Unesco exposes harsh realities of education indicators

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE, Oct 24: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has exposed the stark reality of some education indicators in Pakistan terming them a "worst globally".

It says the long-term effect of neglecting children's education has left a huge skills deficit among young people in Pakistan.

Unesco Country Representative Dr Koosje Kay Nagata has said there was a huge skills deficit among young people in Pakistan, who were facing the world of work.

She said that out of one in three young people in Pakistan had not completed primary school and, as a result, did not have the basic skills they needed for work. "As high as 12 million 15-24 years old men and women lack basic skills, which is the second highest number in developing countries," she added.

Dr Nagata was speaking at the Punjab launch of Unesco's 10th Education For All Global Monitoring Report (EFA-GMR) on "Youth and Skills - Putting Education to Work" organised in collaboration with the Idarac-Falconer-Angeli at a local hotel on Wednesday.

The launch ceremony was dedicated to Malala Youniszai, who was assassinated because she wanted to go to school.

She said when over 70 per cent of the richest young men and women had completed their lower secondary school, only 16 per cent of the poorest young men and fewer than five per cent of the poorest young women had done so. "Nearly half of rural young women had not had the chance to go to school compared with only 14 per cent of urban young women," she added.

Dr Nagata said men, on average, earned 60 per cent more than women and the wage gap was widest for those with low levels of literacy and numeracy. The women with a high level of literacy could earn 95 per cent more than women with no literacy skills, whereas the differential was only 33 per cent among men.

At every $1 spent on child's education yields $10-5 in economic growth over person's working life, Dr Nagata stressed that this called for global push and commitment for education in Pakistan.

ITA Director Programmes and GMR advisory board member Dr Baela Reza Jamil stressed the need to develop more and more certified technical and vocational courses to develop not only social entrepreneurs but also responsible citizens.

She said the government schools' infrastructure usage needed to be optimised by organising technical and vocational certified courses either in the evening or during summer vacation.

"Promoting technical and vocational skills at optimum level will be a one big initiative that will be hand in hand with the GMR," she said.

Unesco national specialist for education Arshad Saeed Khan said progress towards EFA was stagnating, adding that aid to education was slowing down.

He regretted that Pakistan had the world's second highest number of out-of-school children touching the number as high as $1.1 million including three million girls.

Stating that the slow progress left a huge skills deficit among young people, he stressed that poor urban and rural youth especially women urgently needed support to acquire skills.

The primary enrolment ratio had risen during 1999-2010 from 58 per cent to 74 per cent, but the ratio for girls still stood at 14 percentage points behind the ratio for boys - leaving only eight girls to every 10 boys in primary school.

He said that 45.5 million adults were illiterate, including two-thirds women, which was the third largest ratio globally. He said the projections indicated that the number of illiterate adults would increase to 51 million by 2015.

MNA Saira Afzal Tarar, CM's adviser Ziafik Shahnawaz, Teiva GM HR Shahid Jamil, PTCL chairman Faizul Iqbal Khan, Unilever Pakistan senior adviser corporate affairs Basharat Ahmad and ITA TVST programme manager Arun Kaur spoke.