

## **Draft Speech and Talking Points for the Chief Guest**

**My Esteemed Fellow Panelists, Dear Citizens and Development Partners,**

It gives me great honor to be speaking at this important forum learning from and reflecting about the Annual Status of Education Report or ASER in short. ASER's greatest strength is that it is a citizen-led initiative mobilized across the country to gather evidence on how well our children are learning and really to inform us about the status of basic education Pakistan. This year, a total of 49,793 households were surveyed in 2,502 villages and 3 Urban areas across 84 rural and 3 Urban districts. Detailed information was collected on 146,874 children (59% male, 41% female) for the 3-16 years age group and children aged 5-16 were tested for language and arithmetic competencies.

Pakistan continues to perform extremely poorly in education and we are seen to be off track in terms of meeting the education targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA). According to UNESCO, we have the largest number of out-of-school children in South Asia with a majority being girls. The ASER 2011 data gives us district by district vital information on gender disaggregated data that can help us in planning and more importantly mobilizing resources on a need basis for education.

I congratulate the South Asian Forum for Education (SAFED), National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi as well as the development partners, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Foundation Open Society Institute (FOSI) Pakistan and Oxfam Novib for supporting this extremely critical and participatory initiative, enabling our citizens and state to become aware for action of the current status of education in Pakistan for the age group 3-16.

After the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Article 25-A, education has become a fundamental right for all children aged 5-16. Therefore, ASER 2011 has become a forum for accountability and citizens' voice acting as a watchdog, reminding the citizenry as well as the government to walk the talk. As we approach 2015, the target date for the fulfillment of MDGs and EFA, ASER Pakistan is indeed a very persuasive tool to gauge challenges and progress in education annually. The timing of the release of the ASER reports each January is very appropriate for informing the planning and budgeting processes.

I acknowledge the ASER teams profoundly for being the flag-bearer of civil society and citizen partnership with the government as we march hand-in-hand to tackle the challenges of education. What makes ASER unique is that it is a volunteer-led citizens' march for education the champions of education in Pakistan. Can ASER be instrumental in acting as a catalyst for change as volunteers knock on doors making households change perceptions about the urgency of education and learning outcomes? I believe it can and is so for ALL OF US!

ASER is developing a great repository of vital data for all of us in the government, research institutions and political parties to use for policy-making and action. Policy-making without evidence and data is of little value. We do recognize that as our sources for data expand and complement each other such as the Pakistan Social Living Measurement (PSLM) surveys, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and now ASER annually, the Government has to ensure its active use for enacting the legislation for 25 A, designing targeted interventions and more importantly, improved learning outcomes and gender equity.

Ladies and gentlemen as we step into the election year, I believe it is extremely necessary to make education as the highest priority in the electoral debates. It is that single most important sector that leads to significant gains in vital indicators of health, population, environment, gender empowerment, economic growth and democratic participation for sustainable societies. Movements like ASER, I believe provide us with an excellent opportunity to make education a centerpiece for political debates, provide irreversible rationale for raising resource allocations and expenditures for measureable improvement. I hope & pray that this journey continues unbridled symbolizing OUR MARCH FOR EDUCATION to achieve the spirit and promise of Article 25 A fully.