

Rigorous Test Demonstrates the Value of Supporting Village Schools in Afghanistan

Ever wonder if your donations are really making a difference to the education of children in Afghanistan? Do Afghan parents really want their children to receive education—especially their daughters? A newly published study uses a very rigorous methodology to demonstrate just how much the availability of education matters to Afghan children and their parents. The results are astounding.

In 2007, 31 villages in rural Afghanistan without local elementary schools participated in a lottery to be the first to receive new schools—the “treatment villages”. The remaining villages—the “control villages”—also received new schools, but one year later. The main objective was to see if making schools more accessible—in the village rather than a long distance away—would increase school enrollment and improve performance on standardized tests, especially for girls. Girls are especially disadvantaged if they have to travel, but nobody really knew whether their parents would let them attend school even if they did not have to travel.

In each case, the village agreed to provide the space for the school and the project, funded by USAID in cooperation with the Afghan Ministry of Education, provided the rest. The curriculum used is the same government-approved curriculum used in all schools supported by Ayni.

The results:

- In year the first 11 schools were opened, 68 percent of the girls in those 11 villages attended school compared to just 16 percent in the control schools. ***School attendance for girls increased by 52 percentage points.*** Attendance for boys increased a lot, too, but not as dramatically: by 35 percentage points, to 71 percent. Impressively, attendance rates for girls almost caught up with those for boys!
- Increases in test scores were also very large, again especially for girls. In this case, girls didn’t catch up to boys, but they started way behind. In just one year, however, they reduced the gap in test scores by one third.

We could not agree more with the authors’ conclusion: *“Given the harsh conditions faced by girls in rural Afghan villages, their typically low-enrollment rates, and the large existing gender disparities, these results prove that getting girls into school is possible and that village-based schools are a viable strategy for doing so.”*

You can read more about this study at the Jameel Poverty Action Lab, a world-wide network of researchers led by MIT economist Esther Duflo. <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/effect-village-based-schools-evidence-rct-afghanistan>. The following is the citation for the full article: Burde, Dana, and Leigh L. Linden. 2013. "Bringing Education to Afghan Girls: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Village-Based Schools." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3): 27-40. The following is the link to the article: <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/app.5.3.27>