QUESTIONNAIRE ON

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

PAKISTAN

1. ***Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is reflected in school curricula (legislative, institutional and policy framework, and implementation)***

The Constitution of Pakistan sustains an equal view of education based on values and expresses of imparting moral values and of providing education to all citizens irrespective of gender, language, social status, creed, or race. It also expresses eradicating illiteracy and providing free and compulsory education for children of 5-16 years, of ensuring full participation of women in all the spheres of national life. Pakistan had made a commitment to achieve six Dakar EFA (Education for All) Goals within the specified target dates. Pakistan is also a signatory to Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 whereby each member state has to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

The National Curriculum Framework document of the Ministry of Federal Education and Training, Government of Pakistan lists eleven objectives as the aims of education related to curriculum development given in the National Education Policy 2009. Among these, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person in school curricula is reflected by the following:

*iv. To promote national cohesion by respecting all faiths and religions and recognize cultural and ethnic diversity.*

*v. To promote social and cultural harmony through the conscious use of the educational process.*

*vi. To provide and ensure equal educational opportunities to all citizens of Pakistan and to provide minorities with adequate facilities for their cultural and religious development, enabling them to participate effectively in the overall national effort.*

*ix. To raise individuals committed to democratic and moral values, aware of fundamental human rights, open to new ideas, having a sense of personal responsibility and participation in the productive activities in society for the common good.* (National Curriculum Framework, 2018)

Implementation of these aims and objectives differ as the Federal Government has been actively engaged to bring all stakeholders on board to ensure effective implementation by introducing – most recently – a Single National Curriculum to remove myriad interpretations and to curb extremism which uses the guise of religion or the discourse of cultural supremacy.

1. ***Please provide information on how, in your country, the issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is taken into account in the organization of the school system and schools (legislative, institutional and policy framework, and implementation)***

The issue of respect for cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person is stated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and in the National Curriculum Framework document. As stated, the Government of Pakistan strictly moves against the misuse of cultural and religious discourses for inculcating division across the country. Therefore, the state departments and officials actively work in implementing a single national curriculum that fosters an inclusive approach to peaceful coexistence and positive nationhood in all public and private educational institutions.

Private educational institutions, which have been operating in Pakistan since mid-1970s, have so far not been included in the state’s curriculum and reform policies, other than examination systems. Only a small portion of the private schools in Pakistan, especially those which are termed as ‘elite schools’ by the population, uphold the notion of cultural diversity and cultural rights of each person; however, the intensity of implementation and practice among the students and the staff differ in this regard. With effect from March 2020, the Government of Pakistan makes it compulsory for all public and private institutions to adopt the Single National Curriculum and follow the cultural diversity aims and objectives mentioned in the national education policy.

1. **Please clarify to what extent the measures described above relate not only to the issue of languages in education (in this regard, please briefly explain the context and provide details on the State language policy), but also to the arts, heritage, science, history, values and religions, or world views and ways of life, in all their diversity**.

With a population nearing to 230 million, Pakistan is a country rich in social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. Language forms the basis of ethnicity, and Punjabi – forming more than 50 percent of the population – is the dominant language and culture, followed by the Sindhi 12%, Saraiki 10%, Urdu 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1% and others 8%. All ethnic groups have a culture of tolerance and accepted practiced by Sufi understanding and inspirational poetry with message of universal love for humanity and God regardless of language, social status, religion and color. The general understanding across all ethnic groups in terms of artistic, religious, and historical interpretation is moderation against extremism and peaceful coexistence.

Urdu and provincial languages of Pakistan are pivotal for maintaining national identity and integration of diverse linguistic and cultural groups in Pakistan. Article 251 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 declares Urdu as the national language of Pakistan. English is the official language at the present. Native to only 8% people in Pakistan as their mother tongue, Urdu is yet spoken and understood in all major cities, markets, offices, industries, educational institutions, national and provincial assemblies, courts and armed forces. In addition to Urdu, people in different parts of Pakistan use their mother tongues for daily life; indeed, there are more than 50 indigenous languages in the country.

According to the Constitution of Pakistan, provincial assemblies may also by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language. Since 1970s, the Sindh province has introduced Sindhi and Urdu as medium of instruction in its schools. In addition, Sindhi is also being taught as a language in urban areas of the province. Most recently, due to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) concerns for the emerging workforce, Chinese language has also been implemented by the Government of Sindh and various private school systems across Pakistan started offering Chinese along with the existing teaching of Western languages.

Since not all provincial or local languages are equally developed in Pakistan, certain languages are best used for oral communication or folklore only. Pakistan has diverse cultures The National Curriculum Framework document of the Ministry of Federal Education and Training encourages provincial governments to assess the feasibility of adopting these local languages for teaching-learning purposes. The framework also calls to follow a multilingual policy, starting from mother tongue as medium of instruction in early grades, and moving to Urdu and English at lower secondary or secondary levels.

Government of Pakistan is cognizant of the particular socio-cultural environment of each language and the way each language carries along its cultural diversity and origins. The National Curriculum Framework thus encourages federal and provincial policies on medium of instruction by bearing in mind that “*usage of native languages and lingua franca of a country reinforce local culture, history, folklore and values.*”

1. ***Please specify the specific and particular difficulties encountered in ensuring an inclusive and quality education that allows cultural diversity and the cultural rights of each person to flourish at the same time.***

One of the big obstacles on the way to inclusive and quality education is the medium of instruction in the country. In a country where, the national language Urdu is the native language of less than 8 % of the total population, the medium of instruction is either English or Urdu, and regional languages have been mostly neglected from the beginning of the country’s educational journey. Moreover, the prevailing curricula and especially language of assessment is predominantly English, which is mostly the third language for the students. Budgetary constraints and management issues are big hurdles which do not let the policy makers make decisions regarding the inclusion of regional languages and cultures in the overall education system.

1. ***Have specific mechanisms been established to consult and ensure the participation of stakeholders, in particular the populations concerned and parents, for a better understanding and effectiveness of the right to education, including its cultural dimension? What place is given in this context to the voice of children?***

While determining stakeholders for any policy related to education, it is unfortunate that children are utterly neglected. When it comes to the Right to Education and its cultural dimension, most of the families are not aware of it. Same is the issue with inclusion of parents, who are not considered for participation in any stakeholders’ conference, seminar or meeting related to education in general and the Right to Education in particular. **At present, there is no formal mechanism in Pakistan which may be used for such consultations.**

1. ***What recommendations should be provided to States and other stakeholders on these
issues?***

There may be some recommendations regarding the issue of the Right to Education:

* A formal mechanism should be devised to ensure inclusion of parents and children in the consultation regarding Right to Education.
* Regional languages should be given due importance to allow cultural diversity in teaching-learning process.
* In order to ensure value of diversity and culture, curricula need to be free from all kinds of hate speech and bias.
* In order to safeguard cultural rights of each person, necessary legislation and implementation framework needs to be devised.
* Respect of all cultures and faiths needs to be ensured on all levels.