Remarks by Ms. Esther Kuisch Laroche
Director & Representative UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office
on the occasion of the opening of the workshop on
Community Learning Centres and Mobile Learning for Literacy
11-13 May 2015

H.E. Dr. Ali Bagherzadeh Farouji, Vice Minister for Education and Head of the Literacy Movement Organization,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am very pleased and honoured to be with you here today for the opening of this workshop on “Community Learning Centres and Mobile Learning for Literacy”.

This workshop is the result of a number of discussions I’ve had with Dr. Bagherzadeh Farouji following a seminar on literacy held in March 2015, which some of you may have attended.

During that workshop I talked about UNESCO’s activities in the field of mobile learning and community learning centres, and in follow-up LMO requested us for more detailed information about these topics.

And so, I have requested our regional expert in this area, Mr. Ichiro Miyazawa, to come to Tehran to facilitate this workshop. Mr. Miyazawa is based in our Bangkok Office and has worked with several countries in the region to implement mobile learning projects and establish community learning centres to help adults develop literacy, math, and life skills using a supportive and holistic approach, so that they can realize their full potential at home, in the workplace, and in the community.

We are very pleased to have Mr. Miyazawa with us here this week, and he will be able to provide you with answers to some of the practical questions you may have.

I hope that you will find the workshop programme useful and interesting, and I encourage you to make it as interactive as possible. Please ask any questions you may have and share your own experiences in order to get the most out of this occasion.
I sincerely hope that the outcomes of this workshop will enable you to make informed decisions about the approach you would like to adopt here in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Your mission of advancing literacy is one of the most important missions one can have. Therefore, we are very fortunate to have someone as dedicated and committed as Dr. Bagherzadeh at the head of LMO.

Literacy is a fundamental human right and the basis for lifelong learning. It empowers individuals, families and communities and improves their quality of life. Because of its “multiplier effect”, literacy helps eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, and ensure sustainable development and peace.

This is why UNESCO has been at the forefront of global literacy efforts since its foundation in 1945. We believe that literacy is a crucial tool to empower people and nations, and this has also always been the conviction of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During this workshop you will discuss several aspects of community learning centres and mobile learning. Today and tomorrow we will look at policy and practices of Lifelong Learning through Community Learning Centres, and discuss experiences from other countries in the region.

On the last day of this workshop, we will talk about mobile learning and the risks and opportunities associated with that.

In this 21st century in which technologies are changing fast and are becoming ever more important in our daily lives, the importance of functional literacy is higher than ever before, and therefore I believe it is important to integrate the use of ICT in our literacy education efforts.

Yesterday, by chance, I read a quote from a professor at the University of Texas who said: "The future our students will inherit is one that will be mediated and stitched together by the mobile web, and I think that ethically, we are called on as teachers to teach them how to use these technologies effectively. [...]Teaching mobile web literacy seems to me as crucial as teaching basic literacy."

In less than a decade, mobile technology has spread to the furthest corners of our planet. Of the estimated 7 billion people on Earth, 6 billion now have access to a mobile device.
Smartphones and tablet computers are radically transforming how we access our shared knowledge sources by keeping us constantly connected to near-infinite volumes of raw data and information.

Education is getting increasingly interspersed with our daily activities. On our phones, tablets, and PCs, we download life- or work-related applications and articles.

We enjoy unprecedented instant access to expertise, ranging from informal cooking lessons to online university courses. Children learn to read, count or distinguish colours through online educational games or mobile applications. Even when I look at my own kids, my youngest son already knew how to use an iPad at the age of 6 months.

This just goes to show that continuous or lifelong learning will simply be a given for the generations of today’s youngsters who are often literally born within reach of a connected personal device.

This is why, UNESCO is working to help governments and individuals use mobile devices to advance Education for All Goals; respond to the challenges of particular educational contexts; supplement and enrich formal schooling; and, in general, make learning more accessible, equitable and flexible for students everywhere.

UNESCO has conducted research in a number of areas, such as mobile reading, mobile learning policies, and promoting gender equality with ICTs. The resulting publications describe the unique educational advantages of mobile technology and articulate strategies to build policy environments in which these advantages can take root and grow.

In parallel with its research, policy and knowledge-sharing work, UNESCO also pilots many innovative projects with mobile devices and applications in Asia, and other regions around the world.

Mr. Miyazawa has designed a project entitled «Mobile-Based Post-Literacy Programme», which was implemented in Pakistan to address the literacy retention problem of newly literates, specifically young and adult females. He will tell you all about that experience in detail on the last day of this workshop, and we will also discuss the possibility of implementing similar programmes in Iran.
In closing, let me just reiterate that the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office is here to support your on-going efforts to promote and further increase functional literacy in all parts of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The first time I met Dr. Bagherzadeh Farouji I promised him that I would personally do my utmost best to assist him in any way I can, and I intend to keep that promise. Therefore, please continue to count on UNESCO’s full support in all your endeavors. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Dr. Saeidabadi and his colleagues at the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO for their continuous support to our activities.

I wish you very fruitful deliberations and look forward to hearing the outcomes of this workshop.

Thank you.