

Excerpt from Op-ed by Amina J Mohammad

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With 25 million of children out-of-school (55% of them being girls), the second highest dropout rates and huge regional disparities, Pakistan suffers from a profound education crisis. If Pakistan is to provide all children between five and sixteen free and compulsory education, as embedded in its constitution, it must recognize the full potential of education as a catalyst for development – and act as such. Education is not only about learning; it is a multi-dimensional process that ultimately affects our people, our economy, and our planet.

After eighteen months of intense inter-governmental negotiations among Member States, the outcome document of the Open Working Group has recognized the many different ways in which education can advance the future sustainable development goals. It acknowledges quality education not only as a top priority, but also as a cross-cutting issue by reflecting it under three other critical standalone goals related to health, economic growth and climate change. In a major departure from the Millennium Development Goals, the proposal of the Open Working Group also insists on the imperative to leave no one behind – no matter their gender, age, disability, ethnicity, wealth or geographic location.

This has a particular importance in countries like Pakistan, whose education system suffers from tremendous disparities between regions, gender, public and private schools, children with and without disabilities.

In that regard, the special focus on disability of this year, ASER Pakistan survey is also particularly welcome. ASER, being the largest citizen led household based survey, not only aims at improving the state of learning outcomes of children but also works with citizens to foster nationwide conversation and actions on learning. Persons with disability, who account for 1 billion people throughout the world, are often considered as the world's largest minority that suffers from far too many violations of their rights. Denying their access to basic public services such as education is not only a violation of fundamental human rights, it is a profound mistake that affects all.

A Nigerian proverb says that “it takes a village to raise a child”. So let's all work together – governments, civil society, United Nations, private sector, academia and citizens of the world – to ensure a life of dignity for all our children.

