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Check upon Delivery

Assalam Aleikum

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Imagine a young mother, an Afghan mother. She is educated, her children are alive, they are healthy and they are going to school. Now picture a future where every young Afghan mother is this mother. The Afghanistan that you are picturing now is a country that will be well on the road to a durable peace and prosperity as education is also at the heart of Human Security.

A few weeks ago, the Central Statistics Office of the Government of Afghanistan, with the support of UNICEF, released new data on the social, health, and educational status of women and children. Gathered through a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the data tell us the story of a country in transition, a country where great progress has been made, especially in the last decade. Many Afghans now have improved access to drinking water and improved sanitation, school attendance is dramatically up for both boys and girls and child and maternal mortality have decreased. This is all good news.



The data also tells the story of a country where women and children still face immense challenges, and a country of great geographical and social disparities. The infant mortality rate - the number of children per one thousand live births who die before their first birthday - is strikingly different for children born to mothers who have received no education and those whose mothers have received a secondary education.

A mother's level of education is the single most important factor affecting all other indicators, including infant and child mortality. This means that when a mother is well educated, her child is more likely to survive the first days, months and years of her or his life; the child is more likely to eat nutritious food, to stay healthy, to go to school and to stay in school. Through education and by providing access to other quality basic services, we can create positive, self-enforcing cycles of human and social development, and break down this cycle of poverty and deprivation.

The reality is that today only one in five Afghan women between 15 and 24 years of age is literate. We still have a whole lot of work to do. Investment in education must not only be sustained, it needs to increase dramatically. Education is crucial for a dynamic public sector and a vibrant private sector.

If we are to create long-term peace and prosperity, short-term planning and investments will not do. We must think long-term, invest long-term, and build on the significant investments that we have made already.

If we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for Afghanistan by 2020 as we have planned, international funding and political commitment for human and social development, through the provision of quality basic services and employment opportunities for all, must increase.

If we are to realise our vision where every young mother in Afghanistan is educated and her children are healthy and going to school, we cannot afford to leave any mother or any child out. We need urgently to focus our attention on reaching those who are most vulnerable and most excluded.

UNICEF has been working in Afghanistan for sixty years. We are committed to continuing our work to promote the rights of the children and women of Afghanistan, especially the most vulnerable. We commit to continuously improving the way we work in support of the Government and the people of Afghanistan, to deliver real results for women and children, to demonstrate these results, and to be accountable to them.

Ultimately, educated women, and education men and their educated children hold the key to a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan.

Tashakor/Manana

END