

# Jacqueline's Journal

## Pakistan

JUNE 11-19, 2011

**Saturday, June 11, 2011**

### CHITRAL, PAKISTAN

Chitral District is in the northern region of Pakistan, lying on the border of Afghanistan to the west, Gilgit to the East, and the Swat Valley to the Southeast. The flight over the valley is spectacular – the propeller plane traverses straight through the Lowari Pass, an opening in the massive line of the Hindu Kush mountains, stunning in their grandeur, immense and soaring, siblings of the snow-capped Himalayas standing just beyond. This is also a land torn asunder by men who fear one another despite the reminder of these giant mountains themselves of how small we are, how much we need one another.



This is one of the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the valleys are Dir and Swat, spectacularly beautiful, yet areas which have faced considerable instability in recent years. I'm told the mountains are a barrier to dangers seeping into Chitral, for it is known for safety and the kindness and warmth of those who live there. As soon as we land, I see evidence: an older gentleman wearing the traditional rolled felt hat with a white beard and huge smile greets us on the tarmac, asking from where we come and wishing us a wonderful stay.

In the terminal we are greeted by Sardar Ayub, Regional Manager of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), one of Pakistan's most respected NGOs and our partner in a mini-hydro venture in this area. Ayub is an elegant man with black hair flecked with grey, deep eyes, a mustache and light beard wearing a pale blue kurta shalwar and sandals. He was born and raised in the area and could not be prouder of it. We drive along the tiny dirt road from the airport beneath a crystal blue sky through the small town where we see men on the sides of the street selling sundries and weighing grains. Construction workers line the roads, hammering rocks from the mountain walls, drilling, shoveling, all in an effort to build greater access to town. Life is changing here.

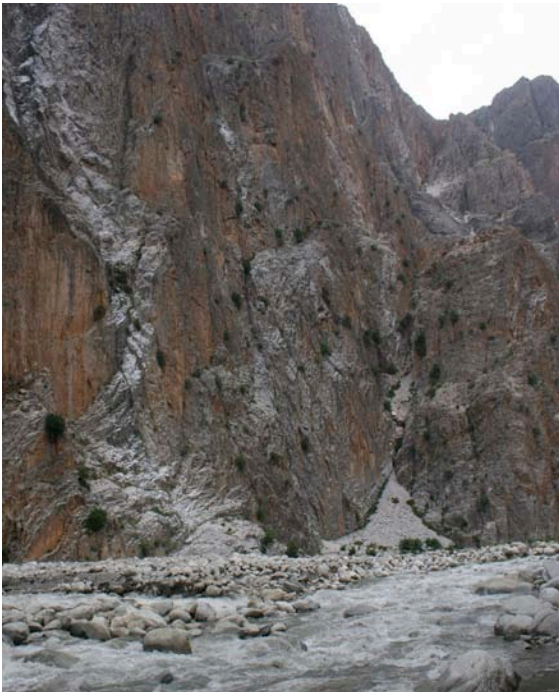
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Twenty-four hours ago, I was in Dubai, a place of sand, concrete and glass, built on capitalism, connection to the world and diversity. Chitral could not be more different. This place at the northern edge of Pakistan is isolated, pastoral, mountainous rather than desert-like, and culturally deep. We pass fields of wheat, apricot and walnut trees, all to an orchestra of birdsong as we gulp in the fresh mountain air. People wave as our car passes and smiles come freely.

Aun Rahman, our Pakistan country director, and I meet with Ayub in his office and then join the larger team for a presentation on the area. Ayub tries explaining why this part of Pakistan is so different. The dominant group here descended from the Khow, an indigenous culture that probably hailed from Tajikistan. It is growing more diverse with Pathans, Bashgalis and Wakhis as well as Afghans and a small tribe believed to have descended from Alexander the Great – the Kalash. Everyone is proud of the peace, we're told. Households subsist on agriculture, mostly wheat and maize as well as livestock, and bring in cash income mostly from working in government or with NGOs. Increasingly they are also earning income from small business transport and construction due in large part to the government building a road – and especially, a tunnel – along the Lowari Pass that for the first time has allowed direct access from this region into the rest of Pakistan.



*A "vertical desert" with slate and granite peaks and water rushing through the ravines.*

Sardar Ayub wonders what the road will do to the culture. Already, many Afghans live in the area, including some jihadis who fought the Russians in the 1970s and 80s. I ask him how they've preserved the culture to date. "The AKRSP worked with many of the main religious leaders who have maintained a distance from fundamentalism and instead, helped foster the culture of tolerance," he responds. So this is part of the reason. "Having to go through the Lowari Pass made it difficult for too many bad influences to impact us here. It is of course due to leadership."

At the same time, he tells us that a tunnel through the Lowari Pass should be completed in the next six months and that could mean much easier access. "I'm sure there will be good things," he says, "but there also could be a lot of bad."

Environmentally, the area is increasingly vulnerable. Not only must people depend on less stable natural resources (global warming has contributed to a high rate of glacier melting, which has destroyed significant physical infrastructure; this is coupled with droughts and flash floods, all of which take a toll on the physical terrain and people's ability to earn income), but dependency on wood for energy has meant massive deforestation. In the southern area, all but four percent of the forests are gone.

AKRSP has been working here for 30 years and is a powerful presence in the area. The organization has built a grassroots community infrastructure by organizing community groups and working closely with them on natural resource management, women's development, market development and policy advocacy. This is one major reason why Chitral boasts some of the highest literacy rates in the country. Sardar Ayub estimates that AKRSP works with 80 percent of the villages here, accounting for about 400,000 individuals. We are eager to start the day with our partner, and go first to see the mini-hydro electric systems we will be financing with and through AKRSP.

### Mini-Hydro in Shogore

Chitral now has among the highest concentrations of micro-hydro plants in the world: AKRSP has built 244 small scale plants, all of which are managed by local communities and provide power for lighting a few hours per day. AKRSP's success rate is extraordinary, in large part because of the Aga Khan's presence and reputation in the area. They are now looking to expand and develop new mini-hydro plants, of which 4 plants in Chitral will be partially funded by a \$1 MM investment from Acumen Fund. These new plants are larger (500-750KW), will use imported technology, will be incorporated as power utilities, and are designed to provide 24/7 hydro-electricity for household heating, cooking, industry, in addition to lighting. They will also reduce the environmental damage created by dependence on wood for fuel and heat. The AKRSP is forming separate utility companies to manage the affairs of each of the four power generating unit under the management of the AKRSP.

We drive for an hour through "a vertical desert", mountains of slate, granite and marble soaring to the clouds, their jagged, faces a testament to millions of years of defiance against winds and floods, with extremes of -40C degree nights and +50C degree days.



*A group balances on a fallen log in order to cross a flooded pass.*

Water rushes through the ravine and when we get out of the car to take in the stark beauty, I breathe in the coolness from the glistening air spraying a fine mist, a tinkling hello to this extraordinary world. There are only a few cars, most of them jeeps. The roads wind around precarious cliffs with nothing between the car and the ravine below. Often, water rushes across them, making driving even more difficult.

We stop to watch the car in front of us try to navigate a flooded pass. After two failed attempts, three women in chadors step out of the car while the driver makes two more efforts until finally jumping up the hill to the other side. The women have to balance themselves across a log over the broken land – and they do so slowly but surely. Athar, our host from AKRSP, mentions that the car is a Toyota Corolla, small and nimble but strong enough to weather this area. “For that reason, it is also the choice of the Taliban,” he tells us.

Always good to know, I tell him.

This is the land of the snow leopard and the ibex, though it has been nearly completely denuded of trees and you can feel

a paradoxical fragility in the flooded roads and the bald mountain walls. Finally, we turn and cross an impossibly narrow bridge hanging over the river and go to the other side where we are greeted immediately by flowers and trees, rolling hills and wheat fields. There is a magical quality of moving from the severe to the pastoral, as if Shoghore, Chitral is a hidden oasis tucked behind the giant mountains lordling over the valleys.

We join a Village Organization meeting and a Women’s Organization meeting in the shade of a grove of trees. You can feel the benefits of AKRSP’s long-term civil society work within minutes of meeting the group. The men, most of them wearing cotton shalwars and rolled felt hats sit on one side, and the women, wearing colorful shalwar kameez and shawls covering their heads, are on the other. For a conservative area, it is exciting to see men and women sitting together.

AKRSP created Local Support Organizations (LSOs), agglomerations of local village organizations in 1997. These LSOs have now become mature, registered organizations and can engage in multiple development activities, including private sector solutions that use profits for the good of the community. For the new plant, this LSO contributed 7 million rupees (nearly \$90,000) among nearly 30,000 villagers and so own 20 percent of the shares of company managing the mini-utility. Though they already operate a small 50KW plant, it enables basic lighting only. Now the villagers want electricity for heat, cooking, light industry televisions, and, eventually, computers as well.



*Groups of men and women gather to meet in the shade of a grove of trees.*

AKRSP estimates that the company managing the plant will take 18 months to build the facility, hiring local workers. At that point, the community will have affordable electricity, and our hope is that we and AKRSP will be repaid in time using revenues from tariffs collected through a metering, distribution, and billing system. Initially, it is expected that the largest portion of ownership will remain with AKRSP, while the rest will be with community based LSOs. After repayment of the Facility, AKRSP will divest from each of the utilities and gradually transfer its shares to the respective LSOs and community members, in accordance with its mandate.

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The Chairperson of the community is an energetic ball of fire named Israruddin, himself a Chitrali with a raspy voice, laughing eyes and a clear love of this village and the work he's doing. He explains the LSO structure and also says that women take the responsibilities in business more seriously than the men. I love that AKRSP reaches out directly to women. I'm also thrilled that they don't immediately think of cooperatives when dealing with the poor, but instead make them shareholders in for-profit companies that create real value. This is an example of the poor using capitalism as a tool for civil society rather than being controlled – and too often – exploited by it.

The women speak about how difficult life is. They work hard in summer, tending fields with their husbands, finding wood for cooking and heat, caring for the children, tending to community. In September, at least half the menfolk leave for work in other parts, needing to get through the Lowari Pass before the snows fall. From September to April or May, the women and children “hibernate”, hardly leaving their homes. The hibernation phase may be one reason Chitrali culture is full of singing and dance – and moonshine vodka made from the ample apricots, cherries and mulberries in the summer months. “What can we do at night but sit together and sing?” a woman asks with a devilish smile.



*Farida's home, a one room living space where she and her family spend nearly all of their waking hours.*

The people throughout these valleys bring with them a kindness in their eyes and a quickness to extend their hand, to laugh, to invite you into their homes. We visit a home in the rural village where our mini-hydro plant is under construction. Farida, a villager, welcomes us into the main living space for winter, a fairly large room with a cut-out in the ceiling – their only ventilation through the long, hard winter. The ceiling itself is thick with smoky blackness; I can feel the sting of residue smoke in my eyes. In one corner, firewood is stacked: it will go to the ceiling before the snows come, as it is the family's only source of heat. In another are mattresses and blankets -- everyone sleeps in the room as well. In the summertime, the family sleeps outside on the porch. Kitchen utensils, pots and plates line the third wall and in the center is the dining and living room, a square area beneath the cut-out in the ceiling where the family spends nearly all of their waking hours together.

I begin to tick off the metrics for our investment in mini-hydropower. First is significant cost-savings to the family. This family, like most in the area, earns between 12,000-15,000 rupees (\$140-175) per month. In winter – for six months of the year – it spends, on average 8,000-9,000 rupees – two-thirds of their winter earnings- on firewood. Very little wood can be gathered for free anymore due to deforestation. In the summer, families spend less than half that for wood, but the figure still accounts for a third of their income. And this is after they were able to purchase enough electricity to provide lighting. With the new mini-hydro system, Farida’s family can expect to pay 200-600 rupees, thus reducing their monthly energy expenditures by 90 percent. So we estimate around a savings of 5000 rupees per month, allowing more income for investment, for school fees, for life.

Second, healthcare costs should at least theoretically be reduced, not only in terms of money spent on curing respiratory ailments from breathing in toxic fumes all winter, but from the invaluable benefits of clean air inside the home and healthier lungs. I can’t help but wonder how living inside a smokehouse for six months at a time impacts health and aging. I know it’s not good – and from society’s standpoint, it is expensive.

Third, the devastation of this region’s forest could possibly be turned around. This will, in turn, reduce flooding and landslides in the region. The business also benefits from carbon credits that calculate a reduction in diesel fuel needed, but the real winner is the forests and the trees that contribute in immeasurable ways to life in the northern regions.

Fourth, family dynamics will likely shift as it will be easier to distribute heat to other rooms in the home, and women will be able to spend less time finding wood and cooking. One woman estimates it can take an hour or so to make bread over an open fire, “and with a stove, maybe three minutes.” Gender dynamics are likely to shift as well as women not only have time to generate more income but to watch TV. As families save more with the electric heating, a TV is likely to be one of their first purchases, and with that comes greater awareness about the rest of the world.

Already, you can see generational divides growing. The women tell me their daughters go to school and don’t want to work as hard as their mothers. They think their girls will have different lives than they did – and they want that for them. The question is not if but how quickly those shifts will occur – and also what we can do to help push the inevitable.



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After a lunch of sandwiches and a community treat of incredibly sweet fresh mulberries, we drive to the local hospital, a thirteen-bed institution providing a range of health and laboratory services. The hospital's director, Dr. Mahmoud, makes the link between affordable energy and providing sustainable health services. He currently must run a generator for any procedure requiring energy – laboratory functions, incubating babies, surgery. And the numbers aren't adding up.

“Take maternity,” he says. “A woman might give birth to a premature baby that needs incubation. We charge about \$8 for a normal delivery, but we have to keep the generator on for 24-hours while the baby is in the hospital. It costs us a little less than \$100 a day to run the generator.” After five similar examples, we laugh sadly and tell him how convinced we are of the correlation between affordable healthcare and energy, something we have known but that has never felt clearer. If quality healthcare is to be sustainable, it cannot rely on charity – and so reducing the variable costs of electricity, so key to everything from surgery to maternal care to laboratory testing, is critical.

### Women, Crafts and Choice

Back in Chitral town, we walk up a narrow pathway under a canopy of pomegranate trees to a small house where a group of women has gathered to do embroidery. Heavy drops of rain fall slowly, each splattering on the ground to mark their presence. I reach the women's room, where men are not welcome, just in time to avoid a wild rainstorm, which turns into a hail storm that drops ice the shape and size of golf balls onto people, trees and the earth. I watch out the doorway in awe as forty women and I talk about their lives and their new venture into the craft world.

AKRSP has facilitated the creation of a local company that works with a number of high-end producers of handbags and clothing for wealthy retail markets. The company provides women in this region who cannot leave their homes a means of earning income and gaining skills. The men cannot join me for the first part of this meeting so I sit in a circle on red and blue rugs with the women. In the middle are incredibly beautiful embroidered panels, each one a piece of art. I'd love to buy one and frame it, but none are for sale.

We talk about pricing. The women receive a standard wage in terms of time spent by unskilled labor, but they know that their panels ultimately are used to make handbags that sell for 30-50 times what they are paid. At the same time, the Company is losing money on the project because it buys all the raw materials, trains the women and works with several retailers, while not wanting to take a large percentage of the women's earnings. This is compounded by the fact that the retailer creates the designs, so the women really are “stitchers” who are already making more than the average wages for the area. And for all of them, this is their first job.

We have a lively discussion around “fair pricing”, what it would mean to capture more of the value chain, as well as longer-term business model possibilities, including giving the women a chance to buy shares in a company, and possibly “finishing” their works or diversifying their product line. What everyone agrees is that this company not only provides income, but a chance to gather with other women to talk about challenges and dreams. The company has taken the first step. It is also considering commissioning some of the women to create their designs and then holding exhibitions to sell the art. Indeed, it has done this once and brought enormous revenues to 20 of the women involved. The company is also creating a women's wholesale store to bring clothes to places where women are allowed to shop, since they are so often excluded from markets in the region.



*Tahira, the host for embroidery group, and her six daughters*

I'm intrigued by the idea of commissioning art pieces to enable the women to express their own views on life. "What might you design on the theme of dignity?" I ask them. No one can think of the word to translate dignity into Urdu and the women don't understand any attempted translations. "What about the idea of choice?" I ask. "What choices do you not have that you want to have?" By now, Aun and our male hosts have entered the room as a number of women had to leave and the remaining ones welcome the men.

"I would like to be able to go to the market and choose fruits and vegetables for my family," a woman dressed in maroon answers. "I cook every day and would like choice." A second woman adds that she would like to choose a dress for herself in the market, especially now that she is earning income for herself. "I do not like that I have no ability to decide what I can wear." In some cases, women will drive with their husbands who will bring items to the car for them to choose, but most are not wealthy enough to have a car and must depend on whatever their husbands bring home.

"I think women should have a say in who our daughters marry. Right now it is only the men, but we know most about our children. We should have choice."

"You know, in our society, people are not happy when they have daughters. Everyone wants a son. I had three daughters in a row. I wanted to stop there – that was enough children. But my husband wanted a son and so we had another baby. A girl. And then we did that again. Now we have six girls. I don't want any more children! This is the choice that I most want – to not have any more children."

The woman's name is Tahira. I ask her to gather her daughters around and each is more beautiful than the next. The two oldest share their mother's intelligent, probing eyes. I wonder what choices they will have.... There comes a moment when Tahira and I are looking at each other and we both feel uncomfortable. This is becoming too painful a conversation. The point is that she and her friends believe they have no choices of their own, not as long as they stay in their villages.

It is time to go. The rain has stopped, the afternoon is waning and we have till to drive to Kalash, about 90 minutes away. We're quiet as we move back down the narrow alleyway when a young man runs toward us and yells "flashfloods" in Urdu. "Turn around and wait," he says, "for it will be a long while before you can leave.

## Flashfloods

Down at street level, mud is pouring like a waterfall onto rapids through and across what was once a road, creating an ever-deepening ravine, gaining momentum as it courses down the hillside. You can see our vehicle in line with scores of cars and trucks along the road to Tajikistan, once part of the Silk Route. Of course, we are on the opposite side of the mud river and everyone agrees it is much too dangerous to forge what is now a wild river of mud. "We will have to wait for a government tractor to come," one man sighs, "and that could be a long, long time."

Athar, our lovely host from AKRSP, laughs, "How long will we be waiting, in that case? Why don't we go and have some tea and then try to cross?"

I am mesmerized by the scene. Nearly 100 men and boys gather on the top of cement walls lining the road to watch events. I am the only woman in sight. I wish I hadn't worn bright pink and look up at the bright blue sky on our side of the mountains and the menacing clouds on the other. Life changes in an instant in this valley, making it hard to plan, and to stick to plans when you do.



*Men gather on top of a wall to watch the roads flood with mud.*

One particularly intrepid (or insane) driver decides to see how far his jeep can make it across the mud river. Before he makes it 30 feet, his vehicle sinks nearly to the top of its wheels and he barely pulls back fast enough to avoid being stuck for good.

After about an hour, a number of decidedly diligent men build a walkway using several big stones piled atop one another. To cross you need to jump from one stone to another, and I'm warned not to fall because who knows what could happen then. It looks to Aun and me that a slip could easily mean death as the mud is still rushing over rocks down the hillside. With the sure-footed help of Israr, I make it across and so does Aun and Athar. Life goes back to normal, at least for us, at least for a little while.

## Kalash

The river runs in a wild, frothy rush as it cuts through the valley while our car flies around the jagged edge of rock mountains reaching decidedly to the sky. At one point, we slowly pass an oncoming car and I swear half the wheels, front and back, hang over the edge. This kind of travel, especially in the hours when the sun casts a softening glow over the most desperate of scenes, makes me feel I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. Still, the mountain faces are now completely bald from deforestation, and I feel physical pain looking at them and thinking of all that has been lost. In one valley, the land is covered entirely by an enormous field of white rocks that slid down from the mountain during the 2010 floods.

You know when you are in Kalash the minute you see women dressed in flouncy navy or black cotton dresses embroidered with colorful flowers or geometric patterns in colors ranging from bright to neon. Equally electric woven belts are wrapped around their waists. Beaded crowns sit on their heads with two long panels hanging down their backs. The women often braid their hair, tying bright pom poms at the end, and wear multiple strands of plastic beads around their necks. Fifty strands doesn't feel excessive here.

In fact, the minute you see the women of Kalash you can't help but smile, partly because they are all smiling at you. "Hello, hello", a young woman waves, her hand fluttering like a fan. "The Kalash are a very special people," Israr tells us. "They are supposed to be descended from Alexander the Great from Greece and they have their own customs and traditions. They aren't Muslim but pray to their own gods. They have their own language, and they like to drink and dance. And their women are very strong. It is a beautiful culture, but there are only 3-4000 Kalash people left."

The men also have a twinkle in their eye. Our host at the main guesthouse in town has thick gray hair tucked beneath a rolled felt hat. He shakes my hand, holding both of mine in his as if I were his long-lost relative. We can't stay for tea, for the rains are coming again and we've promised to visit a Kalash family and don't want to keep them waiting.

By the time we arrive, we are all drenched from the chilly rain. No one seems to mind. The traditional house is built on the hillside of wood and slate and cement with three big rooms for the family to share and a place to burn wood all through the winter. A young girl escorts us to the main room and we wait with the father of the house, a quiet man who proudly shows me ibex horns on his mantle. They sit next to a plastic doll-head that is nearly life-sized.



*Syed Gul, a young Kalash woman, allows Jacqueline to try on one of her traditional garments. Her family shows off more of the beautiful, hand-made clothing.*

Into the room prances Syed Gul, the eldest daughter in the house, still single though she has graduated from college. She has long dark hair, braided beneath a lovely orange and yellow beaded headdress with a green feather tucked in front. Her blue dress is embroidered with a garden of tulips across the bottom and cinched with a bright orange and pink belt. Syed Gul has apple cheeks, an aquiline nose and dark, focused eyes that can't hide an impish side of this twenty-something young woman straddling two worlds.

She's just come back from completing a Masters degree in archeology at Peshawar University after doing her undergraduate studies in Chitral. She tells us she wants to learn all about the Kalash people and help preserve their culture. "I'm even going to your country – the U-S-A – next month. "Where?" I ask. "I can't get email here at the house so have to go to Peshawar and then I will find my itinerary..."

I tell her I love the women's dresses and wonder why they wear them daily and how many each of them have. "We wear them to look beautiful. You see, we are Kalash women!" Yes, of course, I respond. "And we each make our own." (Though she is a bit of a Tom Sawyer and got her younger sister to make her newest one). "Do you want to see the one I made for the U-S-A?"

She rushes out of the room and returns in an instant with another gorgeous dress, this one in peach and reds and asks if I want to try it on. It is as big as a house and I'm intrigued so I say yes. At first I'm swimming in it, but Syed wraps the belt round and round and insists on giving me a headdress as well, and before you know it I have the urge to dance and stomp my feet to make the tiny bells sewn all along the bottom jingle.

“We are not like the Chitralis who dance every night,” she laughs. We dance at our festivals – Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring – and we dance at weddings and funerals. But we don’t dance every night, not in our houses like the Chitralis.”

She beams as she tells us love stories from her culture: when a boy and girl fall in love, the boy comes to one of the festivals and sings a love song he’s written to his beloved, and then the young couple runs away to be husband and wife. And that’s it. After three days, the girl’s father comes to the son’s family’s house to see if she is happy with his family. And then they have a celebration. A month later, if the girl is truly happy, the girl’s family hosts an even bigger celebration.

And when people die, everyone celebrates and buries the dead in open, hand carved wooden boxes until their bodies disintegrate and they are put in the ground. People visit the cemetery with a sense of hope for the Kalash believe that they are going to a better world. Indeed, funerals are the largest single family expense and keep many families living in debt.

“With all of your education and your love for and curiosity about the world,” I ask her, “is it sometimes hard to think of yourself always here? Do you ever want to leave?”

“I love Pakistan,” she answers. “And I especially love the Kalash people. It is true, after three days of being back from school, I am bored. But there is much here for me too.”

“What if you were offered a PhD in archeology in the UK?” I ask. “Ooh, I would like to do that. I would go.” She answers without hesitation.

“And what do you wear when you go to other places?” I ask.

“All different. I wear my Kalash dresses here in the village. I wear Shalwar Kameez when I am studying in Peshawar. I wear pants-shirt when I am in Islamabad or Karachi. I wear Burkhas in Chitral because it is conservative there. And when I go to America? I am going as an archeologist from Pakistan: I will wear my beautiful new Kalash dress of course!”

We have to leave and I tell her I hope to see her again. “Please, you can friend me on Facebook,” she answers. “I don’t do much email but I am always doing Facebook.”

Of course.

This is how the world will change.

## Sunday & Monday, June 12-13, 2011

### CHITRAL, PAKISTAN

Early morning Sunday – 4:30 am wake-up to a bright blue sky in Kalash. Aun and I promise to meet at 5:15 am to do a walk in the village. While I wait for him, I meet the man who seems to be the welcoming host at the hotel, the same jolly Kalashi we first met, the one with a shock of white hair under a rolled hat, twinkly eyes and a square, open face. He wears a white sharwal and we try talking to each other as I wait for Aun, though we share only a few understandable words in common.

Aun explains that we are going walking and the man offers to show us the way, so the three of us start walking in the early light on a dirt road that feels at first like the roads of a million rural villages lined with little shops painted in blues and grey with not much else but a few stray dogs. He turns up a path and soon we are standing in a different place altogether, in a patch of trees in the Kalash’s cemetery. He points to a carved out coffin that still holds bones of someone’s dear one. Most of the open coffins are empty – after awhile, it seems the bones are buried. In one corner are two wooden carvings, a man and a woman, apparently built to honor two of the wealthiest members of the clan. The dawn air is misty and I can almost see spirits and fairies behind every tree in this magical place where the dead are supposed to be continuing the dance.



Wooden carvings in a graveyard, honoring wealthy members of the clan.

We walk upward past a community center built by Greeks (who provide a great deal of support to the Kalashi people) and then visit a woman who is already up and wearing an elaborately embroidered black and red dress, a red scarf around braided hair and at least a dozen necklaces. It turns out she makes the beaded headdresses and necklaces and I end up being her first customer, though it not yet 6:00 am.

As we walk past other houses where families sit having tea, I think about the impossibility of protecting a culture of 3,000 people who live in such an extraordinary way, one that depends on people staying close and pursuing traditions easily threatened by the allure of other worlds and opportunities seen on television. This is a proud people, a beautiful people, but I can't help but think about Syed's words that she gets bored after about three days. And she is one of the ones who want to stay somehow. But she is not yet married, and I wonder who will sing a love song to her now.

Just before we start the return trip to Chitral, we are given news that our flight has been canceled. Apparently, the pilots are the ones who decide whether to attempt the Lowari pass. We can't see a cloud in the sky, and it is unlikely that there are bad conditions in Islamabad where the plane starts. More likely, the flight is near empty and the pilot doesn't feel like flying. It means 24 more hours in Chitral, though there are worse places to be stranded.

We arrive after noon, thank our incredible hosts, and head to the Hindu-Kush hotel, an absolutely lovely place on top of a hill overlooking the mountains of Chitral with the even more massive snow-capped ones of Afghanistan behind them. The view from the little wood balcony in my room inspires awe and delight. I sit for the rest of the day, trying to catch up with the world and then have a long meeting with Aun, who has been sick the past few days. The people at the hotel couldn't be nicer, and the quiet and beauty of the place truly feel like a well-timed gift from the universe.



Monday, June 13, 2011

#### CHITRAL TO ISLAMABAD TO LAHORE

We meet at 5:15 am again, this time to go on a walk in the breathtaking mountains. The sky is bright blue and the sun, already shining, is warming the mountain air. The owner of the hotel, Siraj ul Mulk, is also already up, dressed for a hike with his walking stick and Ridgeback puppy named Porlando. We begin talking and he offers to join our hike and show us the way.

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**The beauty is so extraordinary and we discuss the tragedy that so much extremism can exist in a place that makes your spirits soar.**

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Within minutes, we are climbing across a slate mountain, high above the ground and there is no real path to follow. Siraj moves like a mountain goat: he obviously grew up in these parts and couldn't be more comfortable. He sees me slowing down as I want to ensure that I don't tumble to my end. I turn and see Aun, who has been violently ill all night, sitting down. He tells me he is going to be quiet for a few minutes before returning to the hotel and urges us to continue. Though Siraj is 66, I know I'm in for quite the walk!

We walk and talk for two hours. I can hardly breathe, the world feels so beautiful. I vow to return and do a trek, maybe to see the famous polo matches held high atop the mountains to which players and their horses walk for four days before those who live on one side of the mountains play those living on the other. Polo is like religion in this part of the world.

We pass a house built into the mountain-side. Siraj asks the father of the household how he is doing and he says he's suffering a bit because his child is sick. "How many children do you have?" Siraj asks. "I have one child," he says sadly. "And I have four daughters."

Siraj turns out to be the grandson of the last king of Kalash and he is still considered royalty in this area. He's an extraordinary man who served in the military and then became a pilot for Pakistan International Airlines. He then decided to build this hotel in his homeland and he clearly loves every day he is here. He installed his own micro-hydro system to electrify the hotel and found an affordable way to lift clean springwater from the valley to the hotel. I tell him how much I appreciated the little sign in my bathroom saying I could only expect lukewarm water given that all the water is heated by solarpower. Because of the rain, my water wasn't hot, but it was comfortable enough and I felt proud to be part of the hotel's commitment to sustainability. On sunny days, Siraj tells me, the water can be almost too hot.

On the flight back to Islamabad, Siraj arranges to have me stand in the cockpit with the pilots while we traverse the pass. The beauty is extraordinary and we discuss the tragedy that so much extremism can exist in a place that also makes your spirits soar – or in any place. I think again about what will happen to the safe, quiet, slow ways of Chitral once there is an easier passageway to the neighboring areas.

We stop quickly in Peshawar and then Islamabad for a few hours and we finally land in Lahore, where we have a quick meeting before flying to the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan's premier business university, founded by

our own Babar Ali, who welcomed Acumen to Pakistan in the first place and has been our grandfather ever since. Acumen is very connected to LUMS. A good many team members graduated from LUMS and their sense of loyalty is very strong. We always have summer interns from the university and I'd like to see collaboration in producing case studies for business students across the world.

Our summer associate, Umair, has worked hard with two Acumen Fellows, Benje and Brian, to bring together young social entrepreneurs for a talk and "tea." They tell me to expect to talk to 30 students and young professionals. My colleague Sadaf, who runs business development on our Pakistan team, rushes to the university, goes through the strictly enforced security and arrives to a room packed with more than 110 people sitting in the aisles and on the stairs in addition to the seats. The enthusiasm of this generation is thrilling and it is hard to leave LUMS. This next generation is the hope of Pakistan. It is the country's future and we all need to think about how best to support and release it.

Dinner with the Lahore-based investees – Pharmagen, Saiban/AMC, and Kashf are all represented – and our fellows join along with Noor, Acumen's agriculture and water portfolio manager in Pakistan. The discussion is lively and we remind ourselves to do more to bring our investees together and reinforce the idea of collective leadership. Patient capital will take all of us to move forward as more than just a concept, but a powerful way to bring sustainable solutions to poverty. I leave the evening fully humbled as well by the entrepreneurs, their top managers, our team and fellows. This is the dream – everyone bringing their best talents to bear on solving problems together.

## Tuesday, June 14, 2011

### LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Early morning wake-up after a day of meetings and a dinner hosted by our advisor Monis Rahman, who runs Rozee.pk, Pakistan's version of Monster. Rozee.pk is a successful employment site that is part of changing the landscape for young people and employment in Pakistan. Monis brought people together from several business communities and I had many robust discussions through the evening. Monis is also indicative of younger businesspeople who see serving their community as a major reason for why they are in Pakistan, for people like Monis could be successful anywhere on the planet.

This morning, Lahore is hot and sunny. Jawad Aslam meets us in our guesthouse lobby and we drive through the city, passing Lahore's beautiful fort and mosque, admiring the mix of cars and donkey carts, of morning life, though traffic is easier before 9 as the days start and end later here. I'm happy to be out, happy to be seeing our work. Indeed, I'm never happier than when I'm in communities, talking to people who are making a difference in their own lives.

Saiban's Khuda-ki-Basti 4, the nonprofit housing development project led by former project manager and Acumen Fellow Jawad, has sold almost all of its low-income plots now and fully repaid Acumen Fund. On what was once a moonlike landscape is now a vibrant community with parks and schools, a mosque and even a "shopping mall", nearly built, where shopkeepers have retail space that is separate from the blocks on which people reside. Many of the trees now tower over my head. And people are beginning to take their homes seriously.



*The landscaped courtyard within Saiban's Khuda-ki-Basti 4.*

We visit one of Jawad's team members who also lives in the community. He had worked for the railway all his life and then couldn't find an affordable place to buy or rent once he had retired. Finally, he came across Saiban and bought a standard plot. His son now works in Portugal, and he sends remittances to his father, so now he has upgraded his entire home. The floors are not just bricks, but colorful tiles. He has made several individual rooms and has a fan, furniture and a television. The pride with which he showed us his home was deserved and infectious. His neighbor's home looked like most of the others – very simple and bare – but the mix of incomes is welcomed and, indeed, encouraged.

A group of community leaders waits for us inside the Development in Literacy (DIL) school. Saiban's stability and safety here enabled a nonprofit like DIL to have the confidence to establish itself here. They are teaching the children English and every man at the table sends his children to the bright school, complete with bookshelves lining the walls and displays of clay gourds to demonstrate different weights (1 kg, 500 mg, etc). I ask the men if they send their daughters to school as well.

Apparently, I hit a nerve. "Madame, the Quran tells us that education is a blessing and a responsibility for all Muslims. You must learn throughout your life. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman. It is your responsibility. We educated our daughters and our sons."

I tell them I agree with them, I am impressed and I also know many parts of Pakistan where girls have no education. "Madame, that should change," another community leader tells me. "It is wrong not to educate our children, boys and girls."

The community leaders are a mix of carpenters, rug traders, drivers and retailers. Many have taken a hit on income to live here. To pay the down payment (and most paid that in installments), they had to borrow from family and sell their wives' gold jewelry. And all of them say they are glad to be living here.

I share my concern about measuring social impact after explaining what Acumen does. "Can you help me with what we can measure in terms of how your lives have changed now that you own houses here?" I ask them. The men think. The chairman who trades carpets, answers, "You see, in the city we were distant from our neighbors. We didn't know them, so it was difficult to trust them. Here we have built great trust with each other. There is peace in this area, there is stability.

We are doing things to make the community better, and this gives us hope and strength. And maybe mostly, we have greater confidence to know we can make more changes together."



*Jacqueline meets with community leaders at the Development in Literacy school, located within Saiban's Khuda-ki-Basti 4.*

I laughed, telling them they sound like me. I know that hope and confidence, safety and community are among the most important things we cannot measure. This is Acumen's great challenge as we try to show the world that there is outsized social impact to be had through a patient capital investing approach. We can count the value of the house through the loans that are secured using the house as collateral. We can count change in income and savings due to the proximity of the DIL school. But we can't count – at least not easily – the change in their daughters from attending school, from learning English, from dreaming. We can't count the tolerance they are gaining from leading one of the only communities in Pakistan where people of many sects pray together in a single mosque. We can't easily count the impact on healthier families and communities, and on what it means to have a housing model centered in community that actually works.

In the long-term, I imagine housing values will rise, maybe more than in more difficult areas. In the long-term, some of those children will go on to do great things and invest income back into this and other communities. In the short-term, we have to do better than we've done while also keeping the long-term changes we hope to see in mind.

We also visited AMC, Jawad's for-profit housing company, whose first project Immersion looks today like KKB-4 did four or five years ago: the moon. This time, things are moving faster, though. It took 6 instead of 18 months to register the project with the local government. A team is already moving on installing water, electricity and gardens. This time, Jawad will develop everything in the beginning rather than incrementally, since the business model is a mixed-income model, which means he also will be competing for lower middle income customers to come alongside the lower-income ones. This client wants to see more progress in the short-term, as well as things like parks and schools that promise stability as well as prosperity. Low-income clients, it turns out, like this too, though in very low-income communities, the only way to build sustainable housing is through the incremental approach.

We're learning a lot.

## Pharmagen

Last May, I visited Pharmagen's water shops when there were just four in Lahore. Today, we visit one of seventeen shops selling more than 100,000 liters of clean drinking water a day. The dynamic, moral, focused Pervaiz Sufi, Pharmagen's founder, tells me the company will have the capacity to deliver a million liters of clean water – or 10% of Lahore's water needs – by early 2012. This is a model for scale as well as sustainability.

Pharmagen sells cleaning drinking water to the urban lower income markets. The model is based on a decentralized distribution model, not unlike WHI, though Pharmagen is focused on urban areas and not rural villages. Originally, the model required individuals to visit one of the storefront shops with their own container, which Pharmagen would then decontaminate and refill – for the cost of 35 rupees (about 40 cents) per 20 liters. Having visited WaterHealth International, the Indian water company and another Acumen investee, Pharmagen gained the insight that low-income people will pay to have water delivered for two reasons: convenience and status. Three months ago, the company began offering a delivery service and today, more than 70 percent of sales come through that channel.



*A Pharmagen worker delivers water to the company's customers. Over 70% of Pharmagen's sales come through the delivery service.*

We visit Badami Bagh, a low-income neighborhood outside central Lahore. Badami Bagh means almond garden, though the area is known for people in the scrap metal business. Drivers wearing blue Pharmagen t-shirts drive up to the storefront, each carrying fourteen green 20-liter containers to fill with water then deliver in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, we speak to the individuals who walk in on their own. One is Mohammed, an auto-rickshaw driver wearing a tan kurta shalwar and a baseball cap. I ask him why he would buy his water from Pharmagen. "Better health for my children and me," he answers. "And good quality for less money."

"How do you know it is good quality?" I ask.

"Madame, to buy 20 liters of water from a major bottling company costs 160 rupees and here I get the same thing for Rps35. I feared maybe something was wrong with the water, so I took samples from both to the pharmacist to check the quality. Pharmagen's quality was tested better than the major bottling company. So you see, this is a very good purchase. The taste is better, too."

We visit two sisters in their homes next, surrounded by the requisite crowd of young children laughing and teasing each other and wanting to listen. The sisters come from a traditional family where they are not allowed to go outside the house or communicate with strangers, but they warm up to us. Sadaf, my colleague, explains our interests and engages the two women in conversation. At one point while we are sitting on beds in their home, one woman asks Sadaf to take her picture. As she raises her camera, the woman flings off her dupatta (scarf): her shalwar has a plunging neckline and she is wearing full make-up. The woman strikes a Bollywood pose and we smile, both of us thinking about this sudden transformation influenced by popular culture.

The extroverted sister looks at me and asks why I don't wear lipstick. "I don't feel comfortable when I am not wearing it. I always wear it for beauty," she tells me. I laugh and try to stay focused on the water, though the conversation nonetheless flows itself like water, moving from germs to lipstick and back to pricing. She really wants to give me some so that I can beautify myself and look more like a woman should look. I continue to think about the care the sisters take on their appearance though they are hidden from most people, and how struck they are by how casual I am taking my own appearance today, though I am fully in the public eye.

The women tell us they already pay for tap water – \$4-5 per month, but they don't want their families drinking it. "The water is so dirty you can see the germs floating in it," the extroverted sister says. "This tap water, it gives us stomach problems and makes my heart palpitate. Our children get too sick. And the water smells." The other adds that their husbands like how the Pharmagen water tastes and want them to buy it.

We realize the time and drive madly back to Lahore to get me to a series of fundraising meetings on time. I had planned to change, but the morning has been too interesting and we are behind schedule. Way behind. I decide it is better to show up dusty, sweaty and dressed in casual clothes and sandals while bringing greater understanding than it is to be tailored for the bankers. And so we go.

I ask Pervaiz about lessons learned. First, you can't expect people to come just because you offer a service, he says. You need to build trust with people – they have been disappointed too many times. Indeed, the company has moved away from more traditional marketing strategies to do more of what Seth Godin calls "building a tribe." "If you get the right community members," Pervaiz says, "they will influence the others and do more to sell the product – and help you make it work – than anything else. Through this we've learned the four biggest concerns for our market are convenience, taste, quality and affordability. And so we push ourselves to get better and better on each of those."

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**You can't expect people to come just because you offer a service. You need to build trust with people – they have been disappointed too many times.**

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His dream is to scale in Lahore and then bring the model to other cities across Punjab, then across Pakistan. I believe Pharmagen will do it – and in so doing, create a model for bringing reliable, affordable, high quality water to the urban poor.



Customers line up for water at a Pharmagen store.

Friday, June 17, 2011

#### KARACHI, PAKISTAN

Sadaf picks me up and we drive about a half hour to our partner Aman Foundation's complex, AmanTech in an industrial area of Karachi. Aman Foundation is one of Acumen's most generous supporters and partners. The foundation is funded by Arif and Fayeza Naqvi, an extraordinary couple who believe that the privileged should give not for recognition but because it is a duty, one that all should follow. They are rare not only for the principles by which they approach philanthropy but because of the scale: Aman Foundation has committed \$100 million to Pakistan, and Arif gives much more all around the world. He is one of the individuals who challenges me hardest on many levels.

In my most recent conversation, I walked away with two important insights. First, he said it was time to stop thinking of Acumen as a crusader and recognize ourselves as achievers. "Now is the time to tell the world, look we've done it. And we need more people to do it this way as well." Arif also believes deeply in the role of philanthropic capital as a catalyst for real innovation and for building institutions that will ultimately be financially sustainable. Like me, he worries that the social impact investing field is pushing for higher financial results when it should be focused on the social impact it is creating and being more concrete in the way it measures that impact.

We meet my friend Ahsan Jamil who runs the Aman Foundation in Pakistan as well as his team. Ahsan is full of life, despite the heat, and excited to be showing me this new facility. We walk into the morning meeting for 450 young men who are going through the first semester of Aman's vocational training program. The men are wearing brown uniforms and lined up in a military-style in an assembly. They are young – 16-25 years old - and they are impressive. The assembly is quiet until the main speaker calls out for order. Then the young men stomp their feet and put their shoulders back at attention. The speaker then reads a prayer from the Quran and then a second man – a Hindu – reads the quote of the day. The group sings the national anthem with vigor. Ahsan asks me to speak to the assembly and I try to give some words of encouragement and tell them a bit about Acumen and our partnership with Aman. I feel moved emotionally looking at the faces of these 450 young men, all wanting to better their lives, all knowing they have a real chance by being here.

They will study different trades in a hands-on practical manner: automotive repair, air-conditioning installment and repair, metal working, etc. Those with the highest entrance exam marks get first choice and all go for the cars. When I ask why that is in one of the classes I visit, the young man answers, "Because I love cars, madam." I ask which is his favorite car and he answers "a Bugatti," apparently one of the world's most expensive cars. The young men learn in English because they must pass their international certification at the end of six months so that they can work overseas, most likely somewhere in the Middle East. And if they do pass, Arif is making it his business to connect each graduate to a job, hopefully in one of the companies supported by his private equity company Abraaj, though I'm sure he will influence companies beyond the investees to participate as well.

In the afternoon, there will be a second shift, so Mr. Naqvi will have to find jobs for 900 young men at the end of six months. And the team at Aman Tech hopes to double this number and use the entire space that is available in order to bring nearly 4,000 good jobs yearly to 4,000 trained men. They also hope to start training women once they have the facilities set up in a way that will encourage parents to take the risk and allow for professional vocational training.

This is what most impresses me about Aman. Arif, Ahsan and the Aman team put their money where their mouths are. I can imagine this was just a dream a year ago, and already it is institutionalized. Will they make mistakes? Definitely. But they will make changes without compromising on excellence, and they will determine how to make this model work. Currently, it costs Aman more than they earn in fees from the students, but they are also determined

to make the finances work in time. Aman recognizes that you have to change the landscape in a country where 60 percent of the population is under 25 years old and there currently are too few jobs, even for the university educated.

We visit the yellow ambulances, which make me proud whenever one passes me in Karachi. Inspired in part by 1298 in Mumbai (another Acumen investee), Aman uses the same bright yellow color for their ambulances and has instituted a similar sliding-scale pricing model for its services in Karachi. Already, the ambulance company has 100 vehicles serving the entire city. Their goal is a 6.5 minute response at hospitals and 10 minutes to homes. Recently, the program changed its pricing – 1,500 rupees to take people to hospitals and 400 rupees to go to public clinics. As with 1298, road accidents and terrorism are covered for free.

Evidence of success also comes in the quality they deliver. Some hospitals with critical care needs will call Aman to care for and transport patients because, they say, "Aman's ambulances are better equipped than our hospital's." This setting of high standards is key to Aman's vision for success.

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**Philanthropic organizations that focus unapologetically on impact and make hard decisions to get there must celebrate one another, talk about failures, and do what is needed to effect changes.**

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Aman is also bringing several new, exciting programs online. They are sponsoring Teach For Pakistan and had a hard time selecting 40 fellows for the first year given the enormous demand for the program. I believe there is a revolution happening among privileged young people who want to use their lives for good and don't always know how to do it, but when given the opportunity will show up for it. How we expand and link the programs like this within Acumen is a key question for us as we move into our next chapter.

In fact, I have a good, though too-short conversation with Ahsan about partnership and how we might think about redefining it for ourselves and others into the future. There is so much we can do with one another and learn from one another. Philanthropic organizations that focus unapologetically on impact and make hard decisions to get there must celebrate one another, talk about failures, and do what is needed to effect change. I believe Aman Foundation will be one of the strongest partners we have on all of these levels.

Saturday and Sunday, June 18-19, 2011

BAHALWAPUR, PAKISTAN

Early morning swim and then a riveting conversation with Mosharraf Zaidi, one of this country's most impressive journalists. He thinks with great clarity, and brings honesty, integrity and a deep commitment to change in Pakistan. I follow him on Twitter and am constantly learning from his probing articles and the questions he asks. Conversations like the one we have connect me even more to this country's generation of changemakers. I always leave wondering what we can do better to identify, nurture, link and inspire them, for they are all heroes, all needed.

We fly from Karachi to Bahawalpur. The flight attendant tells us to expect 50-degree Celsius weather (around 120°F), so when we alight from the plane and it is closer to 43 or so (105), I feel delighted. The last time we came, it really was 50 degrees and I remember the feeling. Expectations are everything.

Dr. Rashid Bajwa and Zahoor Hussain Khan greet us in the tiny airport. Dr. Bajwa runs the National Rural Support Program (NRSP), a country-wide nonprofit dedicated to building local community services across the country. He and I have been on several adventures, including a wedding in Bahawalpur, where we danced in the heat, and a trip to the flooded areas of Sindh province, where we stood in back of a pick-up truck as we drove through flooded areas, heartsick from the devastation (NRSP provided daily support, including shelter and meals, to nearly a half million people). Zahoor runs the NRSP Micro Finance Bank, which focuses on providing agricultural loans and financial services (including savings) for smallholder farmers in Southern Punjab and Sindh.



Jacqueline and Dr. Rashid Bajwa, the head of the National Rural Support Program (NRSP) speak with a customer at one of the bank's branches.



Jacqueline speaks with a group of NRSP's female customers.

Acumen is the first investor in the bank, which officially started lending and taking deposits less than three months ago. By the end of June, the bank will have made loans to 150,000 farmers. Already, it has accepted more than \$7 million in deposits from about 10,000 farmer groups and this number is expected to grow exponentially once this current harvest is sold in the fall. We believe this investment is one that can bring not only greater dignity to farmers who no longer have to depend on moneylenders, but it will help bring tremendous structural change as the farmers become more self-organized and self-reliant.

We visit a bank branch. Fans swirl above about fifty farmers seated in the waiting area, each holding a numbered ticket, waiting their turn to borrow or deposit money. They are mostly dressed in white, many wearing turbans. We talk to Mohammed Salim, a farmer dressed in khaki whose number has been called for the teller. He borrowed money from NRSP's nonprofit microfinance organization for four years and developed a track record of consistent repayment, which allowed him to qualify for commercial bank loans. He likes the dignity of this bank and compares it to the only other source of commercial credit for the farmers, where people like him feel mistreated and disrespected. "Here, we are treated like the best customers of rich people's banks", he tells us. He and all the farmers with whom we speak appreciate the electronic number counter that tells them when it is their turn -- a sign of status and professionalism.

Mohammed is here to take another loan to buy two calves that he can fatten over the next few months and sell them in November for the feast of Eid. He quickly rattles off the economics of this venture, and assures me that he has a long history of working with livestock. In fact, here, dairy cows and calves for meat are the most valuable asset farmers hold besides land (if they own land at all). I learn later in the day that livestock is also the farmers' best insurance from crop failure or family misfortune.

The two tellers are women, sitting at a table with their heads covered, working diligently. Neither worked in a bank before and both could not be prouder. Only about seven percent of borrowers are women, but this number is increasing as family incomes from agriculture are rising. Women tend to borrow to make and sell crafts, mostly embroidery, but they are beginning to take home loans based on farm income. These loans help repair roofs, build latrines or install water pumps. 60% of the farmers own less than five acres and 25% are considered landless. The rest own between three and five acres with one percent farming more than this. The main crops are cotton and wheat, which they rotate (the farmers are planting cotton now).

After visiting an incredibly poor colony of squatters, we meet with a group of 16 farmers sitting beneath trees next to green fields near a road where I watch boys on bicycles transporting grass and oxen carts move along like an old picture show. Besides us is a grouping of cows and calves and long-eared goats, paying us little mind, enjoying the slight relief from the glaring sun. Flocks of crows circle above and then rest on tree branches. The men sit on beds made of wood and thatch – as do we. Dr. Bajwa asks them to draw the circle in a bit closer, though we are still constrained by where the trees stand, so some of the farmers feel further from us than I would like.

Mohammed Ashraf, about 35 years old, sits a few farmers to my left and captures my attention at first. He has a brilliant smile and pools of sparkling green for eyes that smile when he talks. He has been borrowing from the nonprofit NRSP for five years and is now a borrower of NRSP Bank. He says he is very happy with the bank. “Why would you borrow from NRSP?” I ask. “What did you do before the bank was here?”

A few of the farmers jump in. “We only had the arthi,” they say. Arthi are middlemen who typically lend inputs valued at 1,000 rupees for preparation and planting, then collect 1,600 rupees six months later – an annualized interest rate of about 160%. The only other agricultural bank doesn’t loan to smallholder farmers, and they charge high interest rates too. “NRSP charges 28% -- they give us training support and we see our income growing.”

Why savings? I had asked the women at the colony in the morning. “If I keep my money in the house, it is too tempting to spend it,” one woman responded honestly. I ask the men and they answer that it helps them save for more investment. “We want to invest in housing and in buying livestock,” said the second farmer, a 35-year old bearded man named Mohamed Ramzan with piercing, intelligent, ambitious eyes, wearing a white turban, tan shirt and green

checked wrap around his waist. He leans forward as he speaks and hangs onto all of our words.

“This past season, we saved about 11,000 rupees each,” he says. “We took some of this money from our savings to pay our current loans and then borrowed to buy hand pumps and toilets for our households.” These farmers are reinvesting everything into bettering their lives. No one mentioned televisions, though all have access to some electricity.



*Farmers gather beneath the shade of a grove of trees to discuss their business needs and desires.*

Mohammed Ramzan seems to be the de facto leader of the group, though a number of farmers become actively engaged in one of the most productive, energetic conversations I’ve had with farmers. They speak honestly about all that can go wrong with agriculture. Last year, they lost a quarter of their cotton crop because of pest attacks, so this year they are using a new kind of seed to protect from that and other pests. They want NRSP Bank to raise the maximum they can borrow from 30,000 rupees to 50,000.

“Agriculture is risky,” Dr. Bajwa says. “What happens if we have a drought or another pest and you cannot pay?”

“Look at our track records,” answers Mohammed Ramzan. “And if something bad happens, we have our livestock. This will give you insurance that we will pay.”

Aun asks about artificial insemination, thinking about our livestock productivity investment in Jassar Farms and whether we might be able to bring their high-quality semen to this area once it is in production in early 2012. The farmers tell us that the semen they currently buy is of such low quality that it doesn't make much difference with their cows' current milk production. If they were convinced there were a much better alternative that they could afford, yes, they would buy it. In fact, they would be very interested in learning more.

There is no tone of pity, no asking for help or hand-outs in this group. This is businessmen talking to business lenders and the sense of self-respect on both sides of the conversation is markedly different from too many charity or government-led conversations I've witnessed. This is what dignity looks like.

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**The poor are not looking for handouts. They want to get the challenges that keep them down out of their way.**

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I can't help myself, so I ask them what they would do if they were president of Pakistan. The farmers laugh. "Why are you laughing?" Dr. Bajwa asks. "We cannot be president," they laugh again. "It is impossible."

"But what if you just took a leap and pretended that you were?" I say. "Even if it is impossible, what should the president of Pakistan do?"



*Livestock, like the ones pictured here at Jassar Farms, are a valuable asset to farmers in Pakistan. They are often viewed as the best insurance against crop failure or other misfortune.*

"Focus on inflation," Mohammed Ramzan answers. "Control inflation to keep prices steadier. Reduce load shedding (energy brownouts or blackouts). Fix petrol delivery because when the petrol doesn't come, public transport is affected and we cannot move ourselves and our crops." Inflation, energy, and the price and availability of oil. These poor farmers who live in the heart of the area known for conservative madrasahs do not mention terrorism. They do not mention violence or most of the things that are at the forefront of so many decision-makers. The low-income people of Pakistan want to get on with getting on. This is an ambitious group of people. The farmers are exploring the idea of buying a biogas producer to use for themselves and maybe sell to others. "You have to have more than one income," one farmer says wisely.

I tell the farmers that I've been in Pakistan for 10 days now and so many people are afraid of the future. They don't seem at all afraid.

Mohammed Ramzan finally says, "You know, Pakistan is a prosperous country. It will remain a prosperous country. We have all the crops we need. We have four seasons. We get good prices. We are happy."

The poor are not looking for handouts. They want to get the challenges that keep them down out of their way.

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**"Pakistan will remain a prosperous country. We have all the crops we need. We have four seasons. We get good prices. We are happy."**

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## Karachi to NYC

Once again, I return to the shores of my own homeland changed just a little bit, or maybe more this time, though I am still trying to understand the manifold layers of Pakistan and how they impact the manifold layers of my own being, my own understanding. On this trip, maybe more than any before, I am struck by how the poor of Pakistan – meaning 80 percent of the population – constitute the true treasure of this country. Whether in the mountains of Chitral or the cotton fields of southern Punjab, I met extraordinary ordinary individuals, trying to scratch out a simple living. This is a country of upwardly mobile people who are overcoming extreme circumstances to create lives of survival, lives of productivity.



There is so much that could be done. I can see this through the work of Acumen's investees, as well as the community leaders of Saiban, the farmers sitting under the tree talking to me about inflation and load shedding, and the students at LUMS sharing their dreams for building a new and better Pakistan. It isn't right that too many farmers' lands yield too little to feed their own families, that nearly half the country is malnourished, that so few children, especially girls in some areas, are educated. We can see this as a bitter, pessimistic vision or we can see it as reason for hope. For in each of those desperate fields, smoky houses, on each of those deforested mountainsides, in each of those squatter areas are people who are not waiting for handouts but seeking to make better lives for themselves. And through our investments, I can see that change is coming.



Those of us with privilege face a choice. We can choose to benefit from the opportunities of the global economy and allow a widening gap between rich and poor. We can choose not to see so many prospects for real change. Or we can choose to follow a path that allows, indeed embraces, passionate idealism tempered with practical realism and an unwavering determination to execute. We can choose to use the markets as a guide for listening to the poor as customers and build solutions that make sense for those most affected. What is most exciting to me is the wave of change I see among the young people in Pakistan – and across the world – who want to take the second path. We need to identify those exceptional leaders among them, nurture them, link them, inspire them and support them to take on the great challenges of our time. For what will work in Pakistan will work in other countries, and more than ever in history, we need to learn from one another.



I feel eternally grateful for the people I know, the friends I have, the entrepreneurs with whom I work and the customers we ultimately serve in Pakistan. They have all been my greatest teachers. In many ways, the journey is just beginning as the layers begin to unfold. And I know that our team and I have never felt readier to take the next step, wherever it may lead us.

Jacqueline Novogratz  
New York City