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USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening Activity

International Summit **Higher Education & Workforce Development in the 21st Century**

Summit Proceeding

MEDIA REPORT



The Nation

Jamad-ul-Awwal 06, 1444
THURSDAY,
December 1, 2022

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The Nation Islamabad | Thursday, December 1, 2022

Quick Read

USAID's international summit on higher education and workforce development begins

ISLAMABAD: The three-day international Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in the 21st Century commenced in Islamabad on Wednesday as part of USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening activities. The primary objective of the summit pertains to an issue close to the hearts of most individuals, especially Pakistanis i.e. Education. The focus, with respect to the aforementioned, is on higher education's alignment with and delivery to the requirements of the fast-paced 21st century – which ought to be achieved through ensuring provision of quality education, resolving challenges faced by HEIs in becoming sustainable and market driven, strengthening of university-level ecosystem, and potential of HEIs to become stakeholders in climate change adaptation.

The inaugural session was graced by the presence, remarks, and discussions of venerated guests from Pakistan and abroad. Key speakers for the inaugural session, among others, included Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, Executive Director Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) Dr. Shaista Sohail, and Ambassador of the United States Mr. Donald Blome. In his remarks in the inaugural session, Ambassador Blome highlighted 60 percent of Pakistan's population being below the age of 30 as the country's strength whilst emphasizing upon helping "youth achieve their full potential." Furthermore, the key assertions of the inaugural session pertained to the recognition of Pakistan's youth bulge's potential in not only aligning Pakistan with 21st century requirements but contributing substantially towards work force development both locally and globally. Dr. Shaista Sohail, Executive Director of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, presided over the first official meeting. Panelists of the first session were Dr. Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Dr. Asim Zia, Dr. Naveed Anwar, and Dr. Deborah Keyek-Franssen. During the panel discussion "Aligning Higher Education to 21st Century Needs," experts from OECD and top universities from around the world dissected five key trends shaping the future of higher education around the globe: Sustainability and Interdisciplinarity; Innovation and Entrepreneurship; Micro-credentials and Skills Education; Online and Distance Education; and Ensuring Building Diverse

Campuses. Additional key points made during the first session by esteemed guests reflected the necessity of connectivity between relevant stakeholders from across the globe; which ought to be ensured by abolishment of "elite capture of resources" by various colonial forms of higher education, especially in the wake of and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Friday

December 2, 2022

Jumadi-ul-Awwal 7, 1444 A.H.

18 pages
Price Rs. 30.00

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Islamabad/Rawalpindi Edition

Also published from
Lahore, Karachi, London and globally on the
World Wide Web at
www.thenews.com.pk

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INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
Friday
December 2, 2022

CITYNEWS

Islamabad/Rawalpindi
Edition

USAID's higher education system strengthening activity

Our correspondent

Islamabad

As part of USAID's higher education system strengthening activities, an international summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in the 21st Century was held in Islamabad. The summit's primary objective pertains to an issue close to the hearts of most individuals, especially Pakistanis i.e. Education.

The three-day summit will conclude on December 3 at Marriott Hotel, Islamabad. Carrying forward the vibrancy in terms of the sessions, the second day of the International Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in the 21st Century consisted of two sessions with enlightening panel discussions and thought-provoking questions. The focus herein is on higher education's alignment with and delivery to the requirements of the fast-

paced 21st century –which ought to be achieved through ensuring the provision of quality education, resolving challenges faced by HEIs in becoming sustainable and market-driven, strengthening the university-level ecosystem, and potential of HEIs to become stakeholders in climate change adaptation. The day was divided into two parts –the morning sessions and the afternoon sessions; the former's theme was "Strengthening University-Level Eco-System" while the latter focused on "Improving Quality of Higher Education and Role of Accreditation". The sessions were a combination of working group discussions as well as plenary sessions. The working groups featuring Chairs Lt. Gen. (Retd) Khalid Asghar, Former Rector NUTECH, Dr. Shahid Munir, Chairperson, Punjab Higher Education Commission, and US Senator Keith Grover further conferred over how to bring Pakistan's higher education institutions

further in line with global norms for institutional management in addition to concentrating on improving the teaching abilities of university professors to increase students' chances of finding work after they graduate.

Speakers in the working group discussions were Roger Griffiths, Thomas C. Piechota, Frankie Santos Laanan, Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Muhammad Usman Ilyas, Osman Hasan, Deborah Keyek-Franssen, Gerardo Blanco, Mary Bane Lackie, Naveed Anwar, and Natalie Humphrey.

The second day's second session featured Chair Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, President, of SZABIST University. A grim assertion she made with respect to Pakistani universities' international accreditation was that "Only two Pakistani universities (QAU and NUST) have managed to be accredited by international HEI ranking systems".

A solution to the aforementioned is quality improvement through the development of partnerships

between HEC, Provincial Commissions, and HEIs as opposed to the former's micromanagement.

The second session was graced by the presence and discussions of Dr. Gerardo Blanco, Dr. Samreen Hussain, and Dr. Sajjad Ahmed. Their key remarks included the imperativeness of developing education's relevance with current and prevalent market trends as well as the necessity of ensuring quality assurance in Pakistani HEIs.

Representatives from 16 public sector universities are attending the 3-day summit. Day 1 featured remarks from the Ambassador of the United States Mr. Donald Blume, Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal and other dignitaries. The summit will continue till 2nd December 2022.



The Nation

Jamad-ul-Awwal 07, 1444
FRIDAY,
December 2, 2022

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The Nation | 09
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Int'l Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in 21st Century continues



ISLAMABAD-Vibrant panel discussions and thought-provoking questions marked the second day of the three-day "International Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in the 21st Century" on 1st December, 2022.

The morning session comprised three working group discussions followed by a plenary session with the predominant theme of "Strengthening University-Level Eco-System". The afternoon session featured an expert panel on "Improving Quality of Higher Education and Role of Accreditation". The summit is part of USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening activities. The objective of the summit is to align Pakistan's higher education delivery to the needs of the 21st century by improving the quality of higher education, seeking ways to improve sustainability of HEIs and making them stakeholders in the country's drive towards climate adaptation. Three simultaneous working groups featured experts from Pakistan and abroad. Group one, chaired by Lt. Gen. (Retd) Khalid Asghar, Former Rector NUTECH, discussed ways to strengthen HEIs governance in Pakistan by aligning it with international best practices. Speakers in Sub Session I were, Roger Griffiths, Thomas C. Piechota, Frankie Santos Laanan, and Fazal Ahmad Khalid. Other working groups focused on capacity-building of HEI faculties which will help bridge the

career readiness gap and employability of graduates.

Dr. Shahid Munir, Chairperson, Punjab Higher Education Commission and U.S. Senator Keith Grover chaired the second and third working group respectively. The speakers for Sub Session II and III were Muhammad Usman Ilyas, Osman Hasan, Deborah Keyek-Franssen, Gerardo Blanco, Mary Bane Lackie, Naveed Anwar, and Natalie Humphrey. The working group discussions were followed by a combined plenary co-chaired by Lt. Gen. (Retd) Khalid Asghar, Dr. Munir, and Senator Grover. Individual group reports were presented. The second session of day two was chaired by Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, President, SZABIST University. Discussing the state of international accreditation of Pakistani universities, she emphasized: "Only two Pakistani universities (QAU and NUST) have managed to be accredited by international HEI ranking systems." She suggested that HEC and provincial commissions should stop micromanaging and should work in partnership with HEIs for quality improvement rather than merely supervising them.

Dr. Gerardo Blanco from Boston College said: "It is necessary to balance not only access and quality of higher education, but also relevance of education to the market trends" to improve employment. He added that for success, quality assurance systems must be complimented by "a commitment by individuals and supported by a culture of cooperation." Dr. Sajjad Ahmed from University of Nevada, compared the American HEIs accreditation system with that of Pakistan. He commented: "PEC, for example, handles entry tests, quality assurance, and licensing in Pakistan. These tasks would be handled by three different organizations in US." He stressed the need for quality assurance in Pakistani HEIs to be made a private, non-profit, and decentralized process.



The Nation

Jamad-ul-Awwal 09, 1444
SUNDAY
December 4, 2022

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Islamabad | Sunday, December 4, 2022 The Nation

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USAID successfully concludes 3-day summit on higher education and workforce development

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ISLAMABAD

The International Summit on Higher Education and Workforce Development in the 21st Century concluded in Islamabad on Friday, 2nd December 2022 after three days of deliberations and discussions. The summit was part of USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening Activity (HESSA). The objective of the summit was to align Pakistan's higher education delivery to the needs of the 21st century by improving the quality of higher education, seeking ways to improve sustainability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and making them stakeholders in the country's drive towards climate adaptation. The final session of the summit, entitled "Higher Education and Climate Change Adaptation" was chaired by the esteemed Sherry Rehman, Minister of Climate Change. Whilst chairing the session Minister Rehman expressed concerns pertaining to lack of integration of Climate Change education into Pakistan's higher education curriculum, asserting that "Campuses are a magnet for learning and change, creativity, innovation, and science-based learning". She further emphasized upon the imperativeness for HEI's adoption of inter and transdisciplinary approaches to climate change and a daption Key speakers for the concluding session were Dr. Asim Zia, Professor of Public Policy and Computer Science, University of Vermont,

Dr. Thomas C. Piechota, Professor of Engineering and Environmental Science and Policy, Chapman University; Dr. Michael Barber, Professor and Chair of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Utah, and Dr. Ghulam Rasool, Head of Climate Change Program of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Pakistan. The speakers primarily reiterated Minister Rehman's assertions pertaining to the development of an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to climate change education. Additionally, Dr. Ghulam Rasool highlighted the necessity for discussions about the reality of climate change especially in Pakistan and South Asia. Dr. Asim Zia carried forth the same ideas, suggesting that "We need to think in ways of indigeneity, what we can do to prepare for climate change on our own". According to Dr. Thomas Piechota, the youth bulge in Pakistan presents both an opportunity and a hazard for developing countries experiencing the worst of climate change. Sharing knowledge gained from his necessity for discussions about the reality of climate change especially in Pakistan and South Asia. Dr. Asim Zia carried forth the same ideas, suggesting that "We need to think in ways of indigeneity, what we can do to prepare for climate change on our own". According to Dr. Thomas Piechota, the youth bulge in Pakistan presents both an opportunity and a hazard for developing countries experiencing the worst of climate change. Sharing



knowledge gained from his university's Grand Challenge Initiative, he remarked, "Students have great ideas and innovations for local level interventions, that's a resource that should be utilized". In an effort to connect climate change education and research at universities around the world, Dr. Michael Barber stated that "Universities should own the climate adaptation," and that "the solutions to climate change will require everybody to be pushing in the same direction". Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Keith Grover, Utah Senator, Mr. Reed Aeschliman, USAID Mission Director, Dr. Aslam Chaudhry, HESSA Chief of Party, and Dr. Shaista Sohail, Executive Director HEC spoke during the concluding ceremony. Addressing the closing ceremony, HESSA Chief of

ceremony, HESSA Chief of Party Dr. Aslam Chaudhry reflected upon the key learnings and recommendations made during the three-day summit. The three key takeaways he outlined from the first session were "Developing higher education policy and programs that are interdisciplinary in nature incorporates sustainability as key consideration in problem solving and mainstreaming entrepreneurial skills to equip the workforce to solve local and global challenges", "There is a need to explore and provide more flexible pathways for upskilling and reskilling of those who want to advance their careers in line with the evolving demands", and "Setting up high quality and flexible online education in parallel to our traditional higher education system". Some of his key takeaways from session II were "Universities must look for new and innovative ways to mobilize resources, build partnerships

which includes private sector and communities, set up endowment funds, free up capital from non productive uses, and strengthen alumni engagement, "Universities should engage strong businesses and renowned academic thought leaders on their respective board of governors because they can help in attracting the private sector funding and also can provide guidance for the reform of the curriculum". Dr. Aslam Chaudhry outlined the necessity of implementation of faculty capacity building programs, elevating resource constraints, and launching mental health programs as crucial to developing institutional stature of universities, as key takeaways of the third session. The takeaways of the fourth session revolved around the education sector taking various paths to improve the value of degrees provided, technological advancements, and hard and soft

skills development of graduating students. Lastly, the important takeaways as well as recommendations of the fifth session that Dr. Aslam Chaudhry focused upon included ensuring cohesion in climate related research efforts with due input and guidance from relevant stakeholders. Low and unequal access, outdated teaching and research methods, poor connections between academics and business, and ineffective administration and governance are just some of the problems the Federal Minister Rana identified as plaguing our nation's institutions of higher learning. He further expressed his gratitude to the USAID for helping Pakistan's HEIs to meet the needs of 21st century. Dr. Shaista Sohail, Executive Director HEC, lauded HESSA for starting a conversation about problems in higher education that had not been adequately addressed before. She expressed optimism for the future, both of higher education in the country and the alliance between HEC and USAID and HESSA stating that, "We will continue our partnership with HESSA and USAID and implement recommendations in line with HEC's Vision 2025." Dr. Michael Barber congratulated the organizers and participants for an insightful summit on behalf of University of Utah, a project partner of HESSA. A special side event saw the inaugural meeting of HESSA-ORIC Working Group in line with HEC's Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC) policy 2021. Representatives from 16 public universities, all of which are participating in the HESSA initiative, were in attendance. Attendees also included academics and dignitaries from Pakistan, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Thailand, all of whom are leaders in the field of higher education. Five sessions were conducted over the course of three days, with working groups, plenaries, and expert panels on how HEIs can be made key stakeholders in the country's drive toward climate adaptation, in building the capacity of faculty, in increasing the market relevance of graduate programs, and in improving the overall quality and sustainability of HEIs.