

Seminar & Policy Discussion
“RTE- Perspectives from South Asia”
January 17th, 2014- Islamabad

Time: 9:00 am-4:00 pm Venue: Kahkeshan Hall, Serena Hotel Islamabad Pakistan.

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Introduction

Right to education is considered as a universal basic fundamental right of every human being. In many countries this is safeguarded in their constitutions. Every country is, thus, bound by both national and international norms to ensure this basic right of their citizens to quality education. Efforts are being made since many decades to eradicate illiteracy from the globe and since 1990 the efforts have accelerated (Jomtien/Dakar/New York) through EFA and MDG movements. Despite many efforts by the national and international communities 774 million people are still illiterate in the world, 57 million children of the primary school age are out of school and 250 million children do not have minimum level of learning competencies¹.

The situation is complex when we look at countries in South Asia, home to well over one fifth of the world’s population, with a mixed trend on access, quality and equity interfaced with fragile contexts. Yet the greatest strength of South Asia is its human resources, a young population, innovative initiatives through partnerships and new media that can overcome deprivations and discrimination for substantive equity for ALL. However, most of the countries in South Asia are making progress, though not sufficient, to achieve the targeted goals set out in MDGS and EFA goals. This can be seen from the gradual decrease in figures of out of school children in these countries according to many reports in the run up to 2015.².

Majority of the countries in South Asia, in line with these goals, have also passed laws to ensure the equal access of their citizens to quality education in abidance with the international norms. Pakistan being a responsible member of the international community has taken significant initiatives for ensuring Right to Education. The major step in this direction was the insertion of article 25-A in the constitution. After the insertion of Article 25-A through 18th Amendment, education has been declared as the fundamental right of every child in the age group of 5-16 years in Pakistan. The country is now in the phase of implementation of the said article.

¹UNESCO Institute of Statistic Database and GMR UNESCO 2012

² “The Knowledge Economy and Education and Training in South Asia”, World Bank

The 18th amendment has also devolved education, which used to be a concurrent subject, entirely to the provinces. The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and two provincial governments have taken significant steps in the right direction for the implementation of this article; however two provinces and all area governments are still lacking behind.

Right to Education Campaign, under ITA is aligned to the results of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 3-16 year olds across Pakistan. ITA is working very closely with the Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE), Child Rights Movement (CRM), teachers unions, media, parliamentarians, the provincial and federal governments for ensuring the right to education of every child through the implementation of 25 A across Pakistan.

RTE-ITA campaign also keeps abreast of developments on RTE at the regional level. ITA's RTE-campaign as part of "citizens" movement for quality education (CMQE)" is hosting a regional level round table discussion on Right to Education. In this discussion, representatives from the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Pakistan, (Provincial/Federal), India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are invited to share progress made by the respective countries. The whole discussion will focus on the following themes:

Key Objectives:

The key objectives of the Discussion would be:

- 1) Taking stock of the RTE regimes and status at the regional level in the context of EFA goals and MDGs.
- 2) To highlight the challenges and progress of South Asia particularly the participant countries on quality/learning and teacher challenges with reference to Post 2015 Development conversations.
- 3) To share information on practices and possibilities towards quality/learning, partnerships and private sector in implementation of RTE in each context. .
- 4) To provide recommendations on the way forward for RTE and the Post 2015 Development Agenda

Goals:

The major focus of this discussion would be to

- 1) Highlight the significance and status of RTE at provincial and national level for Pakistan
- 2) Share experiences from South Asia in the conceptualization and implementation of RTE
- 3) Elaborate engagement and challenges in the region on quality and partnerships to meet the requirements of RTE.
- 4) Discuss the way forward for RTE, and its interplay in context of Post 2015 Development Agenda