GESP teachers also have more formal training than the average in Afghanistan. In some cases this is because qualified teachers have been provided with training to strengthen content knowledge and teaching methodology. In others because existing teachers have been supported to attend formal in-service training. In all of the GESP schools, more than half the teachers had at least two years of higher education by 2013, an increase of over 20 percent since 2010. This is consistently higher than the 30 percent of teachers countrywide with some higher education. GESP is support to girls to become formally trained teachers – providing preparation classes and transportation for girls to sit for the entrance exam (for teachers), building a girls’ dormitory at a teachers’ training college, for some girls actually staying in the city for preparing and returning to teach in their local areas. They make up currently just 4 percent of qualified teachers in these schools. These gains for teachers take time. As an interim measure, where teachers’ skills were not yet sufficiently approved to provide the necessary support to complete the curriculum, accredited classes were made available during the long gaps between the formal examinations. In the majority, the students, most of them girls, were trained in the school to teach in their own schools. The gains for teachers’ skills have also been gradual in terms of the number of students transferring to the success of GESP schools. An important measure of the success of GESP schools has been the increasing likelihood that girls continue on to higher education and the numbers of qualified teachers in the majority of schools. GESP schools have supported this important step by providing preparation classes for what is commonly seen to be a grueling exam, and helping girls with transportation to the exam site and a place to stay when necessary. Since this all occurs months after school is over, many gaps of 2-3 months have been kept of the numbers of girls involved in their school education. Numbers from some individual schools show a high percentage of graduating girls going ahead with this process and doing well. Most who pass the exam, and whose families then allow them to attend further education, have completed a teaching degree. Over 550, as noted, have returned to teach in their own schools.

Analysis 3: A new corps of local women teachers and role models

An important measure of the success of GESP schools has been the increasing likelihood that girls continue on to higher education and the numbers of qualified teachers. In the majority of schools. GESP schools have supported this important step by providing preparation classes for what is commonly seen to be a grueling exam, and helping girls with transportation to the exam site and a place to stay when necessary. Since this all occurs months after school is over, many gaps of 2-3 months have been kept of the numbers of girls involved in their school education. Numbers from some individual schools show a high percentage of graduating girls going ahead with this process and doing well. Most who pass the exam, and whose families then allow them to attend further education, have completed a teaching degree. Over 550, as noted, have returned to teach in their own schools.

These young women teachers are perhaps the most important predictors of the sustainability of the changes supported by GESP. They are a source of pride for their communities and a justification for changing norms, providing important role models for younger girls and are also gradually eliminating the need for reliance on outside teachers. In remote areas especially, the availability of a corps of strong local women teachers is the best insurance for continued schooling for girls. Analysis 4: GESP schools ready to be autonomous

Also encouraging in terms of sustainability is the demand that has been created for what is happening in these schools. This is evident in the number of students transferring into these schools (especially boys) and in the requests for graduates from these schools as teachers. Over 550, as noted, have returned to teach in their own schools. There is a strong sense of ownership in many schools and communities – a recognition that GESP has been an important support to the success of GESP schools. In Afghanistan, a lack of schools and school structures, along with a series of decades of armed conflict, poverty and other related stresses have had a direct negative impact on children’s access to education. A shortage of qualified teachers and learning materials also contribute to the country’s low school attendance rate. While the gender gap is narrowing, a large percentage of girls still do not have access to school education. In response to these challenges, in 2009, with funding from the Government of Canada, AKF started the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP) in three provinces in Afghanistan – Badakhshan, Bamyan and Baghlan.

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Girls in GESP schools have been marrying later and those who marry also are more likely to stay in school or to return after time away. The study conducted by AKF in 2013 revealed that schools supported by the Gender Education Support Programme (GESP) have not only had a radical increase in girls’ enrolment, but likewise an enormous increase amongst girls. As a result, between 2009 and 2013, the number of girls graduates in these schools increased by more than ten-fold.
In addition to training and mentoring almost 4,000 teachers and 6,000 other stakeholders, the GESP Education Support Programme has led the implementation for better education for girls through 71 early childhood centres, Dairy classes for over 6,000 mothers and community fora.

How the programme worked

The GESP Programme supported 216 schools in all, for boys and girls alike. The programme achieved a higher than quarter of all the schools in these provinces, primarily in underresourced areas where girls’ enrolment was low. GESP supported the expansion of many of these schools from primary to secondary, in many cases helping them to become the first secondary schools in their often remote districts. The programme provided training and mentoring for almost 4,000 teachers and 6,000 other stakeholders; supported school management committees and parent-teacher-student associations (PTSSAs); and made physical improvements to the schools. It gave particular attention to providing better education for girls, included 71 early childhood centres in 6,000 communities and cities.

The programme made girls’ enrolment possible in many of these schools from primary to secondary, in many cases helping them to become the first secondary schools in their often remote districts. The programme supported training and mentoring for almost 4,000 teachers and 6,000 other stakeholders; supported school management committees and parent-teacher-student associations (PTSSAs); and made physical improvements to the schools. It gave particular attention to providing better education for girls, included 71 early childhood centres in 6,000 communities and cities.

Key successes

Finding 1: Girls’ enrolment radically increased. Between 2009 and 2013, secondary school enrolment in these three provinces increased by almost 231,000 students – a 28 percent increase in enrolment overall. Although GESP was involved in less than a third of all the secondary schools, these schools were responsible for almost half of the increase. Secondary school enrolment increased by 94 percent over these four years – for girls it increased by over 140 percent (see chart above).

Despite the radical increase in girls’ enrolment, gender equity in the GESP schools remained lower than in non-GESP schools in 2013 (37 percent girls in GESP compared to 42 percent girls in non-GESP). In large part this was because these schools started off in 2008 with so few girls – they typically made only 30 percent. But it was also because these schools attracted a disproportionate number of boys from beyond their catchment areas, and because of their higher quality and the absence of other high schools. Among the factors that the huge increase in enrolment for girls was the growing presence of women teachers in these schools. Countrywide, women now make up one third of the teachers in these schools. It was also because they were heavily concentrated in larger towns and cities. GESP schools made their presence possible in more remote areas through incentive payments, transportation for girls, and ensuring the training of female graduates from these schools as teachers. GESP’s various workshops and roundtables on gender and girls’ rights also had an important galvanizing effect, providing teachers, community members and education officials with a forum where they could air their views, jointly exploring and negotiating changing norms around girls’ education.

Finding 2: Fewer girls dropped out of school. Not only were the GESP schools responsible for a disproportionate increase in girls’ secondary enrolment; just as importantly, most of these girls stayed in school, not dropping out once they reached puberty or marries. Girls in GESP schools have been married later, and those who marry are also more likely to stay in school or to return after time away. Of the cohort of girls who were in grade 6 in GESP, the great majority remained through grade 9 in GESP (in 2009, the great majority remained through grade 8 in non-GESP schools), and their numbers grew in Baghlan and Bamyan as girls moved from other schools. By 2013, the numbers of girls in this GESP cohort had increased overall by only 1 percent. By contrast, 41 percent of the girls in the non-GESP schools were no longer in these schools by grade 12. The numbers of boys dropping out or transferring was also far lower in GESP schools. Parent-teacher-student associations have been instrumental in keeping girls in school. They talk with families when girls stop coming, and encourage them to change their minds. Other students have also played a role, as have teachers and local education officials. In many places it has been a matter of pride to have all girls in school.

Finding 3: More girls graduated. The growing number of girls enrolling and remaining in secondary school is reflected in rapidly increasing graduation rates. In 2009, only 17 percent of the graduates in GESP schools were girls. In 2013, they made up one third of all GESP graduates. In 2013, the numbers of girls graduates have almost tripled since 2009; in non-GESP schools they have increased by more than ten-fold. A girl who entered grade 5 in 2009 in a GESP school was almost twice as likely to graduate as her peer in a non-GESP school.

The study conducted by AKF in 2013 revealed that schools supported by the GESP Education Support Programme (GESP) have not only had a radical increase in girls’ enrolment, but they also have a marked increase in graduation rates amongst girls. As a result, between 2009 and 2013, the numbers of girls graduates in GESP schools increased by more than ten-fold.

| Table 1: national versus GESP provincial reports of poverty and education |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                | GESP boys     | GESP girls    | non-GESP boys  |
|                |                |                |                |
| Primary literacy | 75%           | 55%           | 60%           |
| Secondary literacy | 55%           | 35%           | 40%           |
| Senior literacy  | 25%           | 15%           | 20%           |
| Male literacy    | 85%           | 65%           | 70%           |
| Female literacy  | 15%           | 35%           | 30%           |
| Source: Afghanistan Provincial Briefs (2011) AusAID, World Bank

In the past huge increase in enrolment for girls was due to the growing presence of non-teachers on the GESP schools. Countrywide, women now make up close to one third of all teachers but they are heavily concentrated in larger towns and cities.

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Key successes

Analysis of key success

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The study conducted by AKF in 2013 revealed that schools supported by the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP) have not only had a radical increase in girls’ enrolment, but the increase has been more diverse throughout the school system. As a result, between 2009 and 2013, the numbers of girls in GESP schools increased by more than ten-fold.

Finding 2: Fewer girls dropped out
Not only were the GESP schools responsible for a disproportionate increase in girls’ secondary enrolment; just as importantly, most of these girls stayed in school, not dropping out once they reached puberty or married. Girls in GESP schools have been marrying later, and those who marry are also more likely to stay in school or to return after time away.

A girl who entered grade 8 in 2009 in a GESP school was almost twice as likely to graduate as her non-GESP female peer, but this increase could be attributed to factors unrelated to the quality of education. Analysis 1: Quality teaching
The most significant difference, it is generally agreed, is in the quality of the teachers. AKF has provided basic training for teachers in both methods and subject content. Specific approaches have been implemented throughout GESP included training for head teachers in each school, mentoring of teachers by front-line project staff on active, student-centred methods and management leadership training for school principals and head teachers, and the establishment of leadership circles for mutual support, with teachers who are regional leaders in a specific area helping others to develop their skills. In many schools, it appears that the training and mentoring provided by AKF has been institutionalised as part of the school culture, helping to sustain improvements being continued by school staff and local education officials.

80% 60% 40% 20% 0%

In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girls who have already married (100% in 2009) in GESP schools have already increased by more than ten-fold. In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girls who have already married (100% in 2009) in GESP schools have already increased by more than ten-fold. In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girls who have already married (100% in 2009) in GESP schools have already increased by more than ten-fold. In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girls who have already married (100% in 2009) in GESP schools have already increased by more than ten-fold. In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girls who have already married (100% in 2009) in GESP schools have already increased by more than ten-fold.

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Finding 3: Many more girls graduated
The growing number of girls enrolling and remaining in secondary school is reflected in rapidly increasing graduation rates. In 2009, only 17 percent of the graduates in GESP schools were girls, in 2013 they made up one-third of all GESP graduates. In non-GESP schools, the numbers of girl graduates have been almost tripled since 2009 in GESP schools they have increased by more than ten-fold. A girl who graduated grade 8 in 2009 in a GESP school was almost twice as likely to graduate as her non-GESP female peer, but this increase could be attributed to factors unrelated to the quality of education. Analysis 1: Quality teaching
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GESP teachers also have more formal training than the average in Afghanistan. In some cases this is because unqualified teachers have been provided with training to strengthen content knowledge and teaching methodology. In others because existing teachers have been supported to attend formal in-service training. In all of the GESP schools, more than half the teachers had at least two years of higher education by 2013, an increase of over 20 percent since 2010. This is considerably higher than the 30 percent of teachers countrywide with some higher education. GESP support to girls is to become formally trained teachers – providing preparation classes and transportation for girls to sit for the entrance exam for higher education, building a girls’ dormitory at a teachers’ training college, for some girls actually paying tuition – has led to 558 girls qualifying and returning to teach in their local areas. They make up one quarter of all certified teachers in these schools. These gains for teachers take time. As an interim measure, where teachers’ skills were not yet sufficiently appraised to provide the necessary support to complete the curriculum, accredited classes were made available during the long summer break to almost 3,000 students, the majority of them girls. After completion of the accredited classes and coordination the effort, making it possible for girls between academic years to make up a lot of ground.

Analysis 2: Supportive and involved communities

The quality of GESP schools has also been enhanced in many cases by community involvement. Parent-teacher-student associations have been supported and trained in most GESP schools. In many places they have become very effective groups, serving as a local bridge between school and community, helping with school maintenance, making sure that teachers are present, and encouraging attendance at the school for local government and undertaking physical improvement projects.

Analysis 3: A new model of local women teachers and role models

An important measure of the success of these schools has been the increasing likelihood that girls continue on to higher and secondary education and become the main teachers. This involves first getting the family university examination, GESP schools have supported this important step by providing preparation classes for what is commonly seen to be a grueling exam, and helping girls with transportation to the exam site and a place to stay when necessary. Since this all occurs months after school is over, we have in turned certified 3,000 students, the majority of them girls. AKF and AFH teachers in trained teachers and coordinate the effort, making it possible for girls between academic years to make up a lot of ground.

In Afghanistan, a lack of schools and access to education, along with the last three decades of armed conflict, poverty and climate-related disasters have had a direct negative impact on children’s access to education. A shortage of qualified teachers and learning materials also contribute to the country’s low school attendance rate. While the gender gap is narrowing, a large percentage of girls still do not have access to school education.

In response to these challenges, in 2002, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) started the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP) in three provinces in Afghanistan: Badakhshan, Baghlan and Balkh. In 2009, with funding from the Government of Canada, AKF started the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP) in three provinces in Afghanistan: Badakhshan, Baghlan and Balkh. In 2013, the final year of the programme, the number of girls graduated had risen to over 2,300, having increased by more than ten-fold within five years.

An internet study conducted in 2013 examined descriptive statistics and qualitative research to explore the story behind this dramatic leap in numbers. The key findings and conclusions of the study are highlighted in this document.
A Study of the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP)

In Afghanistan, a lack of schools and access to education, along with other factors, has caused up to three decades of armed conflict. The combined effects of economy, political instability and related disturbances have had a direct negative impact on children’s access to education. A shortage of qualified teachers and learning materials also contribute to the country’s low school attendance rate. While the gender gap is narrowing, a large percentage of girls still do not have access to school education.

In response to these challenges, in 2002, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) began implementing a range of interventions aimed at strengthening the Afghan Government’s capacity to deliver quality education, and at supporting and promoting educational access and quality learning opportunities for all children, particularly girls. Building on the work started by Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS), an AKDN affiliate that had been offering emergency assistance since 1995, these education efforts led by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) cover four of the country’s most rural and remote provinces: Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamiyan and Parwan.

In 2009, with funding from the Government of Canada, AKF started the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP) in three provinces in Afghanistan: that year, 225 girls graduated from GESP-supported schools. By 2013 (the final year of the programme), the number of girls graduating had risen to over 2,300, having almost quadrupled the number of girl graduates from GESP-supported schools.

For more information or to obtain the final report on which this brief was based, please contact:

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International Development Agency (CIDA)
Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)

AGHA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
www.akdn.org

Enrollment and gender equity

Today, the three provinces where GESP was implemented – Badakhshan, Bamiyan and Baghlan – have on the whole better school records than most of the country, with higher primary enrollment than average and a better gender equity (see Table 1 on the next page). Yet Badakhshan and Bamiyan are far poorer than the average in this very poor country, with more remote and unsettled environments, and despite more recent gains in gender equity, Bamiyan and Badakhshan continue to have very low rates of literacy for women.

A Study of the Girls’ Education Support Programme (GESP)

An internal study conducted in 2013 examined descriptive statistics and qualitative research to explore the story behind this dramatic leap in numbers. The key findings and conclusions of the study are highlighted in this document.

The Aga Khan Foundation Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private, non-denominational agencies existing to ensure communities and individuals, offer in development programs that are informed by a holistic vision for human advancement, striving to be a force for good in societies in the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. All organizations are the sole property of the respective organizations.

Developments Partners
Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)
International Development Agency (CIDA)

There is a strong sense of ownership and in the requests for graduates from these schools as teachers. There is a strong sense of ownership in many schools and communities – a recognition that GESP has been an important support at a critical time, but that whether or not external support is ongoing, the changes will continue. The GESP programme has had a catalytic effect on a number of fronts, helping to facilitate changes that were started by communities and district stakeholders and assisting them in changing the status quo. It is reminiscent of the old adage that many GESP teachers are using to facilitate children’s learning: assessing where they are together and what they need to move to in the next stage of their development, and then providing just enough support for them to take the next important step themselves. As one teacher in Badakhshan said, “We have to search somewhere. AKP has shown us all the ways and our people have understood what to do. So now we have to dig deep so that our society advances.”