A letter from Genevieve Walsh

IQRA FUND’S CEO & FOUNDER

The last year has been a hard one for International NGOs in Pakistan. The federal government ordered 38 foreign aid groups out of the country in December 2017, after they didn’t register under regulations introduced in 2015. Iqra Fund is now one of a few remaining international nonprofits working in education on the ground in Pakistan.

Throughout this upheaval, we’ve continued to grow. In 2018, we served 3,038 students, employed 74 teachers, and partnered with 22 communities in Baltistan. As we’ve further strengthened our relationships with the regional and national governments, Iqra Fund has received recognition from Pakistan’s ministries of education and interior, as well as the education department in Shigar District.

Building a high level of transparency and accountability into our operations has earned us this respect, and getting to this point has been a team effort. I’m grateful, in particular, for our Pakistani staff: Through their work, Iqra Fund has become a leader in education. Our board of directors has also been crucial to creating a framework that ensures the team we trust on the ground can develop the relationships, protocols and procedures necessary to making our operations a success.

After eight years working in northern Pakistan, our results show that our model works here. In 2018, 100 percent of sixth to eighth grade girls in our schools passed national exams, as compared to the country-wide average of 57 percent. Our programming is practical, sensitive to the local population, and driven by data. And because it’s demand-based, it is sustainable by nature. Before we consider working with a community, its leaders must form a committee and formally request our partnership and then sign a contract committing to keep their girls in school past primary age. Community leaders and parents say the opportunities we give these children have changed lives. None has broken a contract.

We couldn’t do any of this without our committed donors. Thank you for believing in us. Together, we’ve provided quality education to more than 3,000 children who wouldn’t otherwise have had that opportunity. They are the future of Pakistan.

Genevieve Walsh, EdD
**2018 RESULTS**

- **92%** of girls in participating villages are enrolled in school (from 0% pre-Iqra Fund).
- **100%** of sixth to eighth grade girls passed annual national exams.
- **85%** of fifth grade girls passed annual national exams.

- **25%/90%** minimum percentage of girls’ and boys’ school costs invested by communities within three years of partnering with Iqra Fund.
- **85%** of village leaders regularly participate in Iqra Fund capacity-building workshops designed to help them better support children’s education.
- **40** hours invested annually into each teacher’s professional development through our partnership with the British Council, now in its fourth year.

- **295** girls in five villages received school books and supplies through a USAID grant.
- **850** students served by three new schools built: Rusty “Punk” Templeton School in Doghoro Village, the Dempster-Adamson School in Sibiri Village, and Noorjahan Habib in Beisl Village.
- **90** mothers learned vocational skills including garment making and tailoring skills that increased their ability to earn an income. Funded by the USAID grant.
Iqra Fund board member Kathryn Everett visited our program area and produced a documentary called *Girls Section* in 2018. The film shows our work, as well as the challenges our students face and the incredible strength, passion and resilience in this next generation of leaders. It won awards at the Beijing Film Festival for Best Short Documentary and Best Girls Documentary, and was shown at the Telluride and Big Sky film festivals. Watch it at [vimeo.com/321784435](https://vimeo.com/321784435).
In July 2018, two members of the Iqra Fund Board of Directors, Rahat Azfar and Rabia Iqbal, visited our program area. Rahat is an epidemiologist and dermatologist practicing in Abu Dhabi, and Rabia is a New York City-based business development and investor relations professional at Mubadala Capital.
Rahat and Rabia went to the Hunza region of Gilgit, sightseeing and learning about some of Iqra Fund’s first schools, and then to Baltistan, where they visited four of our partner villages in the Basha and Basho valleys.

They described the region’s incredible remoteness and beauty, noting that the drive from Gilgit to Baltistan took more than 14 hours on rough, winding roads. Along the way, they encountered rockslides and mudslides.

“The people seem poorer and the resources available in these areas are much less than Gilgit,” Rahat wrote in a post-trip report about our current programming area in Baltistan. Internet, mobile connectivity and electricity are constant challenges both in Skardu and the field, and none of the areas they visited had computers.

In the villages, the board members met with Village Education Committee and Mother Support Group members, as well as teachers and students, learning about the girls’ goals and dreams, and how to support female leadership in the organization and the communities we serve.

Our Director of Operations, Pervez Sajjad, accompanied the board members for the duration, and they also met the rest of our in-country staff. Rahat and Rabia described the staff’s commitment to their work, noting they often leave before dawn to travel to a community or spend days away from home.

“The staff told us they feel like a family and are very happy to work with each other,” Rahat wrote. “They collaborate often, and there seemed to be a high level of trust within the Skardu team.”

The following images from their trip show Iqra Fund as we are today: a vibrant, growing presence for education and capacity-building in the communities we serve.
Rabia chatted with some of the younger girls after the Tissar ceremony. The students were shy in front of teachers, parents and male Iqra staff, she said, but with the board members they opened up. The students inquired about scholarships for secondary school, and showed off the work they’d done in their school notebooks.
Students, fathers and village elders attended the Tissar ceremony, and Rabia said she was blown away with the fathers’ enthusiasm. “It was really heartwarming to see how much they truly cared about education and where they wanted to see their girls.”

“These girls want to go to school and want to continue their education,” Rahat wrote. “One wanted to be a pilot. But she just became engaged to a neighbor’s son whose family is very poor. It is unclear if she will be able to continue her education.”
In 2018, we built new schools in Doghoro, Sibiri and Beisl villages. Pictured here is the Dempster-Adamson School in Sibiri, which was built in honor of alpinists Kyle Dempster and Scott Adamson. The other two schools were also constructed and funded in memory of lost loved ones. Since the main focus points of Iqra Fund’s model are community investment, educational programming and teacher training, we’ve always used existing structures for our classrooms, and these are the first schools we’ve built. With our student success rates so high, the demand was there.
A typical day for most female students includes working in the fields, going to school, studying, madrassah and housework. The days are long and exhausting. Through our Mother Support Groups, village women have come up with creative ways to get household and farm work done without as much help from children. Among them is structuring school in shifts, so kids can split their days between school and work, which helps deal with limited classroom space, so a teacher can work with one class in the morning and another in the afternoon. Fathers are also helping more in the fields, allowing children time to study. “Seeing the children eager to learn and the parents struggling financially yet encouraging their children to pursue education was humbling and inspiring,” Rahat said.
From left, Director of Operations Pervez Sajjad, volunteer Sumaiyah Ahmed, board member Rabia Iqbal, Rahat's husband Yasser Khan, Sumaiyah's mother Rubina Islahuddin, board member Rahat Azfar, and Rahat's mother Shirin Razvi. “The trip was enlightening on many levels and provided us with a much better understanding of how our work is accomplished on the ground,” Rahat said, encouraging all board members to visit.
2018 FINANCIALS

$519,671 raised in 2018
$435,717 invested in Pakistan
$100,000 gift established our endowment fund
80% increase in donors
$100,000+ raised during Ramadan
50% increase in Zakat gifts

Continued partnerships with:

For detailed financial reporting, please visit iqrafund.org/financials.