

# UNESCO Islamabad Office

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I took up the position of the Director/Representative of UNESCO in Pakistan in March 2011. Prior to my current post, I was with the United Nations HQ, DESA in New York as a Senior Economic Affairs Officer. UNESCO's mandates include education, science, culture (e.g. safeguarding the world heritage sites), social science and culture and information. Pakistan is a complex and challenging but very interesting country, with energetic and fascinating people.

During 2010, Pakistan passed through number of political and humanitarian crises, including terrorist attacks and the Monsoon floods which caused colossal loss to the national economy and human lives on a scale that the outside world did not truly comprehend. Terror attacks by extremists, sectarian killings, and military operations in the northern part of the country, and insurgency in Baluchistan province, all led to deterioration of law and order in the country, to killings and to the forced migration of minority ethnic groups. The national economy received a significant set-back due to floods and inflation, and as a result the country's loan basket swelled. The country is struggling now to meet the recommendations of the IMF for generating additional revenue and the elimination of subsidies, which may have an adverse impact on social sectors. The education budget noticed a decline (from 2.49% of GDP in 2007-08 to 2.05% in 2009-10) and the budgets of a number of development projects were slashed.

Education remained one of the main domains of UNESCO assistance to Pakistan in 2010. UNESCO expanded the scope of its activities in Pakistan during 2010, thematically as well geographically. The major thrusts were on upstream policy advice about the reforms in education, support for the protection of cultural heritage sites, and disaster risk management during floods and in refugee affected areas of two provinces bordering Afghanistan.

In **education**, the insertion of Article 25-A, on recognition of free education as a fundamental right (and the provision of free education to all children of age 5 to 16 as responsibility of the state) has been an indirect outcome of consistent and persistent advocacy by UNESCO for Education for All (EFA).

National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) was finalized, approved by the Ministry and launched with UNESCO support. Another important intervention was in the area of gender equality in education through sensitization of teachers, printing and dissemination of advocacy material, and opening of learning centres for female illiterates. UNESCO continued to support the government of Pakistan in the reconstruction of the earthquake-affected education system in the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and 3 seismically safe middle and secondary schools were built benefitting local students, including 391 girls.

In **culture**, during the year 2010 the main thrust of UNESCO's activity was on the biennial priority, i.e. protecting, safeguarding and managing the tangible and intangible dimensions and expressions of heritage. Following the devastating floods, livelihoods have become an issue of attention. Through its projects and activities, UNESCO Islamabad has highlighted that culture is a resource which can be harnessed for the economic development and for the well-being of communities. UNESCO has proved that through

support for, and development of, culture-related livelihood opportunities (e.g. cultural handicrafts) it is possible to help to alleviate poverty while engendering identity in the communities.

In **natural science**, UNESCO has been providing its technical support to national partners in Pakistan including higher education institutions, and through these institutions then to support the development of strategies that at least can go some way towards transforming the ill effects of natural disasters into an opportunity for sustainable development. One element of this, is mapping an effective strategy to address future disasters on flood warning/managements and other catastrophes.

In **communication and information**, in response to the 2010 floods UNESCO's main activity was the production and airing of a radio drama series to ensure accurate and life saving messages and humanitarian information to reach flood-affected populations. Another priority was to promote the freedom of expression through capacity building of local journalists and media, with special emphasis on women journalists in post conflict scenarios, and also awareness-boosting for citizens' Constitutional right to information.

"To learn more about the work of UNESCO Islamabad in Pakistan, please visit <http://www.unesco.org.pk/> "

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