

Media Update

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UNICEF

Press Release

UNICEF launches adolescent empowerment pilot in SINDH

KARACHI, Sindh – 14 March, 2017: Adolescents from various youth associations of Sindh came together here today at a colourful ceremony organized by UNICEF and the Rural Support Programme Network (RSPN) to celebrate the launch of – “Improving Adolescent Lives in South Asia” – an intervention funded by the IKEA Foundation.

The project – the primary focus of which is to support a reduction in child marriage, particularly among adolescent girls – will be implemented in a number of Union Councils in Ghotki and Khairpur Districts for a period of three years. It is also envisaged that improving access to information and equipping adolescents with life skills as key interventions will strengthen the capacity of adolescents to form and express their opinions with confidence, thereby promoting and protecting the right of the child to participation and freedom of expression. In addition, parents and communities will be capacitated to understand adolescents’ rights and support their realization through enhanced access to community-based structures equipped to strengthen the protective environment for children.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recently published a General Comment on Realizing the Rights of Adolescents. The Committee highlights that adolescence is a life stage characterized by growing opportunities, capacities, aspirations, energy and creativity, but also significant vulnerability. It observes that the potential of adolescents is widely compromised because states parties do not recognize or invest in the measures needed for them to enjoy their rights, and provides guidance to states on the measures necessary to ensure the realization of the rights of children during adolescence, cognizant also of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In line with the Committee's recommendations, UNICEF is confident that this intervention will provide avenues at the family and community level for adolescents to strengthen dialogue on important matters affecting their lives and will continue to advocate for initiatives such as these to be scaled-up by key government stakeholders in the years to come.

"This is a significant day for the adolescent agenda in the province," said Angela Kearney, the UNICEF Country Representative in Pakistan.

"Adolescence is a unique defining stage of human development characterized by rapid brain development and physical growth, enhanced cognitive ability, the onset of puberty and newly emerging abilities, strengths and skills," she added. Kearney explained that positive early childhood interventions and experiences facilitate optimal development as young children become adolescents, but that adolescents should also receive adequate attention in an effort to not waste their full potential.

UNICEF, globally and in Pakistan, is dedicating growing attention to adolescent programming, because children in the second decade of life are agents of change and a key asset and resource, who can positively contribute to their families', communities' and country's life. "This year, UNICEF commits to supporting government counterparts and civil society organizations in Sindh to improve adolescents' lives with renewed zeal, because our youth is representing the foundation of present and future social and economic prosperity in the province" concluded Angela Kearney. Mr. Fazlullah Qureshi, Member, Board of Directors, RSPN, gave the vote of thanks. Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Khairpur, Mr. Riaz Wassan was the chief guest of the occasion, while ADC Ghotki, Mr. Saleem Ullah Odho was also present.

Approximately 30 boys and girls from youth associations in Ghotki and Khairpur participated in the event and committed to act as champions in promoting peer-to-peer dialogue and mentoring on key life skills and rights, with the guidance and support of RSPN and UNICEF. Challenges faced by adolescents were highlighted through art, songs and theatre performances, while the significance of a protective environment wherein all boys and girls can grow and thrive, was emphasized.

The event, fully hosted and presented by adolescents, was attended by officials from the Social Welfare, Youth, Health, Local Government, Education, Planning and Development, Police Department, Child Rights Commissioner for the Provincial Ombudsman's Office, district administration

Khairpur and Ghotki District as well as a number of civil society organization and youth groups. (#)

Download pictures here: <http://bit.ly/2mEW5JX>

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