

Media Update

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UNDP

Press Release

Islamabad conference declares: improve access to justice through community-based paralegal services

Islamabad, 26 July 2016 – Government officials, paralegals, and international and national representatives came together today to issue the Islamabad Declaration on Community Based Paralegals, affirming the important role that paralegals play in resolving conflicts within communities. This declaration came at the end of a major conference in Islamabad co-hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Rural Support Programmes Network.

Accessing the formal legal system can be a long, expensive and difficult process for many, especially women and marginalized groups. The National Conference on Community Based Paralegals is the first time that the role of paralegals, who are trained in relevant aspects of the law but are not full-fledged lawyers, has been acknowledged in providing access to swift and accountable dispute resolution and judicial services within their communities.

Through the Islamabad Declaration, the attendees committed to enhancing the quality of services, called for their full recognition in communities, governments and the legal system, and urged that paralegal services be considered a core part of development, including the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal 16 by advancing access to justice. They also declared that a core goal of the paralegal sector would be to ensure gender equity.

At the conference, attendees shared their experiences and resources, and learned new tools and methods to enhance their own practice. They acknowledged the need to establish paralegal networks across Pakistan and the region, compiled strategies for appealing to governments to recognize



them as providers of judicial services within their communities; and discussed approaches to capacity building and the development of formal relationships with government, bar associations, legal aid clinics and law schools.

The conference was held under UNDP Pakistan's Strengthening Rule of Law Project. Operating in 12 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, this project endeavours to improve access to justice and strengthen the rule of law by engaging with the judiciary, bar associations, police, prosecution and NGOs. To help reduce the load on the judiciary and promote access to swift justice, the project focuses on reforming alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and empowering community based paralegals with funding from the European Union.
