

NEWSLETTER

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Ishtivi Primary Girls' School in the Foothills of Nooristan

Editorial

With the international forces planning a phased withdrawal from the country in the coming two years, the fear of insurgent attacks on schools, in particular girls' schools in the country, has become more intense, with alleged incidents of poisoning of students, and torching of school buildings being a cause of serious concern, both for the families of school-going children, and for school administrators and the government. As many as 550 schools in 11 provinces of the country remained closed down in response to threats from anti-government groups.

This somber picture of the state of education in the country however, is not without a brighter side. The incident of the closure of schools in Ghazni last month, ended positively in Andar district, when the communities of 10 villages united against the groups threatening schools in their area, and took up arms against them and routed them out of their districts, determined to protect the right of their children to an education and a better future.

This issue of the EQUIP newsletter focuses on the northern region provinces, bringing other similar heart-warming stories of communities that took on the responsibility to allow education to reach their children and actively contributed to realizing the hope for a better tomorrow for their children. We plan to bring stories from other regions of Afghanistan, of other challenges and victories in subsequent issues.

We welcome your reactions and comments, which will enable us to produce more interesting and relevant content in our subsequent issues. Please email any suggestions or feedback to zikh.haq@gmail.com. We look forward to a hearing from you.

EQUIP and NEI – A New Partnership for Common Goals

In May EQUIP found a new partner in the Nutrition Education International (NEI), a US-based humanitarian aid agency that aims to eradicate malnutrition in Afghanistan through introducing soya bean as an affordable and highly nutritious protein source for impoverished masses at risk of malnutrition.

The initial meeting on May 16 led on to more exciting developments when, ten EQUIP School Management Shura members representing Noman and Sadiqi High Schools in Parwan, along with the Provincial Deputy Director, participated in a planned training of the NEI in PARwan, for the Provincial Agriculture Directorate leadership and local farmers.

National and international experts from NEI explained the importance of nutrition, and trained participants in planting, caring for, and using soya bean as food. At the end of the one-day training, each participant received 5 kilos of soya bean seed and fertilizer. The two schools that participated plan an experimental and educational yard garden in the school premises, which will be used to educate students about nutrition, and the role soya bean can play in eradicating malnutrition.

EQUIP has already made plans with NEI, that its school 'shuras' and Provincial Education Directorates in Herat, Ningarhar, Kunar, Kunduz and Daikundi, will also send trainees to the training

School Management Shura Members of Khalid Bin Walid High School Raise funds For Boundary Wall Construction

School Management 'Shuras' have sometimes proved to be forces of positive change, and have provided support to the cause of education. This was proved true by the 'shura' of Aolia Khalid Bin Walid High School in Balkh province. With a population of 1956 students of whom, 950 are female, the school was established in 2006. The school lacked a boundary wall, which seriously compromised the safety and privacy of the students, particularly the older girls. At a recent meeting of the 'shura', Mr. Abdul Wahab and Ms. Maryam Zelah, members of the school management 'shura', donated 275,000 Afghanis and 300,000 Afghanis respectively, for construction of the school boundary wall.

The 'shura' raised an additional 275,000 Afghanis by soliciting help from the provincial UNICEF office, bringing the total funds raised for the wall to 850,000 Afghanis.

This outstanding achievement of the school management 'shura' was announced at its recent meeting on May 01, attended by the Provincial EQUIP Officer and Head of Balkh Education Directorate, Mr. Qais Mehar Roain.

EQUIP in Nuristan

EQUIP's contribution to the vision of 'education for all' in Afghanistan, has taken its services to the remote and picturesque province Nuristan. The province's rolling green hills, crystal clear mountain rivers, and blue skies, belie the extreme hardship of the life of most of its inhabitants. However, the people of this scenic paradise, with a lifestyle still centuries behind even by Afghan standards, have understood the value of education, and are doing all they can to ensure benefit of a modern education for their children.

An example is the community in Parun Markaz district, which contributed whole heartedly to the construction and equipping of Ishtivi Primary Girls' School. A school 'shura' member, Maulawi Zenatullah, donated two 'jeribs' of land worth 600,000 Afghanis, for community contracted construction of the school building. Construction of the school began as soon as the first installment of funds was released. Determined to use the window of five to six warm months to the full, the community advanced the remaining cost of construction, to complete the work before winter, instead of waiting for the remaining installments from EQUIP. The harsh winter weather there makes any kind of construction activity impossible.



Grade 4 students in Ishtivi School Nuristan



Learning to write in Ishtivi School Nuristan

Problem of Retention of Girl Students in Panjsher High Schools

“School administrators and principals should model a strong belief in the principles of education for all, and should be champions of the cause of schooling for girls.” Mr. Zikria Yahyapoor, Provincial EQUIP Officer from Panjsher made this remark when relating the problem of high school girls of Lycee Naswan Unaaba and Lycee Naswan Qabzan.

The provincial EQUIP office in Panjsher received reports that girls above ninth grade from the two schools, were dropping out of school in worrying numbers. The school management ‘shuras’ were consulted and asked to find out the reason for girls dropping out of the schools. An investigation committee visited families of the student drop outs, and even persuaded a few to return. Most had social pressures and family reasons for the decision to discontinue their education.

The committee discovered that the headmaster of one of the schools and the principal of the other had also pulled out their daughters from school due to social pressures.

This action on the part of the leaders of education was not in keeping with their position and unlikely to inspire confidence in the education system. Mr. Yahyapoor recommended that these points be considered seriously when recruiting school administrators and principals.

The community also constructed five functional washrooms and a water reservoir for the school children from out-of-pocket contributions. Social Mobilizer Qari Safiullah remarked on the community’s commitment to the cause of education, and reported that the local women contributed out of their earnings from selling beans they had harvested from the land.

The Ishtivi School Management Shura used the quality enhancement grant effectively, stocking the school with excellent quality locally made furniture, a science laboratory, and computers.

Despite community support, education advancement is snail paced in this forgotten land. The reason is a severe lack of qualified female and male teachers. “We have done our part”, says Qari Shafiullah, “but what good are all the rooms, furnishing and equipment the schools have, if we do not have qualified teachers?”

The communities in Nuristan look toward the Ministry and the EQUIP program, to solve the problem of qualified teachers, while their own teachers complete training at teacher training colleges in neighboring provinces.

My Mission to Yamgan District in Badakhshan Impressions of a Social Mobilization Coordinator

I was deeply impressed by the growing realization of the value of education, among communities even in some of the most remote parts of the country. Last year during an official mission to Yamgan district in the mountainous northern Badakhshan province, I had an experience that has left a lasting impression on my mind.



Going to school in Yamgan Badakhshan

*Some Interesting Facts
About Education in
Samangan Province*

Population: approx 400,000

*Teacher Training Colleges: 2
(for male and female
students)*

*High schools: 29 girls'
schools, 25 boys' schools, 6
schools for both girls and
boys, and 3 vocational
schools*

*Middle Schools: 34 boys'
schools, 22 girls' schools, 49
schools for girls and boys*

*Primary Schools: 33 boys'
schools, 8 girls' schools, and
52 mixed schools*

*Islamic Education Schools:
1 Dar-ul-uloom, 7 madaaris
for boys, 1 madrassa for girls*

*Total enrollment in schools:
97,353 [61,017 boys and
36,336 girls]*

*Total number of teachers:
2806 [1703 male and 1103
female]*

Schools with buildings: 132

*Schools without buildings:
123*

*Schools with buildings under
construction: 17*

The EQUIP office team was on its way to Yamgan, an 8 -10 hours drive from the provincial center, to monitor progress in work on a community constructed school building. Having driven along a precarious mountain dust road for hours, we were stopped by a road block just 10 kilometers from our destination. Local men were excavating the mountainside for road construction. Huge rocks and boulders had been dislodged and were scattered all over the way, making the road impassable for the car we were riding.

We got down to talk with the workers, and to take pictures of the scene, having concluded that there was hours of work before the way could be cleared, and that we would have to turn back and retrace our steps.



EQUIP team surveys road block on way to Yamgan



Yamgan School Constructed by EQUIP

As soon as the men discovered the purpose of our journey, the momentum of the work changed. An elderly gentleman refused to let us return, saying that whoever was bringing education, health, or development to their village, would not have to turn back before they got there, and promised to ensure that the road block would be cleared in minutes rather than hours. He expressed the appreciation of the people of Yamgan and hoped that because of our efforts, the children of Yamgan would read and write, and grow up to one day lead the nation.

We agreed to wait, and lend a hand in clearing the way, and sooner than we had imagined, the rocks and boulders had been tossed into the river below, clearing a way for our vehicle to drive through.

As we arrived in the village, where the community has agreed to contribute labor to clear the six feet of high ground surrounding the school building, I was struck by the genuine thirst for education and progress among the people of this remote mountain village.

Story and pictures contributed Mr. Najibullah Torakai – Social Mobilization Coordinator EQUIP.



Girls and boys in Samangan Schools