

Media Update

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FAO

PRESS RELEASE

FAO and MNFSR collaborate to bring innovative financing in agricultural research

A consultative workshop on Innovative Financing for Agricultural Research was jointly organized by Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to provide an opportunity to look at examples of financial mechanisms for research in Pakistan and around the world. Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Mr Syed Fakhar Imam attended the workshop as a chief guest.

Financing models of Pakistanis agricultural research institutions as well as research institutions from leading agricultural countries such as Australian Rural Research and Development Corporations, Brazilian Agriculture Research Corporation, European Union, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, United States Department of Agriculture and Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences were looked into in order to identify possible way forward for the research in Pakistan.

The spending on research and development has reduced from 1991 to 2012 in Pakistan. The impact can be seen on the per hectare production of major crops like wheat, rice, sugarcane, cotton and maize. Resultantly, Pakistan is losing the competitiveness in the international market for these crops. Import of cotton for textile has increased and import of food items has also increased. This workshop provided an opportunity to explore more options to pool resources for research and development to improve production and competitiveness.

Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Mr Syed Fakhar Imam said that the workshop would provide an opportunity to national and

international experts to discuss various financial mechanisms and how we can evolve a pragmatic financial mechanism for our research institutions.

FAO Representative in Pakistan, Ms. Florence Rolle, while thanking Mr. Fakhar Imam for asking FAO to undertake an assessment of PARC and PCCC, emphasized the importance of investing in agricultural research and extension in order to reduce poverty, malnutrition and hunger.

Former Executive Director, Australian Rural Research and Development Corporation, Dr. Steve Jefferies, Country Director, International Maize and Improvement Center, Pakistan Dr. Thakur Prasad Tiwari, Representative from United States Department of Agriculture, Jodi A Scheffler, Agricultural Commissioner, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Pakistan, Dr. Gu Wenliang, Development Advisor, Agriculture and Climate Change, Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan, Roberto Aparicio Martín shared best international practices on innovative financial mechanism. Representatives from academia, federal and provincial agriculture departments also shared national experiences.

UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

Repeated school closures due to COVID-19 leading to learning loss and widening inequities in South Asia, UNICEF research shows

Limited access to devices, low connectivity, and limited teacher contact are severely constraining remote learning in the region

KATHMANDU, 9 September 2021 – School closures have led to alarming inequities in learning opportunities for children in South Asia, despite significant efforts by governments and partners to expand remote learning, according to UNICEF research conducted in India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

School closures in South Asia due to the COVID-19 pandemic have interrupted the learning of 434 million children. According

to UNICEF’s research, a substantial proportion of students and their parents reported that students learnt significantly less compared to pre-pandemic levels. In [India](#), 80 per cent of children aged 14-18 years reported lower levels of learning than when physically at school. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, 69 per cent of parents of primary school children reported that their children were learning “less” or “a lot less.” Girls, children from the most disadvantaged households and children with disabilities faced the biggest challenges while learning remotely.

“School closures in South Asia have forced hundreds of millions of children and their teachers to transition to remote learning in a region with low connectivity and device affordability,” said George Laryea-Adjei, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia. “Even when a family has access to technology, children are not always able to access it. As a result, children have suffered enormous setbacks in their learning journey.”

Despite significant efforts from governments, low connectivity and access to digital devices have severely hampered efforts to roll out remote learning. In India, 42 per cent of children between 6-13 years reported not using any type of remote learning during school closures. In Pakistan 23 per cent of younger children didn’t have access to any device that could support remote learning. Poor and disadvantaged households have been the worst hit, with many families struggling to afford even a single device.

Even when devices are available, UNICEF’s research indicates that they are often underutilized and that children’s access to them is often limited. For example, in Pakistan, among children with access to devices, only about 24 per cent could use them when they wanted to.

The research found that student-teacher engagement, when regular and reciprocal, is a strong predictor of success in children’s learning, especially for younger students. However, the surveys found that most students had little or no contact with their teachers after schools closed. In Sri Lankan private primary schools, 52 per cent of teachers reported contacting their students five days a week, but this number dropped to only 8 per cent for teachers from public primary schools.

“The safe reopening of schools must be considered an utmost priority for all governments. Parallely, investing in teachers will ensure that teachers and schools can adapt to all situations. The more teachers are trained, equipped and supported on distance and blended learning, the better they will be able to reach all their students,” added George Laryea-Adjei. “This is a

critical investment we need to make for children as the region gears up for future waves of COVID-19. We need to build systems which can weather any storm and keep children learning, no matter the circumstances.”

To ensure that children keep learning, UNICEF is calling on:

- Governments to prioritize the safe reopening of all schools, while also ensuring that children are able to pursue quality learning remotely if necessary
- Teachers to assess children’s learning levels and ensure catch up is enabled through a "learning recovery" period
- Governments to prioritize the vaccination of teachers to support the safe reopening of schools
- Governments to train and equip teachers to better reach children and adolescents with limited or no access to technology through a [combination of modalities](#) including mobile devices, TV, radio, and printed materials
- Governments and donors to protect and expand investments in education, including critical pre-primary and foundational literacy and numeracy
- Private sector and civil society organizations to work with governments in improving connectivity and creating high-quality, multilingual remote learning content tailored to students’ needs
- School administrators and education officials to provide more guidance to teachers to engage with their students and use different types of learning techniques
- Parents and caregivers to receive adequate support and guidance to continue home-based learning

School closures in South Asia have compounded a situation which was already precarious. [Even before the pandemic](#), almost 60 per cent of children in South Asia were unable to read and understand a simple text by the time they are 10 years old. In addition, 12.5 million children at the primary level and 16.5 million children at the lower secondary level were out of school.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) works with UNICEF Country Offices in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to help to save children's lives, defend their rights, and help them fulfil their potential. For more information about UNICEF's work for children in South Asia, visit www.unicef.org/rosa and follow UNICEF ROSA on Twitter and Facebook.

For more information about Education in South Asia, click [here](#).

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