



NEWSLETTER EQUIP

The Education Quality Improvement Programme

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Faces of Afghanistan of Tomorrow

As we wrap up the activities of 2012, schools are closed for the long annual winter holidays in most parts of the country, and the empty halls and corridors – oftentimes the bare tree branches underneath whose green shade children sat on the dirt floor facing a blackboard, await the return of the childish chatter and commotion, and the ringing of the school bell, with the onset of the coming spring, renewing life and hope for the country.

This issue of the EQUIP newsletter marks the end of an academic year hails in the beginning of the New Year. It is dedicated to the dreams and aspirations of Afghan school boys and girls. Through it we would like to showcase the aspirations and achievements of young Afghans, and to let the students, or their work speak for themselves. We present a collection of photo montages, student art work, and stories that reflect the world vision of our citizens of tomorrow, and underline the importance of ensuring a safe and fulfilling environment in which they can develop into responsible and capable adults. We also recognize the sincere efforts of communities that believe in their children's right to education, and which are willing to contribute their time and resources to protect this right.

Among the myriads of unfinished and yet-to-begin efforts, our children represent the resilience and individual success stories that give us hope, and make it worth our while to continue striving to promote the challenging but vital goal of education for all in Afghanistan.

As always, 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.

In January and February 2013...

- 1 30 new classrooms were built in 3 provinces
- 2 5 schools' construction completed through community contracted and national competitive bidding grants
- 3 124 new school management 'shuras' established in 14 provinces
- 4 606 'shura' members from 79 school 'shuras' trained in Balkh province

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Sameera Afzali An Artist in the Making



Teenaged Sameera Afzali is a high school student and portrait artist. During a routine monitoring visit to Number Yak Yulmarab Girls High School in Mazar-e-Sharif, DSM Zahra Areib (Mazar-e-Sharif EQUIP officer) met with a budding

artist -- eleventh grader Sameera Afzali.

Sameera started painting five years ago, when she was in grade eight. Her art teacher, Najma, trained and inspired her to pursue her passion for art, and since then, she has been

fortunate to receive continuous encouragement and support from her family and teachers. Sameera works with pencil, charcoal, and pastel colors, and has produced 100 drawings, to date.

Her talent was recognized and encouraged by the Provincial Education Directorate and she received an appreciation letter signed by H.E. Education Minister, along with other gifts.



Samples of Art by Sameera Afzali



From Darkness into the Light Yalda Ihsanzada

Yalda Ihsanzada is a seventh grader in Lycee Durkhanai, a girls' high school in Kabul with 4216 students. In her mid-year exams she stood first in the entire seventh grade, among 800 students. An aspiring journalist Yalda not only works hard at her school books, but also coaches her classmates in preparation for exams. Her best friend and classmate Zahra gets help from Yalda to understand difficult scientific concepts in Physics and Chemistry. In addition to her school work, Yalda is memorizing the Holy Quran, and has memorized seven of its 30 verses. Like many other girls her age, Yalda likes to listen to Afghan music and to her favorite radio programs. But Yalda is no ordinary girl.

Yalda is special in that she does all this although her eyes

cannot see. The oldest of eight children in her family, Yalda was born blind. She has never seen any light or color; she reads and knows shapes with her fingers, and measures space with her feet. When Yalda first tried to enroll in this regular school after having been home-schooled her in reading and writing in Braille for two years by the NGO SERVE (which helps to rehabilitate and reintegrate children with special needs into the education sector in Afghanistan), the school management was reluctant because they did not have the resources to provide learning tools and other facilities for a student with special needs. Today, Yalda is successfully following the regular school curriculum and is at the head of her level. She speaks better English than most of her classmates, and is even able to help her peers with their lessons. All her school books are in Braille, and recently one of Yalda's school teachers participated in a training workshop to learn Braille. Lycee Durkhanai school is now confident it can provide education to more students with special needs.

Yalda Ihsanzada has two younger siblings who are also blind. They are currently learning Braille at home in preparation to join a regular school.

Yalda's quiet determination and simple optimism are an inspiration to everyone around her. Her school, Lycee Durkhanai, is an example of the first small steps toward inclusive education in Afghanistan that is accessible to students with different learning abilities.

Community Support for Hejrat Abad School in Rodat

The local community's support for Hejrat Abad School in Rodat district of Nangarhar province -- a mixed school with 759 girls and 803 boys students -- is beginning to have positive results. The active school 'shura' has enabled the school administration to address some of its urgent problems, and to ensure a secure and comfortable learning environment for its female and male students and staff. The 'shura's' most significant contribution to the well being and security of the school has been its decision to construct an 88 meters long, 2.5 meters high boundary wall, and install a school gate, using a total



of 48,000 Afghanis in out-of-pocket funds.

Construction work is underway.

The 'shura' recently responded to the urgent need for toilet facilities for girl students. Though the school has both boy and girl students, toilet facilities are available only for the male students; girls have to go home in case of need, thus disrupting their lessons. The 'shura' recognized this as a serious problem, and has made construction of toilets for girl students a top priority in the school's improvement plan. They appealed to EQUIP and the District Education Department to support their request and enable the school to solve its problems.

Where People Value Education

Khwaja Khan Baba Middle School located in Khwaja Khan Baba village, street #12 of the central district of Baghlan province, has more than 320 male and female students. The local villagers contributed 120,000 Afs to purchase 1.2 Jeribs of land beside the village mosque for the community-contracted construction of a 4-classroom school building. As a result, students who were previously having their lessons in the village mosque could have a separate school facility. The agricultural plot of land had a small hillock, which was leveled at an additional cost of 40,000 Afghanis, also contributed by the community, and prepared for building the school. Cont...





School Shura Supports Charmgarkhana High School Development in Jowzjan

Initially established as an elementary school in 1984 (1363), Charmgarkhana High School in Jowzjan, first began providing elementary level classes in the guard room of the Research Center for Petroleum and Gas, with a single teacher. With the number of students increasing, the space was not enough, and the directorate of the research center also allocated the tailoring house for use by the school. Seven years on, the school was upgraded to middle school to provide for the need of the growing student body. In 2001 (1380), Charmgarkhana School was finally upgraded to high school level, and currently has 1885 male and 2077 female students, and 10 male and 117 female teachers. Due to the constraints of adequate suitable classroom space, male students have classes at the research center's tailoring facility, and female students within the hydro meteorology and cartography directorate compound.

The School Management 'Shura' is actively involved in

solving the problems of both the school's (boys and girls) sections, and supported the school in improving the security, and addressing socio-cultural challenges. The most significant contributions of the school 'Shura' include:

- Construction of 6 toilets
- Purchase of frame for school gate
- Repair of 45 student benches
- Mud plastering of school roof every year before winter season
- Purchase of plastic floor mats for class rooms
- Assistance to school management with monitoring students' and teachers' attendance
- Establishment of First Aid facilities in the school
- Repair of students drinking water tanks
- Ensuring of school security.

The 'Shura' enabled the school to use the quality enhancement grant of 275,000 Afghanis, provided by MOE's Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) to procure books, computers, desks, chairs, and cupboards.

As one of the community elders and 'Shura' members says, "After establishing the school management 'Shura', significant positive changes have been observed in the education environment. The number of girls enrolled in the school has increased; student attendance has improved, and boys and girls are coming to school with interest. More and more people are taking interest in helping education. Now that we are involved in school improvement issues and in solving problems, we understand that we are members of a community that supports education. At the monthly meetings of the school 'Shura' we evaluate the school's needs and problems, and work together to find ways to solve them."

Where People Value... Contd.

The education-loving village community not only invested material resources in building the school, but also protected the right of their children to a good education. While construction of the school was underway, the area was temporarily taken over by armed groups. However, school construction could continue because of the intercession of the 'shura'.

Though all needs of the school and its students are far from having been met, thanks to the active 'shura', Khwaja Khan Baba Middle School now has a permanent school building.

Through the intervention of the school management 'shura' the IDA constructed surrounding walls for the school compound according to the standard design recommended by the Ministry of Education.