 162m. Its per capita income is US\$ 2,370 (PPP). Pakistan has been ranked 136<sup>th</sup> in the Human Development Index (HDI, 2007-08).

**Basis and focus of the Review (UPR)**

This review focuses on the right to education, based on the following international norms:

- Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Provision of free and compulsory basic education
- UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) - Provision of equal opportunities of education in all public sector schools, and elimination of discrimination based on race, gender, religion, social origin, or economic conditions etc.

**Status of Right to Education in Pakistan**

A significant segment of population has not been able to enjoy their right to free and compulsory basic education; 47% of the age group 10+ were illiterate as of 2005-06 (PSLM Survey 2005-06), and only 68% of school-aged children were enrolled in primary schools (GMR 2008, UNESCO); 31% of students drop out before completion of the primary education cycle (National Education Census, AEPAM, 2006) partly due to poor learning conditions in schools. Out-of-school girls and illiterate women form the bulk of this group. Enrolment rates for girls are very low, especially in some rural districts and illiteracy rates for women are very high. The State has not been able to offer all children equal access to basic education, in terms of physical facilities, curriculum, teaching staff etc. Because of the lack of public education possibilities, families increasingly resort to private education which is poorly regulated and unaccountable, and where facilities range from poorly equipped schools for general population to high quality for children from

privileged families. Since religious education is free of charge, poor parents often send their children to Madrassahs where they are not able to acquire knowledge in modern subjects like Math or Science as these are not taught.

### **Achievements of Pakistan**

The following initiatives are helping expand the provision of free basic education to children, out-of-school youth, and illiterate adults:

- i. Abolition of school fees and provision of free textbooks in all public sector schools since 2004. This has reduced the financial burden of parents leading to an increase in enrolment.
- ii. Special incentives (food incentives, stipends, etc.) for girl students in selected districts.
- iii. Additional financial support to the provinces under the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) programme.
- iv. Adult literacy centres for illiterate youth and adults, and non-formal basic education schools for out-of-school children and youth.
- v. The above programmes have helped create a more conducive environment for children and adults to enjoy their right to free basic education.

### **Voluntary commitments and pledges by Pakistan**

The following pledges and commitments by the Govt. of Pakistan aim to improve the provision of basic education in the country:

- Pakistan has committed to achieving Education for All goals by 2015. It has prepared a National Action Plan for EFA (2001-2015) which sets targets of bringing 100% children into schools and raising literacy rate up to 86%, by 2015.
- Announcement of the Govt. of Pakistan to gradually increase budget allocations for education up to 4% of GDP.
- Incorporation of National Action Plan for EFA targets e.g. primary level enrolment and literacy rate in documents such as PRSP and Mid-term Development Framework (MTDF).

### **Challenges (gaps and shortfall)**

The Govt. of Pakistan has taken steps to expand and improve the provision of facilities for free basic education. However, a sizeable segment of population is not yet able to enjoy their right to free basic education. Challenges faced to ensure the provision of free basic education to all are below:

- Financial constraints - inadequate provision for education in the state budget
- Low absorptive capacity of the education system
- Political interference at various levels
- Direct costs borne by parents, e.g. stationery, uniforms, transportation, payment of charges under 'school fund' and pocket money for lunch/snacks during school hours
- Poor physical facilities in rural schools and distance to schools in rural areas
- Teacher absenteeism

### **What needs to be done by the State?**

Pakistan should take the following steps to ensure the provision of free basic education to all its citizens, without prejudice to age, gender, place of residence, or economic status:

- Enforce legislation to ensure free primary education, as a constitutional right.
- Increase funding to a minimum 4% of GDP, ideally 6%.
- Expand and improve educational facilities.
- Build capacity of teachers, school heads, and education managers.
- Undertake reforms to improve educational governance and ensure transparency and accountability.

### **Needs of Pakistan and Role of UN**

To accelerate the achievement of complete free basic education for all in Pakistan, UN assistance is needed in areas such as advocacy, advisory and capacity building:

- i. Advocacy to highlight free basic education as a human right.
- ii. Policy dialogue with decision-makers and sensitization of political leadership at various levels.
- iii. Research studies and surveys for identification of administrative bottlenecks and barriers which hinder provision of right to education.
- iv. Capacity building of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and local communities to manage their local education system
- v. Strengthening of EMIS to facilitate better planning and effective monitoring.
- vi. Strengthening of national education assessment system

These UN interventions will contribute to expanding educational opportunities in the country and allowing increased numbers of children and adults to enjoy their right to free basic education.