

Media Update

22 December 2016

UNICEF

Press Release

UNICEF Launches Adolescent Empowerment Pilot in Punjab

Lahore – 22 December, 2016: Adolescents from various youth associations of Punjab came together at a colourful ceremony organised by UNICEF and the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) to celebrate the launch of “*Improving Adolescent Lives in South Asia*” – a regional intervention funded by the IKEA Foundation.

The pilot 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 Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur Districts for a period of three years. It is also envisaged that improving access to information as a key intervention 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" says Douglas Higgins, UNICEF's Chief of Field Office in Punjab. "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. While positive early childhood interventions and experiences facilitate optimal development as young children become adolescents, any investment in young people risks being wasted if their rights throughout adolescence do not also receive adequate attention."

"This is why UNICEF, globally and in Pakistan, is dedicating growing attention to adolescent programming - children in the second decade of life being agents of change and a key asset and resource - with the potential to contribute positively to their families, communities and countries," he added. Mr. Higgins further said, "This year, UNICEF commits to supporting government counterparts and civil society organizations in Punjab to improve adolescent lives with renewed zeal, representing as they do the foundation of present and future social and economic prosperity in the province."

Approximately 200 boys and girls from youth associations in Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur districts 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 CYAAD. 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 was attended by the Ombudsman's office, Youth Affairs, Social Welfare and Local Government department representatives, as well as several Youth Associations and Civil Society Organizations.

###



About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and well-being of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit our global website: www.unicef.org

Follow UNICEF Pakistan on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

For more information, please contact:

Daniel Timme, Chief, Advocacy and Communication UNICEF Pakistan, Tel: 051 209 7810, E-mail: dtimme@unicef.org

Adresh Laghari, Communication Officer, Advocacy & Communication, UNICEF Pakistan, Tel: 051 209 7812, E-mail: alaghari@unicef.org