

Keeping Ambitions Alive

UNESCO support enables schools in IDP camps to provide equal learning opportunities and hope in adverse circumstances

Risalpur, Pakistan, 18 August 2009 - 13 year old Mehreen Gul, smiles as she packs her school bag at the end of the school day, at the middle school in Benazir IDPs Camp. The only girl student studying in the camp middle school, she is happy to continue her studies. "I am the first and the only girl in my entire family to go to school," Mehreen says, standing next to her siblings who are there to fetch her from school. "When we left home, I was worried that I'll not be able to continue my studies, I am happy now, I can study in this school".

"When we left home, I was worried that I'll not be able to continue my studies, I am happy now, I can study in this school".

Mehreen and her entire extended family, including her seven siblings, were amongst the 399 families that settled in the Benazir IDPs Camp, after fleeing from Bajaur agency, when the fighting between the Pakistan army and insurgents intensified 6 months ago. The military operation and escalating fighting in FATA forced more than 300,000 people to flee their homes and take shelter in IDP camps in districts of Malakand, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, Charsadda, Swabi, and Lower Dir.



Benazir IDPs Camp, Risalpur; Mehreen Gul (right) teaches her sister how to read Urdu after school hours.

UNESCO's Emergency Response to IDP crisis, with USD 0.14 million in funds from Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and USD 25,000 from UNESCO headquarters, provided access to education through 14 Middle and Secondary schools in 7 IDP Camps with the help of local and international non-governmental organizations. The IDPs schools provided educational opportunities to 1057 IDP students. 132 IDP students were also supported through Provincial Education department for appearing in Secondary School Certificate board examination in examination centers near the IDP camps. In addition, trainings were conducted for teachers to enable them to start education in an emergency situation and emergency supplies were provided to the schools. The supplies included tents and educational learning materials such as text books, bags, reading writing materials, as well as teaching learning materials including registers, black boards, mats, and teacher furniture.

The IDP schools have provided the children with an opportunity to continue their education in a safe and secure environment. "I like this school, we have classes every day," Mehreen says. "In Bajaur, there were often no teachers in my school." Giving credit to the school for helping understand the significance of hygiene and sanitation, Mehreen intends to be a teacher one day. "I want to be a teacher and teach other girls" she says, as she narrates a passage from her Urdu book to her younger sister.

In addition to provision of educational facilities and supplies, UNESCO also supported construction of two temporary schools, shelters and provided water and sanitation facilities. With the return of IDPs back to their areas, many of the schools, having served their purpose of ensuring continuation of education for over a thousand students, will close down in the coming months.