Central Asia Institute’s field report documenting projects in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan
In this issue:

3 WELCOME: Join us on another Journey of Hope
4 GENERATIONS OF HOPE
7 ‘If You Learn, Then You Have To Do’
11 NURTURING HOPE: Starnes and Mortenson visit CAI projects in Pakistan’s mountains
18 HOPE LEADS THE CLASS
22 ‘This Is A Noble Job’
24 Never-Ending Search For Qualified Teachers
26 FACES OF HOPE: Photo essay
30 HEALTH AND HOPE
33 ‘Much Work To Do’
36 GENERATING HOPE: Pennies for Peace
40 WHY IS GIRLS’ EDUCATION SO IMPORTANT?
44 LISTENING TO HOPE IN THE PAMIR MOUNTAINS
47 HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL: CAI celebrates good news
48 CAI Personnel, Board of Directors and Contact Information
48 About the Journalists

Cover: A group of girls giggle at the sight of visitors to the Nar School in Baltistan, Pakistan.
Opposite page: A woman breaks twigs to start a fire for tea in Chapurson Valley, Pakistan.
Inside back cover: A woman threads a hand-cranked sewing machine at Singul Women’s Vocational Center in the Ghizer district of northern Pakistan.
Back cover: The CAI-supported Kipkut High School in Afghanistan’s Wakhan Corridor is shadowed by the towering Pamir Mountains.

Photos by Erik Petersen
Asalaam Alaikum,

As executive director of Central Asia Institute, I want to welcome you to Volume VII of the Journey of Hope. I recently had the honor and pleasure of visiting Pakistan and Afghanistan, visiting schools and meeting many of the students, teachers, and community members portrayed in this edition of our annual publication.

I want to congratulate Karin Ronnow and Erik Petersen for their hard and difficult work in gathering the stories and photos for all of us to enjoy. Many CAI-supported schools and projects are located in extremely remote and dangerous areas. In some cases, the only means to travel to those schools was by extensive foot travel or on horseback.

As I look through this year’s edition of JOH, I am reminded of the amazing work CAI does to provide educational opportunities for thousands of young people. And I am reminded why CAI is still needed.

Every day our students embark on a journey of Hope. Some literally walk miles to get to school while their families make great sacrifices to put an end to generations of illiteracy. The education they receive, which we believe should be a right of every child, gives them hope for a better, healthier, safer, and more peaceful future.

Enjoy, and thank you to all who have supported Central Asia Institute now and in the future. Your support does make a difference and the Journey of Hope is our way to share that with you.

David A. Starnes, Executive Director

Left: CAI Executive Director David Starnes and Co-Founder Greg Mortenson walk through a village in Husha Valley, Baltistan, Pakistan.

Above: Starnes gives young students a quick English lesson at Marzigon Primary School in Husha Valley, Pakistan.
Gulal Begum couldn’t read books to her eight children or help them with their homework. “There were no schools in my time,” Gulal, 54, said of growing up in Hushe Valley in the Karakoram Mountains.

But she was determined to break the cycle of illiteracy that ran for generations in her family. “Always, whatever problems came along, [my husband and I] put those on our own shoulders and put our children’s education first,” she said.

Gulal’s daughter, Shakeela, knows that her mother sacrificed for her. Her mom’s steadfast encouragement was key to Shakeela becoming the first female graduate of Central Asia Institute (CAI)-supported Hushe Community School, and recipient of a CAI scholarship for higher education in Lahore.

“I am very thankful for my mother,” Shakeela, 25, said. “Mostly mothers insist to bring daughters to labor in the field or work with animals. But she kept me focused on my studies.”

Most people in the impoverished villages where CAI works live in grinding poverty, never knowing anything different. Life is about survival. Resources are limited. They are far removed from seats of power and there is little or no communication with the outside world, except by word of mouth.

The culture is hierarchical, built on family and kinship, and includes strict gender roles. Traditionally, girls help their mothers at home, marry young, have babies, and repeat the cycle.

Shakeela’s parents were determined to break that cycle. Her father, Mohammad Aslam Khan, was the first educated man from Hushe. He knows the value of education and insisted on it for all of his eight children – sons and daughters. And her mother, although uneducated, was enlightened enough to agree.

What Gulal didn’t anticipate, however, having no education herself, was the willful determination her daughter would develop. “She was mostly a quiet child,” Gulal said, smiling at her daughter. “Then after she got in school she got a little confidence and she became much opinionated.”

Confidence is good. One could even argue that confidence is mandatory for any young woman working outside the home in this part of the world.

For the past two years, Shakeela has been a full-time government health worker in the Thalley Valley, northwest of Khapalu. “Mostly my work is to give help delivering babies, sometimes in my clinic, sometimes home delivery,” she said. “I cover 16 villages—the whole valley. There’s no phone, no taxi, nothing. Just convey word people to people. Mostly people are coming after midnight. The main problem with delivery cases at nighttime is that it is hard to get there. Usually I have to walk two to three hours.”

But she knows that women are more likely to die in childbirth if there is no midwife present—so she gets there.

In the first 18 months on the job she helped deliver more than 180 babies. In the past, dozens of women died every year in childbirth, but since Shakeela has been on the job, only two mothers died in childbirth, one from a retained placenta, and one from cephalopelvic disproportion (CPD), which happens when a baby’s...
“Mostly mothers insist to bring daughters to labor in the field or work with animals. But she kept me focused on my studies.”

—Shakeela Begum
head or body is too large for the birth canal.

Between deliveries, she provides pre- and postnatal care, and family planning when requested (she said women used to have as many as 16 children, and a few still do, but the average is now closer to nine). She also cleans and disinfects wounds, makes stomachaches go away, and treats high blood pressure and pneumonia. The visits are free, but she has to charge for the medicine. She also visits at least one school in the valley each month to talk about hygiene and nutrition.

The job pays Shakeela about $150 per month, plus housing.

She and her husband, Abdullah, who is also educated, have talked about moving. “If she could work at hospital in Khapalu, she could make more money, and transportation, medicine, and doctors would be available,” he said.

Khapalu, the district capital, is downriver from Hushe. Shakeela’s parents resettled there to give their children access to higher education. “Aslam, her father, he has been trying to transfer her to Khapalu,” Abdullah said. “But when the community there [in Thalley Valley] heard this idea, they start a revolution against her leaving.”

But communities had already begun to sense that something had to change. Populations were growing, putting pressure on limited resources, said Saidullah Baig, program manager for CAI-Gilgit.

“Mostly in the remote areas people have small lands, and the families are dividing and dividing the land,” Baig said. “A father dies and his land is divided among his four sons. Then those four then divide their smaller pieces among their own sons. Eventually, they have no land there; it’s finished. That’s why we need men and women to work together for education and a better future.”

For centuries, education wasn’t a possibility in many of the remote places where CAI works. Against a backdrop of grinding poverty, one generation of illiterate people succeeded another.

“When he [CAI Co-founder Greg Mortenson] first came to Braldu Valley, he talked about a school and we said we had no school, no books, no pencils,” said Taha Ali, village chief in Korphe. “We said, ‘Braldu Valley has Marco Polo sheep, ibex, snow leopards, but no education.’”

No one could make the argument for girls’ schools quite like the late Sarfraz Khan, who led the way for CAI in some of the most re-

For centuries, education wasn’t a possibility in many of the remote places where CAI works. Against a backdrop of grinding poverty, one generation of illiterate people succeeded another.

“When he [CAI Co-founder Greg Mortenson] first came to Braldu Valley, he talked about a school and we said we had no school, no books, no pencils,” said Taha Ali, village chief in Korphe. “We said, ‘Braldu Valley has Marco Polo sheep, ibex, snow leopards, but no education.’”

But communities had already begun to sense that something had to change. Populations were growing, putting pressure on limited resources, said Saidullah Baig, program manager for CAI-Gilgit.

“At that time, not everyone was in favor of girls going to Skardu for education. They were criticizing Jahan that she is going out of Islam. Now everyone is saying, ‘We have made mistake. If we had sent our daughters to school, maybe they would be success like Jahan.’”

—Taha Ali, village chief in Korphe, and Jahan’s father
Jahan Ali, Taha’s daughter, didn’t have her mother around to fight for her. Jahan’s mother died in childbirth and her father and grandparents raised her. Luckily, her illiterate grandfather, Haji Ali, had the foresight to bring education to the village. Korphe School was completed in 1996 and Jahan was immediately enrolled in the school that eventually bore her grandfather’s name.

Taha said: “If my father [had] not allowed her to go to school at that time, Jahan would be another uneducated woman, maybe with three to five kids, no education, no good life.”

After she completed Korphe School, which was then a middle school, a CAI-supported scholarship allowed her to finish high school, attend a six-month government healthcare training program and finish college in Skardu. “I want to give good example for CAI,” she said.

She has done all this hand in hand with Tahirah, daughter of Korphe School headmaster Master Hussain. Tahirah, too, is married. She and her husband have one son. The families live together in an apartment in Rawalpindi, a crowded and noisy garrison city a world away from Korphe. The two young women are now enrolled in a master’s degree program for English.

Taha said he has no interest in learning to read and write, but he has learned something along the way. “Usually all the girls and women who have no education, they have many problems. But now Jahan is safe.”

Education can provide long-term safety. Yet in the short term, in this part of the world, it can still be a dicey proposition for females.

Afghanistan has been “in a protracted state of conflict and instability” for three decades, according to Unicef. Everyone suffers, but females in particular bear the burden of the instability. A lack of girls’ schools, short-term areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. He said in 2012: “We tell them, ‘If the mother is educated, she can teach all of your children. Father not teaching children, he is out from the house, going to work in fields. But mother is inside the house. Education starts from home, from the mother. If mother has good education, then she teaches her children from when they start learning. After that, your daughter’s children become good people and then we have peace. That is why we need girls’ education.’”

Each generation should be made to bear the burden of its own wars, instead of carrying them on, at the expense of other generations.

—James Madison

‘IF YOU LEARN, THEN YOU HAVE TO DO’

GICH, Pakistan—Chan Bali has gone where no woman in her village has gone before.

After completing training at the Central Asia Institute-supported women’s vocational center here, this mother of four set up a small tailor’s shop on the main road through the village, making her the first woman business owner in Gich.

“I thought, I can do something for myself,” she said. “I can stand on my own feet.”

She opened her store in late 2012. Thus far, the community has embraced her enterprising spirit. “If they create problems, I don’t care about that because I need to help my family,” she said in late May.

Her family supports her. “My husband is in the Pakistan Army,” said Bali, who declined to give her age. “He’s the one who has given me the idea. He said, ‘If you learn then you have to do.’”

Supportive family members, particularly husbands and fathers, “who put no limits on their movements or who they spoke to,” are key to female entrepreneurs’ success in Islamic countries, according to a study by the University of Bedfordshire in England.

In Bali’s case, her husband encouraged her and “helped me negotiate [rent] with the owner of this building.”

It’s a simple shop, a square room in a cement building. One wall holds a floor-to-ceiling shelf, six wooden planks stacked high with fabric, yarn, thread — some for sale, some for use in making the hand-embroidered “bed sets,” clothing, and school uniforms that Bali sells.

“Locally people demand these bed sets for weddings and other such kinds of events,” said Bali. “Also, people from this village and from the other villages, when they need to...
Afghan students at Kapisa Teacher Training College share their experiences.

“My country needs teachers. Education is necessary because it will change Afghanistan for the better.” —Asra

——Karion Ronnow

In a proper way to do something for ourselves children are proud of me.”

My kids, school fees and clothing. We have not so big land here, so I use for children’s education, so we think about what we can do for our children. They should have good education and good lives.”

CAI’s training program gives women the tools to deliver on those dreams, Bali said.

“We have seen so many institutions working in different places, but I’ve never seen an organization trying so hard [as CAI] to empower every family member and pushing us in a proper way to do something for ourselves and our family,” she said.

Now she is a role model, showing what can be done.

“I am earning more than my expectation,” she said. “I use the money for expenses with my kids, school fees and clothing. We have not so big land here, so I use for children’s education. I have four children, three sons and one daughter. They are in good schools. My children are proud of me.”

And so are we.

—Karin Ronnow

age of female teachers, prohibitions on female education, concerns about safety and security issues—all contribute to Afghanistan’s stubborn 13 percent female literacy rate.

For generations, rural Afghan women believed education was not possible for them or their daughters. Things began to change after international forces ousted the Taliban from power in December 2001. But more than a decade later, violence against female independence has not abated. A 2011 Thomson Reuters Foundation poll ranked Afghanistan the most dangerous country in the world for women. Taliban attacks on girls’ schools, students, and teachers continue, despite “official” Taliban declarations that girls’ education is OK.

Anisa, a young woman in Kapisa province, was killed in early 2013 as she walked home from school.

“She was working for the government. She just took polio vaccine and went to homes to vaccinate children,” said Asra, Anisa’s 18-year-old neighbor. “She did work because she got paid and needed that money for her family. Her father and mother are both dead. She lived with her sister.

“One day she was walking alone and someone killed her with a gun. She didn’t use burka and some people don’t like it when women don’t wear a burka, go to school, or go outside their home,” Asra said.

Asra, however, is not intimidated. A CAI-supported scholarship student at Kapisa Teacher Training College, she wants to teach high school-level science and math to girls.

“My country needs teachers. Education is necessary because it will change Afghanistan for the better,” she said.

The violence touches everyone, intimidating some while motivating others.

Hasina, Asra’s classmate, is among the motivated. Her father died in the fighting during the Taliban rule in the late 1990s. Her widowed, illiterate mother was left in Kabul with three daughters and few options, Hasina, 19, said. “My mother was young and women did not have permission to work,” under Taliban rule. “If we stayed in Kabul, we would starve, so we moved to Kapisa,” to live with extended family.

As soon as Taliban rule ended, when Hasina was 7, her mom enrolled her girls in school, determined that they would have more opportunities than she did.

“My mother had the same idea for herself, but she didn’t have a chance to go because of fighting,” Hasina said. “I have good fortune that my mother didn’t. She is happy I have this opportunity.”

Their extended family, however, is not happy about Hasina’s pursuit of higher education. “They told me to stop it,” Hasina said. She is able to continue only because of her mother’s support and the CAI scholarship.

She wants to teach mathematics to middle-school-age students, “but I can teach any class. No matter to me.” Like so many students in Afghanistan, she understands the role of education in building a better future for her country. “This is the best way to help my family and my community,” she said.
still, these brave young women are the exception rather than the rule in Afghanistan. Girls now make up nearly 40 percent of the nation’s 8 million students, but Afghanistan still has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world, according to UNESCO.

Shabona, 18, wanted to go to school. “Knowledge is very important, but my family wouldn’t let me go to school because it is far from my house,” she said.

She found a happy medium, however, in the CAI-supported literacy program in her Kabul neighborhood.

Wakil Karimi, CAI’s program manager in central and eastern Afghanistan, created the nine-month program for females of all ages who missed out on education. Classes are held in teachers’ homes to assure privacy and safety. The curriculum brings students up to about a third-grade education, able to read and write, count money, navigate their way around the overcrowded city, and even use a cell phone.

Shabona said she found it just in time; her window for education is small. She is engaged to be married, she said. “My fiancé says once we are married, no more school.”

Most of the 45 women at one CAI-supported Kabul center “didn’t go to school because their parents wouldn’t let them,” their teacher, Wazhma, said. “They grew up in time of fighting and there were no teachers, no schools. Or they had to work at home or in the fields and then married young.”

At age 28, Zeba, is just learning to read and write. Like the other women, she arrives under the cover of a burka, which makes walking from her house less objectionable to the local men. Whatever it takes, she said, is worth it; she’s determined to do this for her children. “My children are too young to go to school yet. But I want to learn some things so that I can help them,” she said, adding that her husband is illiterate. “What I learn here every day I go home and teach them. Education is a family problem.”

For Liluma, 35, the literacy program is a family solution. Her husband balked at the idea of sending his daughters to school. “I wanted education for my daughters, but my husband did not agree with me,” she said. “He said no to education. Then he learned about this school and he said, ‘Yes, go. And take your daughters with you.’

“It is not too late for me,” Liluma continued. “I very much want to learn to read and write. People who can’t read are like blank. But now my eyes are opening and I see many differences in myself.”

One of her daughters, 12-year-old Sadaf, said she hopes this is just the beginning of her education. “I want to learn to read and then get more education and become a teacher.”

Just before he left the country in February, Gen. John Allen, former commander of U.S. and NATO forces, told Reuters news agency that improved access to education was one of the most important accomplishments in Afghanistan in the past decade. “Here’s an opportunity for this young generation… to grow up in an environment where education is inherent in who they are,” he said.

But the gains are tenuous. No one knows what will happen in 2014 when international troops leave. And conservative areas of the country are still resistant to girls’ education. “Some of these places are still like jail for women,” Karimi said.
had to ask for money from men,” Kamela Sediqi, an Afghan entrepreneur who helps other women start their own businesses, told Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, author of Dressmaker of Khair Khana. “If we can give them some training and an ability to earn a good salary, then we can change their lives and help their families.”

This is particularly important because women are far more likely than their husbands to spend money—if they have it—on their children’s health and education.

The CAI-supported women’s vocational centers in central Afghanistan are a natural next step for graduates of the literacy program. Women learn how to make patterns and sew clothing for themselves, their families, and, in some cases, their neighbors.

“I will make clothes for my children, then for the village, and slowly get money,” Sunila, 35, said. “I have six children. I can use money to buy notebooks and supplies for their schooling. Most of the time men don’t give us money. My husband has a little bit of education, but he is a farmer. If our children get education, Afghanistan will improve and develop. But security is the most important issue for us. When people have education, then security will follow.”

The CAI-supported women’s centers are a big hit in northern Pakistan, too. In early May, 54 women at the Hasis Women’s Vocational Center, a 2012 project, were in training for handwork (embroidery and stitching) and “cut and sew.”

For Shah Froz, 30, the training has already been a big help for her family. She had to quit school when she was in seventh grade. “My father died of pneumonia and there was not any way to continue my studies. My parents were not educated and I had no elder brother or anything to support us. For three or four years I was working in the fields and with animals, helping my mother. I was 15 years old when I married.”

She is married to a retired soldier, who is uneducated, and they have four children, ages 6 to 14. “We are facing many difficulties to give good education to our children, to feed them. We can’t meet their needs,” she said. “If I had a good education, I could support my family and always I am thinking about that.”

Since the training began, she has begun doing some sewing work on the side.

“With the training I am improving my handmade things and selling them,” she said, adding that she gets $1.50 to $2.00 per piece. “When there are not other events, I can do one per week.”

She uses the money to pay her children’s school fees. “All four children are in school. They want to change their lives. They shouldn’t live their lives like us, they should do something to have better life.”

B ack in Khapalu, Gulal Begum and Aslam Khan feel the same way about Shakeela and their other children. They said educating their children paves the way to a better future for their entire community—especially the women.

“It’s all our energy. We saw trekkers and they asked, ‘What is this?’ We said, ‘We have no jeep and we are taking her to Khapalu.’ So the trekker said, ‘If you don’t mind, I can carry her on my back.’

“At that time I make promise that I will push for lady health workers for our area. I’m very happy that my daughter can stand on her feet for this service,” he said.

Shakeela is a pioneer, CAI Executive Director David Starnes said when he met her family in June. But she didn’t accomplish it alone.

“The door can be open for education, but you have to walk through,” he said. “It’s inspiring to see a family take such an interest in making their community a better place.”

Mortenson recalled meeting Shakeela in Hushe more than a decade ago.

“Shakeela was 10 or 12 years old when she told me she wanted to be a health practitioner,” Mortenson said.

Shakeela quickly corrected him. “Actually I wanted to be a lady doctor.”

It didn’t work out quite that way for her, she said, holding her 3-year-old daughter in her arms. But her brown eyes sparkled as she said she intends to work just as hard as her parents did for her own children’s education.

Already she has dreams for her daughter. “She will become a doctor,” Shakeela said.

A student listens to her teacher at Shesph Girls’ High School in Afghanistan’s Wakhan Corridor.
NURTURING HOPE IN PAKISTAN’S MOUNTAINS

Starnes and Mortenson visit CAI projects to see what works and what doesn’t. By KARIN RONNOW
Every school day, rain or shine, Mohammad Iqbal, 14, throws his right leg over his bicycle and starts pedaling up the road. He rides for an hour to get to his high school, pedaling along the dirt road carved in the mountainside above the Shyok River.

He wants to be a civil engineer with the military, so the ride is worth it.

“It’s far to walk, so I got a bicycle and a pump for flat tires and I go,” he said.

Mohammad attended Halde Middle School, which Central Asia Institute (CAI) helped build in 1999. But the village has no high school, so only the most determined students like Mohammad are able to continue their education, CAI Co-founder Greg Mortenson told the organization’s Executive Director David Starnes during a June visit to Pakistan.

“The first time I met Mohammad, he was in about fourth grade,” Mortenson said. “He was sitting in the front of the classroom and even then I could see his invincible determination to go to school. It’s hard to know just where it comes from. But it’s that courage and resilience that will make the difference. Without it, Mohammad faces impossible odds.”

Mohammad’s can-do attitude also inspires younger children in his village, who run alongside him calling his name and asking for rides.

On that June day, 50 girls and 73 boys were enrolled at Halde School, according to Headmaster Abid Hussain. They attend classes in three buildings—an old stone community primary school, a blue cement government school, and the yellow four-room addition CAI helped build.

“This school was a lot of work,” Mortenson told Starnes. “It’s a long story. There was lots of fighting.”

But the contention didn’t end with completion of the building. In 2011, a CBS News report in the United States alleged that Halde was a failed project, a “ghost school” that the community was using to store wheat rather than to educate students.

That’s not true, Hussain told Starnes and Mortenson, shaking his head.

“Iqbal agreed. “From the beginning [Halde School] was running, it was never closed.” Plus, he said, it’s a good school. “I got a good education in Halde, so now high school is easy.”

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

The snowcapped peaks of the Karakoram Mountains tower over Halde and extend for miles in every direction. Five of the 14 highest peaks in the world are here—K2, Nanga Parbat, Gasherbrum I and II, and Broad Peak.

The mountains give and take. They provide precious water for drinking and cultivation. Their meadows provide pasture for animals and the rocky slopes hold sought-after minerals and gemstones. Periodically, the mountains heave and shudder, causing catastrophic avalanches, flash floods, and landslides.

The mountains also hold endless challenges for climbers, whose expeditions in turn create hundreds of seasonal jobs for high-altitude porters, cooks, and guides. The CAI team’s June visit coincided with the start of the 2013 expedition season.

“There are still many unclimbed peaks here,” CAI’s Baltistan program manager Nazir Mohammad said over tea at the home of Mouzafer Ali, the Balti porter who led Mortenson off K2 in 1993.

Mouzafer was the one who originally requested CAI’s help with the Halde school, Mortenson reminded Starnes as they walked to the school after tea.

Village elders walked with them, agile
men with hands clasped behind their backs and eyes on the rocky paths. School had already finished for the day, so a boy had been dispatched to find the headmaster. Curious children abandoned their chores and tagged along, creating a celebratory procession through the village.

Hussain met them in the schoolyard, situated on flat ground downhill from Mouzafer’s house, closer to the river. After discounting the “ghost school” story, the 30-year-old educator led a tour of the school. He boasted about the recent shift to teaching some classes in English and bemoaned the lack of a boundary wall around the school’s three buildings. “People walk through and make distractions for students,” he said, just as a woman strolled through leading a small cow.

The government pays the school’s six teachers, he said, but added, “We have teacher shortage. We have nine classes running, from nursery up to eighth class, but only six teachers.”

The CAI team knew where Hussain was going with this. Although CAI has been working in Baltistan for nearly two decades, the demand for education in these mountain villages has exploded, Nazir told Starnes. “I have more than 200 request letters.”

Starnes told the headmaster this was his first visit to Baltistan and he was just collecting information, not making any promises. Later, he explained: “It’s clear that by CAI helping these small community-based schools, we’ve opened the positive version of Pandora’s box and demand is skyrocketing. But as we say at CAI, this is a good problem. We will continue to work with communities and government and others to figure out how best to address the never-ending requests for more help.

“But we can’t do it all ourselves. CAI has created the opportunity, the interest, and the demand, but now it’s bigger than us. In the future we need to find ways to bring more partners to these areas,” he said.

LONG NEGLECTED

In a world defined by maps and borders, Baltistan is part of Pakistan’s Northern Areas, now known as Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). The rugged mountain region borders India, China, and Afghanistan, and has been a “disputed territory” with India ever since partition in 1947. Its estimated 1.2 million people are mostly Shia Muslim and speak at least 15 different languages and dialects.

Only 1.8 percent of the land is cultivated, according to the GB Department of Education. Generations of illiteracy mean most of the workers are unskilled. As of 2010, per capita income hovered around $350 a year.

GB’s education system lags behind the rest of Pakistan, but people want education, the education department reported. “Due to rapid change in quality of life of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan,” more parents are demanding quality education for their children. A handful of institutions like the military-operated Cadet College offer high-quality education to an elite few. Most “poor children study in the non-elite low-quality private and public schools. Most of these schools fail to produce students who can compete for high-end jobs to allow” them to climb out of poverty.

EDUCATION EXPEDITION

Starnes and Mortenson had an ambitious schedule during their month-long visit to the region. Starnes’ goal was to see it with his own eyes, “I’m here to be educated about the work that CAI, Greg Mortenson, and the communities have done over the past 18 years so that I can really have a better understanding of how it happened, what’s working, what isn’t working, and the role that CAI can continue to play in supporting the right of every child to get an education.”

They started in Gilgit in early June and immediately headed north to the Chapurson Valley. Although there was no time for sightseeing, their route along the Karakoram Highway (KKH) took them through some of the most beautiful places on the planet. The highway itself is a marvel, having been carved out of the mountains in the 1970s with the help of Chinese engineers and dubbed the Eighth Wonder of the World.

As the KKH winds north through the Hunza Valley, sections of it are as “quiet as a
country lane, running beside neatly planted fields of spinach, potatoes and cabbage and sun-dappled orchards of apricot, apple, peach, pear and plum,” travel writer Michael Palin wrote about his 2003 visit to the region.

But it is a mountain road and the weather, landslides and truck traffic from China take a toll. In recent years, Chinese crews have returned to help Pakistan rebuild the KKH. The improved sections are two lanes wide, paved, with drainage ditches and guardrails. Rocks still crash down from the mountains, punching holes in the new pavement and periodically stalling progress—but it is a huge improvement.

Traffic moves faster along these improved stretches, but everything comes to an abrupt halt at the edge of Attabad Lake. The icy-cold reservoir formed in 2010 when a massive landslide dammed the Hunza River, flooded villages upstream, and destroyed a stretch of the KKH. Although locals still hold out hope that the dirt dam will give way and the lake will drain, the solution in the meantime involves something not commonly seen in these mountains—boats.

Dozens of big wooden dories brought up from Karachi ferry a steady stream of people, imported Chinese goods, food, and supplies from lakeside “ports” on the north and south ends of the lake. This past year, an ambulance boat was added to the fleet after numerous people died on the north side of the lake for lack of medical attention. Chinese transport companies have even invested in a barge with cranes onboard to move trucks.

Yet there is still only one way to move a private vehicle across the lake.

Starnes watched us as Juma Khan, a CAI worker, slowly and carefully drive his red Land Cruiser onto two boards laid across the gunwales of one of the dories. “Well, necessity is the mother of invention,” he said.

Later, he added, “People figure out what they need to do. Mother Nature came in and created this massive event. People paused and then found a solution. Is it particularly safe? No. Is it crazy? Maybe. But if people feel it’s worth it, they do it. They make it work.”

But if the fleet of boats solved some of the problems created by the lake, Starnes soon learned it hadn’t solved them all.

Ali Nazir, head of the education committee in Khubabad village, further north on the KKH near Sost, said the effects of the lake plague the region.

“We are disconnected, road-wise and communication-wise,” he said. “We cannot transport any basic food items. Everything economically is very big burden. People used to grow potatoes and onions. Now they don’t grow because can’t ship them. Prices of everything go up. Construction materials cost rise 40 to 50 percent. It is a big, big problem.”

REMEMBERING SARFRAZ

Just past Sost, on the left, is the turnoff for the Chapurson Valley road. The vertigo-inducing road winds through sandstone cliffs along the Chapurson River, heavy with spring runoff in early June. As the road climbs higher into the Hindu Kush Mountains, cut here and there by mountain streams, the rock changes to granite and the valleys grow wider and greener.

The road bumps along through more than a dozen small villages until it ends in Zuudkhan, a small village at over 11,000 feet altitude. About 70 families live here, almost all of them Ismailis (a subsect of the Shia branch of Islam) of Wakhi descent.
CAI has worked in Zuudkhan since 1999, so the elders know Mortenson well.

“It is a long time since you visited and the whole village was waiting for you,” Dildar Baig, head of the local jamat (village organization), told Mortenson during a celebratory feast at the Zuudkhan Library. “It was Fazil Baig who first introduced CAI to this valley and we thank him for his great work. Last year we had the great loss of Sarfraz Khan. It is a national loss. We cannot forget his services. May his soul rest in eternal peace.”

Khan, CAI’s most-remote-areas project director and a Zuudkhan native, died in 2012. The library was one of his last projects.

One of CAI’s first projects in the village was Zuudkhan High School. Saidullah Baig, CAI’s Hunza-region program manager, is particularly proud of the school’s evolution. He attended the school in its early days, back when, “it was only a primary school without any building,” Baig said, adding that Khan was his first teacher.

“We were studying in the teacher’s house, in somebody’s kitchen, or in the open air,” he said. “Now in Zuudkhan we have a high school with 14 classrooms, science lab, computer lab, and library. Everything is set up there. So when I go there I am proud because I know which condition that school was 25 or 30 years before.”

CAI also helped the community build a women’s vocational center, which “changed the lives of our women here,” Haider Murad, a village elder and curator of the local museum, which CAI also supports, said during a reception at the center.

“Before this center, the women were working in a small kitchen. It was smoky and with no light. Then CAI provided the women with this building, and training, and now they’ve become more commercial-minded and even opened this shop.”

The shop is a small, one-room cement building adjacent to the center where the women sell their handicrafts: heavy wool sweaters, hats, gloves, rugs, and embroidered pieces. They also stock some soap and other toiletries that have become much harder to get “because of the lake,” Baig said.

The women’s center has 70 active participants, said Fazil Karim, head of the management committee. And they are active. This past year they worked with other CAI-supported women’s centers in Chapurson to start a Sunday crafts bazaar, arranged for additional “sweater-making” training, and churned out dozens of woolen mats handicrafts for the shop. “All of this we sell and the profit we are giving into the women’s savings accounts,” Karim said. Each woman earned about 30,000 to 40,000 Pakistan rupees (about $300 to $400) last year.

“Mubarak (Congratulations),” Mortenson told Karim and the women.

But there’s more, Karim said. “For future plans, we are trying to train for different skills. We want to sell wool [yarn] in the market. We should get a loom to make wool for caps and coats. We’d like to have more training for sweaters to improve the quality of the product. The women also bought land, a field for growing crops. They leveled the ground, plowed and planted it. I’d like to start a welfare education center and maybe use the crop money to help orphans with education costs. I was orphan and had no education opportunities. We could help pay for books and school fees.”

Mortenson praised their accomplishments. He said people had settled Chapurson Valley eight to 10 generations ago, “but for 100 years there was nothing – no education, no road, only aloo (potatoes). Two generations ago, some dedicated boys walked to school, but no girls, only boys going. Then in 1999 CAI helped with a water project, then a high school, then a vocational center. Three years ago electricity came here. Then the lake dam happened and many more hardships come to Chapurson again. But women didn’t give up. You still have hope, and your faith and dedication is keeping the area alive during this time.”

CAI’s multiple projects here have helped, too. Starnes and Mortenson visited as many of the primary, middle and high schools, preschools, village healthcare workers, and women’s centers as they could. And the reception they got everywhere exceeded Starnes’ expectations, he said.

“I am overwhelmed with your generosity, your welcome, your willingness to take in a stranger and make him feel so much at home,” he said in Sheresubz. “I will be back for another cup of tea.”

On their last day in Zuudkhan, Mortenson and Starnes joined villagers at Khan’s graveside for a memorial service. People put rocks and flowers on the grave and the elders praised the man who’d given so much to his community, country, and the world.

The villagers were then invited to Murad’s house for tea, where people told stories about Khan and laughter mixed with the tears.

The mood lightened significantly, however, when Murad announced it was time for the polo match, organized in honor of the visitors. The women and children of SherSubz village in Chapurson Valley, Pakistan, line up to welcome their visitors.
and in memory of Khan, an avid polo player. Musicians on the sidelines provided additional entertainment and men danced on the polo field between sets. The local team won.

Before leaving, Starnes said CAI would work with the community to find a way to honor Khan’s memory. “I did not have the privilege of knowing Sarfraz, but I am sorry for your loss. But Sarfraz couldn’t have done any of this work without you; you all deserve credit for the accomplishments of this village. And CAI will see what is the best way to continue on all the great work that has already been done.”

NEXT STOP, SKARDU
For Mortenson, this journey covered many familiar paths. He first came to GB in 1993 to climb K2 and has been coming back ever since.

“This time I was there to show David around the projects,” he said. “I promised him I would show him what works and what doesn’t work. Over the years I have learned that one can always learn more, and the best way is to learn from your mistakes. I also learned that what’s key is relationships. No matter what you do, without relationships there is nothing. So I wanted to introduce David to as many people as possible.”

The next stop on their trip was Skardu, the capital of Baltistan (also known as Little Tibet), about 100 miles east of Gilgit. The shortest route is via the Skardu Road, through the mountains alongside the mighty Indus River. Travel writer Palin called it “the road that eats jeeps.” He wrote: “The existence of a road at all in this desperately confined space is something of a miracle.”

This time the CAI crew had clear sailing, no landslides or other obstacles, just a slow, bumpy, twisting eight-hour drive through the Indus River gorge. For Mortenson, crossing the bridge over the Indus just before Skardu churns up all kinds of emotions.

“For me, coming back to Baltistan always feels like coming home,” he said. “I am always elated, no matter how tired I am, to see the great Karakoram Mountains and return to the people I love who are so hospitable and kind.”

And this time, Nazir had a surprise waiting. When they arrived at the Indus Hotel Starnes and Mortenson walked into a “Silver Jubilee” party. Nazir had collected about a dozen friends and longtime CAI supporters and laid out an impressive spread of fresh fruit, cookies, a cake, and many pots of tea.

“Today is the 20th anniversary of Greg and his mission” to promote education in the mountain villages of Pakistan, Nazir said. “Twenty years of service. Congratulations, sir!”

ATTITUDES CHANGE SLOWLY
Much has changed since 1993. Nazir said the biggest change is among the people, who now understand “the importance of education, especially for their sisters and daughters.”

Yet girls’ education is still an uphill battle in some places. In Hushe village, where CAI has worked since 1997, only 61 of 205 students at Hushe Community Middle School are female. And there are no girls in classes six, seven or eight.

That is a concern, Mortenson said.

Khadiim Ali, a teacher at the CAI-supported Hushe School, agreed. He said villagers – including Abdul Karim, a renowned expedition guide known in mountaineering circles as Little Karim – have worked hard to change the thinking about girls’ education.

“At first, the people were not sending daughters and sisters to school,” he said. “They think they need to work at home, collect the firewood, work with the animals – all this is done by the girls and women. So when I start, we go house to house saying, ‘Please send your females to school. It is compulsory to send boys and girls to school now.’ So now you see that there are more girls in the younger classes.”

Hushe’s head teacher Hassan Rashid attributed the low girls’ enrollment to the region’s poverty and traditions. “The parents are poor. And in Islamic society sometimes families think girls shouldn’t go to school, or only go for two or three years. Sometimes they marry their daughters as young as 12 or 13.”

But, he said, things are “slowly changing. There were no girls here at all when I started. But in the next years we will work harder.”

MOTHER NATURE
On the day Mortenson and Starnes headed for Hushe, Mother Nature tested everyone’s patience. After a stop in Khapalu to collect friends and juggle vehicles to accommodate the growing crowd, the crew headed north.

As Nazir had predicted, spring runoff had carved a water-filled gully through the road in flood-prone Talis village. And there were reports of more roadblocks ahead.

Apo Razak, Mortenson’s longtime friend and CAI advocate, was pessimistic about going forward. “Road broken in three places and now afternoon sun and more water coming,” he muttered. “Too much problem.”

Mortenson, however, was undeterred, convinced that the jeep drivers and the villagers would find a workaround. He and others handed out boxes of mango juice and notebooks to the children who had gathered around the jeep. Several boys, giddy about their gifts, ran uphill, lifting their notebooks in the air and shouting, “Yes!”

Two hours later, Mortenson’s optimism...
won out. The jeeps splashed over strategically placed rocks in the gully, the people were escorted across a jury-rigged stick bridge, and the crew moved on.

After stops at projects in Halde, Marzigon, and Khanday, they were back on the dirt road that winds up the Hushe Valley. As they bumped along, Mortenson pointed out CAI projects, and he and Nazir recounted past adventures to give a sense of the organization’s history in the Hushe Valley.

As the shadows began to lengthen, the jeeps hit the brakes. Another landslide/road-block. This time the jeeps weren’t going any further.

So everyone piled out, pulled off shoes and socks, grabbed luggage, boxes of school supplies and food, and crossed the frigid stream to two local jeeps waiting on the other side. It was dark by the time the crew reached Hushe. Mortenson got out so he could walk into the village and greet old friends. He’d seen it countless times before, he said, but “the poverty and living conditions here always sadden me.” Access to basic services – clean water, electricity, healthcare, cellphone service – decreases as the road heads north. By the time the road ends in Hushe, elevation 10,006 feet, the living conditions are bleak.

“Mostly the men work with the foreigners, climbers and trekkers, or they are farmers,” teacher Khadim Ali said the next day. “A few have government jobs. But most are uneducated, they work hard on farming, but have no sources of income, only their land. Now the growth rate is increasing and it will be harder for those who have less land. Without education, it will be difficult for them to solve their problems.”

The CAI school, however, stands as a beacon of hope. A beautiful stone building made with the help of a Kashmiri stonemason named Makmahl, it was one of CAI’s first projects.

“Before, the percent of education was so weak here,” head teacher Hassan Rashid said. “Then CAI came here and provide for us a good building, teachers, and furniture. We are thanking you.”

The community has since merged the CAI and government schools to form a unified school that takes students through class nine. CAI still pays two teachers and provides stationary and other school supplies. The six teachers are all men, Rashid said, a situation that he hopes will change as more girls are allowed to finish middle school and leave the village for higher education.

He estimated that 15 to 20 students, including him, had so far been able to pursue higher education with the help of parents willing to send them away. Only a handful of them were girls. “But now everyone knows education is very important, he said. “Nothing is more important. Hushe was 100 percent illiterate before. Now, thank God, everyone is thinking about education.”

Village chairman Muhammad Anwar told Mortenson and Starnes, “Without education we all are not helping our community and country so that’s why I stand for this fight. For long time you are coming and telling us that education is important. And after education you can see success in their lives. So we are always emphasizing education.”

The headmaster had several requests, including more teachers, toilets, and classrooms. “We still have a shortage of space and the population is increasing.” Several of the elders also requested scholarships for older children.

Starnes repeated what he had said so many times in recent weeks: “I can’t make any promises now. I’m just here to listen.”

He and Mortenson then toured the classrooms. The kids were shy at first. But Mortenson knows how to make everyone feel important.

“Hushe School is No. 1 school in Pakistan,” Mortenson told them. “These old men, they cannot read and write. But they carried many, many stones to build this school and we thank them. It is easy to be porter, cook, or guide, no problem. Education is much more difficult. Stones can make school and school can make your mind.”

He encouraged them to study hard, respect their teachers, and thank their parents. “Dream the dream of education,” he said. “We believe in you.”
HOPE LEADS THE CLASS

By KARIN RONNOW, CAI Communications Director

When the acting principal opened the classroom door, the seventh-grade students were sitting at their desks, books open, talking softly so as not to draw attention to themselves.

The light coming through two small windows was barely enough to read the assigned English lesson.

“There is no teacher for this class,” said Mohammad Niam, a geography and history teacher at the Central Asia Institute-supported Sarhad “Sitara” Higher Secondary School, an octagonal building situated in a wide valley at the end of the Wakhan Corridor. “The English teacher was transferred to another school. The government said another teacher is coming.”

But no one has arrived yet. And the only communication linking this remote, rural outpost with the rest of the world is word of mouth. There is no phone service or electricity here.

So the students and remaining six teachers make do, and hope the government will make good on its promise, Niam said.

Afghan law dictates that the government must provide the teachers. So CAI advocates for the Sarhad school with district education officials, only to be told that money and qualified teachers willing to work in the village at the end of the road are scarce.

And so they wait. “Inshallah (God willing), we will get another teacher soon,” Niam said.

South of Sarhad, the Broghil Pass follows the old Silk Road through the high peaks of the Hindu Kush Mountains, connecting the Wakhan with the Chitral District of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan. Foreigners can’t cross the border, which is heavily guarded on the Pakistan side, but local people use the ancient trade route, usually traveling on horseback.

Not far below the pass on the Pakistan side, 15-year old Sharifa and her brother are among about two-dozen students who get up early every day to walk from Chikar village to the CAI-supported Broghil Chilmariabad High School.

“It is two-hour walk each way,” Sharifa said, adding that her parents allow her to come to school as long as she walks with her older brother.

They follow the narrow paths through the mountains, quickly burning off the milk tea and bread they had for breakfast.

“There is a government school in that village, but no teacher,” said Yousef Ali, head teacher at the Broghil school. “So students come here.”

The people on both sides of the border have much in common, including their Wakhi heritage and language, geographical isolation, crippling poverty, and neglect by their respective governments. Opium addiction, malnutrition, and illiteracy are common.

But they are peace-loving people and fight hard for education. Sultan Jan, 13, also from Chikar, said he would go to any length to get an education.

“If there was no school here, then I would go to China,” the ninth-grader said. “I need education.”

Yet here, too, teachers are in short supply. Broghil is an eight-mile walk past the end of the road. There aren’t enough local people qualified to teach, especially in the high-school-level classes, and non-local teachers tend not to stick around very long. As for salaries, CAI already pays three of the five teachers.

For now, Ali said the best option has been to combine some of the elementary-level classes.
“There just are not enough teachers,” Ali said.

To the southeast about 75 miles as the crow flies, the community school in Lower Thasnaloot village also has teacher troubles—but of a different sort.

Some years ago, another NGO helped build a school, said Saidullah Baig, CAI-Gilgit project manager. “They appointed a teacher, but he took their money and did not come to school. They closed the school. For this other NGO, it was very far and difficult to manage. The community asked and we started helping last September.”

The 22 students needed uniforms, books, school supplies, and desks. The rustic building needed maintenance. And of course, the school needed a teacher. They found a young man named Khoshalam, and the school reopened last year.

But their troubles weren’t over. Khoshalam quickly determined that he had a school full of students who may have previously attended school, but had learned little.

“Even though they are in upper classes, they should not have been promoted because there was no teaching,” said Khoshalam, who now teaches and runs the school. “The former teacher did not give attention to kids’ performance and just promoted them. So many kids, they are older, but still in primary class and have no interest.”

Not enough teachers, ill-equipped teachers, underpaid teachers, government schools where teachers don’t show up and make all the other teachers work harder—addressing the litany of teacher troubles is a constant juggling act.

But teachers are the heart of every school, CAI Executive Director David Starnes told those gathered at a school in Pakistan’s Chapursan Valley in June. It is noble work. “So much of teaching is about your dedication to making students’ lives better, giving these children a choice in their lives that many of you did not have when you were their age,” he said. “You have a chance to inspire them. And we are inspired by your work.”

Whenever possible, CAI tries to work with communities to recruit local teachers. But the talent pool is still small, given that most adults are still illiterate.

There are exceptions, most of them young men whose parents sent them away for education.

“My father was working as a laborer in Hunza when I was 2 years old,” said Doulat
Baig, who teaches a combined second- and third-grade class in Broghil. “At that time, there was no school in Broghil. My father realized education helps you have a good position in the world. He decided he would definitely give education to his son. So he took me to Hunza. Now I have 12-class education and my father is very proud. I came back to Broghil in 2012 and became a teacher.”

Two of Hushe Community Middle School’s first graduates, who attended back when it was just a primary school, struggled mightily to continue their education away from home.

“We had so many difficulties and challenges to continue our education,” said teacher Sher Ali. “We had to go by foot and travel very long ways to get middle school education and then high school. We had to live with other families. We had no proper clothes and our plastic shoes were torn. Our class fellows [in the city] were teasing us, saying we are from the far village. We think maybe we should not continue our education.

“But my parents always say I have to keep trying for education. When I went to Punjab [Province] for higher studies I find more and more difficulties. I have to work cleaning hotels and such. This was a very tough time. But I finished and now I am teaching,” Ali said.

Most families don’t have the money to send their children away for higher education, said CAI Cofounder Greg Mortenson. Without a local talent pool, qualified teachers must be recruited from “downside,” in more urban areas. That sometimes works.

At Zuudkhan High School in Pakistan’s Chapursan Valley, for example, teacher Rahim Ibrahim said he took a post “in this far-flung area because this is where the people need us. The kids need us.”

His altruistic outlook, and that of other non-local teachers, became easier when CAI built a teachers’ hostel in Zuudkhan.

There are no such accommodations in the villages surrounding DeGhulaman High School in the Wakhan Corridor, where only two of eight teachers are local. Yet here, local families go out of their way to help the non-local teachers, said Principal Rajab Ali. “They give room for teachers from other villages and bring them food.”

But it is still hard. Teachers assigned to schools in these remote places often struggle to find their place. As the author V.S. Naipaul once observed: “Village life had pleasures only for people who belonged there; it held nothing for outsiders.”

The result is absenteeism and general disgruntlement. All three government-appointed teachers in Hushe are from “downside,” said Khadim Ali, another Hushe School graduate who went away for higher education then returned home to teach.

“This is a hard area,” he said. “Transport and communication are a problem. … When teachers go downside [on weekends] they don’t get back in time on Monday. So they are not attending school all the time.”

Or, as teacher Hassan Rashid explained: “For the teachers sent by the government, coming to Hushe is like punishment and they are much absent.”
Meanwhile, despite significant efforts to bolster the number of female teachers in Pakistan and Afghanistan, local female teachers are still outnumbered by men in the areas where CAI works.

All the teachers in Hushe, for example, are men. “Inshallah, maybe in two years we will have female teachers after they finish [college] in Skardu,” Rashid said.

Any efforts to increase the pool of female teachers start with getting girls educated. But as DadKhuda, 16, who helps at Broghil school while he awaits his metric (high school) exam results, said, “I'lliterate men, especially, don’t think girls should go to school.”

Ali, the Broghil head teacher, said many parents still “keep the girls at home for working.” But members of the education committee are going door to door trying to recruit students. “I understand the population of the females is not equal to the boys, but we are trying to improve.”

It’s a good start. But once young girls are enrolled in school, there must be a concerted effort to keep them there – through high school and beyond.

“The people of this area have been backward with respect to education due to lack of facilities, especially for girls’ education,” said Arshad Mehmood, an English teacher at CAI-supported Khurd Government High School in Jhelum district of Punjab province. “There was no girls’ high school nearby. Most of the students had to give up because of lack of access. Now CAI has gifted this building to the people of the area. At last, people get solution to their problem.”

Before the high school opened in January 2013, the local girls’ school was housed in a ramshackle three-room building. Primary classes met inside; the older girls had to study outside, on the ground, “open to the sky,” as Principal Sidra Jabeen said. Many girls dropped out before completing high school, unable to tolerate classes held in the blistering sun and monsoon rains.

“I want to study more and more, but it [has been] very difficult to stay in school,” said Isma, who is in class 10 and wants to become an engineer.

The new 11-room building gives the 410 students individualized attention as they work on a writing exercise.

Female teachers play a dramatic role in increasing the number of girls in school in underdeveloped Islamic countries. Parents feel more comfortable that their girls are safe. And the teachers themselves serve as role models of working women.

Plus, new research suggests that “even after achieving gender parity in school enrollment, there may be continued benefits to a policy of preferred hiring of female teachers due to their greater overall effectiveness in improving learning outcomes, and specifically ... reducing gender gaps in test scores,” according to researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in Cambridge, Mass. “Our results suggest that female (and male) teachers are relatively more effective when teaching to their own gender, that learning for girls increases when they are taught by female teachers relative to male teachers, and that boys do not suffer adverse effects when taught by female teachers relative to male teachers.”

“Our estimates suggest that expanding the hiring of female teachers ... would improve overall learning outcomes and be especially useful as a tool for bridging gender gaps in learning trajectories over time,” the NBER research found.

But it is not always easy finding qualified female teachers in the remote areas where CAI works. At the Sun Valley School in Baltistan, Pakistan, the headmaster encouraged education of women in his own family. His daughter, 19-year-old Azra Parveen, and her daughter-in-law, Saeeda Ali, both completed 12th grade and became primary-level teachers.

Azra herself attended this school, and then went away for high school and college. “I wanted to go to [more] school, but then I got married,” Azra said. “I wanted to marry. And I also want to be a teacher. Some people say I should stay at home and work in the fields and take care of babies. But I want to teach.”

The pressures on young female teachers to leave work increase dramatically as they begin to have children. Saeeda has two children, a 1-year-old son and a 3-year-old daughter. Her husband is a policeman in Gilgit, a 10- to 12-hour drive from Khanday.

She said it’s hard to leave her children every morning, but she’s lucky to have in-laws who believe in education. “I can do this only because my mother-in-law helps with babies at home while I am working,” she said.

In Afghanistan, increasing the number of teachers is a national project. As the Ministry of Education (MoE) has noted, decades of war in Afghanistan destroyed the physical infrastructure and human resources “so critical to establishing a quality education system.”

The country gets high marks for efforts to increase the number of teachers: since 2001, teacher-training colleges have been set up in every province and tens of thousands of teachers hired and given at least some train-
ing, according to a 2010 analysis of the education sector by London-based Adam Smith International.

But big gaps remain. Only about one-fourth of the country’s teaching force has completed 12th grade. Children are not spending enough hours each day in school. And the government infrastructure to support and supervise teachers, deliver textbooks, and maintain buildings is “strained.”

Furthermore, there is a glaring shortage of female teachers, especially outside the big cities, and that almost always translates to fewer female students, especially in the upper grades.

In Kapisa Province, for example, only about 24 percent of the 85,000 students are girls, and only about 11 percent of the 2,300 teachers are women, according to the MoE.

Farida is one of the women hoping to change that. She was 36 years old when she enrolled at the Kapisa Teacher Training College (TTC). She was relieved to learn that tuition is free. But she quickly realized that she was still going to need some financial help.

“Without assistance, I don’t have money to get [transport] to the school, to pay taxi or for bus, to buy books and supplies,” Farida said in February. Her situation is typical. “All females in Afghanistan, they have talent, but they don’t have the opportunity to tap that.”

Wakil Karimi, CAI’s central Afghanistan program manager, saw that gap. Working with the MoE and the Kapisa college administrators, he selected 32 of the best female students and offered them a scholarship in the form of a monthly stipend.

“If we do this, we can help girls and women to help the society,” Wakil said. “We want to assist these students in their education so they can know their rights and their roles and then they can help other people, especially girls.”

Marasa, 19, wants to do just that. “I want to be a teacher because it is a good job, and because girls need female teachers,” she said.

Kapisa is the smallest province in the country, but is densely populated. Most of the estimated 400,000 residents live in rural areas and make their living via agriculture. Only 6 percent

Young women are slowly but steadily joining the ranks of Afghanistan’s teaching profession.

‘THIS IS A NOBLE JOB’

RAMINJJI, Pakistan – Fida Ali is an excellent teacher. He’s so good, in fact, that the government tried to recruit him away from his teaching post at the Central Asia Institute-supported school in his home village.

But he declined the government job, opting to stay in his home village, close to family, doing a job he loves.

“I have been teaching math and science to the middle-school students here for four years,” he said. “This is a noble job and I love my job. I am keen to continue this.”

Ali was reinvigorated this past year by his participation in CAI-Gilgit’s teacher training program. The intense two-week program, held in January so that teachers could attend during the winter break, provided him with new ways to think about everything from homework to student behavior.

“I was teaching in traditional ways before the training but now, with new and modern techniques and teaching methods, I am feeling that I am a totally changed teacher,” he said in June. “I am re-energized.”

The students clearly look up to him. He is one of eight teachers in the school, which goes to class eight. He smiled and laughed easily as he joked with the boys who followed him around during an after-hours tour of the school.

Raminji village is perched on a plateau above the Chapursan River. All but 10 children in the village, home to 28 households, attend school, Sher Baz, the village spiritual leader said during an unscheduled visit to the school in June. CAI built a five-room addition to a pre-existing community school in 2006 and pays two teachers.

“Thanks for the building and for the teachers’ salaries you provide to improve the quality of education for our children,” he said. “But next time you are coming let us know and we will prepare a proper reception.”

CAI Executive Director David Starnes apologized for the lack of advance notice.

“Our curiosity got the best of us,” he said. “We saw the sign, saw the road, took a chance and found paradise. This is truly an impressive school.”

Instructional posters, displays of students’ artwork, schedules, and photos cover the walls of the school.

“By all the charts, schemes and schedules I
of households have access to electricity. Kapisa is also considered “a transient area for insurgents, transport of weapons and criminal activity,” according to a 2012 US Central Command web post. Security is in the hands of Afghan authorities, but TTC Deputy Principal Abdul Maurif said last winter that the situation remained volatile.

“Right now two districts in Kapisa are under control of the Taliban; there are no female students or teachers there,” Maurif said. “Unfortunately because of the situation in Afghanistan, we have a shortage of teachers. This is a result of the fighting.”

Each scholarship student receives 3000 afghanistan (about $60) per month over the course of the two-year post-secondary program, Wakis said. “It is not a lot of money, but if you manage it well, it is enough,” he told the students in February. “Use the money in the proper way so it can give you benefit.”

“Also, our help is not for a short period. We will help you graduate. But you must study hard because if your marks fall, if you lose position, we will stop the scholarship.”

In October he said the program “is running very well. There is much competition among the girls; each one wants to get first, second, or third position in their class. There are big improvements in their talent. Therefore the principal and the teachers are happy about this program.”

In addition to helping train more female teachers to enter the workforce, CAI is committed to helping improve the skills of those teachers already on the job—male and female.

CAI-Gilgit launched its teacher-training program in January 2013, with help from the Gilgit-based Human Enterprise and Development Institute (HEDI), and a team of master trainers, graduates of the Aga Khan University’s Institute of Educational Development.

“I was thinking of this program for a long time,” Baig said. “It is important to teach the teachers.”

Planning the two-week January event required a bit of juggling. The 74 teachers came from some of CAI’s most remote projects, including Broghil, which meant travel was difficult. They speak different languages and dialects, although most are fluent in Urdu. And most of them had never participated in a teacher-training course.

“It was a large group, with participants from different backgrounds and different education (levels),” said trainer Doulat Begum. “I was wondering how I was going to teach them. But it was marvelous. ... They have the capacity and they raised the questions. Sometimes we underestimate people, but we should not. They have the talents, but they have not had the platform to share it or express themselves.”

One goal was to spark new energy in the teachers, Baig said. It’s not hard to imagine that teachers grow weary of the traditional rote teaching methods—dictation, memorization, and recitation—so common in these areas.

“Rote teaching is rigid,” said trainer Nazir Bulbul, also a renowned Wakhi poet. “It does not inculcate a desire to learn” and teachers should be “preparing kids to be thinking people in a rapidly changing world.”

So alongside workshops on teaching fundamentals, trainers focused on child development, ethics, art and music, bullying and tolerance, and critical thinking.

One of the most popular aspects of the course was the local-history component. Social studies lessons almost always come out of textbooks. But the trainers devised an exercise to show teachers how to incorporate stories of their own communities. They divided the teachers into groups by geographic region and told them to craft handmade “books” about their regions, using reliable sources, illustrations, and storytelling.

The books presented on the final day of the training were, in many cases, the first draft of history ever written by local people.

The teachers left Gilgit, training certificates in hand, with lots of ideas and enthusiasm. Maintaining that, of course, is the next challenge, Baig said.

“Take this home. Take it and use it. This is the beginning,” he told the teachers at the
When the community asks CAI-Gilgit for a teacher, we arrange a meeting with them and give a target date to collect documents of persons interested in position. Then the community manages the interviews themselves. They finalize and give us a resolution, an application with the person’s documents they want to teach in their school.

Then we discuss with the person our rules—that we can help you as a teacher for one year, from February or March until December. We cannot make permanent contracts with someone because then we cannot push him or her out even if he is not performing. This way teachers become much conscientious and much hard working.

After schools close for winter break in December, either they are finished or reappointed. Community tell us continue this person or replace them, because they are managing.

Some leave for their own reasons, working for government or another NGO. They are getting experience with CAI schools then go to government job because it is a relaxed job, no one is making sure they are doing job, and they have government pension.

If they want to change the person, if they want a new teacher, they write resolution and give documents. If again the community wants the teacher, we contract with them with new agreement for another year of work. This is our style.

We are working in such areas where it is very hard even to get qualified or experienced teachers. Hardly even the new teachers we are hiring are from the same village as school. They are from far-off place and then they demand a house and more salary.

Mostly the teachers we are hiring are new persons without any experience or knowledge of teaching methods. In Broghil area, we hired one teacher with 10-class education to teach with primary grades, even though the minimum is 12 class. But there we have to continue the project, continue the school. Even if low education, if the person is from the village, it is better than someone far away. Then we replace undereducated teachers as we can. If teacher has potential, we can help with training.
Shah and the other teachers have posted handmade instructional charts and illustrations, which they learned how make during the training, in the classrooms. And they are trying new things.

“Today, the students are working in groups. They discuss what they read and conclude or summarize,” Sher Baz Khan, a CAI-supported teacher at Teru School, said during an English lesson on patriotism in late May. “I never used this method before the training. But I did lesson plans, prepared at home, and now it is easier to deliver in the classrooms. It is a world of difference.”

The training appears to have imparted a new level of confidence in Khan and Ata Hussain, also a CAI-supported high school math and science teacher. They are more relaxed and engaged. And students have noted the difference, Hussain said.

“We are trying one by one to implement what we learned in our classes and the students are seeing this,” he said. “They are feeling better than before the training.”

Significant issues remain, however, said Shah. For example, as CAI-supported schools evolve from primary to middle to high schools, “content knowledge is a basic problem for teachers, particularly in science subjects.” But he feels more capable of finding a solution. “We are thinking about how to fix that, to share responsibility and problems and find solution to that problem.”

Expanding the training to other regions where CAI works is the next step. Teachers are hungry for solutions to problems they face every day.

Teachers everywhere will understand the sentiment behind Mohammad Ismail’s question. “Why are parents not involved in children’s education?” Mohammad Ismail, 31, a teacher in Hushe village in Baltistan, asked. “These children are with us only six hours a day, but they are with their parents for 18 hours a day. Some kids come to school without even their books. What should I do?”

Finding ways to engage parents, especially illiterate parents, is a constant struggle. At Sun Valley School teacher Saeeda said the students are “bright and get what we teach quickly. The problem is that parents are not helping with children’s education.” They request extended leave for their children “and we are not giving so they come and complain. They want children to cut the wheat and store, take care of chickens, sheep, goats, and cows, do work with vegetables and apricot trees, collect firewood. Sometimes when they move to upper areas with the animals they take the children and stay away a week or 15 days.”

As Mortenson has said, the changes that come from education are generational. The work is not easy and requires big doses of time, and patience.

The first step is a school staffed with dedicated teachers.

“This school was a dream of my father,” said Ghulam Nabi, the eldest son of Mastal Khan, the man who sought CAI’s help in Broghil. “For many he was requesting and now his dream become truth and kids are getting education up to class 10 in his village. On behalf of children, I am thanking you. Maybe in one time this area people will be able to survive as others around us are. We will never forget that you made effort to come in such a remote area where no one else even dreams to work.”

The teacher of this fifth-grade class at the new Chilmarabad High School in the Broghil region of northern Pakistan said the girls opt to sit at the back of the classrooms. “They don’t like to sit in front of the boys.”
Right: A laborer brushes the mortar on the exterior of a new school building in Zhamak village, Vanj district, Tajikistan.

Opposite page: A young girl smiles while listening to a community-wide presentation at Marzigon Primary School in Hushe Valley, Pakistan.
Clockwise from top left: An elder in a village near Broghil, Pakistan, pauses for a portrait; This student at Nar School, in Baltistan, Pakistan, is all smiles; A female high school student at Teru Community School in Ghizer District, Pakistan, listened as her classmates discussed the merits of education; A male student in Broghil, Pakistan, wears a green ball cap marked with the star of Pakistan.

Opposite page: Bibi Gulnaz, mother of the late, legendary Sarfraz Khan, mourns in her son’s home in Pakistan’s Chapurson Valley. Gulnaz lost her husband Haji Muhammad and son Sarfraz in November 2012.
The dozens of people milling around red carpets on the rocks beside the Yarkhun River were visible from a half-mile away—a splash of color on a grey-brown palette. As the people came into sharper focus, so too did the feast laid out on the red carpets, a display of food incongruous in such an impoverished region.

“Strange place for picnic,” murmured Saidullah Baig, director of Central Asia Institute-Gilgit.

As it turned out, the gathering was intended to catch Baig and the rest of the CAI team as we returned from a late spring trip to Broghil village, high in the Hindu Kush Mountains near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. In a region with no mobile-phone service, word travels remarkably fast.

Baig pulled his old Toyota Land Cruiser off the road. “They are here for us,” he said. “Let’s see what they want.”

After the obligatory greetings with village leaders—“Asalaam Aleikum” and a hand-shake—we were invited to sit on the carpets. A young man went around offering warm water for hand washing. Tea was poured.

Dolat Mohammad, village elder and spokesman, then got to the point: Khandkhun needed a resident healthcare worker. Winters are long and hard for the 70 families here. Heavy snow and below-freezing temperatures make travel impossible for almost half the year, he said.

“Last winter four women died during childbirth,” Mohammad said in his native Khowar language. “And four to six children died of [respiratory] sickness because of no medicine. Even in good weather, there is no help for women at delivery time.”

If there are complications with a preg-
nancy or delivery, “the women must travel four hours to the nearest health center in Shoo. But in winter, we get more than 3 feet of snow and for months the road is closed; we cannot go anywhere,” he said. “The women, they just wait to die.”

The men and women in the crowd nodded and murmured in agreement.

The backdrop—a collection of mud-brick houses, small patches of green irrigated fields, and breathtakingly beautiful snow-capped peaks—belied the village’s poverty and isolation. Photographer Erik Petersen and I were the first foreigners to travel up the valley in five years; travel restrictions had been lifted on our behalf. “You opened the area,” we were told time and time again. And our presence opened the floodgates for CAI: everywhere we went we got requests for schools, bridges, scholarships, health care workers and clinics.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government has started to build an adequate road from Mastuj north—with promises to eventually reach Broghil—but it’s a long way from done. And road conditions are a metaphor for the region’s problems, with the near-constant landslides destroying just-finished stretches of the mountain-hugging road. I thought of Sisyphus and the existentialism of pushing rocks uphill over and over again.

As for the requested healthcare worker, Mohammad said the villagers had pinned their hopes on one young woman, Jahan Bibi, who had finished high school with a science emphasis. Her family had pooled limited resources and sent her to attend higher secondary school (classes 11 and 12) down the valley in Mastuj.

The desperate villagers told Saidullah they wanted to pull her out of school and bring her home to help. “She can finish her studies privately,” Dolat said.

Baig, however, was leery of the idea. The young woman should be allowed to finish her education, he said.

“But she’s the only one,” Mohammad replied, looking downcast.

“Ah,” Baig said, shaking his head. “That is why you need more educated girls.”

EDUCATION

Education and health together form a life-line in the remote and impoverished areas where CAI works. Studies have proven repeatedly that educated people improve the health of those around them. Educated mothers have healthier children. Healthy children learn more in school.

“Now more people know about sending their children to school,” said Malika, CAI-supported public health worker in Shitmarg, a village in the Pakistan’s Chapursan Valley. “And that improves everyone’s health.”

CAI’s public-health efforts date back to the early 1990s, when CAI Cofounder Greg Mortenson climbed K2 in northeast Pakistan.

“When I went to K2 I just saw so many maladies with the porters: kerosene burns, open wounds, abscesses, broken bones that didn’t heal right,” Mortenson said. “We helped as best we could, treating the porters with medicine. But I realized after several years that this is a common occurrence. There is no healthcare infrastructure in most of these remote places, but handing out medicine is not the solution. Although its hard when you see a 3-year-old girl with a nasty eye infection not to help, it’s better to support a local healthcare system because they are the ones who are going to be there when everyone has left.”

But Mortenson, who worked as a trauma nurse before starting CAI, was also well aware of the value of basic hygiene and sanitation.

“My father was a huge public health advocate,” he said. “Back in the 1960s when I was growing up in Tanzania, he set up a teaching hospital. I learned from him the importance of teaching people about preventative medicine. It is far more enduring, increases awareness and can make such a huge difference.”

CLEAN WATER

One of the first ingredients of preventative healthcare is a community source of uncontaminated drinking water.

“Water is the basic need for every living thing. We humans must have water,” Baig said. “In Pakistan there is no shortage of water, but clean water for drinking is a dream for most of the population.”

The UN suggests each person needs 20 to 50 liters of water a day for basic needs, including drinking, cooking and washing. Yet only an estimated 50 percent of people in Pakistan, 27 percent of Afghans and 66 percent of Tajiks have access to safe drinking water.

Since its early days, CAI has tried to install...
clean-water sources either in its schools or in the villages where it works, Baig said.

“The community leaders always request for water. So it is our priority to fix wells or bring water down from mountains or springs with a pipe,” he said.

The links between clean water and education are unmistakable, said Fozia Naseer, CAI’s Azad Jammu Kashmir program manager. Dirty water makes people sick, sometimes really sick.

“I visited Banna Mullah village to check the school there in early September and people were suffering from cholera,” she said. “According to my understanding it was because of dirty water after the rains.”

All over Pakistan and Afghanistan, students and teachers frequently miss school or work because they have stomachaches and diarrhea, or must care for other family members who have gastrointestinal maladies, she said. The World Health Organization reports almost 40 percent of deaths and 80 percent of diseases in Pakistan are due to unsafe drinking water.

“Kids spend six or seven hours every day in school and they need clean water right there,” Naseer said. “If they are getting sick again and again, sometimes they just stop school. Healthy body and healthy brain require clean water.”

In some cases, solutions include rerouting water as it flows downhill to circumvent pollutants, a relatively simple fix, but one that often has to be explained.

“When I spent part of the winter in Korphe village in the early 1990s, I noticed that they had set the village toilets alongside the irrigation streams at the high end of the barley and buckwheat fields,” Mortenson said. “So the water was going right down into the fields. They were essentially recycling their diseases.

“So I talked to them about that and they moved the toilets to the bottom of the fields, away from the irrigation. But as we talked about this, I realized that teaching basic hygiene, sanitation, and nutrition could go a long way toward improving health care in these areas,” he said.

Nearly 20 years later, Mortenson still expounds on the importance of everyone washing their hands—"with soap!"—when he visits CAI-supported schools. The program managers, too, underscore that lesson at every opportunity.

At Noorabad Preschool in Pakistan’s Chapursan Valley in June, teacher Parveen gave her students a math lesson. “I like teaching children at this age when the basic development of skills, speaking and reading, start for them,” the 30-year-old mother of two said.

The walls of her classroom were covered with colorful graphic posters and charts. She had arranged work stations Montessori-style around the edges of the room, complete with flash cards, sandpaper letters and numbers, arts and crafts materials, puzzles and other games that teach colors and counting.

When the lesson was complete, the students—between ages 3 and 6—sat in a circle to eat their mid-morning snacks.

During the lull, Dilshad Begum, CAI’s Women’s Education Program Director–Northern Areas, praised Parveen. “This is good teaching,” she said. But then she chastised her for skipping a step: “Don’t forget the basic things. They always should be washing their hands before they eat. You have clean water in this village. We will send you soap.”

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Clean water is critical to sustaining life, but in the areas where CAI works, it is only one piece of the public health puzzle.

Hospitals and clinics in these remote areas are few and far between. Those that exist are chronically underfunded, understaffed and undersupplied. Maternal, infant, and child mortality rates are among the highest in the world, a situation further complicated by traditional bans on male doctors treating female patients.

Trained healthcare workers in the villages are CAI’s solution. CAI helps communities identify, hire, and train women in basic healthcare delivery; provides tools such as stethoscopes and blood-pressure cuffs; and supplies about 15 different medicines.

This arrangement resembles the Pakistan government’s Ladies Healthcare Worker (LHW) program, which employs an estimated 100,000 women to help women and their families in the country’s rural areas.

“They provide information, basic services and access to further care,” Oxfam’s Duncan Green wrote on his blog From Poverty to Power. “The LHWs receive training, are knowledgeable, earn their own income, and gain respect—challenging imbalances in the home and community.”

Jahan Ali, one of the first graduates of Korphe School, trained as an LHW before returning to university to study business. Shakeela, a graduate of Hushe School, got her LHW training, along with additional midwife training, and now works at a government clinic in the Thalley Valley.

CAI’s program also increases women’s visibility, mobility, and status. However, CAI’s program is more grassroots, and the women’s skills vary according to their education and determination.

In Chapursan Valley, Aziza was the first woman hired as a CAI healthcare worker. In the past decade or so, she has dedicated herself to improving the health of the people in Zuudkhan village, where she lives, and sur-

**“Healthy body and healthy brain require clean water.”**

—Fozia Naseer

Left to right: Aziza’s dispensary in Zuudkhan. Soap and schools supplies in Baharak.
Arounding areas.

“Aziza was the first worker because she had basic training from the government and then we provided additional training,” Baig said. “Before Aziza there were no healthcare facilities and not even any basic medicine in Zuudkhan.”

At one time, mothers dying in childbirth were common, but Aziza said her training and intervention has put a stop to that. In addition, there are fewer babies being born. “Nearly half, 39 of 71 couples, in Zuudkhan are now asking about family planning,” she said.

These days, “the biggest problems are pneumonia in winter and diarrhea in summer,” Aziza said.

It wasn’t that long ago that people relied on traditional herbal remedies—“wild plants from the mountains that they chew or make tea and drink or put in curry, or use with oil for massage,” said Ayan Numa, the CAI healthcare worker in Kermin.

But for medicine and doctors, “there was nothing. So some people died and some alive by the help of God."

These days, pharmaceuticals are used to treat stomach problems and diarrhea, headaches, arthritis, eye and ear infections, and basic injuries. But Malika, the CAI healthcare worker in Shitmarg village for the past seven years, said she has also seen a dramatic improvement in people’s understanding of health—from the role of basic hygiene and nutrition (folic acid and iron supplements for pregnant women, and less salt and fat for people with high blood pressure) to the dangers of smoking.

She sees an average 60 people per month in a village of 350 people. Coughing, stomach and joint problems are the most common complaints, she said, although she periodically treats injuries and open wounds.

One of the most important things for these local healthcare workers is to know when they need help, when a situation demands a doctor’s attention.

Last year three women had complications with deliveries and Malika had to send them to the closest hospital, a six-hour drive away. This year, as of early June, she’d delivered three babies, and “all are OK,” she said. “Mothers are OK. Babies are OK.”

**MOMS AND BABIES**

Just north of Chapursan Valley, Afghanistan’s remote Badakhshan province long held the dubious distinction of having the highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

It’s not hard to understand why. The province is mountainous. The people are heart-wrenchingly poor. And government investment in the province has been marginal at best. When public health consultant Aziz Baig

---

**Nearly half, 39 of 71 couples in Zuudkhan are now asking about family planning.**

— Aziza

— Karin Ronnow
visited Badakhshan in 2004, he found only 11 health facilities to serve 1 million people.

“Almost all health facilities were without female health professionals, equipment and lifesaving drugs. Laboratory facilities were nonexistent,” Baig wrote on his blog [azizbaig.com]. “The most heart-toucing story that brought tears to my eyes were of those hundreds of thousands of pregnant women who developed complications during pregnancy and left their home for [provincial capital] Faizabad with a hope that they would return alive and rejoin their family, but died on the way.”

“Hemorrhage, infection, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy and complications of unsafe abortion” cause most maternal deaths, UNICEF reported in 2012. “And for every woman who dies from complications related to childbirth, approximately 20 more suffer injuries, infections and disabilities that are usually untreated and ignored and that can result in lifelong pain and social and economic exclusion.”

UNICEF noted that “most of these complications cannot be predicted and prevented.”

But they don’t have to be fatal. A trained female midwife or nurse can make the difference. Over the past decade, the international community zeroed in on the problem in Badakhshan. A coalition of NGOs worked with the government to train midwives, build new health facilities, and provide female staff. By this year, the number of health facilities was up to 110, a 10-fold increase. And the World Health Organization and provide female staff. By this year, the number of health facilities was up to 110, a 10-fold increase. And the World Health Organization

For the past few years, both Bano and Parveen have attended annual training with the CAI workers in northern Pakistan.

“We learn about delivering babies, which babies we can help deliver and when we should take the mother to clinic or hospital,” said Parveen, 31. “We also learn about first aid and basic medicine.”

Education is part of the long-term solution. The risk of maternal death is almost three times higher among women with no education, UNICEF reports.

This is profoundly demonstrated by the reality on the ground in Afghanistan, which has one of the highest maternal, infant, and child mortality rates in the world—an estimated 460 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, according to World Bank statistics—and a shockingly low female literacy rate, with only 13 percent of women over age 15 able to read and write.

In Broghil village, in northern KP province, 18-year-old Gulnar, CAI’s healthworker in training, described the situation:

“We have so many problems. There are no health workers, or center, or medicine. And mostly, for females, during delivery they are facing so many problems. There is not even the basic facilities of health care. Last year two women died during delivery. Before there were so many cases of maternal death during delivery. Now there are fewer, but it has not ended.”

Zuudkhan, in Pakistan’s Chapursan Valley, the maternal mortality rate has dropped, too. “No women die in childbirth now,” Aziza said in May.

Other changes occur quietly, for cultural reasons. The healthcare workers help girls and women better understand their bodies and their monthly cycles. And they are in-
is inevitably linked to Afghanistan, which remains the world's leading producer of the drug. Opium is smuggled across the border and works in SherSubz village in Chapursan Valley. "They got awareness."

Shimshad Begum works in SherSubz village, Chapursan Valley.

treatment course for them."

MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION

Two things that people don’t like to talk about are mental health and addiction. But there is a growing awareness that keeping these topics in the dark doesn’t help anyone.

Women walk the dusty, rocky roads to get to their fields at the edge of the village, past the smelly irrigation ditches. Their brightly colored clothing draws the eye and belies the depth of sadness that many of them experience.

"There are two main problems in this area," said Shah Rais, 40-year-old father of three and headmaster at CAI’s Imit Higher Secondary School in Ghizer district near Gilgit, Pakistan. "Drugs are one problem. Most of the parents are uneducated. Many are using drugs like opium. At one time they were growing it themselves, but now it's not a local product. The Pathan traders bring it.

"The new generation doesn't use. Education has changed young people and other NGOs have been positively working on this."

The spread of opium addiction throughout the mountainous areas where CAI works is inevitably linked to Afghanistan, which remains the world’s leading producer of the drug. Opium is smuggled across the border into Pakistan, where traders peddle it far and wide, Baig said.

In the Yarkhun Valley in northern KP province, "opium is a big problem," he said.

Besides the physical and mental deterioration that accompany opium use, the problem is economic, he added. "Pathan traders come

and when people have no more money for opium, they trade their land. Then strangers wind up owning land in these villages."

Upriver in Broghil village, 50 percent of people are using opium, said Gulnar, CAI’s healthcare worker there. "Even the religious leader is using opium. How can he lead the people? Also, (opium addiction) is the reason some of them are not sending kids to school, because they need their children to work. We need a

"There are many problems with mental health in this area and people are becoming more aware," Jamida said. "Many of the students were not interested in this subject, but now we know that common understanding of psychology can help. And if we can know about healthy ways to release tension and deal with stress, we can help others."

In Gilgit, a number of the CAI-supported scholarship students are studying psychology.

"I am interested to know about the psychology of people, what causes the problems and why, so I can help," said Razia, 20, a student from the Gojal region of Hunza.

The coursework includes an understanding of human personality, anxiety, stress, behaviors, functions, and characteristics, said Jamida, 21, of Gojal.

"There are many problems with mental health in this area and people are becoming more aware," Jamida said. "Many of the students were not interested in this subject, but now we know that common understanding of psychology can help. And if we can know about healthy ways to release tension and deal with stress, we can help others."

Jamida personifies the link between healthy communities and education, Baig said, after hearing her speak. "It always comes back to education."

In late spring, three girls killed themselves in Thashnaloot, a village north of Imit. "There are no health facilities here," he added. "We have no doctors to consult or psychologists to share problems with. For this generation, this is a big problem."

In Afghanistan, women constitute 95 percent of the suicides, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health reported in September. Most of the more than 2,500 female suicides in the past year were either young women between the ages of 16 and 19 and women experiencing physical abuse.

Afghanistan has some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world, and it increased in the past year alongside the suicide rate, Tolo News (Afghanistan) reported. "Public health officials cited forced marriage, often between preadolescent girls and adult men, as well as widespread illiteracy as the main adversities facing female Afghans that contribute to the startling rates of suicide," Tolo reported.

In the Yarkhun Valley in northern KP province, “opium is a big problem,” he said.

Besides the physical and mental deterioration that accompany opium use, the problem is economic, he added. “Pathan traders come

Increasingly asked to help with family planning. "Women now stop having children at five or six," said Shimshad Begum, 42, who lives and works in SherSubz village in Chapursan Valley. "They got awareness."

FA L L  2 0 1 3

’It always comes back to education’

—Jamida

In late spring, three girls killed themselves in Thashnaloot, a village north of Imit.

"There are no health facilities here," he added. "We have no doctors to consult or psychologists to share problems with. For this generation, this is a big problem."

In Afghanistan, women constitute 95 percent of the suicides, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health reported in September. Most of the more than 2,500 female suicides in the past year were either young women between the ages of 16 and 19 and women experiencing physical abuse.

Afghanistan has some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world, and it increased in the past year alongside the suicide rate, Tolo News (Afghanistan) reported. “Public health officials cited forced marriage, often between preadolescent girls and adult men, as well as widespread illiteracy as the main adversities facing female Afghans that contribute to the startling rates of suicide,” Tolo reported.

But things are changing, albeit slowly. Malika, the health worker in Shitmarg, Pakistan, said that “now women are sharing their problems with us and we are helping,” and the number of women reporting depression has decreased.

In Gilgit, a number of the CAI-supported scholarship students are studying psychology.

“I am interested to know about the psychology of people, what causes the problems and why, so I can help,” said Razia, 20, a student from the Gojal region of Hunza.

The coursework includes an understanding of human personality, anxiety, stress, behaviors, functions, and characteristics, said Jamida, 21, of Gojal.

“There are many problems with mental health in this area and people are becoming more aware,” Jamida said. “Many of the students were not interested in this subject, but now we know that common understanding of psychology can help. And if we can know about healthy ways to release tension and deal with stress, we can help others.”

Jamida personifies the link between healthy communities and education, Baig said, after hearing her speak. “It always comes back to education.”

Back in KhandKhun, meanwhile, four months after the roadside jirga, the young woman the village chose will start her two-year healthcare training in December, Baig said.

“It is a painful situation. But I think the people of Khandkhun are really thankful for CAI to help them and with the training of Miss Jahan Bibi their problem will be reduced,” he said. “Also I think the elders are better understanding the value of science education for their girls and women because everyone faces the problem in their families when women suffer during babies’ deliveries and there is no chance to shift the patient to some other place because of much snow and no transportation.”

And Jahan Bibi? How does she feel about her future?

“The women and children of my village are suffering since a long time and there was no one to help them,” she said in October. “I am happy and thankful to CAI for helping me to fulfill my dream to become a helper to them.”
Dear CAI,
Thank you for helping us organize our fundraiser. Our Backyard Kids raised $65.74 and we’d like to donate this to Pennies for Peace.
Thanks, Bethany Pettigrew

Every penny counts. The Backyard Kids learned that this summer while raising money to help students attending Central Asia Institute (CAI) schools in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.

But that wasn’t the only lesson the campers in South Orange, N.J., learned, said Bethany Pettigrew, co-founder of the camp built around a simple premise: “How can we make the world a better place? It starts in your own backyard.”

“Our curriculum includes taking care of yourself, with a daily fitness or dance component; sharing with others, doing arts and crafts and other team-building games; and giving back to the world, performing lots of great community-service deeds and collecting for global charities like Pennies For Peace,” Pettigrew said.

Pennies for Peace (P4P) is a service-learning and fundraising program designed by CAI to educate participants about the world beyond their experience. The P4P curriculum helps broaden students’ cultural horizons while demonstrating that they can make a positive impact on a global scale, one penny at a time.

“Every fundraising opportunity has learning moments,” Pettigrew said. “In this case we utilized your online materials so that they understand where the money is going. They made up slogans like, ‘Every Penny Counts,’
‘Each penny is worth a pencil in Afghanistan,’ and ‘We’re helping build schools in countries that have less than us.’

“They really get it and they feel empowered that they are making a difference. In fact, that’s part of our whole message: It takes just a little bit to start making a difference in the world. It can be collecting pennies, putting a smile on a senior citizen’s face, giving donations to a preschool child in a bad neighborhood, picking beans on a farm for a homeless shelter—the list goes on,” Pettigrew said.

CAI’s earliest supporters were students at Westside Elementary School in River Falls, Wis., who collected pennies to help other children get an education. (To read more about the origins of the program, visit www.penniesforpeace.org)

“They collected 62,340 pennies as seed money for the Korphe School in Baltistan,” CAI Co-founder Greg Mortenson recalled. “Since then Pennies for Peace has been an active part of CAI’s outreach, especially for bringing awareness to the American public.

“In the 18 years that P4P has existed, more than 7,000 groups have been involved, children and adults in more than two-dozen countries who have raised nearly $7 million, often contributed in pennies or small change,” he said.

But P4P also connects students to each other in unexpected ways, he said.

“Everywhere I go it seems that children have a fierce desire to attend school and they also want to connect,” Mortenson said. “When I visited a school outside of Kabul, Afghanistan, in October 2013, I was sharing with the Afghan kids about the Pennies for Peace program, explaining that some of CAI’s support comes from children all over the world. We talked about the fact that there are over 61 million primary-school-age children around the world who are not enrolled in school.

“The next day a young girl named Jawana brought an old rusty ghee can to school and talked to her classmates about helping the kids in the United States raise money to help other kids go to school,” he said. “That’s a powerful connection.”

The desire for meaningful work and a sense of contributing to something good is universal. In fact, community service has become a mantra in the United States as people look for ways to give back. “The country seems to have entered an era of energetic involvement in our collective fate,” Patricia Williams reported for AARP Magazine in 2009.

“Children in this country in particular have so few chances to feel that they are really making a difference,” said Jerene Mortenson, Greg’s mother and a lifelong educator. “It’s so hard for them to believe there are children who don’t get to go to school and learn how to read and write and have to work all the time. But when they find out that pennies can make a difference, it creates a sense of efficacy and empathy. They feel good about doing something outside themselves.”

And it seems to be contagious. The Millennial Generation, 95 million Americans born between 1982 and 2003, “the largest and most diverse generation in U.S. history,” are generally “fiercely committed to community service,” Ron Fournier wrote in the August 2013 Atlantic magazine.

They volunteer at food banks and animal shelters, tutor other students, work with disabled children, run errands for the elderly, and pitch in on political campaigns in greater numbers than their parents ever did. Although Fournier said they are “the most supervised and entitled generation in human history,” they are also, in general, more open minded and globally oriented than earlier generations of Americans.

“Millennials are less ideological than their Baby Boom parents and far more tolerant,” he wrote. “Polls show they are less prone to cast negative moral judgments on interracial marriages, single women raising children, [and] unmarried couples living together. … Wired to the world, they are more likely than past generations to see the globe’s problems as their own.”

They are also quite cynical about the traditional political process and the role of government. “They are more likely to be social entrepreneurs, working outside government..."
to create innovative and measurably successful solutions to the nation’s problems, even if only on a relatively small scale,” he wrote.

Jerene Mortenson said she sees that first hand. She was principal of Westside Elementary when students there heard about her son’s efforts to build the Korphe School and pooled their pennies to help. She has since retired from education, but remains passionate about CAI and P4P and is a popular guest speaker—which gives her a window on what matters to kids.

“I was speaking at a school in Minnesota and afterwards a little kindergarten boy came up and told me that he didn’t have any pennies at home so he took his dollar to the bank and bought some,” she said. “Then he asked, ‘Was that cheating?’ After assuring him it wasn’t, that it was creative, he asked me what CAI was going to do with his 100 pennies. I told him that it was a wonderful, neat idea. He then asked, ‘What would you like them to do?’ I said, ‘I’d like them to buy a hundred pencils so a hundred kids can write.’ And in his voice you could hear him seeing just that happening,” she said.

Dear Pennies for Peace,

“Although my colleagues and I coordinated much of our involvement in your program, the children could not have been more hands on in their approach to learning and excited to be part of something so important. I would imagine in the future they may be more likely to seek ways to get involved in their communities and the larger world as a result of their involvement in Pennies for Peace.”

Sincerely, Veronika Draxler, teacher, Knebworth Primary School

Although the majority of P4P campaigns take place in the United States, P4P is not just for Americans. Draxler helped her fourth-grade class in Hertfordshire, England, organize a campaign in late spring 2013.

Draxler said she learned about P4P in 2009 during her teacher training in the United States. “The empathy children showed at such a young age was astounding, especially since the idea of school is so real for children and the idea of not having one is so foreign,” she observed.

Fast forward to 2013. Draxler showed a CAI/P4P video to her Knebworth School class “to see how they would react. They immediately decided to get involved.” She read Three Cups of Tea aloud with the students and incorporated the story into her geography, literacy and guided-reading lessons. She put a large pop bottle in her classroom for pennies and “soon children from other classes were coming in throughout the day to have a go at filling up the bottle.”

To increase their donation, the kids decided to have a jumble sale, “where we all brought in our old toys that we don’t play with and we sold them for pennies,” said student Harley-Ann.

“All the children from our school who brought change walked away happy with what was to them a new toy,” Draxler said. “No one was turned away and all items sold for pennies. My students saw how something little, which seems so insignificant [to them] could bring so much happiness to someone else.”

The students bagged up the money and took it to a local bank. Then they each sat down and wrote a letter to Mortenson.

“I was very inspired by your campaign [sic] to give children in Korphe education and I hope the money really helps,” Thomas wrote.

Molly wrote: “We are astounded by you and the way you put the effort into the children to have an education to learn. I think it is unfair that they didn’t have a school but we did. … We have given 150 [British] pounds because most of us from the school helped and gave some pennies, plus we have sold some of our old things for pennies. We have counted up all the money and the silvers too!”

“We are going to send you the pennies,” Skye wrote. “We have loads. I hope you build a wonderful school for the children.”

As it has for many years, P4P participated in the National Education Association’s annual convention this past summer. Held every year in early July, this year’s event was in Atlanta, and Jerene joined CAI Executive Director David Starnes and Database Manager Laura Brin at the P4P tradeshow booth.

“Most people had heard of CAI before, and a lot of them knew about Pennies for Peace, but it’s always fun to talk to people about how applicable it is in their classrooms,” Brin said. “It was interesting hearing about how it functions for them because it really is a great learning tool. Students learn about culture, religion, geography, and at the same time they get to support schools in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.”

Brin said people had questions about the controversy of recent years [see story on page 47]. Additionally, “People who knew about the program were really curious about our schools. ‘Do the kids really have to walk an hour to school?’ Questions like that.”

The CAI team handed out hundreds of digital copies of the P4P toolkit, which includes the K-12 curriculum (complete with standards and an assessment tool), fact
A lot of teachers, especially the social studies and geography teachers, who hadn’t heard of us before were excited to learn that they could use Pennies for Peace for the community service portion of their curriculum,” Brin said.

P4P will be at the NEA convention again in 2014, this time in Denver.

“Dear the Pennies for Peace organization and people in Afghanistan and Pakistan,

My name is Bridget. I started donating for Pennies for Peace when I was 7. I asked for it for Christmas and Santa gave it to me. It was a jar and a money counter.

Sincerely, Bridget, age 8, almost 9”

“Often the smallest thing can be the most powerful thing,” Greg Mortenson said. “The idea behind P4P is that anybody can make a difference.”

Kids can do it on their own or with friends; some children have even used it as a birthday party theme. Students and teachers organize single-classroom P4P drives or school-wide programs. Adults have conducted campaigns through civic groups, professional organizations, retirement homes, religious institutions, book clubs, and special events.

Last year, supporters registered 106 P4P campaigns with the CAI-US office in Bozeman, Mont., and those efforts generated $18,800.

One of those was organized by Kate Herlihy, a student at Dr. Leroy Mayo Elementary School in Holden, Mass. In a letter to fellow students about her penny drive, she encouraged everyone to get involved:

“There will be a five-gallon bucket next to the gym, and when you come to school in the morning, you can dump your donations inside,” she wrote. “When the two months are over, I will take the donations earned to a coin counter and make a check for Pennies for Peace. I will send the check to Montana and they will buy school supplies for the children.

“Thank you for joining me in this cause because without an education we wouldn’t have knowledge, and knowledge is power. Again thank you and remember just one penny to them can make a difference,” Kate wrote.

But Pennies for Peace is not just about fundraising for CAI, Greg pointed out. “Pennies for Peace was designed so that kids could support whatever or whomever they want. We encourage them to support charities in their local communities or even use it to start their own nonprofit. Kids should be creative with how they use their pennies.”

And they are. In August 2013, hundreds of people in Lima, Ohio, collected pennies for peace, according to the local newspaper, then crafted a 2-mile-long penny chain—about 170,000 pennies. The pennies were then donated to local charities.

In fall 2012, students at Cuthbertson Middle School in Waxhaw, N.C., did a school-wide read of Three Cups of Tea and then focused their efforts on “giving back and making a difference in the world,” WBTV, a local TV news station, reported. They partnered with Kids Against Hunger, a charity in nearby Charlotte, N.C., and in a marathon effort assembled 100,000 meals, which the charity distributed just before Thanksgiving.

“Helping other people is really its own reward,” Mortenson said. “That’s what it’s all about.”

For more information about Pennies for Peace, the curriculum or how you can use the program in your own organization, visit penniesforpeace.org, email info@ikat.org, or call CAI in Montana at 406.585.7841.

Dear Mr. Greg Mortenson,

Hope you are doing fine! My name is Suhani, and I am a 4th grader from Mason Intermediate in Mason, Ohio. I am doing a citizenship project for my school, and have selected to collect money for the Pennies for Peace program. I have also donated money for this program in the past, and would hope to do so in the future. Yours sincerely, Suhani
WHY IS GIRLS’ EDUCATION SO IMPORTANT?

BY GREG MORTENSON, CAI Co-Founder

After having dedicated two decades of my life to promoting literacy and helping establish schools in rural communities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and also having spent several years on the ground, I am convinced that the most powerful force of change, and the best investment one can make in a developing society, is girls’ education.

As I’ve often said before, “We can drop bombs, send in troops, enforce sanctions, hand out condoms, put in electricity, or build roads, but unless girls are educated, a society will not change.”

As far back as 1959, the UN General Assembly’s Declaration of the Rights of the Child stated that, “The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory. He shall be given an education, which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.”

In 2000, the United Nations developed a set of eight Millennium Goals, which were to be implemented over 15 years. In education, the goals included eradication of illiteracy, and universal education for every child on earth. Thirteen years later, the UN Millennium Goals have mostly fallen short of the objectives. In 2012, according to UNESCO, there were 61 million children not in school, including 33 million girls.

The World Literacy Foundation reported in 2012 that 796 million people on the planet were illiterate, including 310 million women, a tragedy that costs the global economy at least $1 trillion each year. At a practical level, it means billions of people around the world lack the ability to use a map, read medicine and food labels, access a bank, read or write a letter, use computers or cellphones, read a newspaper, fill out an application, file a report, or help their kids with homework. Many of them are also hobbled in their ability to think critically and understand government policies.

As a child growing up in Tanzania, East Africa, I learned a quote: “If you teach a boy, you educate an individual; but if you teach a girl, you educate a community.” In other words, while a single educated boy might leave his village, an educated girl is more likely to stay, and become a mother who encourages her own children to go to school, which is why teaching both boys and girls is important.

In the Army, I learned another valuable term: “force multiplier.” This is military parlance for what happens when a particular ingredient—a tool, capability, or means—is added to a combat force, thus significantly increasing the probability of a successful mission outcome. A force multiplier can bring profound change, and often change the tide of battle or a war. In today’s war on poverty, disasters, crippled economics, environmental degradation, corruption and much more, I believe one of the most effective force multipliers to help bring about a better society is girls’ education.

In simple terms, girls’ education empowers women (and thereby boys who have educated mothers), gives women choices, and serves as a powerful force to alleviate poverty. Several global studies have proven that investing in girls’ education yields huge returns in socio-economic development. By enabling young women to complete at least secondary education, the returns on investment are realized in increased food security, reduced child marriage, and lower fertility rates. Furthermore, educated women are more likely to use contraceptives and limit family size, which can lead to better health outcomes and decreased child mortality.

But the benefits of education for girls go beyond the individual and family level. Educated women are more likely to be involved in economic activities, including small-scale businesses, which can contribute to economic growth and development. Additionally, educated women are often involved in community decision-making processes, which can lead to better governance and more effective public policies.

In conclusion, investing in girls’ education is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a matter of national and global security. By empowering girls to reach their full potential, we can create a more stable, prosperous, and secure world for all.

Khushpak High School in Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan.
economics, health, population, and politics.

In the case of Islam, as in many other faiths, there is nothing that prohibits education of girls, and/or boys, and in fact in the Holy Koran, the first word of the revelation to Mohammad the Prophet is “Iqra,” which means “read” or “get an education.” Also, in the Hadiths (Islamic “teachings”), it says that seeking knowledge is mandatory for all Muslims.

Here are a few other important reasons that girls’ education is vital to social cohesion, stability, and future of our planet:

**SOCIOECONOMIC**
- Girls’ education leads to increased income for the girls themselves and for nations as a whole. Increasing the share of women with a secondary education by 1 percent boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent. That’s significant, since per capita income gains in developing countries seldom exceed 3 percent a year.**
- Educating girls also boosts farming productivity. Educated farmers are more efficient and their farms are more productive, which leads to increased crop yields and declines in malnutrition.*

**MATERNAL AND HEALTH CARE**
- Educated women have smaller, healthier and better-educated families.
- The better educated the women in a society, the lower the fertility rate. A 2000 study in Brazil found that literate women had an average of 2.5 children while illiterate women had an average of 6 children.***
- The better educated the women, the lower the infant mortality rate. “The mother’s education is often the single most important influence on children’s survival. Primary education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. Educated mothers learn how to keep their children healthy and how to secure necessary support for their children—by using health services, improving nutrition and sanitation and taking advantage of their own increased earning capability. Girls who stay in school also marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for children.”**
- By increasing health care knowledge and reducing the number of pregnancies, female education significantly reduces the risk of maternal mortality.**
- Educated women more likely to insist on education for their own children, especially their daughters. Their children study as much as two hours more each day than children of illiterate mothers and stay in school longer.*

**WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**
- Educated girls and women are more likely to stand up for themselves and resist vio-
lence: “In poor areas where women are isolated within their communities, have little education and cannot earn much, girls are often regarded as an economic burden and women and girls sometimes suffer deliberate neglect or outright harm.”

- Educated women channel more of their resources to the health and education of their children than men.
- Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings and decision making.
- Studies show that education promotes more representative, effective government. As women are educated and approach parity with men, research shows that “governments and other institutions function better and with less corruption.”


**Key Ingredients to Successful Girls’ Schools**

**TOILETS, TOILETS, TOILETS.**

On World Toilet Day, which is celebrated annually on Nov. 11, the world is reminded of the importance of hygiene and of the fact that 2.5 billion people have no plumbing and use outdoor toilets. Also important is that the second highest reason that post-pubescent girls drop out of school is lack of toilets. In Pakistan, a 2011 UNESCO study showed 70 percent of government schools had non-functioning toilets, and 68 percent of schools had no clean, drinking water. In 2012-2013, CAI put an emphasis on toilets and providing clean water in all our schools, and will continue to do so in 2013-2014.

**LOCATION**

A World Bank study showed that school-age children are 10 to 20 percent more likely to attend school if they live in a village with a primary school. Proximity also increases parental involvement.

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

When parents are involved in their child’s education, especially via a formal “PTA” (Parent Teacher Association), schools have more productive teachers and higher quality education, and students have lower dropout rates and better attendance.

**GIRL-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS**

When schools in conservative areas have privacy and boundary walls, the girls feel safer, and often do better academically. In some cases, it’s most appropriate to build separate schools for girls.

**FEMALE TEACHERS**

Girls do much better academically when they have female teachers, who also are good role models. Even very young women can teach programmed curricula effectively if they are trained and supported.

**PHYSICAL SPACE**

Studies have found that students do better in a learning environment with adequate lighting (most CAI schools still lack electricity), heating, ventilation, and sufficient space, and when those schools are close to their homes.

**TEACHER TRAINING**

Ongoing teacher training has huge impact on the quality of education. In the future, CAI plans to organize and offer more teacher training, with an emphasis on teaching cognitive skills, instead than reliance on rote learning, and on math and science skills.
LISTENING TO HOPE in the Pamir Mountains

Tajikistan’s literacy rate may be higher than that of neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the impoverished country has been losing ground on education ever since the country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1992.

According to the World Bank, “The education level of the [Tajik] population has decreased over the past two decades. Today, less than 25 percent of the working-age population has a professional education. Tajikistan is a rare example of a country in which the education level of older generations is higher than that of the youth. What is more, graduates’ skills lack relevance to the needs of the economy and to development.”

Central Asia Institute began working to reestablish schools in four villages in eastern Tajikistan in 2011: Zhyamag, Kona Kurgan, Langar, and Vanqala. All four are geographically remote, economically impoverished, and neglected by the Tajik government. The schools built during the Soviet era are crumbling, classrooms are small and crowded, and even the most basic supplies are scarce.

Yet as CAI Co-Founder Greg Mortenson was reminded during a visit to the country in the fall of 2013, Tajikistan’s children are like children everywhere, determined with hopes and dreams for a better future for themselves, their families, and the world.
Above: Aziz, the top student at Langar School, poses for a photograph with CAI Co-Founder Greg Mortenson in October. Langar is one of four schools CAI built in Tajikistan in 2012-2013. Aziz’ dream is to someday be president of Tajikistan.

Right: Five students at Vanqala School in GBAO sing a welcome song for visitors. The students are in what the Tajik education system refers to as “zero class,” the equivalent of kindergarten.

Left: Students gather outside Langar School in the Afghan Wakhan in September 2013 for the inauguration of their new school, built by Central Asia Institute.

Below: The top students at Javshangoz School near Karl Marx Peak in GBAO discuss their dreams with CAI Co-Founder Greg Mortenson. Students’ parents and Javshangoz elders have asked CAI for help with their 40-year-old Soviet-era wooden school.

Photos courtesy of Greg Mortenson
Kona Kurgan is an isolated and impoverished village east of Murghab in eastern GBAO. CAI built a new high school in this high-altitude village, replacing an old Soviet-era building with leaky windows, and crumbling walls.

Above left: Zumrad tells a visitor to her 11th grade classroom at Langar School about her dream to be an international journalist. She is the No. 2 student at her school in Langar village in southern GBAO, on the Panj (Oxus) River.

Above right: A second-grade student reads aloud for her class at Kona Kurgan High School near Murghab, in the eastern Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan. Most of the residents in this part of GBAO are of Kyrgyz descent.

Right: Mehbuba Qurbonalieva, CAI’s project manager in Tajikistan, writes a check to pay a contractor.
Central Asia Institute received a flurry of good news in the fall of 2013. First, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower-court ruling dismissing a purported class-action lawsuit filed by readers of *Three Cups of Tea*.

The suit — which alleged CAI, CAI Co-Founder Greg Mortenson, his coauthor David Oliver Relin, and Penguin Publishing had devised an elaborate conspiracy to defraud readers — was filed after a television news program alleged that Mortenson had fabricated parts of the book.

U.S. District Court Judge Sam E. Haddon dismissed the suit in May 2012, calling the allegations “flimsy and speculative.” The 9th circuit reaffirmed that decision on Oct. 9, 2013.

“The district court acted within its discretion in dismissing the complaint and denying leave to amend,” a three-judge panel concluded. “Plaintiffs’ conclusory statements and minimal factual allegations do not satisfy [the requirement] that fraud claims be treated with particularity.”

On the racketeering charges, the plaintiffs “fail to allege that the purported misrepresentations caused their injuries” and “fail to specify with the requisite particularity defendants’ individual roles in the alleged racketeering scheme, to plead an enterprise theory, or to properly plead the predicate acts of mail or wire fraud.”

The second piece of news worth heralding is the conclusion of all matters related to the Montana attorney general’s office’s 11-month inquiry into allegations that CAI failed to maintain adequate financial controls, governance, and stewardship processes.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the AG’s office issued a report, which noted that “Despite CAI’s problems and deficiencies, its mission is valuable and its achievements are important. With appropriate corrective action, and restitution for some of the financial improprieties, the attorney general believes CAI can move forward on a positive track in the pursuit of its mission, and its donors can have confidence in it.”

The corrective actions were outlined in an Agreement of Voluntary Compliance (AVC), which called for Mortenson to pay CAI $980,000 in restitution and step down to an ex-officio role on the board, CAI to appoint a new board of directors, hire a new executive director, and submit to monitoring for compliance on various financial and governance matters.

CAI has “satisfactorily completed all specific actions outlined” in the settlement, CAI Board Chairman Steve Barrett said in October. The AG’s office also indicated that it is satisfied and did not propose any further action.

“The conclusion of both of these weighty matters — the appeal and the AVC requirements — allows CAI to rededicate its energy and resources to the important work of promoting education, especially for girls, in remote areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan,” Barrett said. “As we’ve said before, no other NGO does what we do in these locales with such a small team of dedicated individuals.”

CAI Executive Director David Starnes said, “The past two to three months have seen a series of positive news for us. All this points to a bright future for CAI, its supporters, and the thousands of young people who have been provided opportunities as CAI continues to deliver on its mission to empower communities through literacy and education, especially for girls.

“Thank you to those supporters who have stood by us, the communities who work with us, and the dedicated CAI team here and overseas,” he said.
CAI has a limited number of 2014 calendars available for sale, at $10 each. The calendar includes Erik Petersen’s stunning photography of CAI projects and partners, students and landscapes. Proceeds from calendar sales help CAI carry out its mission to promote and support community-based education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. Visit www.ikat.org and click on the calendar link to order yours today!

About the Journalists

Karin Ronnow, 51, joined Central Asia Institute as communications director in May 2011, after nearly 25 years as a newspaper journalist. Prior to joining CAI, she was a reporter for daily newspapers in Maine and Georgia, a U.S.-based reporter for Lafferty Publications in Dublin, Ireland, managing editor at the Livingston (Montana) Enterprise and assistant managing editor of the Bozeman (Montana) Daily Chronicle. Her 2007 stories on CAI’s work in Afghanistan and Pakistan were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and she has received numerous awards for her reporting, writing, and editing. She earned her bachelor’s degree in urban studies and journalism from Macalester College in Minnesota and master’s degree in journalism from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism in Illinois. She lives in Montana with her husband, Kimball Leighton, and their three dogs. Their daughter, Carmine, lives in Boston. Karin can be reached at karin@ikat.org

Erik Petersen, Erik Petersen, 38, has been a Montana-based photojournalist for 14 years and made his first trip on behalf of Central Asia Institute during the summer of 2012. Now a freelance photographer, his newspaper work includes eight years at the Bozeman (Montana) Daily Chronicle and five years at the Livingston (Montana) Enterprise. Erik has garnered many state, regional, and national awards for his work, including Newspaper Photographer of the Year in the Western U.S. and Canada two years in a row. He earned his bachelor’s degree in mass communications from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. He lives in Clyde Park, Montana with his wife, Faith, and their two sons, Henry and Kasa. Erik can be reached at erikpetersen-photography@gmail.com and erikpetersen.photoshelter.com

Board of Directors

Steve Barrett
Board Chair

Talat Khan
Board Member

Greg Mortenson
Board Member, Ex-officio

Farid Senzai
Board Member

Iram Shah
Board Vice Chair

Howard T. Slayen
Board Member

Peter Thatcher
Board Treasurer

John E. (Jed) Williamson
Board Secretary

International Partners

Afghanistan

Pariwash (Pari) Gouhari
Wakhan/Pamir

Wakil Karimi
Central, Southern and Eastern Provinces

Jan Agha Jaheed
Badakhshan

Sarfraz Khan
In memory 1957-2012

Pakistan

Fozia Naseer
Azad Kashmir

Lt Col (R) Ilyas A Mirza
Rawalpindi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Saidullah Baig
Gilgit/Hunza

Fazil Baig
Ghizer

Mohammad Nazir
Baltistan

Suleman Minhas
Punjab

Apo Abdul Razak
Northern Areas, Emeritus

Tajikistan

Mahbuba Qurbonalieva
GBAO

Emeritus Advisors

Abdul Jabbar, PhD

Karen McCown

Julia Bergman

Andrew Marcus, PhD

Dr. Jean Hoerni
(1924-1997) In memory

Thomas Vaughan MD
(1937-2009) In memory

Central Asia Institute

PO Box 7209
Bozeman, MT 59771 U.S.A.

Phone: 1+406-585-7841
Website: www.ikat.org

CAI Communiqué Blog: www.ikat.org/cai-communique

facebook.com/CentralAsiaInstitute
twitter.com/peacethroughed
instagram.com/centralasiainstitute
centralasiainstitute.tumblr.com

CAI has established or significantly supported more than 300 community-initiated education and service projects. CAI is a registered nonprofit organization U.S. IRC § 501(c)(3) | EIN: 51-0376237
Central Asia Institute empowers communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, especially for girls, promotes peace through education, and conveys the importance of these activities globally.  

www.ikat.org