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Only 22% of girls over 10 years old will finish primary school – compared with 47% of boys.

Girls' Education in Rural Pakistan

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION, DEVELOPMENTS IN LITERACY

by Sarah A. Simons



Student in a primary school run by Developments in Literacy

IN DECEMBER OF 2006, I traveled to Pakistan, where my classmate John Hellmann and I conducted interviews with teachers and staff of Developments in Literacy (DIL) schools. Our work and research in Pakistan were components of a Master's in Public Policy client project, and involved a seven-month organizational assessment to aid Developments in Literacy in its efforts to bring education to the disadvantaged girls and boys of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, only 53% of population is literate—where literacy is defined as the ability to write a simple letter and read a newspaper. As in many countries where women's basic human rights are still emerging in the political and public spheres, literacy rates reflect entrenched cultural inequities. In some regions of Pakistan the

literacy gap between men and women can be as large as 45 percentage points. Take for example the North West Frontier Province that borders with Afghanistan. There the male literacy rate is 61%, while the female literacy rate is an abysmal 22%. In some rural areas of the country such as Kalat in the Province of Balochistan, only 9% of women are literate – compared to 40% of men.

Many international nonpartisan organizations, such as the *International Crisis Group*, have declared that the state of Pakistan is failing to provide education – one of the most important public goods – to its citizens. This is most evident in enrollment statistics from the country's own private school census data. (Private school is defined to include both for-profit and non-profit schools.) More than one-third of Pakistan's students attend

schools operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Public government schools are particularly absent in rural regions. Moreover, there are many *ghost schools*: empty, unused government buildings in rural areas where urban teachers do not want to teach. For these reasons, Developments in Literacy and other organizations have stepped in to work with communities and set up schools. Developments in Literacy, in particular, is emerging as one of the leading education NGOs in Pakistan that provides education to children in rural areas and incorporates a special focus on girls.

Developments in Literacy

Developments in Literacy is a non-profit organization formed in 1997 by Pakistani expatriate women to provide education for underprivi-

In my village there was a lot of ignorance and illiteracy before. A lot of people from my generation are illiterate, but now the tides are changing and I hope that within the next ten years there will be no one who is left without an education. I dream of making my school so good that it will become a model in relation to other schools.

– DIL teacher at a school in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

leged children in rural Pakistan. DIL (which means *heart* in Urdu, the national language of Pakistan) currently has nine projects throughout the country, six of which it manages through local NGOs. Currently, DIL and its partner NGOs are operating 150 community-based schools and educating over 13,000 students. Many DIL schools are the first ones in their village, representing the first opportunity for girls and boys to obtain an education. Furthermore, DIL hires only women as teachers. This is primarily to generate buy-in from parents who would otherwise feel uncomfortable sending their daughters to male teachers. However, it is also evident that hiring women as teachers not only generates employment for women (for many it is their first job opportunity), but also influences the role that women have in their communities as leaders in the education of the next generation.

While DIL schools are open to both boys and girls, the organization focuses on targeting girls. Each school has a Village Education Committee that is composed of volunteers from the community who, among other tasks, speak with parents to encour-

age them to send and keep their girls in school. Although cultural norms are shifting in Pakistan and women play a much larger role in society, there are still areas where girls' education is a newly embraced concept. DIL's project staff, as well as the Village Education Committee members, play a vital role in shaping these communities and the futures of many girls.

The Client Project

The assessment John Hellmann and I conducted for Developments in Literacy examines the current teacher professional development strategies DIL is using. DIL's teachers have on average the equivalent of an 8th grade American education and typically have received a poor education based on rote memorization techniques. They often have no teaching experience prior to entering the classroom. For this reason DIL provides its teachers with continuous teacher training throughout the year in order to help its teachers improve their subject and pedagogical skills.

Our client project involved conducting a total of 91 in-depth, open-ended interviews with DIL teachers,

staff, and teacher trainers as well as with leadership and staff of other leading education NGOs in South Asia. Three weeks of our seven-month analysis were spent in Pakistan in the field. We also conducted a thorough document analysis of DIL's internal records and communications in order to evaluate organizational management and operations issues. Lastly, we used a best practices and literature review in the analysis of the critical issues we identified and the recommendations we generated for DIL.

Our time in the field with DIL's teachers revealed that they do face problems in the classroom, but are extremely dedicated to their work. One teacher we interviewed instructs from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon and then tutors all of her students in her home every day after class. Additionally, demographic data on the educational attainment of the parents of DIL's teachers demonstrates the changes that are occurring in their rural communities. We found that while nine years was the average education level of the teachers' fathers, their mothers had only received an average of two years of education. Given that DIL's teachers are educat-

ing a new generation of girls and boys, it is evident that their impact on the future of these rural areas will be profound.

Our project's work focused on ways in which DIL could improve the impact and sustainability of the professional development strategies it currently uses. Teacher training is one critical area and our final report identified methods with which DIL's project staff can improve the efficiency and reach of training workshops. Our recommendations included the institutionalization of a pre-service training program for all new teachers that incorporates on-site observation of more experienced teachers, as well as increased on-site support to facilitate the learning process that DIL's teachers are undergoing. We also provided DIL with methods in which it could utilize peer mentoring and staff coaching techniques to help teachers effectively transfer skills and knowledge from training workshops to the classroom. Lastly, we provided DIL staff with recommendations to help them improve the efficiency of the needs assessment methods they currently use.

The ultimate product of this client project was an in-depth report with the analysis and criteria through which we weighed options and narrowed our final recommendations. As DIL is a non-profit organization the recommendations sought to maximize existing resources, namely personnel and current activities. Eco-

nomics feasibility was another critical criterion and the report incorporated cost analysis and budget expenditure proposals. Lastly, we provided DIL with a detailed work plan for implementing our recommendations and a fundraising plan for addressing future cost difficulties.

Working in Pakistan alongside the women who form the team of teachers that instruct in DIL's schools was a remarkable experience that will guide me not only in my professional endeavors, but in my personal desires to ensure that women's basic rights become a part of the public policy debate in lesser developed countries like Pakistan. As DIL's teachers expand their own education through the professional development that DIL provides to them, the girls and boys in their classrooms will also receive a higher quality of education.

Ensuring education for girls is vital, not only for resolving gender inequities such as those occurring in Pakistan and many of the world's lesser developed countries, but it is also critical for helping these countries rise up out of poverty. As Vinod Thomas of the Economic Development Institute has stated, "educating girls lifts their earning potential and their nation's economic growth, ...and reduces child mortality, fertility rates and the spread of AIDS." Education for girls is a basic human right that empowers them as they grow into women who will shape the future of their families, communities and countries.

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Sarah Simons is a Master in Public Policy Candidate in the School of Public Affairs. Her academic and professional work focus on international development policies,

specifically in the field of education and economic development. She earned her B.A. in Language Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz and then worked in Mexico for three years. During her time in Mexico she worked for a non-profit organization that addresses health and family planning issues for indigenous women in rural areas of the state of Oaxaca. She also assisted in the coordination of a research project on the role of midwives in rural Mexico. Upon graduation in June of 2007 she will be entering the U.S. Foreign Service to work overseas in the field of international policy. She is grateful for the generous assistance of a travel grant from the Center of the Study of Women that helped her conduct her research in Pakistan.