

Joanna Reid, Head of Department for International Department Pakistan, along with Chairperson Standing Committee on Education and 4 Members of Parliament took stock of the Siyani Sahelian Second Chance Program designed for Girls Education in Bahawalpur Pakistan on 4th September 2019.

Pakistan has made 12 years of education a fundamental constitutional right under Article 25 A and is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and SDG 4 on education, skills and literacy. However, it still faces the challenge of 22.8 million children being out of school and those enrolled in school not receiving adequate learning. Even more so, girls remain more deprived than boys across Pakistan- needing urgent action. Therefore, it is critical to have decision makers visit programs that are addressing these challenges to access and quality and are showing early outcomes that can be scaled up across the country.

Maryam, Farah and Iqra shared the misfortune of being drop outs from grades 5, 8 and 9 due to various reasons such as poverty, inaccessible distances to school and early marriage, swelling the numbers of out of school children in Pakistan. However, in June 2018, their fortunes turned when the Siyani Sahelian (Advancing Action for Adolescent Girls) second chance program was launched by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), a civil society organization known for its nationwide citizen led campaign on students learning outcomes ASER that influences policies and plans on education for quality learning.

Siyani Sahelian (SS) is a two year pilot program for 22,000 girls aged between 9-19 years, funded by DFID in Punjab. It caters to girls who are not in school (drop out or never enrolled) in Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh districts where gender challenges are also very daunting. Punjab has 10.5 million children out of school (5-16 years) a majority of whom are of age group 9+ in post primary grades. In less than 14 months, 16,500 beneficiaries have been reached-nearly 75% of the target through robust and successful interventions focusing on accelerated learning.

To take stock of the program and be inspired by its early successes, Joanna Reid Head of DFID Pakistan, along with Chairperson Standing Committee on Education (Aisha Nawaz Chaudhry) and 4 members of parliament including the Minister of Punjab for Food (Mr. Sami Ullah Chaudhary), Member of the National Assembly NA-173 (Bahawalpur-IV) (Mian Najeebuddin Awaisi), Member of the Punjab Assembly Mr. Ehsan Ul Haq accompanied by representatives from Department of NFE & Literacy (Zahid Nazir Khan) visited the SS hub in Bahawalpur.

They witnessed the entire program interventions with holistic inter-sectoral approach and innovative partnerships. The program combines accelerated academics with ICTs, health, menstrual hygiene, life skills, vocational training/entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment supported by caring mentors. Among the beneficiaries who have participated in the program thus far, 7000 girls aged 9-14 have completed their catch up literacy program, approximately 1000+ girls have acquired certified vocational skills, more than 14,000 girls have participated in an organized life skills-based education program.

To test technology enabled learning, 7000 students have been exposed to lessons on tablets and 60 to online learning for grade 9 science subjects-contrary to myths that girls in deprived areas cannot learn through technologies.

The high-level decision makers witnessed and heard these voices promising to do much more for girls education and continue with the program that has brought hope with strong outcomes.