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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

### Musharikat Grantee's Advocacy Puts Girls Back in School



*THRA meeting Director for Directorate of Women's Affairs, Nangarhar Province.*

*"Islam emphasizes the necessity of education for both females and males."*

*Najwan, Kama, Nangarhar*

Najwan (not her real name), from the Kama district of Nangarhar province had a big problem: she really wanted to go to school, but a group of boys harassed her so much on the way to class that she and her family decided it was best for her to just stay at home. Najwan wanted an education and, as she states now, "Islam emphasizes the necessity of education for both females and males." She also understood proper schooling would enable her to contribute to her community, but she and her family did not know what to do about the boys standing in her way. And Najwan was not alone. She knew of at least 20 other girls also trapped at home by the harassment.

Fortunately for Najwan, the Training Human Rights Association for Afghan Women (THRA) organization stepped in to address the girls' problem. THRA is a small civil society organization (CSO) that was a founding member of USAID Musharikat's Access to Education Coalition. One way Musharikat supports its coalition members is to provide advocacy skill training workshops. THRA attended these sessions and with support from a Musharikat grant, put this new learning to work.

THRA quickly found that girls faced two key challenges: lack of women teachers and harassment of girls going to school. To address the lack of women teachers, THRA put together – with the support from Musharikat's advocacy and policy team – a presentation on the importance of having women teachers in school. This compelling advocacy work was presented to the leadership of the Directorate of Education at a fortunate time because the school system was in the middle of a restructuring. With the valuable information from THRA, the Department of Education took the initiative to hire 33 new female teachers.

Addressing the problem of boys harassing girls on the way to school would require a different approach. THRA knew they would need help from the community, so they met with local community elders and influential mullahs to explain the serious problem girls were facing. Once everyone in the room fully understood the problem, the group decided that first the elders would talk with the parents of the misbehaving boys. At the same time, the mullahs would deliver Friday prayer sermons directly addressing the importance of girls' education and the support girls need from the community.

Fortunately, the conversations with parents and the mullah's sermons worked! As a result of THRA's advocacy efforts, 23 girls from the Kama district resumed attending school. Najwan was free to pursue her educational dreams, and her father was proud to declare, "I am pleased that I have been able to support my daughter." More generally, the Kama district school principal Mr. Shafiullah, noted that there has been a "great change regarding girls' harassment in the district," and he sees a large increase in the number of girls enrolling.