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PAKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Food For Thought

USAID provides monthly rations to poor families as an incentive to send their children to school



Naz Gul sits outside school in her village of Chaghai with her monthly ration of wheat for her family.

“I felt terrible about taking my daughter out of school because it is important to educate girls. With the food she now brings home, we can make sure she is well-fed when she attends classes every day,” said Gul, Naz Gul’s father.

Telling Our Story
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In late 2007, economic recession combined with a regional drought brought poor communities to their knees in rural western Pakistan. Families stopped sending their children to school, and instead put them to work to help pay for their evening bread. With few skills or opportunities, the least fortunate took to the streets to become beggars.

Naz Gul, a fourth grade student in a government primary school in Chaghai village in Baluchistan, was one such child. Despite her wish to stay in school, circumstance led her to beg for bread every day in the surrounding communities.

“My parents were extremely poor and could not afford to buy food, so I had to quit and work with my mother in the fields,” said Naz. “In the evening I had to beg for food.”

A year later, 12-year-old Naz was back in school. Her parents learned that a USAID program was distributing wheat and cooking oil to schoolchildren of Chaghai. Soon after they re-enrolled Naz, she brought home a 50 kilogram sack of wheat and a quart of cooking oil, enough to feed her family for a month.

The innovative USAID-supported program that Naz and her family benefit from encourages school enrollment and retention by providing the food to more two million deprived students in 12 districts across three provinces. Contingent on attendance, students receive the supplies every three months.

The donation helps each family save 1,200 to 2,000 rupees (\$14-24) per month, enough to purchase an additional sack of wheat. Parents come to school on distribution day to participate in capacity building session on health and hygiene.

“I felt terrible about having to take my daughter out of school because it is important to educate girls,” said the girl’s father, Gul. “With the food she brings home now, we can make sure she is well-fed when she attends classes every day.”

Since the start of the program, the Chaghai primary school has seen a remarkable 43 percent increase in enrollment. Parents who had given up on their children’s education found a ray of hope for their present and their future.

Photo: WFP