Abstract

Since Tajikistan’s independence in 1991 the number of rural girls leaving school after grade 9 has been increasing at an alarming rate. In order to improve rural girls’ secondary school attendance and retention, in 2006 Save the Children, local non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, and the Ministry of Education implemented a two-year UNICEF-funded Girls’ Education Project (GEP). This mixed-method study compares rural girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities at six schools (three GEP schools and three non-GEP schools) in two districts located in regions with the lowest levels of female secondary school participation nationwide.

Two research questions guided this study: 1) What factors serve as obstacles or enablers to girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities in rural Tajikistan? and 2) How did the GEP attempt to overcome factors limiting rural girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived to be most effective?

The study’s theoretical framework contains concepts from two sets of theories: 1) social reproduction (schooling as a means of maintaining and reproducing the status quo) and 2) empowerment (schooling as a means of changing the status quo). Data collected reveals two groups’ perspectives: 1) adult participants (Ministry of Education officials,
NGO staff, school administrators and teachers) and 2) rural female upper secondary school students. A multi-level data analysis process was used to compare findings within and across districts.

Factors that serve as either an obstacle or an enabler of girls’ educational experiences and opportunities include those relating to the community/society, family, school, and self. Factors related to community/society include the dominant belief that a girl is “grown-up” by 15 and should no longer go to school which intersects with family poverty to create a major barrier to girls’ non-compulsory secondary schooling. Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to the family were the most significant determinant of a girl’s schooling. Of all the GEP activities, participants consistently considered the girls’ overnight camp to be the “best” activity. Findings show how enabling just a few girls to return to school significantly increases the likelihood of other girls being allowed to attend school in these rural communities.
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Acronyms

CEC  Community Education Committee
DED  District Education Department
DRD  Direct Rule District
EFA  Education for All
GEP  Girls’ Education Project
MDG  Millennium Development Goals
MoE  Ministry of Education
NGO  Non-governmental organization
PTA  Parent Teacher Association
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID United States Agency for International Development

Exchange Rate (on September 27, 2009)
1 US Dollar = 4.38 Somoni (Tajikistan’s currency)
(http://usd.exchangerates24.com/tjs/history/2009-09-27/)
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Chapter 1: Introduction

What we need for an assault on injustices that exists in, and work through, the education system, is knowledge of how a given pattern of social relationships has come into being, how the people in the situation relate to it, and what are its tensions and contradictions. It is simply not helpful to think about it as an array of causal factors that can be manipulated to produce a cure. Rather, we need to think in terms of potentials that a given situation has for the people in it, and the constraints on what they can do with it. Both potentials and constraints are constructed by the history of social relationships involved, and they also change as social structures change. (Connell et al., 1982, p. 193)

This study explores the experiences of female secondary school students in the two districts in Tajikistan with the lowest percentage of female enrolment to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to girls’ secondary schooling and the efforts to overcome them through the Girls’ Education Project. The problem of rural girls dropping out of secondary school in the Republic of Tajikistan began after independence in 1991 and became more acute during and after the civil war (1992-97). Attention to issues relating to girls’ education in Tajikistan began in the early 2000s, once the civil war ended. This period coincided with the creation and global promotion of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the aim of the third goal being to “promote gender equality and empower women, with a target being to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015.” In Tajikistan, as in many other low-income countries, one response to improve the educational experiences and opportunities of marginalized children, particularly girls, has been the creation of development projects implemented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The Girls’ Education Project (GEP) was one such project implemented in 50 rural schools in six districts in Tajikistan from 2006 to 2008, with the international NGO Save the Children serving as the lead implementing organization.

While many studies have been conducted on girls’ education over the last thirty years within the poorest countries of the world, most of which are located in Sub-Saharan Africa and
South East Asia, very little research has been conducted on girls’ education in the former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan. In addition, little empirical research has been conducted to determine what elements of NGO development projects, such as the GEP, improve (or do not improve) girls’ schooling experiences in low-income countries (Noonan & Kristjansson, 2009; Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008), although there is some consensus within the field of international development regarding the factors to be addressed (Birdthistle, Dickson, Freeman & Javidi, 2011; Herz & Sperling, 2004). Through this study I aim to address two persistent research gaps within the field of girls’ and women’s education in low-income countries: to gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting rural girls’ schooling in Tajikistan, as well as gain a deeper understanding of an NGO intervention, the GEP, implemented to address factors limiting and/or hindering in order to improve girls’ educational experiences, opportunities and achievement.

Research questions

To address these two research gaps, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What factors serve as obstacles or enablers to girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities in rural Tajikistan?

2. How did the Girls’ Education Project (GEP) attempt to overcome factors hindering or limiting rural girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived to be most effective?

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework situates the main theoretical concepts used by the researcher to inform the collection and analysis of data. In this thesis I draw upon concepts from two major schools of thought: first, Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) work on social reproduction, particularly his ideas about how individuals are holistically influenced, affected, and shaped by their
interactions within different social fields (community/society, family, school), and second, theories of education for girls’ and women’s empowerment drawn from the work of Stromquist (1993, 2002), Kabeer (2001), and Malhotra et al. (2002), situated within the field of international development.

I use this conceptual framework to explore factors affecting rural girls’ secondary schooling experiences and opportunities from the perspectives of two groups: key stakeholders (MOE officials, NGO staff, school administrators and teachers) and rural female students in grades 9, 10 and 11. My findings from the six rural school communities in this study confirm what is already well known, i.e. that the majority of rural girls in Rumi and Rasht districts leave school after grade 9. However, much needs to be learned as to why this is the case. Through this study I document findings that contribute to filling this gap by identifying and exploring factors as critical inputs affecting girls’ schooling mentioned by participants. I categorize the factors as those related to community/society, family, school, or self. Following Bourdieu, I conceptualize factors inhibiting and restricting girls’ access to secondary schooling as those that maintain and reproduce the status quo while also drawing on the empowerment framework to identify and explore factors that challenge the status quo and enable girls’ secondary schooling. As will be seen, these factors play out in different ways for each girl, depending on her circumstances.

Second, I use this framework to investigate the nature of the Girls’ Education Project (GEP) activities, which aimed to challenge the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling in these rural communities by enabling more girls to go to and stay in school. I also discuss which GEP activities were perceived by participants to have been the “best” or most effective in terms of improving the secondary school experiences and opportunities of rural girls. While some adult participants believed that advocacy activities within the community were the “best” GEP activities, many more adult and student participants mentioned that girls’ participation in
experiential activities (such as camp, visiting other schools, and visiting the homes of absent female students) were the “best”. My theoretical framework leads me to contemplate what can be learned from the findings of this study to enable more girls who want to complete their secondary schooling in these communities to do so.

**Methodology**

For this study, I collected qualitative data (in the form of semi-structured interviews) and quantitative data (in the form of school enrolment statistics) at six rural schools in two districts (Rumi and Rasht) in Tajikistan. Three schools had implemented the GEP and three had not. Four schools (two GEP and two non-GEP) were in Rumi district and two schools (one GEP and one non-GEP) were in Rasht district. I conducted interviews with Ministry of Education and NGO staff as well as Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers, parents and female students in grades 9, 10 and 11. Data analysis occurred at multiple levels including comparisons across schools and districts.

I believe it is important to explain how I came to conduct this research in Tajikistan as it affects how this research was planned and conducted. In April 2009 I was awarded a Save-University Partnership for Education Research (SUPER) Fellowship through Save the Children US to conduct doctoral research on the effectiveness and sustainability of the Girls’ Education Project in rural Tajikistan. Save the Children provided a set of primary research questions as a guide (Appendix A). Working in collaboration with Save the Children, I developed a research plan from May to August 2009 and collected data in Tajikistan from September to November 2009. Throughout the research process, Save the Children allowed me to develop and conduct this study in a manner I felt most appropriate. (See Chapter 4 for more details.)
Background to study

Having been the poorest of the Soviet Republics in Central Asia, the Republic of Tajikistan became classified as a poor country in the 1990s after gaining its independence, resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. A devastating civil war erupted in Tajikistan only one year into its transition from a centrally planned Soviet economy to a market-based capitalist economy. While a national reconciliation agreement marked the end of the civil war in 1997, periodic unrest occurred in some locations until 2000 (Akiner, 2001; Harris, 1998; Waljee, 2008). As a result of the economic transition and civil war, an economic crisis caused the people of Tajikistan to experience a severe decline in their standard of living, reflected in a sharp decline in the country’s economic and social indicators including those relating to the education system.

No longer part of the highly developed Soviet education system, the government of Tajikistan has been unable to maintain the standards and delivery of a comparable education system. Decaying infrastructure, widespread teacher and textbook shortages, and the collection of school fees and bribes from parents (many of whom are ill-equipped to cover such costs) are realities in the present day education system and are more extreme in poor rural communities, such as those included in this study. There has been a growing awareness and understanding of inequalities within all levels of the education system in Tajikistan (Silova & Abdushukorova, 2009; Whitsel, 2009).

One of the inequalities is reflected in the number of rural girls who leave school before completing their secondary education. This number has been growing at a disturbing rate since independence in 1991. Educational statistics were the first means by which awareness of this problem became evident, followed by a UNICEF-funded qualitative study in 2003 (D’Hellencourt, 2004). Although short in duration (two-months) and limited in breadth (it was conducted in Dushanbe, the capital, and in two war-affected towns 15 km from Dushanbe)
D’Hellencourt’s study provides important insights regarding factors that result in some girls dropping out or being kept from going to school. In the report of the study titled *Qualitative survey on issues in girls’ education in Tajikistan: An in-depth analysis of the reasons girls drop out of school*, D’Hellencourt (2004) describes this survey as “a first step” (p.5) in understanding issues relating to girls’ education in Tajikistan and calls for more studies of gender and education to be conducted (p.32). Collette Harris’s (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006) ethnographic study of gender relations in Tajikistan, particularly her study of gender relations in Khatlon region, provides insights and understandings that support and validate the findings of my study, especially regarding how social control affects the lives of adolescent women in rural areas.

Heightened concern about the educational circumstances of rural girls in Tajikistan by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, as a stakeholder, resulted in the development and implementation of a two-year, community-based initiative known as the Girls’ Education Project (GEP). The aim of the GEP was “to attract girls who have dropped out of school [to come] back to school and to enhance the overall self-esteem, motivation and success of girls who are in school” (Save the Children, 2006). Initially begun as a one-year project, the GEP was extended for an additional year. Save the Children worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (nationally and regionally) as well as with three local NGOs to implement GEP activities in 50 schools within six districts located in three regions identified by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF as priority areas.

While little research has been carried out on girls’ education in Tajikistan, studies conducted over the last thirty years in the poorest countries in Africa and Asia have documented multiple barriers to schooling serving to marginalize girls and young women, especially those living in rural areas. Despite the varying contexts of these countries, scholars, researchers, and international development agencies have found many common factors that play a role in
restricting or limiting rural girls’ educational opportunities and experiences. These factors include but are not limited to the direct and indirect costs of schooling to the family, long distances to schools, parental attitudes regarding the value of girls’ education, discriminatory school-based and/or societal practices, physically unsafe environments, and the quality of the education (Lewis & Lockheed, 2006; Rihani, 2006).

Although much has been learned since the 1980s when attention to issues of girls’ education in developing countries began to intensify, many scholars have called for research that explores important questions that have yet to be answered regarding how the experiences and outcomes of schooling affect girls and young women in low-income and developing countries (Kelly, 1978; Lloyd, 2005; Maslak, 2008; Sen & Grown, 1987; Stromquist, 2003). This research provides insights into the schooling experiences of girls in the six rural communities included in this study.

Organization of thesis

This thesis consists of 10 chapters. Having introduced the study in this chapter, I present the national context of this study in Chapter 2 with a brief overview of historic and contemporary Tajikistan, including a discussion of gender and education in three time periods: Pre-Soviet (prior to 1917), Soviet (1917-1991) and Post-Soviet (September 1991 onwards). Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of the current education system. In Chapter 3, I discuss two sets of theories regarding the role and function of education within society. Social reproduction theories, the first set of theories discussed, are located within the field of sociology and stress schooling predominantly as a means of maintaining the status quo. Empowerment theories, the second set of theories discussed, are located within the field of international development and stress schooling as a means of changing the status quo. I used concepts from these two sets of theories to construct my conceptual framework. In this chapter, I trace the emergence and
development of these theories historically and note the theoretical dialogue that has taken place over time to result in the current thinking on these theories particularly on how they apply to girls’ education in low-income countries such as Tajikistan. In Chapter 4, I detail my research design and methodology as well as my conceptual framework.

In Chapter 5 through 9 I present my study’s findings. In Chapters 5 and 6 I discuss qualitative and quantitative findings regarding the district, community, and school contexts in Rumi District and Rasht District, respectively. In these chapters, I present a profile of each school with data drawn from interviews with adult participants. In Chapter 7, I compare the contexts of the two districts and findings from the six school profiles (both across and between districts) before moving on in Chapter 8 to discuss female student participants’ perspectives regarding factors affecting girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities in their schools and communities. The focus of Chapter 9 is the Girls’ Education Project in which I detail the main components of the project, its genesis, and participants’ perspectives on project activities. Finally, in Chapter 10 I summarize and analyse the key findings of this study before discussing my conclusions.
Chapter 2: Tajikistan

Introduction

Widely-held gender norms and practices affect who goes to school, for how long, and for what end. Gendered norms and practices are fluid, can change over time, and are shaped by social, political and historic factors. The purpose of this chapter is to set the context of this study by presenting historical, economic and societal factors that have greatly affected and currently affect girls’ education in rural Tajikistan.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, a brief history of what is now the Republic of Tajikistan is followed by basic demographic, political and economic information that serves to situate present-day conditions. In the second section, predominant societal traditions regarding women’s place in society and how they affected girls’ education are historically traced. In the third section, the current structure of the education system is presented, with a focus on gender disparities.

Historic and contemporary Tajikistan

The Republic of Tajikistan is located in Central Asia with Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west and northwest, Kyrgyzstan to the north, and China to the east (see map on next page). Present-day Tajiks are descendants of a people with an ancient history dating back to the 5th century BC (Harris, 2004). (See Figure 1.)

The region now known as Tajikistan was part of the Silk Road, a transcontinental trade route between the East and West. Tsarist Russia conquered the area in 1868. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) created the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. Five years later the USSR established the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, a Republic in its own right.
The collapse of the USSR in 1991 brought independence to Tajikistan. With independence and increasing unemployment came a political power struggle between government forces and a coalition of three opposition parties. Regional differences factored heavily in this power struggle (Harris, 2006; Jonson, 2006). Amongst the regional differences of the quarrelling factions were differing views on the role of Islam within the political arena. This power struggle resulted in a brutal civil war from 1992 to 1997. The devastation caused by the civil war was immense: “35,000 houses destroyed, 60,000 people killed, many more were missing, many women were raped and forced into marriage with men of the opposing side, 55,000 children orphaned, 26,000 families without a primary breadwinner” (Akiner, 2001, p. 44).

The signing of a national reconciliation agreement in 1997 marked the official end of the civil war. However, the violence did not end overnight. “Aftershocks” of the civil war included “kidnappings, murders, violent burglaries, muggings, abductions and rapes of young girls”
(Harris, 1998, p. 657). After the peace agreement was signed, some people who had become refugees or Internally Displaced People during the civil war began returning to their home areas. However, it was not until early 2000 that most had returned (Akiner, 2001) and “sporadic civil unrest” had ended (Waljee, 2008, p. 100).

Those returning home included many who sought refuge in Afghanistan during the civil war, including opposition party members. Harris (2000) points out how opposition party members were affected by their experiences in Afghanistan and how their return has affected the communities to which they returned. She states that

> the threat of the imposition of a strict form of Islam, according to the mujahaddin model [that] members of the opposition party brought back with them from their in exile in Afghanistan after the recent civil war, also constantly hangs over people. (Harris, 2000, p. 2)

**Demographic information**

A decade after the end of the unrest, the population of Tajikistan was estimated to be 7,627,200 (CIA, 2011), 74% of whom live in rural areas (State Committee on Statistics & UNICEF, 2009, p.13). In 2010, 36% of the population was under 15 years old (International Organization for Migration, 2011). The majority of the people are Muslim, with 85% being Sunni and 5% being Shia Isma’ali (2003 estimate) (CIA, 2010).

According to the 2000 census, 80% of the population was Tajik, 15% Uzbek, 1% Russian, 1% Kyrgyz with 3% from other ethnicities (CIA, 2010). Within the group classified as “Tajik” there is much diversity as different groups within this classification have different histories, religious interpretations, traditions, music as well as social structures resulting in differing, strongly-held local identities (Akiner, 2001, p.7). This diversity amongst Tajiks is partially due to the effect of the mountainous topography of Tajikistan as numerous mountain ranges divide rural communities and limit the amount of arable land to only 7% (CIA, 2010). Akiner (2001) notes that there are two main settlements of Tajik people: those living on the
plains (Ferghana Valley in the north and river basins including Gharm in Rasht in the central eastern region) and those who live in the mountainous areas (central and southwest regions including Khatlon).

The official language is Tajik, a Western Iranian language. Official statistics report that all the population is literate. The World Bank (2010) reports an adult literacy rate of 100% and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010) estimates that 99.8% of male adults, 99.6% of female adults and 99.9% of both male and female youth, 15 to 24 years old, were literate in 2009. However, other sources such as the International Crisis Group (ICG) report how “experts suggest there has been a large, albeit unrecorded, surge in illiteracy” (2003, p.6). (Also see Amnesty International, 2009.)

Roughly 60-65% of the population belong to a clan (known as an avlod in Tajik), “the strongest traditional institution of informal authority in Tajik society” (Yusuff, Rustam and Natalya, 2007, p.18). Yusuff, Rustam and Natalya (2007) define an avlod as “a consanguineous patrimonial group….the Avlod is a complex entity, economic, territorial, spiritual, cultural, ideological, and legal” (p.18). There are more than 12,000 avlods in Tajikistan, although Yusuff, Rustam, and Natalya (2007) note that this figure is from “incomplete data” (p.18).

Tajikistan, which had been the poorest of the fifteen Soviet republics, is the poorest of the countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with the lowest health, education, and living standards within Central Asia. Globally, Tajikistan is ranked 127 out of 187 countries worldwide on the Human Development Index 2011, located roughly in the middle of the “medium human development” category (United Nations Development Programme, 2012). More than half of the population (54%) lives below the absolute poverty line of US$2.15 per day with 17% considered “extremely poor” (State Committee on Statistics & UNICEF, 2009, p. 24). According to the World Food Program (2012b), “the poorest groups of the
population spend over 70 percent of their income on food. Around 30 percent of the people are food-insecure, with some 6 percent of them facing severe food insecurity” (p.1).

**Government structures**

The secular, democratic government is described by Johnson (2004) as “a ‘presidential’ system, giving the president the power to rule by decree with the force of ‘constitutional’ law” (Johnson, 2004, p.14). Tajikistan is considered a weak state (Akiner, 2001; Whitsel, 2009). Corruption, which also existed during the Soviet period, is widespread (Akiner, 2001; Babajanian, 2004).

Tajikistan is divided administratively into four regions: Sughd in the north, Direct Rule Districts (DRD) in the center, Khatlon in the southwest and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in the west (see Figure 2).

With the exception of DRD, the regions are referred to as provinces or “oblasts”, a Russian term for administrative region. Dushanbe is the capital city of the country as well as the capital of DRD (also known as Districts under Republican Subordination). The districts within DRD, including Rasht, are ruled directly from Dushanbe. Khujand is the capital of Sughd, Kurgan-Tyube is the capital of Khatlon, and Khorugh is the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). Of the four administrative regions, GBAO is the largest geographically and least populated while Khatlon is the most populated (International Labor Rights Forum [ILRF], 2007). (This study was conducted in Rumi District located within Khatlon and in Rasht District located within DRD.)
Each administrative region is further divided into three levels with a descending hierarchy. Regions are divided into districts. Each district is divided into jamoats which comprise of several hukumats (village-level self-governing units).

**Socio-economic information**

Recognizing how Tajikistan’s infrastructure was built up during the Soviet period (1924-1991), Harris (1998) labels Tajikistan’s situation as “undevelopment” (p. 660) referring to how the infrastructure has been “unraveling” since independence (p. 669) while DeYoung and Constantine (2009) consider Tajikistan to be “de-industrializing” (p. 266). Whitsel (2009) describes Tajikistan as “an unindustrialized country with a weakened state and an educated population” (p. 16). Tajikistan’s two main exports are aluminum and cotton, the only commercial crop (ILRF, 2007, p. 5). Cotton has long been the most important crop grown in Tajikistan and cotton fields dominated the arable landscape in the two main cotton producing regions, one of which is Khatlon, where this study was conducted.
Of the women who work at paid employment, the vast majority work in economic sectors, such as agriculture, public health services and education, where workers receive 4 to 7 times lower wages than sectors such as industry, construction, transportation and communication (Amnesty International, 2009). Cotton field work has been done by girls and women since the Soviet era when the state demanded they do so (D’Hellencourt, 2004).

With few employment opportunities especially in rural areas, an estimated one million people have left Tajikistan to seek work abroad. The majority of the labour migrants are men who work seasonally in construction in Russia (CIA, 2010). The money labour migrants send to their family members in Tajikistan has become the primary source of income for most families (Babajanian, 2004). While in Russia, many migrant labourers marry second wives (Harris, 1998). Over the years there has been a gradual increase in the number of migrant labourers who settle in Russia and begin new families (ICG, 2003). Thus economic poverty in Tajikistan has resulted in a high level of labour migration separating older boys and men from their families and causing “social poverty” (Babajanian, 2004, p. 2; also see Harris 2004). Given that men have traditionally been the head of the household and primary wage earner, with many men living and working abroad, women have become more vulnerable, both economically and socially (Babajanian, 2004, p. 15).

An Oxfam report (2011) about women farmers notes how male labour migration has resulted in an increasing number of female-headed households, which are usually poorer than male-headed households. Some women take on the household responsibilities in their husband’s absence, with their husbands returning home for a visit once every few years. Other women have been abandoned by their husbands who have migrated while some have been widowed (Oxfam, 2011). The Oxfam report (2011) points out that even during a father’s absence, if a group of migrant families is under male authority, be it the head of the avlod [clan], grandfather or brother, they are still
financially better off than migrant households consisting only of women and children. Widows and female-headed households are in a particularly precarious situation and are dependent on other households for charity or security in times of difficulty; they have a lower average level of education and they comprise an older age-group with ages ranging from 40 to 55 years. (p.10)

(Also see Golobal, Weine, Bahromov & Luo, 2011; Mirzoeva, 2009.)

One consequence of the separation of husbands and wives in Tajikistan due to labour migration has been an increase in divorces, including divorce-by-text, which have recently “sky-rocketed” in number (Robson, 2011). Divorce has very difficult economic and social repercussions for women. As Robson (2011) reports, “for Tajik women, abandonment and divorce is a deeply shameful thing – they are often shunned and denied property rights and child support” (p.1). (Also see Harris 2004.)

Furthermore, Amnesty International (2009) reports that “in Tajikistan, one third to one half of women may at some time experience physical, psychological or sexual violence at the hands of husbands or other family members” (p.5). In a 2009 report, Amnesty International documents the negative effects of practices such as illegal early marriages of girls, unregistered marriages whereby a woman become the second or third wife, and divorce on the lives of girls and women. This report (2009) calls attention to

the entrenched societal attitudes of acceptance and justification of violence against women in the context of the increasing promotion of traditional discourses, which advocate confining women’s sphere of activity to the home. These perceptions pose a further obstacle to the protection and fulfilment of women’s rights. (p. 6)

Amongst these rights are girls’ and women’s right to education.

**NGOs in Tajikistan**

One reaction to the many socio-economic difficulties and subsequent increase on foreign aid dependency has been a steep increase in the number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in Tajikistan. Akiner (2001) reports that over 400 NGOs registered with the
government within the first decade after independence (1991-2001), with many focusing on addressing issues related to youth and gender. When the government reduced the “astronomically high” registration fee in 2001 (Abdushukurova, 2008, p. 207), the number of registrations skyrocketed. In 2006, 2,750 NGOs were registered with the government, with approximately one-third described as inactive or as “dead souls” (Abdushukurova, 2008, p. 195).

Abdushukurova (2008) notes how most international NGOs provide services and deliver humanitarian aid. According to Aminjanov, Kholmatov and Kataev (2009), approximately $100 million in foreign aid was used to implement 80 projects in Tajikistan in 1997 whereas by 2006 foreign aid grew to over $270 million, funding more than 400 projects. (For more on foreign aid for education in Tajikistan, see Tilak, 2010.) The increase in the number of NGOs opened up local employment opportunities especially for women, who account for the majority of the people working within the NGO sector (Amnesty International, 2009).

Of all the sectors within Tajikistan, the education sector and the social welfare sector are “the most project-intense” (Aminjanov, Kholmatov & Kataev, 2009, p. 30). Within the education sector, the number of projects has grown significantly as illustrated in the following example. From 2003 to 2006 the number of projects in the education sector almost doubled from 64 to 114 as did the number of “active donors” which increased from 25 to 40 (Aminjanov, Kholmatov & Kataev, 2009, p. 31). As for community-based education projects (of which the GEP was one), the UNESCO EFA mid-term national report (2007) notes many such projects were implemented throughout the country with funding provided by multilateral development agencies (such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, and the United Nations World Food Programme), private foundations (such as the Open Society Foundation-Soros Foundations and the Aga Khan Foundation) as well as NGOs (such as CARE and Save the
Children). Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) describe the educational reform that has occurred in Tajikistan since its independence, as in other former Soviet Republics, as being part of a “post-socialist education reform package” (p. 2), with the agendas for these reforms set by international donors. Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) consider the girls’ education initiatives implemented in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as a feature of this reform package.

**Gender and education in Tajikistan**

As in every society, dominant gender norms and practices have delineated expected roles for women and girls in urban and rural Tajikistan and have changed over time. These norms and practices are reflected in the formal education system, determining who should go to school, for how long, what they should learn and for what purpose(s) (Durkheim, 1911/1956; Leach, 1998; Subrahmanian, 2007; Sweetman, 1998). These norms and practices, and thus education systems, have been shaped by economic, political and religious factors, among others.

The term “education” can be applied to informal, formal, and non-formal learning. In Tajikistan, there are two main education systems that enable students to acquire knowledge formally: secular formal schools provided by the state with a national curriculum and religious education taught by local clerics with students studying the Kor’an and other holy books.

The following discussion of gender and education in Tajikistan is divided into three time periods which reflect distinctly different educational conditions: Pre-Soviet (prior to 1924), Soviet (1924 to 1991), and Post-Soviet (1991 onwards).

**Gender and education in Pre-Soviet Tajikistan (before 1924)**

In pre-Soviet times, the advanced feudal agricultural society was regulated by Shariat laws which included practices of seclusion for women (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992). Seclusion practices meant women and girls were to stay within their houses and they required a man’s permission to visit relatives outside the house (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992).
During this period, education was solely non-formal in nature for the vast majority of children as older family members taught young people the economic and social skills required for their daily lives. Women taught girls skills that centered on the household since the primary role of women was as mothers and “guardians of Muslim way of life in the home” (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992, p. 41).

As throughout the world, religious education was the first type of systemic formal learning available in Central Asia, available to children largely from the upper classes of society (Harris, 2004). Clerics taught children to read Arabic through the study of the Kor’an and other holy books. Boys could attend *maktabs*, Islamic primary schools, located on the premises of mosques (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992). During this period, some girls also received religious education which consisted of the same syllabus as was taught to the boys. While almost all urban upper and middle class girls received religious instruction in their own home, other girls studied at the home of their female teacher, known as a *bibitun* (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992). Anderson (1997) describes a *bibiotun* as “a cross between a female mullah and a wise woman, who served to educate women and children to ensure the maintenance of ancient customs” (p.46).

When Tsarist Russia colonized areas that are now part of Tajikistan in the late 1800s, the people were under local administration and the education system did not change (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1992). Soviet historians have written that the people of Central Asia were illiterate and Harris (2004) notes that prior to Soviet rule, few women were functionally literate. However, Tokhtakhodjaeva (1992) calls attention to studies documenting widespread literacy amongst the local population through religious education although she does not distinguish between the level of literacy for men and women. Soviet rule of Tajikistan, which began in
1924, resulted in many changes, including changes to gender relations and education, which will now be discussed.

**Gender and education in Soviet Tajikistan (1924-1991)**

As with colonial powers throughout history, the Soviet leadership aimed to modernize a people they considered “backward”. Modernization included industrialization, creating a secular society, and “emancipating” women in all spheres of life (politically, economically, and educationally) from their oppression. As part of transforming the lives of women and girls, the Soviet leadership conducted a major campaign, begun in 1927, to eliminate the practice of veiling (Northrop, 2004). The most common veil of the time was heavy, made of horsehair and cotton, and covered a woman from head-to-toe. It was worn by women and girls over nine or ten years of age when they were in the presence of men other than family members (Northrup, 2004). The unveiling of girls and women was a very important and symbolic element of the Soviet “emancipation” process (Massell, 1974; Northrop, 2004; Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009). (Also see DeYoung and Constantine, 2009.)

The Soviet leadership believed in the importance of educating the entire population, with the education of girls and women playing a critical role in their “emancipation.” Literacy campaigns were conducted throughout the Republic in the 1920s. During this time, formal education was established as Muslim schools were being eliminated (Akiner, 1996). In 1931, the Soviet leadership established universal primary education (DeWitt, 1961). According to Holmes, Read and Voskresenskaya (1995), “prior to 1939, seven years of schooling was the norm for the majority of children” (p.126) in the Soviet Union.

In little more than a decade after becoming a Soviet Republic, progress in creating a literate population in Tajikistan was evident. The Soviet census of 1926 documented a literacy rate of 2.2% overall (Akiner, 2001, p. 18) and 1% for women (ABD 2000 cited in Silova &

Within the Soviet system, everyone had the right to education and full employment. However, Inkeles (1953) notes that of the three categories of people within Stalin’s Soviet Union (the intelligentsia, the working class, and the peasants), the children of the intelligentsia and working class had greater access to schooling than children of the peasants. In 1938, children of the intelligentsia and working class “constituted 47 per cent of the student body although the group made up only some 17 per cent of the total population” (Inkeles, 1953, p. 621).

Inkeles (1953) notes that there were two levels of educational attainment: seven years of schooling was known as “incomplete secondary” while ten years of schooling was known as “complete secondary” (p. 617). By 1950, compulsory education was extended to eight years (Holmes, Read, & Voskresenskaya, 1995). (Also see DeWitt, 1961.) Compulsory education was later extended to ten years by the 1970s (Holmes, Read & Voskresenskaya, 1995.)

The percentage of women in specialized secondary schools increased significantly between 1928 and 1938. Enrolment of women in specialized secondary school increased from 37% to 51% in those 10 years (Inkeles, 1953). According to Inkeles (1953), “during this period women comprised a large part, in some cases over half of the students at industrial training schools, and as a result they came to represent a significant proportion of the skilled workers in Soviet industry” (p. 612). Women’s enrolment within Soviet universities also increased significantly from 1928 to 1938 from 28% to 43% (Inkeles, 1953). In 1959, although women accounted for 29% of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, only 9% of the students were “women of the local nationality” and were of Tajik and Uzbek ethnicity (DeWitt, 1961, p. 350). DeWitt (1961) notes that the majority of these “native
women” studied in either the educational-cultural or health branch of a higher education institution. Quota systems for women were used during the Soviet period to increase women’s participation in all levels of education as well as in the military and government (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).

As for employment under the Soviet system, each school graduate was guaranteed a job (Asminov, 1987, p. 66). While many urban women were employed within the formal economy, most rural women worked as casual labourers on collective and state farms along with other family members (Dodhudova, Odilov, Mirzoeva, Bozrikova, Kuvatova, Rabieva, et al., 2003; Harris, 2004). Women’s participation in the labour force increased from 28% in 1928, when Stalin began implementing aggressive economic reform programs of industrialization and collectivization, to 38% one decade later (Inkeles, 1953). Before World War II, approximately 40% of industrial specialists in the Soviet Union were women (Inkeles, 1953). Noting the increase in women’s participation in agricultural production, Inkeles (1953) states that “the shifts in the rural regions were no less striking as large numbers of women assumed positions of responsibility and skill on the collective farms” (p. 612).

While the Soviet leadership believed that government directives would change cultural and religious norms including those related to gender roles, people resisted and tried to preserve their traditions. Throughout the period of Soviet rule, when compared to other Central Asian populations, Tajiks were considered especially conservative (Anderson, 1997). Despite anti-Islamic policies in Tajikistan during the Soviet period, people prayed and conducted Islamic rites of passage at home secretly (Harris, 2004). This was especially true in remote mountain communities that were more isolated from Soviet influence than other communities in Tajikistan (Akiner, 2001, p. 29).
Harris (2004) argues that the “hardening of social norms” was a consequence of this resistance (p. 16). Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) noted how, even after decades of Soviet rule, women and girls wore the veil and female seclusion was still practiced locally in the 1950s (p. 362). As religion went underground, women came to be perceived as the “keepers of the traditional culture” (Tadjbakhsh, 1998).

Anti-Islamic policies in the Soviet Union were relaxed by Gorbachev in the mid-1980s when economic and government reforms known as glasnost (translated as “openness”) and perestroika (translated as “restructuring”) were introduced. The late 1980s and early 1990s also saw an Islamic revival in Tajikistan, in which some people advocated for a return to pre-Soviet traditions regarding women’s place in society (Akiner, 2001). Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) argue that women were frequently used as a “political tool” within this revival to revive and reinvent a new cultural national identity (p. 363).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan’s independence in 1991, the population of Tajikistan experienced significant political, social, and economic challenges which had many repercussions for gender relations and the education system, as will be discussed in the following section.

**Gender and education in Post-Soviet Tajikistan (1991 onwards)**

With independence, the Ministry of Education transitioned from being part of a highly centralized system control from Moscow to managing its own education system. As such, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the operation of all state-run primary, secondary, vocational and higher education institutions as stipulated in the country’s Constitution. The Ministry of Education consists of thirteen departments at the national level, two of which are the Department of General Education (covering grade 1 to 9) and the Department of Secondary and High-Vocational Education (covering grade 10 and 11 and vocational education) (Ministry of
Education website, 2012). There is a national curriculum for all levels of education developed by the Ministry of Education. Each region in Tajikistan has a Ministry of Education District Education Department (DED) as do cities, with 71 in total (Ministry of Education website, 2012).

In response to the economic crisis and as part of a process to decentralize the education system, Whitsel (2009) notes how the government transferred the source of control of the school infrastructure from the Ministry of Education to local government authorities. In the process, public schools at all levels have been given the ability to charge students school informal fees to generate revenue (World Bank, 2002). While financing basic education became the responsibility of the local government, they were poorly prepared to handle such responsibilities. As a World Bank Report (2002) noted, “local budget lines for education vary from 0 to minimal amounts. It is not clear that even those amounts budgeted reach the schools” (p.3).

While primary and secondary schooling continues to be “free” as it was during the Soviet period, parents must make informal payments or bribes to school staff thus increasing the direct costs of sending children to school (Akiner, 2001; Amnesty International, 2009; Baschieri & Falkingham, 2009; Heyneman, 2004; UNESCO, 2007, 2008). The level of payment required differs between generally wealthier urban areas and poorer rural areas. Parents pay in cash or kind, such as providing labour for school maintenance (Babajanian, 2004). These payments are commonly used to cover teachers’ salaries or to repair the school (UNESCO, 2007). “Gifts” given to teachers at all levels within the educational system ensure that certain students receive more attention in class and receive good marks (Babajanian, 2004; Harris, 1998; ICG, 2003; ILRF, 2007).
Some poor families are unable to make these payments, which negatively affects their children’s access to school (Babajanian, 2004; UNESCO, 2007). To assist children from poor families, the government provides these children with a financial grant to help cover schooling costs. Approximately 20% of the student population receives such grants which, according to a UNESCO report (2008), is 6 Somoni per quarter (roughly $1.33 USD).

One form of school costs are the uniforms required for students in grades 1 through 10. The school uniform for boys consists of a white shirt and black pants while the school uniform for girls consists of a white shirt, black skirt and black pants. The provision of school uniforms for children can be costly for families. The Global Monitoring Report 2008 notes that “school uniforms represent 60% of average household education expenditure on public primary schooling in Tajikistan” (p. 151). Students must also rent or buy textbooks as well as buying their own pens and exercise books.

The quality of education in Tajikistan has declined significantly since independence due to several factors, including a severe shortage of teachers (Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Many highly trained teachers, who were ethnically Russian, left Tajikistan at the time of independence when civil unrest was growing and when Tajik replaced Russian as the official language (DeYoung & Constantine, 2009). Low teacher salaries have resulted in highly qualified teachers leaving the profession (Baschieri & Falkingham, 2009; UNESCO, 2007; Whitsel, 2009). Reports on teachers’ monthly salary varied from US $6.30 (World Bank, 2002) to less than US $5 (Irin News, 2004). In 2007, Steiner-Khamsi (2008) reports that the average teachers’ monthly salary was US $29, significantly lower than the average national salary. There has also been a huge reduction in the prestige of teachers, considered amongst society’s elite during Soviet times (Niyozov, 2001, 2011).
Along with effects of a severe teacher shortage, the quality of education is also negatively affected by a severe shortage of textbooks. A UNESCO report (2008) that “only 30 per cent of pupils in general secondary schools have a complete set of textbooks, in some subjects only 10 percent” (p. 166). The UNESCO EFA mid-term national report (2007) describes the textbook shortage as “the most acute problem facing both teachers and students at school” (p. 59).

**Structure of the education system**

In Tajikistan there are five levels of formal education: Pre-school (for children 3 to 6 years of age), Primary education (grades 1 to 4), General basic education (grades 5 to 9), General secondary education (grades 10 and 11) or vocational education (for children from 16 years of age with programs of study from one to four years) and higher education (with programs of study from four to six years). After independence in 1991, the structure of the education system remained the same as it was during the Soviet period with two exceptions: secondary schooling was expanded from grade 10 to grade 11 while compulsory education increased from 8 years to 9. (Since this study explores factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling related to ethnicity, it is important to note that compulsory education expanded in Uzbekistan from grade 9 in 1998 to grade 11 in 1999 and to grade 12 in 2002 (USIS, 2012). Uzbekistan has the highest level of compulsory education of all the Central Asian former Soviet Republics.)

Although a pre-school system exists, it is not well attended as nationally only 9% of children attend pre-school, with great urban/rural differences. In urban areas 21% of children attend pre-school compared to 3% of children living in rural areas (State Committee on Statistics and UNICEF, 2009).
There are two types of general education schools which differ by grade level offered. General education schools offer grades 1 to 11 and are more common than general basic education schools that offer grades 1 to 9. In 2003/04 there were 3745 general education schools and 841 general basic education schools (Ministry of Education, 2005). The predominance in the number of general education schools compared to general basic education school results in the vast majority of children (86%) attending schools offering grades 1 through 11 (Briller, 2007).

While Tajik is the language of instruction for the majority of the students up to the end of secondary school, some schools in certain communities, depending on the demographics, offer Uzbek, Russian, Kyrgyz, or Turkmen as the language of instruction. Of these four national minority languages, Uzbek is offered in 23% of schools with Russian available in 2% and Kyrgyz in 1%. No percentage was provided for Turkmen (UNESCO, 2007).

The school year, from September through May, is 34 weeks long and is significantly shorter than the international average of 38 to 42 weeks (Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Students in Tajikistan receive the lowest amount of instructional time when compared to students in other Central Asian countries (Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Students in grades 1 to 3 are promoted to the following grade without having to take exams. Students in all other grades write end of year examinations. Students in grades 9 and 11 write national exams at the end of the school year.

Educational statistics provide insights into who is going to school and for how long. In 2005, only 55 percent of all students continued on from grade 9 to 10 (UNESCO, 2007). In some areas, such as in the capital city of Dushanbe and in Khatlon region, the UNESCO EFA mid-term national report (2007) notes that the number of students who continue in school from grade 9 to 10 has been declining yearly (p. 61).
The following table presents the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in 2007 disaggregated by post-primary education levels and by urban and rural areas. The GER is the “total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year” (UNESCO, 2012).

**Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by education level and urban/rural**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 5 to 9</td>
<td>109%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 10 and 11</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNESCO, 2008, p. 114

This table illustrates how there is a significant proportion of children in rural areas who are not attending compulsory grades of schooling, especially given that 74% of population live in rural areas (UNESCO UIS, 2012). When considering post-compulsory GER, only 43% of rural students attain grades 10 and 11 compared to 57% of their urban peers.

While yearly enrolment statistics are collected and well-documented, the same is not true for attendance rates (see Chapter 4 for more details). A 2003 ICG report points out that, “enrolment figures hide widespread non-attendance especially for girls” (p.5).

Reflecting the effects of studying within a deteriorating education system, student achievement is low. In 2002 the Ministry of Education conducted the Monitoring of Learning Achievement Study which found that only 37% of students in the study passed the literacy test whereas 50% of the same students passed the numeracy test. Students from remote rural areas had the lowest test scores (Dodhudova, Odilov, Mirzoeva, Bozrikova, Kuvatova, Rabieva, et al., 2003). This seems to contradict 2009 literacy statistics that estimated that 99.9% of male and female youth, 15 to 24 years old were literate (as noted in Chapter 2).
In 2005, there were 71 Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) institutions in Tajikistan. A total of 25,000 students were enrolled in these institutions at that time, 1.7 times fewer students than in 1991 (UNESCO, 2008).

Tajikistan has 38 higher education institutions, with Tajik and Russian being the two languages of instruction (Ministry of Education, 2005). As a result, students whose first language is Uzbek, Kyrgyz, or Turkmen face language barriers to access higher education (UNESCO, 2007). Prior to 2003, the state provided students with free higher education including housing in the form of dormitories. In 2003 tuition fees were established for higher education institutions and dormitories were privatized. Babajanian (2004) notes that “access to prestigious education institutes can be bought or facilitated through official payments. In addition to entrance fees and unofficial annual fees, students very frequently pay bribes to their lecturers for examination to ensure pass marks” (p. 10). (Also see ICG 2003; ILRF, 2007.) As with other aspects of the education system, students have to pay bribes to access the dormitories (ICG, 2003).

**Gender disparities in education**

Educational statistics and studies reveal a decrease in educational participation and a growth in educational inequality, particularly an increasing gender disparity in favour of boys. Despite the fact that schooling is compulsory until grade 9, UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics (2011) reports that 45,000 children of lower secondary school age (grades 5 to 9) are out-of-school in Tajikistan, 87% of whom are girls. Gender disparity increases at each level of education, as noted in the following table of educational statistics for 2005/06.
Table 2. Percentage of female students enrolled in 2005/06 by education level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Percentage of female students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1-4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5-9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10-11</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNESCO, 2008, p. 121

As noted above, the percentage of female students receiving education steadily decreases as students move up through the education system, particularly after grade 9.

This trend continued, as illustrated in Table 3 highlighting the 2008 enrolment statistics including the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). The NER is “enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population” (UNESCO, 2012).

While almost all primary school-age boys are enrolled in school, 5% of primary school-age girls are not. This enrolment gap continues at the secondary level when 23% of all secondary school-age girls are not enrolled in school compared to 12% of their male peers. At the tertiary level, 29% of the male population are enrolled compared to 11% of the female population. Fewer female students from rural areas go on to grade 10 and 11 compared to those from urban areas. In 2005, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in grades 10 and 11 was 57% for girls in urban areas and 43% for girls in rural areas (UNESCO, 2007).

While this study focuses on secondary school students, it is important to explore gender issues at the TVET and university levels since advancement to post-secondary education is
commonly the primary reason students in Tajikistan, as elsewhere, complete secondary school. Table 4 highlights enrolment statistics for 2003/04 for 47 TVET institutions (Ministry of Education, 2012). “Normal school” refers to institutions that train teachers. TVET institutions in Kurgan-Tyube and Rasht are in bold as these institutions are geographically accessible to students in Rumi and Rasht districts, respectively. The government provides funding for students attending 26 institutions, each identified by an asterisk. All other institutions except two have spaces for government-funded and fee-paying students. Students at the Metallurgical College in Tursunzade and the Medical School, Khorog, are fee-paying.
Table 4: Technical vocational enrolment in 2003/04 by region, number of students, and percentage of female students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Name of Institution, Location</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Female Students by Number</th>
<th>Female Students by Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Tursunzade</td>
<td>270*</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>College of Education, Khujand</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBOA</td>
<td>Medical School, Khorog</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Medical School, Kanibadam</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Normal School, Kanibadam</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Hisar</td>
<td>480*</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Teachers College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Medical School, Hisar</td>
<td>875*</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Normal School, Mastchoh</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Medical College of Khujand</td>
<td>1167*</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Normal School, Kubodien</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Rudaki</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Normal School, Penjikent</td>
<td>533*</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Medical School, Penjikent</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Medical School, Vahdat</td>
<td>800*</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Medical College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>1937*</td>
<td>1398</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Medical school, Istaravshan</td>
<td>522*</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Medical College of Kulyab</td>
<td>890*</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Medical College of Kurgan-Tyube</td>
<td>991*</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Medical School in Dangara</td>
<td>694*</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Teachers College, Kurgan-Tyube</td>
<td>874*</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Teachers College, Kulyab</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Medical School, Rasht</td>
<td>405*</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Medical school, Javan</td>
<td>526*</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Normal School, Rogun</td>
<td>163*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Technology College, Kanibadam</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Jirgital, (Rasht Valley)</td>
<td>225*</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>College of Art, Dushanbe</td>
<td>172*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>College of Music, Dushanbe</td>
<td>181*</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Cultural school, Rudaki</td>
<td>303*</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Nurabad, (Rasht Valley)</td>
<td>172*</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Music school in Khujand</td>
<td>318*</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>College of Statistics, Vahdat</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Financial and Economic College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Metallurgical College, Tursunzade</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Trade College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Engineering-pedagogical, Dushanbe</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Mining and Metallurgy College, Chkalovsk</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>Agricultural College, Maschoh</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Polytechnic College, Zafarabad</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Technical College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>1171*</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRD</td>
<td>Normal School, Rasht</td>
<td>143*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Geological College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Polytechnic College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>672*</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>Sports College, Dushanbe</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Agro-business College, Bokhtar</td>
<td>221*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Cultural School, Kulyab</td>
<td>100*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* students do not pay tuition to attend these institutions (Ministry of Education, 2012)
The statistics in Table 4 confirm that in most regions female students account for at least two-thirds of all students attending medical colleges and teacher training institutions at the vocational level, reflecting gendered divisions of studies and labour. In districts located within Khatlon and the Rasht Valley, such as Rumi and Rasht where this study was conducted, the percentage of female to male students is significantly lower in medical colleges and normal schools than in the same types of institutions in other regions throughout Tajikistan. This is the case despite the availability of government-funded spaces. The most extreme example of this is the Normal College in Rasht which only 8% of its student population was female in 2003/04.

While the gaps between boys and girls schooling at various levels within the education system in Tajikistan have been well-documented, the literature on why this is so is limited but informative. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the first qualitative study on girls’ education in Tajikistan was funded by UNICEF and conducted in Dushanbe and two nearby towns over two months in 2003. Participants included teachers, male and female students as well as out-of-school girls and their parents.

Findings from the study were grouped into four themes: 1) family expenditure priorities in a context of poverty; 2) gender socialization; 3) the roles and functions of school within a gender perspective; and 4) religion as a buttress of community integration and a pretext for gender discrimination (D’Hellencourt, 2004). These findings reflect and reveal the complex interplay of various economic, social, and religious factors that result in girls leaving school before completing nine years of compulsory education. For example, the purpose of education differs for boys (who will be the wage earner for the family) and girls (who will marry into another family). D’Hellencourt (2004) notes that “the boy was seen as a social being who must present himself before society” whereas “daughters were hidden away at home” (p. 31). As for
the effects of religion and traditional culture on the lives of girls and women, D’Hellencourt (2004) states that religion

rules the rhythm of private, family and community life and still appears to condone most of the discriminatory practices in terms of gender: the control by men over women’s social life, women’s consignment to the home and to housework, forced marriages, domestic violence, and the exclusion of women from inheritance. The patriarchal traditions seem to possess legitimacy from both culture and the religion. (p.32)

In low-income countries, such as Tajikistan, poverty at the family level is commonly understood to be the main barrier limiting girls’ schooling. However, D’Hellencourt (2004) importantly notes that

despite what parents may say, poverty alone does not constitute the main obstacle to the education of girls. The main obstacle consists, in fact, of combination of poverty and gender inequality that is prominent and readily tolerated in traditional culture. (p. 6)

The wording and nature of the study’s recommendations are very telling. The recommendations fall within one of seven categories: 1) The re-evaluation and protection of teachers and schools; 2) Awareness-raising among communities and throughout society; 3) Drawing girls out of isolation (for example, participating in activities outside their district and region); 4) Alternative education for girls who drop out of school or risk doing so; 5) Support poor families; 6) Human Rights, gender issues and violence against children and women; and 7) Better coordination (both in terms of programmes on gender and education as well as between and amongst stakeholders).

These recommendations stress the need for efforts to be undertaken at the state, community/society, family, school and individual levels. At the state and community/society level, the study calls for efforts advocating for girls' schooling and the elimination of other discriminatory practices affecting girls and women (recommendation 2 and 6, respectively). At the family level, the study suggests actions be taken to reduce economic barriers to girls’
schooling (recommendation 5). At the school level, the study calls for improvements in the
educational quality of schools and the provision of non-formal schooling to help girls who have
dropped out of school to return (recommendations 1 and 4, respectively). Finally, at the
individual level the study supports efforts to enable girls interact with other girls who have
dropped out and/or other female students and provide girls with opportunities to experience life
outside their village, thus “drawing girls out of isolation” (recommendation 3) (D’Hellencourt,
2004, p. 37). (Given that the GEP was a UNICEF-funded project, many of these
recommendations were taken up through project activities as will be seen in Chapter 9.)

D’Hellencourt (2004) cautiously notes that the study’s findings should not be
generalized and stresses the need for further inquiries into girls’ schooling in other areas of the
country. She states that

the results of the survey should not be taken necessarily to refer to all schools in
the towns visited and even less to all schools nationwide. They represent, instead,
a first step in a wider inquiry that would cover a greater diversity of
geographical, regional, ethnic and socio-economic variables and would explore
the full range of factors influencing the schooling rate among girls.
(D’Hellencourt, 2004, p.5)

Findings from this study are also borne out in a study comparing the roles of individual,
household, and community influences on school attendance in Tajikistan. In this study Baschieri
and Falkingham (2009) stress how “the factors influencing school attendance are complex and
multifaceted, and that individual, household and community characteristics are all important” (p.
217).

The main barriers to education are listed within the EFA mid-term national report (2007)
with economic factors such as “insufficient funding, small net of educational institutions”
ranked first followed by social factors such as “poverty level, poor work of family and parents,
reduced interest to receiving education among specific groups” (UNESCO, 2007, p.62).
“Ethnical and cultural [factors] connected with traditions and stereotypes, especially in what
concerns equal access to education for men and women” are ranked third amongst the barriers to girls’ schooling (UNESCO, 2007, p.62). (Ineffectiveness in educating orphans and disabled children was ranked fourth and “low adaptation of the base education system to the needs of individual categories of students” was ranked fifth.)

Within its report on domestic violence in Tajikistan, Amnesty International (2009) states that “education is a key factor for girls’ empowerment to avoid and escape situations of violence” (p. 7). The report (2009) describes how the increase in drop out rates of girls is affected by the widely accepted notion that “girls are viewed as an economic benefit to another family, so not worth investing in for their own family” (p.7). Girls’ schooling (or lack of schooling) and marriage are interconnected as “young and uneducated girls are at a premium as prospective brides, because their lack of experience is thought to make them more compliant” (Amnesty International, 2009, p. 32). This report (2009) also highlights that “what is considered valuable is woman’s virginity and chastity, and therefore many families prefer to keep their daughters away from men’s gaze once their womanhood begins to show in puberty in order to marry them successfully” (p. 33). This includes keeping girls at home rather than allowing them to go to school.

Amongst the report’s recommendations are those pertaining to girls’ compulsory schooling. At the family level, authorities should “address the root causes for girls’ dropping-out through work with individual families and social assistance measures, including the provision of security and more schools which are geographically accessible to girls in rural areas” (Amnesty International, 2009, p. 45-46). At the school-level, authorities should ensure education, at least at the primary level, is “genuinely free and compulsory” (Amnesty International, 2009, p. 45). Attendance needs to be accurately tracked and reported. Teachers’ salaries and working conditions need to be improved and “temporary special measures” be taken to reduce
discriminatory teaching practices that contribute to why girls drop out of school (Amnesty International, 2009, p. 45-46). (For more on domestic violence in Tajikistan see Haarr, 2010.)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Harris’s (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006) ethnographic work on gender relations in Tajikistan, particularly her study in Khatlon, provides valuable insights and understandings of social constructions of power relations and how they affect girls and women in the rural areas where Harris conducted her studies. Even the title of her 2004 book is telling: *Control and subversion: Gender relations in Tajikistan.*

In this work Harris (2004) describes gender relations in the family as follows: “formal discourse portrays each family as represented before the community by a mature male charged with ensuring the compliance of other members” (Harris, 2004, p. 171). Parents need to have control over their children, even after their children have grown, or they will be the subject of harshly community criticism. In regards to girls behaviour in relation to dominant norms and practices, Harris (2004) notes that “girls may be able to take advantage of their situation to step outside the conventional as long as this is not publicly perceived as such and they don’t go too far” (p. 127). Harris (2004) found that “a lack of submission on the part of a daughter-in-law is often linked in the minds of their mother-in-law with higher education which is why a daughter with tertiary education commands considerably less kalym” [bride price] (p. 109).

Since independence in 1991 there is evidence that more and more people, especially those considered religiously conservative, believe that girls’ and women’s primary roles in society are as caregivers and homemakers (ADB 2000, D’Hellencourt, 2004; Harris, 2004, UNESCO/UNICEF 2000). Akiner (2001) refers to some influential people who restrict formal schooling for girls based on their religious beliefs as “local Muslim extremists” while Waljee (2008) refers to them as “conservative Muslim elements that would hold women back in the name of Islam” (p. 96).
A UNESCO report (2008) notes how the aforementioned study on girls’ education in Tajikistan found the main barrier to girls’ schooling to be “combination of poverty and gender inequality which is strongly pronounced and admitted in the traditional culture” (p. 123). An increase in the practice of early marriage is noted as another reason girls drop out of school (UNESCO, 2008). Gender inequality is rooted in the widely-accepted notions of the role of males as the wage earner and females as caregivers and homemakers.

When parents accept females solely as caregivers and homemakers, they are far less likely to see any value in educating their daughter beyond the post-compulsory level, if even to that level. The Tajikistan Women’s United Nations Report Network (WUNRN)-MODAR (Tajik for “mother”) Conference Declaration (September 2006) clearly articulates how this belief affects girls’ lives as it states that the absence of professional and social ambitions of the parents towards their daughters lead to the fact that girls stay at home with their parents and afterward, getting married they continue staying at home with the parents of the husband, [and they are] occupied just with the household.

Further evidence is provided by the ICG report (2003) that states, “even when more liberal parents allow their daughter to study, the final aim often remains marriage, not career. Education is then perceived as an additional tool for a successful marriage” (p.8). (Also see DeYoung and Constantine, 2009.)

**Efforts to address gender disparities in education**

The Government of Tajikistan has made many attempts to improve the status of women within society, including increasing their educational participation, thorough official declarations such as the National Plan of Action of the Republic of Tajikistan for Enhancing the Status and Role of Women for the Period 1998-2005 and the “Main Directions of the State
Policy aimed at Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women for 2001-10”. UNESCO (2008) notes that the existence of state policies to improve the status of women and encourage them to acquire education and actively participate in commerce and other spheres of life. However, in practice, due to a complex of factors women are actively forced out of social processes. The policy pursued has no strong effect on changing social relations between men and women. (p. 121)

Besides policy initiatives aimed at improving gender equity, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has worked in collaboration with many development assistance organizations to implement projects and programmes to increase student participation, particularly that of girls, throughout the country. While discussing all such projects and programmes is beyond the scope of this study, two United Nations World Food Programme initiatives will be discussed since they were implemented in the districts where this study was conducted. The two initiatives are the school feeding programme and the Take Home Rations (THR) programme, both of which aim to provide nutritional support to students so they may stay in school and learn more effectively.

The school feeding programme enables primary school students to receive one hot meal a day. The WFP works with communities to implement this program. The following is a description of how the community implements this program:

As WFP provides only dry foods on the basis of calories, proteins and lipids, the PTAs, in conjunction with local authorities, complement the programme by providing vegetables and condiments [which WFP doesn’t give], including firewood for cooking for those schools lacking electricity. (Irin News, 2004)

The program was first implemented in 1999 in the northern region of Sughd, benefiting 5,000 students. Since that time the program expanded to an additional three regions reaching 360,000 students in four regions. These students account for approximately 60% of primary students living in rural, food insecure villages (WFP, 2012). Given the low wages teachers
receive, they are “authorised and encouraged” to also receive a daily hot meal (Irin News, 2004).

The other program, known as the Take Home Rations (THR) programme, aims to enable more girls to attend secondary school in areas where girls’ enrolment is very low. Female students who participate in this program must maintain at least an 80% attendance rate to receive food rations, consisting of wheat flour, vegetable oil, and salt, for their family. According to the WFP (2010), 40,000 girls participate in the THR programme. Reporting on the outcomes of the programme in the Rasht Valley, the World Food Program (2010) states that between 2001 and 2009 “increased the enrolment probabilities of girls aged 16 and 17 years of age by 26 percent in six districts and helped narrow the gender gap in enrolment in Grades 10 and 11” (WFP, 2012a, p. 1).

In addition to initiatives such as those just mentioned, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan responded to a significant decline in the percentage of female students in higher education by establishing a quota system in 1997 to increase access to certain higher education institutions for female students, especially those from poor rural communities. Known as the Presidential Quota, the government allocates a certain number of spaces yearly to each of the 58 administrative districts in Tajikistan for girls from rural areas. In 2006, there were 911 spaces allocated through the quota system of which 475 were for female students and 436 were for male students (UNESCO, 2008, p. 121). Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) note that, in 2008, 15 of the 34 higher education institutions have offered quota spaces to rural female students (p. 367). Most of the spaces for female students are for the study of teaching while a small percentage of female students are assigned to more prestigious areas of study such as “international relations, law, management and others” (UNESCO, 2008, p. 123).
Despite the availability of support for female students to continue on to higher education through the Presidential Quota system, the spaces are not always filled. Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) describe how, in the first decade of the quota system, 1271 of 6719 (roughly 20%) of all the quota spaces available to female students at the 15 higher education institutions were unfilled. (At the Tajik Technical University 44% of the spaces available were unfilled.) In 2007/08, 27% of the students in higher education were female, roughly the same percentage of female enrolment as in 1999 (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009). Given that female students accounted for 39% of the students in higher education in 1989, in the last years of Soviet period, female participation in higher education remains significantly lower (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009). When compared to other Central Asian former Soviet republics, Tajikistan has the lowest percentage of female enrolment in higher education (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009). The following table comparatively illustrates the percentage of female enrolment in all tertiary programmes in four of the five Central Asian countries that were former Soviet Republics. No data was available for Turkmenistan.

**Table 5: Enrolment in all tertiary programmes in Central Asian former Soviet Republics by country and by percentage of female students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Enrolment</th>
<th>Female Enrolment</th>
<th>Percentage of female students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>635,241</td>
<td>370,545</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>294,349</td>
<td>165,931</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>157,452</td>
<td>45,725</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>300,782</td>
<td>121,707</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2012

The fact that each year spaces allocated through the Presidential Quota go unfilled reflects several factors serving as barriers to rural female students taking advantage of the quota system. Cultural, societal, and religious norms serve as barriers when families value and prioritize a girl’s marriage over her formal education. These barriers are compounded by the practise of early marriage, which Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) note is becoming more
common as well as “increasing patriarchal culture and traditional stereotypes which limit women role to motherhood and home” (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009, p. 367). Families of female students who live in rural areas are often extremely reluctant, if not totally against, sending their daughter to study at a higher education institution located in an urban area. Silova and Abdushukurova (2009) note how “most higher education institutions do not have appropriate living conditions adherent to them and young women form rural areas are continuously discouraged from entering higher education institutions in urban areas” (p. 370). Families could also question the value of receiving a higher education as the female quota recipients return to their rural homes after completing their education where employment opportunities are extremely limited (UNESCO, 2008, p. 123).

If the family of a female student wanted her to attain higher education, economic factors then serve as another type of barrier to females taking advantage of the quota system. While the state provides financial assistance to each quota recipient, the amount provided is not enough to cover all the students’ living expenses. Since Presidential Quota recipients are female students from poor rural families, their parents and families often cannot provide the additional money required to enable the students to complete their higher education (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).

Despite all the barriers just mentioned some rural female students go on to higher education through the Presidential Quota system, with some attending higher education institutions without having to pass entrance exams. Since, as noted earlier, the quality of education at rural schools is very low, some of these students did not have sufficient academic knowledge, skills and abilities to succeed and, as a result, dropped out (Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009).
Discussing issues related to attendance and retention in schools in Tajikistan, Baschieri and Falkingham (2009) argue that, given the complex and multifaceted nature of factors that influence children’s school attendance, “policies to increase school attendance in Tajikistan need to focus on individual-, family- and community-level interventions” (p. 217). Efforts to improve girls’ schooling include policy initiatives at the state level as well as many school- and community-based interventions such as the WFP school feeding programme at the primary level, the WFP Take Home Rations Program at the secondary level and the Presidential Quota system at the tertiary level. Many other initiatives have been and continue to be implemented through various NGO projects to improve girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities including the GEP, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Summary

In this chapter, I historically traced issues regarding gender and education in Tajikistan beginning with the Pre-Soviet era when education was informal. During this period, mothers taught their daughters the skills necessary for daily life as did fathers to sons. As elsewhere in the world, religious education was the first formal system of schooling in Tajikistan and was accessible to upper class boys and girls.

Once Tajikistan became part of the Soviet Union in 1924, the Soviet leadership sought to educate the entire population through literacy campaigns and a formal school system, including universal primary education. In the process they also sought to emancipate girls and women from cultural and religious norms regarding their place in society. Increasing girls’ and women’s participation at all levels of education was believed to be part of the emancipation process. Attempts to change the cultural and religious norms regarding girls and women were resisted and challenged.
Independence in 1991 marked the start of another historic period for Tajikistan, followed almost immediately by a five-year civil war. A severe economic decline coupled with destruction during the civil war resulted in the deterioration of the well-developed, well-resourced education system built up during the Soviet period. Since 1991 there has been increasing gender disparities in the education system that become more acute at the secondary and post-secondary level, revealing growing educational disadvantages for female students from rural communities, especially those from religiously conservative rural communities. Recognizing the need to address these gender disparities, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has undertaken efforts to improve educational opportunities and experiences for girls and women through policy initiatives as well as through collaborating on implementing projects and programmes at the school level.

In the following chapter, I discuss theoretical perspectives on education and gender and explore how education, through formal schooling, can be understood to be a means of maintaining as well as challenging the status quo. I also introduce the key theoretical concepts that I used to construct the conceptual framework for this study, which I present in Chapter 4.
Introduction

As noted in Chapter 1, this study explores the schooling of rural girls in six communities in Tajikistan with a focus on factors affecting their secondary school opportunities and experiences as well as efforts to address barriers to schooling through the Girls’ Education Project. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical literature from which I derive the conceptual framework for this study. My conceptual framework draws from two sets of theories relating to the role and function of formal schooling in society: theories of social reproduction which position schooling predominantly as a tool for reproducing the status quo and theories of empowerment which position schooling predominantly as a tool for changing the status quo. Theories of social reproduction and schooling are largely situated within the field of sociology of education while theories of empowerment and schooling are within the field of international development and education.

These two sets of theories provide a foundation on which to understand better the tensions and complexities inherent in a study, such as this one, exploring efforts to increase the girls’ educational opportunities. Elements from both these sets of theories informed my research process, from what I chose to research as well as how and why I researched it. Furthermore, policy makers, aid agencies and project implementers in the development field base their work on the elements within these theories that they believe provide the best pathways to resolve targeted issues.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss concepts within theories of social reproduction, specifically those relating to the role of formal schooling in reproducing and reinforcing existing social hierarchies. I also discuss how gender is situated (or
not situated) within these theories. In the second section, I contrast these concepts to concepts within theories of empowerment, specifically focusing on those relating to “education for empowerment”, the dominant development discourse advocating for improved educational equality (sameness) and equity (fairness) for girls and women in developing and low-income countries. In the third section, I discuss how issues relating to girls’ and women’s education in developing and low-income countries have been theorized. (Concepts from these three sections have been incorporated into my conceptual framework, presented in Chapter 4.)

Since the social, cultural, and economic events of a given time period greatly influence how theories emerge and develop (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989), I discuss both sets of theories within their historical contexts, noting the critiques that, in some cases, led to the development of alternative theoretical perspectives. In the next section, I trace the development of theories of social reproduction and the role of formal schooling from the early 1900s to present day.

**Education as a means of social reproduction (Social Reproduction Theories)**

The idea that education systems, through formal schooling, serve to reproduce existing social hierarchies, norms, and beliefs was articulated initially in the early 1900s by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Understanding that society was structured with interrelated parts, Durkheim understood formal schooling to be an entity functioning in relation to all other entities in society rather than in isolation from all other entities. Durkheim (1911/1956) theorized that “education, far from having as its unique or principal object the individual and his interests, is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence” (p. 123). He believed that, through schooling, young children and youth were systematically socialized to fit into society by being taught how to behave “appropriately” and what they should value. Durkheim understood schooling to be an institutional mechanisms ensuring societal stability. In this way, schooling was understood to serve society in a positive manner.
Durkheim’s perspective reflects what came to be known theoretically as structural functionalism.

The structural functionalist approach dominated the field of sociology of education in the 1950s (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). Structural functionalism is predicated on the notion that a) all entities (parts) of society function in a state of balance or equilibrium, b) that some groups of people are more advantaged than others based on “a given distribution of social and economic privileges and burdens,” and that c) this distribution of “privileges and burdens will be most stable if each person accepts his share willingly and if the ideas and actions of each are in conformity with his place in society” (Lipset & Bendix, 1953, p. 12). (The writings of Durkheim as well as of Lipset and Bendix reflects the male-oriented language and embedded assumptions of the 1950s and earlier.)

Addressing the place of change within society from a structural functionalist perspective, Lipset and Bendix (1953) note how the “distribution of social and economic privileges and burdens do not change or change so slowly that” equilibrium is maintained (p. 12). Equilibrium requires everyone to willingly accept their place in society and function accordingly, regardless of the degree of (dis)advantage they are “given” (p.12).

The role and function of schooling from a structural functionalist perspective is to reproduce and reinforce existing socially stratified structures so that equilibrium continues to be maintained. Children from different social groups are “given” (or not “given”) different educational opportunities based on widely-held societal expectations of what their future life will and should entail. These expectations then determine the type and level of skills, knowledge, and attitudes each child needs to acquire through formal schooling to live their lives.

In the mid-1970s, economists Bowles and Gintis (1976) contributed to the development of social reproduction theories through a neo-Marxist critique of structural functionalism in their
book *Schooling in Capitalist America*, which Arnot (2002) asserts is “one of the most significant and ground-breaking texts within the sociology of education in the post-war period” (p. 200). As neo-Marxists, Bowles and Ginitis (1976) argue that “the prevailing degrees of economic inequality [in society] are defined primarily by the market, property and power relationships which define the capitalist system” (p.11). The relationship between the economy and the education system is the central focus of a neo-Marxist perspective on the role and function of schooling. While structural functionalists argue that the education system ensures social stability, neo-Marxists argue that the education system in a capitalist economy perpetuates social relations whereby those who own the means of production are greatly advantaged over those who do not, resulting in conflict.

Through a structure of differentiated educational streams, education systems result in students being selected and/or sorted into education programs that prepare them for certain types of work and careers. School structures and practices correspond to, respond to, and reflect workplace structures and practices. The role and function of schooling is to maintain existing societal inequalities. In this way,

> schools foster legitimate inequality through the ostensibly meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students and allocate them to distinct positions in the occupational hierarchy. They create and reinforce patterns of social class, racial and sexual identification among students which allows them to relate “properly” to their eventual standing in the hierarchy of authority and statues in the production process. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.11)

Although writing about “Capitalist America,” Bowles and Gintis (1976) posit that, at the time, the fundamental issues related to economic inequality in America also held true for the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Despite private ownership of the means of production having been abolished in these socialist countries, “relationships of economic control, dominance, and subordination characteristic of capitalism” (p. 266) were being replicated. These economic relations then affected the education systems of these socialist
countries in the same way it affected the education systems of capitalist countries, such as America.

In response to neo-Marxists’ perspectives on schooling and social reproduction, Carnoy and Levin (1985) argue that schools do more than just reproduce unequal class relations. According to Carnoy and Levin (1985), a neo-Marxist structural functionalist would argue that, “schools [in industrialized societies] merely develop the skills and attitudes needed in work; as work requirements change so do schooling practices and even the whole structure of education” (p. 3) whereas “more traditional societies have no need for school because the family, church, community and workplace are perfectly capable of preparing the young for adult roles” (p. 19).

Carnoy and Levin (1985) posit that Bowles and Gintis failed to “account for the contradictory trends towards equality and democracy in education, trends that were especially prominent in the 1960s and 1970s” (p.22). As a result of the pressure caused by the social movements in the 1960s and 1970s that advocated for greater equality in educational opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, gender and socio-economic status, “these movements have pressured schools to pursue egalitarian outcomes, even when they are not consistent with the priorities of the workplace or of taxpayers” (Carnoy & Levin, 1985, p. 150).

Carnoy and Levin (1985) argue that school structures and practices do not simply mirror those of the workplace and highlight a fundamental difference in expectations regarding “what schools are expected to do for the poor and discriminated against and what the economy is supposed to do for them” (p. 150). According to Carnoy and Levin (1985), “schools do more than other institutions in the way of providing equal opportunities for participation and rewards” (p.1) and are “the most important institution for families seeking social mobility for their children” (p. 150).
Bowles and Gintis (2002) respond to critiques, such as those argued by Carnoy and Levin (1985), by reformulating aspects of socialization theory presented in *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Bowles and Gintis (2002) explain how societal values and cultural traits are transmitted from one generation to the next from parent to child (known as vertical transmission) as well as from people in the prior generation to young people (known as oblique transmission). An example of the latter is how school children acquire societal values and cultural traits from their teachers. Parents and teachers may transmit societal values and cultural traits that are the same or that differ. Bowles and Gintis (2002) describe how this can play out for school children:

Confining attention to a single trait, suppose the teacher has the same trait as the parents. Then the youth is assumed to retain the trait. But if the parents and the teacher have different traits, the youth considers which one to adopt, surveying the experiences of those he knows (his classmates) for guidance in making the switch. (p.13)

School systems can promote societal values and cultural traits “that would not otherwise proliferate” (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 13). In this way, the school system is not simply reproducing the status quo but “can also promote traits that are advantageous to one group (the group determining the structure of schooling)” (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 13). Bowles and Gintis (2002) describe the implications of this transmission process as follows: “In the absence of the oblique transmission of the disadvantaged cultural form, the advantaged cultural form always drives out the disadvantaged form” (p. 14).

While the work of Bowles and Gintis has significantly influenced the development of theories of social reproduction and education, so too has the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu explored how power relations function and are reproduced within society through schooling. When considering the role of formal schooling within society, Bourdieu (1986) criticizes human capital theorists who view rates of return on educational investments
solely in economic terms, particularly on how the returns affect national economic productivity. (A detailed discussion of Human Capital theory is presented in the following section on development theories.) Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) argue that, in addition to a student’s aptitude, social dynamics and power relations, both in the structure and practices of schooling, significantly affect a students’ achievement (or lack of achievement).

Bourdieu’s analysis of social reproduction consists of three central concepts – social fields, habitus, and capital (economic, social, and cultural). A social field is a social setting or arena in which individuals interact. Social fields include the family, school, church, mosque, and community. Bourdieu (1972/1977) notes how experiences within various social fields shape how individuals, referred to as “agents”, understand the workings of the social world as well as their place within it. (Several of the key concepts used in this study are drawn from Bourdieu’s work and are detailed in the conceptual framework presented in the following chapter.)

Bourdieu (1972/1977) defines \textit{habitus} as “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experience, functions at every moment as a \textit{matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions}” (p. 82-83). In other words, habitus refers to one’s worldview which affects and shapes one’s actions or “practice” and behaviours in any given moment.

Bourdieu (1972/1977, 1986) broadens the meaning of \textit{capital}, commonly thought of solely in economic terms, to include \textit{cultural capital} and \textit{social capital}. Like economic capital, cultural capital and social capital can be accumulated through transmission and converted, in certain conditions, into a type of gain or “profit.” However, unlike economic capital, which in the form of money is a concrete form of capital, cultural capital and social capital are abstract forms of capital that Bourdieu (1986) classifies as \textit{symbolic capital} (p. 245).

Cultural capital is accumulated by individuals unconsciously through their interactions within various social fields. For Bourdieu (1986), the family, as a social field, plays the most
important role in transmitting cultural capital. Individuals from privileged backgrounds accumulate more cultural capital through their family interactions and social networks than individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The transmission process depends on the degree of cultural capital “embodied” in the family. For example, this process includes how much (or how little) time a family determines is appropriate for a child to go to school, to do their homework, etc. Bourdieu (1986) argues that “the transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital” (p. 246). Cultural capital accumulated by individuals from privileged backgrounds benefits them when they are in school.

Bourdieu (1986) understands educational qualifications to be an institutional form of cultural capital. He notes that “academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 187). As with economic capital, Bourdieu (1986) points out that scarcity also increases the value of educational qualifications as a form of cultural capital, since different levels of schooling are perceived to have different levels of social value depending on the percentage of individuals within society who attain that qualification. For example, if only a small percentage of the population acquires a university degree, then a university degree is understood by many to be of greater value than a secondary school degree. As a result, those who acquire a university degree are more likely to have a greater chance of social mobility and improving the quality of their life.

Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as follows:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital. (pp. 248-249)

Thus, being a member of a particular family, class, ethnic group, political party or attending a particular school all confer an individual with a certain degree of social capital, with some
groups and/or social networks having more social capital than others. Those groups considered most prestigious enable its members to accumulate a much higher degree of social capital than members of lower status groups. In this way, the degree to which an individual “profits” in society, in terms of social capital, depends on the status of the social networks or connections one has because they are a member of a particular group.

Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) belief in the constraining and determining effects of societal structures on individuals (or agents) is evident when he states “the agents’ aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product” (p.166). Bourdieu (1972/1977) refers to the world of realized ought-to-be, in which things are what they are only because they are what they ought to be, in which an agent can have at one and the same time the feeling that there is nothing to do except what he is doing and also that he is only doing what he ought. (p.166)

Several scholars have criticized Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory, particularly his works published in English in the 1970s, for his heavy emphasis on the determining influence of social structures on an individual’s agency. Bourdieu’s critics question his heavily deterministic understandings of the effects of societal norms, values and expectations espoused through various social structures, such as the family, school, church, and community, on how an individual perceives themselves, behaves and acts (Connell et al., 1982; Moi, 1991). Arnot (2002) argues that without grappling with issues of social conflict and change the social reproduction theories of the 1970s “were vulnerable to the charge of excessive functionalism and of economic determinism, of setting up a far too simple and mono-causal account of schooling” (p.7).

The significance of Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory on the field of sociology and sociology of education in the 1970s is exemplified by the large number of critiques of his work, which began to be voiced in the 1980s. I argue that the critiques of Bourdieu’s social
reproduction theory can be classified into two categories: the way he conceptualizes
determinism and/or change and his failure to address gender considerations.

Critiquing Bourdieu’s apparent determinism, Connell et al. (1982) criticize Bourdieu’s
emphasis of the importance of a child’s cultural capital as the determining factor of her or his
success in school, that the student is “the bearer of cultural capital, a bundle of abilities,
knowledges and attitudes furnished by the parents” (p. 188). Connell et al. (1982) believe “what
children actually bring to school is their relationship to their parents’ educational experiences
and strategies; and that relationship may involve rejection, ambivalence, misunderstanding or
selection as much as endorsement or duplication” (p. 188). Moi (1991) asks “Are Bourdieu’s
theories, with their insistence on the way social agents internalize dominant social values,
capable of theorizing change? Is Bourdieu implying that social power structures always win
out?” (p. 1020). Arnot (2002) notes that, without apparent concern for social conflict and
change, these theories of social reproduction failed to capture of the complexities and
contradictions of the relationships between social structures and individual agency. According to
Reay (2007), “Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital has been heavily criticized for producing
the working-class as passive, even “culture less” (p.25) and that “one of the main limitations of
cultural capital theories is an inability to explain working-class educational success” (p. 25).

Scholars also questioned the place of gender considerations (or lack of gender
considerations) within his work. Moi (1991) comments that gender issues were “somewhat
undertheorized” (p. 1020) in Bourdieu’s work. Adkins (2005) points out that social theory “had
relatively little to say about women and gender” (p. 3). Addressing notions of reproduction and
disruptions of reproduction, Acker (1987) points out, for those working within educational
institutions who seek to foster more equitable educational opportunities and experiences for
students, especially female students, “the tension between education-as-reproductive and
education-as-liberating is encountered daily” (p. 432). Acker (1987) draws attention to a dilemma within educational theory regarding the relationship between structure and agency when she asks “should women be seen as immobilised by reproductive social and economic structures, by tradition-bound institutions, by discrimination, by men? Or are they active agents, struggling to control and change their lives” (p. 432). (Also see Acker, 2010.)

As a result of critiques of the work of Bourdieu and other theorists, Dillabough (2003, 2006) notes the emergence of feminist reproduction theory in the 1980s. Dillabough (2006) notes how feminist educational scholars “highlighted larger macro-questions of structure and their role in shaping gender relations as historically grounded sets of gender relations and codes” (p.49).

In the 1990s Bourdieu responded to both categories of criticisms. In the Preface to the second edition of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977/1990) Reproduction in education, society and culture, Bourdieu responds to the criticism that his work is too deterministic. Recognizing that the language in Reproduction in education, society and culture “did at times reach peaks of density and difficulty,” Bourdieu (1977/1990) argues that many readers, “advocates and adversaries like,” have misinterpreted the thesis presented, through “extraordinary simplification - if not outright distortion” (p. vii). Bourdieu (1977/1990) states that they have reduced an involved analysis of the extremely sophisticated mechanisms by which the school system contributes to reproducing the structure of the distribution of cultural capital and, through it, the social structure….to the ahistorical view that society reproduces itself mechanically, identical to itself, without transformation or deformation, and by excluding all individual mobility. It was no doubt easier, once this mutilation had been effected, to charge the theory with being unable to accommodate change or to take it to task for ignoring the resistance of the dominated. (pp. vii-viii)

To reduce misinterpreting the thesis presented, Bourdieu (1990) calls for readers of Reproduction in education, society and culture to also read the empirical research on which it is
based as well as to read his other works on social reproduction, especially *Outline of a theory of practice* (1972/1977) (p. vii).

In the late 1990s, Bourdieu (1998/2001) wrote *Masculine Domination* as a response to criticisms that he failed to address gender issues in his early work as well as the high level of determinism understood to be in his work (lack of change). In the Preface to the English edition of *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (1998/2001) notes how this work “addresses explicitly a question that is obsessively raised by most commentators (and most of my critics) – that of (observed or desired) permanence or change in the sexual order” (p. vii). He also notes that “in some of my earliest work…I tried to show how the educational system helps to reproduce differences not only between social categories but also between the sexes” (Bourdieu, 1998/2001, p. 83).

Writing broadly about the place of patriarchy in society, Bourdieu (1998/2001), notes the following:

The division between the sexes appears to be ‘in the order of thing’, as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural, to the point of being invisible: it is present both – in the objectified state – in things (in the house, for example, every part of which is ‘sexed’), in the whole social world, and - in the embodied state – in the habitus of the agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action. (p.8)

When discussing institutional factors of the reproduction of gender divisions within society, Bourdieu (1998/2001) argues that three main institutional “agencies” (the family, the church and the school) have historically “transmitted” to individuals implicit assumptions of male superiority and female inferiority, reproducing and reinforcing these assumptions, and shaping an individual’s habitus or worldview of themselves and how they fit into society. Of the three agencies, Bourdieu (1998/2001) recognizes the family as playing the most important role when he states that,
the work of reproduction was performed, until a recent period, by three main agencies, the family, the church and the educational system, which were objectively orchestrated and had in common the fact that they acted on unconscious structures. The family undoubtedly played the most important part in the reproduction of masculine domination and the masculine vision; it is here that early experience of the sexual division of labour and the legitimate representation of that division, guaranteed by law and inscribed in language, imposes itself. As for the church, pervaded by the deep-seated anti-feminism of a clergy that was quick to condemn all female offences against decency, especially in matters of attire, and was the authorized reproducer of a pessimistic vision of women and womanhood, it explicitly inculcates (or used to inculcate) a familialist morality, entirely dominated by patriarchal values, with, in particular, the dogma of the radical inferiority of women .... Finally, the educational system, even when it had freed itself from the grip of the church, continued to transmit the presuppositions of the patriarchal representation. (pp. 85-86)

Bourdieu (1998/2001) notes how the process of schooling reproduces, reinforces, and normalizes dominant societal norms, beliefs, and practices regarding women and men, girls and boys. Greatly influenced by their schooling experiences, girls (and boys) internalize the dominant societal norms, beliefs, and practices which affects their habitus (ideas about their current and future place in the world). Bourdieu (1998/2001) notes that

through the experience of a ‘sexually’ ordered social order and the explicit reminders addressed to them by parents, teachers and peers, themselves endowed with principles of vision acquired in similar experiences of the world, girls internalize, in the form of schemes of perceptions and appreciations not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural and in a sense to anticipate their destiny, refusing the courses or careers from which they are anyway excluded and rushing towards those for which they are in any case destined. The constancy of habitus that results from this is thus one of the most important factors in the relative constancy of the structure of the sexual division of labour. (p. 95)

In addition to Bourdieu, other scholars within the field of the sociology of education have recognized the dual, contrary role of formal schooling. Many have explored the tension in understanding schooling both as a means of social reproduction as well as a means for change (Acker, 1987; Apple, 1982; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Connell et al., 1982; Farrell, 2003; Fox, 2003; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006; Lipset & Bendix, 1953; Phillips &
Schweisfurth, 2006; Reay, 2010; Thomson, 2010; Weis 2010). Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey (2006) posit that “the main question is whether education can be a source of progressive change or whether it must inevitably reflect and reproduce existing ways of thinking, doing and dividing the spoils” (p.6).

Having discussed theories of social reproduction and education, with a focus on how schooling is predominantly understood to be a means of reinforcing and reproducing the status quo, I now review theories of empowerment and education. As mentioned earlier, theories of empowerment and education pertaining to low-income or developing countries are situated within the field of international development, with increasing emphasis on girls’ and women’s education as a tool for liberation and social change. (In addition to the use of concepts from Bourdieu’s work, several concepts from the work of some empowerment theorists are also incorporated into this study’s conceptual framework.)

**Education as a means of social change (Empowerment Theories)**

Within the field of international development, empowerment theories came to prominence in the mid-1980s. They emerged and developed as a result of critiques of dominant theoretical approaches of the time, particularly modernization theory and human capital theory. (Modernization and human capital theories continue to greatly influence the ways education, gender and development are conceptualized.)

Empowerment theories within the field of international development need to be understood within the context in which they emerged and developed. In this section I first briefly discuss the modernization theory of development (as well as its variant, human capital theory) which serves as the foundational theory from which other approaches regarding women, education, and development emerged, developed and became dominant. These approaches are Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and
Development (GAD). The similarities in these three names reflect “cross-fertilization” that has taken place over time between these approaches (Visvanathan, 1997, p. 17) and exposes overlaps (Young, 1997; Unterhalter, 2005). The overlap between empowerment theory and GAD is illustrated by the fact that GAD has been referred to as the “empowerment approach” (Connelly et al., 2000, p. 62). Integral to each of these approaches is the role and function of education, in the form of schooling, as a development tool. The final section details empowerment theories.

Modernization theory and Human Capital theory

Modernization theory of development emerged in the 1930s (Parpart, Connelly & Barritteau, 2000) and dominated the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s during which time it was largely unquestioned (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989). Considered a classical development framework, modernization theory is based on a liberal neo-classical economic growth model (Kabeer, 1994) which also emphasizes sociological factors such as values and attitudes. Integral to the modernization of a country’s economy is “the decline of the economic importance of farmland and the rise of human capital skills and knowledge” (Schultz, 1980, p. 642, as cited in Fägerlind & Saha, 1989, p.48). According to this theory, an economically poor country will become “developed” economically and socially by establishing “modern” institutions, implementing “modern” practices and adopting “modern” values, with “modern” being synonymous with “Western”.

Development, within modernization theory, is understood to be “an evolutionary, unilinear process of change which [takes] societies from their pre-modern status through a series of stages towards the final destination of modernity” (Kabeer, 1994, p.16). Pre-modern societies, with an agrarian economy, become modernized economically through becoming industrialized. Urbanization is integral to the process of industrialization (Reddock, 2000).
Through this process, an economically poor country sheds its “backwardness” and moves along the development path. Thus the process of industrialization is a critical component of modernization theory. From this perspective, it is believed that, through industrialization, conditions will improve for all individuals within society (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989), “trickling down” to the poorest people and improving their lives. Education was understood to be critical to the process of industrialization, and thus modernization, as it requires the population to learn and master new skills and knowledge driven by demands of industry and the marketplace.

An important variant of the modernization theory of development is human capital theory, developed by economists Schultz (1961), Denison (1962), and Becker (1964) (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989). According to this theory, development occurs as the “human capital,” the population, improves itself through educational attainment. Within human capital theory, education is considered “a tool that provides the skills necessary to charge the ‘engine’ of development” (Bloch & Vavrus, 1998, pp.8-9). Existing societal inequalities are believed to be a result of natural selection whereby “individuals attain as much as they are inherently capable of on the basis of merit, without considering such factors as race, class, or gender” (Bloch & Vavrus, 1998, p.9). Thus, it is assumed that as a population becomes more economically productive and markets grow, enrolment in formal schooling will expand, and more and more people will go to school as well as attain higher levels of schooling. In addition to acquiring valuable knowledge and skills, research from the 1960s and early 1970s provided evidence that students also acquired values, beliefs, and attitudes considered “modern” (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989, p.52).

As a component of modernization (and human capital theory), economic returns from governmental investment in education have been studied since the late 1950s (Psacharopoulos, 2002). Evidence from these studies has been and continues to be used to illustrate how
profitable government investments are within the education system. By comparing returns on investment, investments in one level within the education system are determined to produce greater returns than investments in another level.

Human capital theory was the largely unquestioned dominant development discourse into the 1970s. As a result, human capital theory greatly influenced the work of international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989, p.48).

Within modernization theory, since women play a central role in childbirth, it made sense that they “specialize in domestic labour, which was compatible with this role, while men specialized in full-time production for the market” (Kabeer, 1994, p. 17). Women were linked to traditional life (Reddock, 2000). Women were considered solely in terms of their reproductive role, confined to the private sphere within society. Thus, prior to the 1970s, throughout the world (with notable exceptions), girls and women were predominantly understood in policy terms to be within the private sphere of the home, economically dependent on their fathers or husbands. Consequently, it was thought that women did not have a role to play in the formal economy.

During the United Nations (UN) First Development Decade, from 1961 to 1970, only the role of men in development was considered. Development projects were designed to provide men with training opportunities since men were understood to be heads of households and thus of utmost importance while women were excluded from such opportunities (Kabeer, 1994). As evidence of women’s invisibility, Kabeer (1994) notes that the UN First Development Decade policy statement did not contain any specific references to women. Kabeer (1994) sums up the approach to development during this period as being “about men, by men and for men” (p. xi).
Answers to educational questions such as who should go to school and who should access certain levels and types of education always reflect the widely-held beliefs and theories of the day in any context. Historically, access to formal schooling has been restricted to a small percentage of the population in countries throughout the world (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989), with educating the male population most often of utmost importance. For example, this notion was also evident in colonial education policies, as formal schooling was largely restricted to boys. During this period, it was assumed that girls would acquire all the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes at home from their mothers and other female family members (see Janigan, 2002, for the example of colonial Eritrea).

During the 1960s and 1970s, various significant events alongside an increase in awareness of gender discrimination led to challenges and critiques of the expected outcomes of modernization theory, leading to the emergence, development, and rise of other theoretical approaches. Evaluations of projects and initiatives implemented during the Decade of Development revealed how the intended economic “trickle-down” effect of industrialization had not improved the life circumstances of the poor and women in developing countries and had, in fact, worsened their conditions. In this same time period, various social movements, namely civil-rights, black-power, and women’s movements in North America and the liberation struggles in the “Third World”, were also gathering momentum (Maquire 1984, cited in Kabeer, 1994, p.2). Leach (1998, 2003) contends the increasing concern about women in the “Third World” at this time was a global extension of the impact of the women’s movement. This awareness and concern about the lives of women in the “Third World” led to the creation of the Woman in Development approach within the field of international development.
Women in Development (WID) approach

The Women in Development (WID) approach emerged in the early 1970s. In addition to the effects of the above mentioned social movements and liberation struggles, the origin of this perspective has also been attributed to the influential research of Ester Boserup, a Danish agricultural economist, who in her book, *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970), provided statistical evidence that women throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America were far more involved in and central to economic activities than had been previously understood (Beneria & Sen, 1997; Fagerlind & Saha, 1989; Goetz, 1998; Jackson & Pearson, 1998; Kabeer, 1994; Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Moser, 1993; Parpart, Connelly & Barritteau, 2000; Unterhalter, 2005).

Boserup (1970) not only documented how women performed productive as well as reproductive roles, she also exposed the “regressive impact of development” for women (Visvanathan, 1997, p. 17). Men, considered the labour force, were the target of the development projects and as such were given training and educational opportunities while women were excluded.

For Boserup (1970), the education of girls and women was of great importance as outlined in the final chapter of her book, titled “The Design of Female Education.” Along with policy recommendations, Boserup (1970) notes how “women’s way to employment in the modern sector is barred not only by women’s prejudices, but also by their lack of proper qualifications” (p.212). Thus educational attainment for girls and women would lead to their employment in the modern economy accelerating economic growth at a far higher rate than if they were excluded (Boserup, 1970).

According to Connelly, Li, MacDonald and Parpart (2000), the WID approach “represents a merging of modernization and liberal-feminist theories.” It is assumed under
modernization and human capital theory that as access to education becomes equalized for all, individual achievement, competition and merit will reduce the socio-economic differences between women and men as well as other marginalized groups such as people of differing ethnicities (Mickelson, Nkomo & Smith, 2001). Coupled with the assumption that a growing market would provide job opportunities for educated women, women would then become integrated into a modern public life (Mickelson, Nkomo & Smith, 2001). Through this process, incremental changes to societal norms and practices would occur gradually and peacefully (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989) resulting in greater equality for women.

During the 1970s, large-scale educational studies were, for the first time, exposing educational inequalities. (Prior to the 1970s, Leach (1998) argues it was assumed that males and females had equal access to all levels of education and benefited equally from the education they received.) Fägerlind and Saha (1989) note “that girls were falling behind boys on all three indicators of educational participation: access (numbers enrolling), retention (length of time spent in school), and achievement (exams passes, especially in maths and science)” (as cited in Leach 1998, p.10).

Educational studies in the 1970s primarily focused on access to schooling (Stromquist, 2003). Research studies provided evidence that “the determinants of women’s access to education are not the same as those for men” (Kelly, 1984, p.81). Kelly (1984) stated that the single best predictor of whether girls will attend school is not ethnicity, social class background, religion, demand for educated manpower, or the states of the nation’s economic development - though all these may contribute - but rather whether schooling is made available and accessible to women. (p. 82)

In the mid-1970s and into the 1980s, critiques of the WID approach led to the development of an alternative approach called Women and Development.
**Women and Development (WAD) approach**

Critiques of the WID approach by women on the political Left in the mid-1970s and 1980s resulted in the emergence of an alternative theoretical approach known as Women and Development (WAD) (Arnot & Fennell, 2007; Jackson & Pearson, 1998; Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Peet, 1999; Rathgeber, 1990; Visvanathan, 1997). Visvanathan (1997) points out that there are disagreements amongst feminist historians as to the origins of WAD perspective. Some, such as Tinker (1990), attribute its emergence to the influential role played by the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the US women’s movement where others, such as Snyder and Tadesse (1995), attribute its emergence to the influential role of anti-colonial and liberation struggles in Africa.

The WAD approach posited that society consists of “a constantly changing system that manifests dissension and conflict at all points” (Bock, 1982, p.83). The dominant social group, termed within Marxism as the oppressor, holds the most power and is highly influential in ensuring that their needs and interests are paramount. The oppressor facilitates the growth of the economy to its benefit and at the expense of the exploited masses. Whereas advocates of WID proposed that women be integrated into the development process, advocates of WAD recognized that women have always played a role in development and that the development process had not only failed to improve the living conditions of women in developing countries but had, in fact, worsened their living conditions (Peet, 1999). The WAD approach stressed that both “men and women must contribute to and benefit from development efforts” (Parpart, 2000, p. 35). Rather than simply adding women to the development process (as suggested by the WID approach), policy makers and project implementers needed to examine critically structures, institutions, and practices to determine who was setting agendas, for what purposes, and for
whose benefit. According to this perspective, equality and equity for girls and women could only be enhanced through structural change.

Visvanathan (1997) critiques the WAD approach for its failure to question how gender roles and relations affect women’s marginalized position in society. (WAD is based on the assumption that women’s position within society would improve as structures become more equitable.)

Critiques of the WID approach made by women from the “Global South” also played an influential role in the debates within the field of international development in the mid-1970s and 1980s (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007). On the basis of their post-colonial analysis, these women critiqued WID as a theory of development based on Western ideals which “do not translate to the contexts of the Global South” (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007, p. 201). In contrast to the ‘top-down’ orientation of WID, these women called for a “bottom-up” approach that would increase the involvement of women’s grassroots networks and research institutes in the Global South producing research “by and for women” (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007, p. 201). Moreover, in its ‘top-down’ approach, WID was criticized for ignoring indigenous knowledge (Connelly, Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000).

The need to consider how issues of race, class, sex and religion, among others, affected the multiple identities of women was argued by both women from the Global South and women of colour and minority women in the Global North (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007). Consideration of the multiple identities of women is critical as they affect gender relations within institutions and between men and women daily (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007). The term gender relations refers to the way social processes create and sustain differences in the positions held by men and women within societies (Razavi & Miller, 1995). Connelly (2000) notes how “feminist scholars in the South have become increasingly vocal about the need for
studies to give voice to the complex, diverse and multilayered realities of Third World women” (p. 93). Women from the “Global South” challenged the practice of essentializing “third-world woman” and “development” (Marchand & Parpart 1995; Mohanty 1988, Spivak 1999).

Despite critiques of the WID approach since the 1970s, Connelly, Li, MacDonald and Parpart (2000) contend that “the WID perspective has enhanced our understanding of women’s development needs, particularly the need to improve statistical measures of women’s work and to provide women with more opportunities for education and employment” (Overholt et al., 1984, as cited in Connelly, Li, MacDonald and Parpart, 2000, p. 58). Uterhalter (2005) points out that WID was “successful generating simple messages and clear policy directives” (p. 26). Rathgeber and Motzafi-Haller (2007) argue that the importance and influence of the WID approach is evident because “it continues to this day to be the primary approach used to insert women and women’s interest into mainstream development work” (p. 240). Describing how WID advocates sought to operationalize their approach into practice by development agencies, Razari and Miller (1995) note that

WID advocates found that it was more effective if demands for social justice and equity for women were strategically linked to mainstream development concerns. Arguments for equity tend to be more powerful and persuasive if they are combined with the pursuit of some overarching goals from which a large majority of people may gain. (p.6)

Both the critiques of the dominant development discourse from women from the Global South and the Left arose out of the recognition that women’s lives in developing countries had not improve as anticipated, despite the development efforts based on the WID approach, and that women remained marginalized within the mainstream of development. These critiques, in turn, greatly influenced the emergence of a new theoretical perspective in the 1980s known as Gender and Development.
Gender and Development (GAD) approach and Empowerment theories

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach conceptualizes issues of gender and the gendered nature of relationships as central and fundamental to women’s subordination (Unterhalter, 2005). Whereas WID and WAD focus on women as the main category, the GAD perspective utilizes gendered relationships between women and men as the main category of analysis. Rather than “adding women” to the development process, the GAD approach calls for policy makers and project implementers to rethink development concepts and practice placing gender relations and issues at the center.

GAD takes an holistic approach to the workings of society and questions how structures and processes serve to disadvantage women (Peet, 1999; Young, 1997). Peet (1999) contends that “disadvantage came from the globally pervasive ideology of male superiority: men have power and control over women” (p. 187). Young (1997) points out that this approach “does not assume men are aware of the social bases of male dominance or that all men actively promote male dominance” (p. 51) but “it does assume that male privilege makes most men unlikely to ally themselves to the cause of women’s advancement without a powerful persuasion” (p. 52).

Within the WID and WAD approaches, women’s exclusion from the market (and thus access to cash income) was the fundamental reason for their subordinate position within many societies. Missing from these approaches was a questioning of how the functioning of gender relations serves to restrict women’s access to the market in the first place (Razavi & Miller, 1995). In contrast, gendered roles and the division of labour are conceptualized within the GAD approach as the fundamental reason for women’s subordination (Molyneux, 1985). Gender roles within any society are based on and “shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants” (Arnott & Fennell, 2007, p. 5). Young (1997) notes that this broader consideration of women’s lives and work means that, within GAD, the state has a
necessary and critical role to play in promoting women’s emancipation in contrast to the WID approach whose proponents understood the market to play a dominant and necessary role.

Issues of multiple identities are also considered within the GAD approach. In contrast to WID and WAD, the GAD approach recognizes the need to consider the various roles women may have as daughters, wives, and mothers as well as individuals who have hopes, dreams, and aspirations other than those categorized as economic (Rathgeber, 1990, 2005; Razavi & Miller, 1995). Rather than considering women as beneficiaries of development policies and initiatives, the GAD approach considers women as active participants engaged in improving their position in society (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Connelly et al., 2000; Malhotra et al., 2002).

In terms of education, a GAD perspective broadens the concerns for girls and women from the narrow focus on access to those of the overall structure of an educational system and how it functions. Leach (1998) and Stromquist (2003) contend that the mid-1980s was a crucial period when concern for and interest in girls’ education became prominent within the international development field. Particularly influential in advancing the importance of girls’ education, the initiatives developed at the 1985 United Nations Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi included twenty-nine education-related “Forward Looking Strategies” (Leach, 1998; Stromquist, 2003). Stromquist (2003) points out that education studies in the 1980s looked further than issues of educational access for girls and women to examinations of the “determinants of these opportunities and the benefits of women’s education for society” (p.180).

**Empowerment theory**

Empowerment theory came to the forefront of the GAD approach in the mid-1980s. The popularization of the term *empowerment* within the development field has been attributed to a network of women researchers, activists, and policymakers from the economic South known as
DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) whose ideas were articulated through the work of Sen and Grown (Connelly, Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000; Visvanathan, 1997). Visvanathan (1997) contends that “empowerment represents Third World feminist writing and grass-roots organizing” (p. 20). Within this theory women are understood as agents of change within the development process, thus representing a “bottom-up” approach to development (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Definitions of the term empowerment vary. Some definitions focus on the individual and their ability to make the best of their own lives (Longwe, 1998). Definitions focusing on individual decision-making have been referred to as ‘the power to’ (Lukes, 1974). Several theorists conceptualize empowerment in broader terms (Kabeer, 1994; Lazo, 1993; Longwe, 1998). Stromquist (2002) believes empowerment comprises four elements: “the cognitive (critical understanding of one’s reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income)” (p.23). Through these four elements, Stromquist (1993) understands empowerment to be “a process to change the distribution both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society” (p. 13).

Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (p.19). She notes how “enabling factors,” in the form of critical inputs, are understood to be catalysts for empowerment. Enabling factors could also be conceptualized as “resources” (Kabeer, 2001, p.20). Kabeer (2001) describes “agency” as being “at the heart of process by which choices are made while “achievements” are the outcomes of choices (p.19).

While definitions of empowerment theories vary, Malhotra et al. (2002) point out four key central terms that overlap within these definitions: “options, choice, control and power”
Malhotra et al. (2002) also identify two essential elements of the concept of empowerment. First, empowerment is a process (Kabeer, 2001; Oxaal & Baden, 1997; Rowlands, 1994). Second, women are agents, rather than recipients, in the process of change (Mehra, 1997; Sen, 1993).

Education, in terms of formal schooling, is commonly cited and understood as a tool of empowerment for girls and women by development actors despite their diverse political and economic orientations. The prominence of this concept is illustrated as “women’s empowerment” was the central phrase of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Longwe, 1998) when the commitment to improving issues related to girls’ and women’s education was expanded upon in the Platform for Action (Stromquist, 2003). Globally, empowerment discourses have been taken up by influential international development agencies, such as the World Bank and the UN agencies. For example, by 2005, empowerment was mentioned in more than 1,800 World Bank project documents (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006).

The following are four examples of how various UN agencies position the role of education in relation to girls’ and women’s empowerment. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) understand education to be “one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process” (UNDP, International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, 1994, Paragraph 4.2). The United Nation Development Fund for Women’s (UNIFEM) publication Progress of the World’s Women (2000) states that “education is essential for improving women’s living standards and enabling women to exercise greater ‘voice’ in the decision-making in the family, the community, the place of paid work and the public arena of politics” (p. 66). The United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goal 3
illustrates how empowerment is understood to be integrally linked to education as this goal aims to promote gender equality and empower women by eliminating gender disparities in education at all levels by 2015 (United Nations, 2011). The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative [UNGEI] envisions “a world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality.” (United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative, 2012)

Given its predominant position within development discourse, many scholars have explored the usage of the term empowerment. They have found multiple interpretations of the term and that rarely is the definition of empowerment provided when used (Rowlands, 1995). Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) point out that even within one organization empowerment has been inconsistently interpreted. This blurring of the term’s definition has led to critiques such as that of Visvanathan (1997) who states that “northern population and development agencies misinterpret the term often uncritically treating education and employment as empowering instruments that lead to women’s fertility reduction” (p. 26).

Stromquist (2002) notes how, in many developing countries, access to school is understood to be empowering. However, she notes that interpreting empowerment in this way fails to consider how formal schooling can function to reproduce existing social norms, values, and expectations, reflecting the tensions between understanding education as a means to liberate vs. understanding education as a means to reproduce the status quo (Stromquist, 2002).

Based on the assumption that formal education serves as “a selective social screening mechanism, enhancing the status of some and ratifying the status of others” (Farrell, 1999, p.111), Farrell’s (1992, 1999) equality framework is designed to identify where, in any educational system, gender begins to make a difference. The framework delineates the following four aspects of equality:
1. Equality of *access* - the probabilities of children from different social groupings getting into the school system, or some particular level or portion of it.

2. Equality of *survival* - the probabilities of children from various social groupings staying in the school system to some defined level, usually the end of a complete cycle (primary, secondary, higher).

3. Equality of *output* - the probabilities that children from various social groupings will learn the same things to the same levels at a defined point in the schooling system.

4. Equality of *outcome* - the probabilities that children from various social groupings will live relatively similar lives subsequent to and as a result of schooling (have equal incomes, have jobs of roughly the same status, have equal access to positions of political power, etc.). (Farrell, 1999, p.112)

Within the school system, Leach (1998) and Stromquist (1994) call attention to the critical importance of examining curriculum and teacher training practices “because it is at these two points that messages, practices and beliefs crystallise gender ideologies” (Leach, 1998, p.15). Careful monitoring of girls’ daily experiences, including their interactions with male peers, is also required to ensure the success of girls in schooling (Stromquist, 2003).

In the 1990s, while the GAD approach came to prominence within the development field, classical liberal economic theory dominated the development discourse both in terms of policies and project implementation. There was (and continues to be) a great need to provide evidence of improvements as a result of policies and projects to justify to funders how their money was being used. Psacharopoulos (1994) notes how studies on the return on investment in education revealed that, globally, investments in primary education have “the highest social profitability” (p. 1326) and that overall, “the returns to female education are higher than those for males” (p. 1327). Using efficiency arguments (as were used in the WID approach), policy makers and project implementers justify their interventions by explaining how money will be produced or saved (Heward, 1999, p.2). Unterhalter (2005) emphasizes the influential role of the World Bank publication of King and Hill (1993) in shaping the development discourse of the 1990s as they frame the benefits of girls’ and women’s education in economic and social terms.
as they relate to the family, community, and country, referred to as an *instrumental argument*.

King and Hill (1993) note that

> the benefits of improving female education go beyond increasing individual productivity and income. When fertility decreases, population pressure eases; when a family’s health improves, life expectancy increases and the quality of life rises, not only for the family, but also for the community. (p.21)

In 1993, the World Bank’s Chief Economist also articulated this perspective when he stated that

> an educated mother faces higher opportunity cost of time spent caring for children. She has a greater value outside the house and thus has an entirely different set of choices than she would have without education. She is married at a later age and is better able to influence family decisions. She has fewer, healthier children and can insist on the development of all of them, ensuring that their daughters are given a fair chance. And the education of her daughters makes it much more likely that the next generation of girls as well as boys, will be educated and healthy as well. The vicious cycle is thus transformed into a virtuous circle. (Jeffery & Basu, 1996, cited in Heward, 1999, p.5)

There has been a great deal of criticism of the World Bank’s statements on development, which reflect an instrumental argument. Jeffery and Basu (cited in Heward, 1999) refer to the World Bank view as “education as contraception” (p. 6), believing that the education of girls and women is being used to serve child welfare and population control needs. Jackson and Pearson (1998) note that the assumption underlying the World Bank’s policies is that “education is a ‘silver bullet’ policy instrument which can reduce women’s fertility, and therefore population growth, as well as being the key to changing households’ income-generating aspirations and activities” (p. 12). Unterhalter (2005) contends that proponents of this argument believe that “education of women is for others, not for themselves” (p.18). Unterhalter (2000) as well as Fine and Rose (2001) point out that this perspective does not take into account the concerns of women themselves. Stromquist (2003) notes how the critics of the instrumental argument are calling for a “more human and anthropological conceptualizing in which women are seen not as mere economic agents but as citizens” (p.199).

Stromquist (2003) notes how
schooling presents a paradoxical situation in the process of gender transformation. Schooling is undoubtedly a major source of cultural capital, employment, and social mobility. At the same time, however, educational institutions are conservative settings that reflect the values and rule of patriarchal society. (p. 178)

Longwe (1998) contends that, without consideration of the functioning and structures of the school system and the broader societal structure on which it is based, formal education provides “schooling for women’s subordination” (p. 19). Longwe (1998) argues that women with more schooling are more indoctrinated. They have been schooled to believe in the value of schooling. They have been schooled to progress within the existing system, and not to change it. They have been schooled to believe that women get ahead by being schooled, and that women are less advanced than men because of lack of schooling. (p. 26)

Shklar (1990) notes that, without a broader focus, individuals who simply accept the social reality will either deny the existence of inequalities or assume the inequalities are the result of an individual’s misfortune rather than the result of an injustice in the social system.

Stromquist (2003) cites Gail Kelly, a “pioneer thinker” in the area of women and education in developing countries, and notes how she “admonished us to not only understand how education of women can improve society but how education can improve the lives of women themselves” (p. 180). Referring to the gendered nature of formal education which impacts differently on girls and boys, Stromquist (2003) points out that “more evidence has been accumulated to demonstrate the pervasive nature of these conditions and their existence despite variations in social class and ethnicity” (p. 182). Leach (1998) believes it is necessary to address the causes of the gender gap itself.

During the 1990s, while the instrumental argument for girls’ education was dominant in the development discourse, a theoretical perspective known as “Education as a Human Right” gained prominence in regards to girls’ education, led by the work of UN agencies.
Education as a human right

Although education for girls and women was articulated as a human right in several global human rights treaties beginning with the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, Heward (1999) notes how, in the 1990s, UN agencies such as UNDP and the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) sought “to broaden the context of debates about gender, education and development in the international donor community” (Heward, 1999, p.4). This was done through several initiatives that strove to place advocacy for the education of girls and women at the forefront of the global development agenda based on a human rights approach.

In March 1990, the World Conference on the Education For All (EFA) was convened by UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank in Jomtien, Thailand, with the purpose of reaffirming the fundamental right to education for everyone, first articulated in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. With participation by one hundred and fifty-five governments and all the major donors and development banks as well as civil society organizations, a ten-year initiative was adopted by the international community with the goal of achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2000. According to Stromquist (2003), the EFA document “is widely agreed to represent a breakthrough in terms of national and international support for basic education and girls” (p. 196). Leach (1998) notes how the delegates clearly understood that if the goal of UPE was to be achieved it was of paramount importance to increase the number of girls in school since they accounted for two-third of the 110 million out-of-school children (UNESCO, 1996).

Because the EFA goal of UPE by 2000 was not met, UNESCO convened the World Education Forum in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, to reaffirm the commitments made in Jomtien by setting goals for 2015. In the same year, the international community and the dominant development agencies, under the leadership of the UN Development Group, committed to eight
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 (UNDP, 2008). Goal two is to achieving UPE while goal three is to promote gender equality and empower women.

UNICEF’s articulation of their support of the human rights perspective to education is illustrated through publications beginning with the 1992 “Educating Girls and Women: a Moral Imperative” (UNICEF, 2007). While UNICEF (2012a) notes societal benefits, it centers the effects of education on the child’s personal development with the view that schooling will enable girls and boys to attain the “knowledge and skills needed to adopt healthy lifestyles, to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they transition from adolescence to adulthood” (p.1).

Arnot and Fennell (2008) note the place of the education as a human right approach within current development discourse by arguing that

gender equality, although portrayed as a human right, is now associated with the new demands of neo-liberal economic globalization, encouraging national regimes and indigenous cultures to move towards Western versions of modernization. (p.3)

Closely linked to a human rights approach to education (and other elements of human development) is the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2011), discussed in the next section.

**Capability approach**

The development field, including the gender and education arena, has also been influenced by the capability approach to human development. Philosopher and economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1980, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2004) developed this approach to provide a more comprehensive analysis of poverty (and well-being) than the income-focused analysis that dominates the field of international development. Others, such as Nussbaum (2000, 2011), use the approach to theorize about basic social justice. According to Sen (1993), “the
approach is based on a view of living as a combination of various ‘doings and beings’, with quality of life to be assessed in terms of the capability to achieve valuable functionings” (p. 31).

The three core concepts of the capability approach are functionings, capabilities, and agency. Sen (1999) defines functionings as “the various things a person may value doing or being” (p 75) while “the capabilities of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve” (Sen, 1993, p. 31). Sen (1999) describes capabilities as “the substantive freedoms [a person] enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value” (Sen, 1999, p. 87). Sen (1985) defines agency as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (p. 206).

Within the capability approach, education is understood to be one of “a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being” (Sen, 1992, p. 44). Sen (1999) stresses how “women’s education strengthens women’s agency and also tends to make it more informed and skilled” (p.192).

Writing on Sen’s work in regards to education, Walker and Unterhalter (2007) note how “social context and social relations can enlarge or constrain individual capabilities for education and in education; personal and relational differences set conditions for capabilities” (p.9). Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argue that “in the capability approach, education is assumed (and expected) to be empowering and transformative” (p.11). However, Walker and Unterhalter (2007) also use the example of research on the harassment of female students in class as ways that female students can be pushed out of schools and they stress that “capabilities can be diminished as well as enhanced” (p.11).

Unterhalter (2009a) points out that the capability approach raises useful questions when exploring human development and education, such as,

are valued capabilities distributed fairly and equally in and through education?
Do some people get more opportunities to convert their resources into
capabilities than others? Which capabilities matter most when it comes to developing agency and autonomy for educational opportunities, social connection and valued dimensions of living? (p. 221)

(For more on Sen’s Capability Approach and education see Robeyns, 2005; Saito 2003; Unterhalter, 2007, 2009b; Walker, 2005)

Tracing the theories that have dominated the discourse reveals the complex nature of the evolution of various overlapping theories and approaches. Furthermore, while a theoretical term may be used in policy or practice, a critical examination can sometimes reveal conflicting underlying assumptions that contradict the terminology used. Leach (2003) notes that “by the mid-1990s, WID had become GAD in most development agendas; however, there was a great deal of confusion, with many projects and programmes containing “gender” in their title but in reality espousing a WID approach” (p.9). Furthermore, Chant (2000) points out “it is widely recognized that the concepts of ‘gender and development’ and ‘women in development’ have been frequently been construed as one and the same thing, and often not mistakenly” (p.6).

**Research on girls’ and women’s education**

Research on girls’ and women’s education in developing countries over the last three decades has focused primarily on barriers to schooling as well as the economic benefits of schooling for the family and society (Hertz & Sperling, 2004; Kelly & Lulat, 1980; King & Hill, 1993; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002; Sutherland-Addy, 2008). Furthermore, quantitative methods dominate much of the research on the schooling of girls and young women in low-income countries such as Tajikistan. Data collected on girls’ and boys’ enrolment in schools at various levels as well as repetition and completion rates provide important insight into what is happening to students in any given country at a particular time and is useful when comparing countries and regions of the world. However, there is a gap in the research as the perspectives of girls and women have not been taken into account (Unterhalter, 2005).
The importance of understanding the lived experiences of girls and women in terms of schooling and the lack of research in this area was initially voiced by Kelly (1978) and has been articulated by many in the years that followed (Sen & Grown, 1987; Sharma-Brymer, 2007; Stromquist, 2003). More than thirty years ago, Gail P. Kelly, a pioneer in issues relating to girls and women’s education in developing countries, called for research that “explain[s] to us the significance of education to the lives of women” (Kelly, 1978, p.365). Stromquist (2003) points out that while it is widely accepted that “school is undoubtedly a major source of cultural capital, employment and social mobility” (p. 178), there is a lack of understanding of the significance of education to the women themselves and the ways education affects decision making and choices in their lives. Despite increasing attention and efforts focused on the schooling of girls and women in poor countries in the period since Kelly made her call, there persists a gap in the research as studies fail to document students’ lived experience of schooling and its effects on their lives.

This gap is highlighted in the 2003 paper (Malhotra, Pande & Grown) for the World Bank Gender and Development Group titled *Impact of Investments in Female Education on Gender Equality*, which examined existing empirical literature, from the late 1980s to 2003, on the benefits of educating girls and women. In this report (2003), Malhotra, Pande and Grown recognize how societal and particularly familial benefits of educating girls and women are “well-understood” (p.2). They note how studies which included women’s education used it as a control variable and that most studies were “not specifically interested in the question of how women’s education benefits women themselves” (Malhotra, Pande & Grown, 2003, p.37). According to Malhotra, Pande and Grown (2003), within the education and social demography fields, the literature emphasized the importance of the process of education, specifically, the process of going to school, being outside of a constraining home environment, being
exposed to new ideas, being socialized in a non-family situation. All these are hypothesized to empower women to improve their own lives and health. However, the empirical evidence does not explore these key aspects of the empowering power of education. (p.38)

Lloyd (2005), in her research on the transition to adulthood for people in developing countries, notes how “important research questions remain unanswered”, specifically “what is the relationship between formal schooling and self-efficacy and agency (especially for young women)?” (p. 147).

Much of the literature on girls’ education in low-income countries provides evidence of the multiple barriers that girls face related to their schooling experiences and opportunities in various contexts. Some literature attempts to use this evidence to offer suggested actions intended to reduce or eliminate these barriers. In the often-cited publication *What Works in Girls’ Education*, Herz and Sperling (2004) suggests “a package of policies and programs in four areas to improve girls’ access to and achievement in education” (p. 9). The four areas are categorized as follows: 1) Make girls’ schooling affordable; 2) Build local community schools with community support and flexible schedules (community involvement in local schools is key); 3) Make schools more girl-friendly (school with latrines for girls, female teachers as role models, and a teaching and learning process and environment that supports and encourages girls’ achievement) and; 4) Focus particularly on quality of education.

Calling attention to the dominant norms and practices and their effects of girls’ schooling, Herz and Sperling (2004) point out that “where daughters traditionally ‘marry out’ of their families and join their husbands’, parents may doubt how much they will benefit from having more-educated daughters” (p. 7). Herz and Sperling (2004) assume theories of human capital development will win out when they state that “where parents are more ambivalent about educating girls, improvements in education quality may be particularly important to tip their decisions to educate daughters” (p. 12).
Herz and Sperling (2004) highlight the importance of leadership and political will to “get the job done” through comprehensive national education strategies and mobilizing internal and external resources (such as donor assistance) (pp. 14-15). (This “package of policies and programs” is evidence of a type of education reform package described by Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) as being implemented in Tajikistan, which I discussed in Chapter 2.)

Summary
Two sets of literature pertaining to the role and function of girls’ and women’s education in poor and low-income countries were reviewed in this chapter as they provide the theoretical foundation from which this study’s conceptual framework was developed. The first set of literature reviewed was theories of social reproduction, situated within the field of sociology of education, while the second set of literature was empowerment theories, situated within the field of international development. The literature was reviewed by tracing the origins of each set of theories, how they emerged, developed and were critiqued.

Emerging in the early 1900s in the work of the sociologist Durkheim, social reproduction theory posits that education systems and schooling serve to maintain and reinforce the status quo. Within this theory, schooling was a means to systematically socialize a child to fit into society with that child receiving (or not receiving) a certain level and type of education as deemed appropriate based on her or his place in society. The status quo was thought to be in a state of equilibrium with individuals willingly accepting their “appropriate” place in society, based on their sex, race, socio-economic status, amongst other factors. By the 1950s this structural functionalist approach to social reproduction dominated the field of sociology.

A neo-Marxist critique of this approach came to prominence in the mid-1970s in the work of the economists Bowles and Gintis (1976) who argue that education systems and schooling serve to select and sort individuals based on the structures and practices of the
workplace within a capitalist system, with those who own the means of production being greatly advantaged over those who do not.

Also coming to prominence in the 1970s was the work of French sociologist Bourdieu whose analysis of social reproduction consists of the concepts of social fields with the school, as well as the family and church, as being the key environments in which an individual’s worldview is developed and reinforced. Bourdieu’s concept of social fields is used in my conceptual framework, as are concepts from empowerment theories, and, as such, informed all aspects of how this study was designed and conducted.

The second set of literature reviewed was empowerment theories situated within the field of international development. Empowerment theories have their origins in earlier theories about the role and function of girls and women within the development of their countries, namely Women in Development (WID) in the 1970s and subsequently Women and Development (WAD). Empowerment theories emerged in the 1980s at a time when the Gender and Development (GAD) approach to development came to prominence. Empowerment theories posit that schooling can be a means to provide girls and women with the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to improve their lives. Focused on more than issues of access to schooling, empowerment theorists posit that educational attainment is a process requiring critical inputs or resources to increase a girls’ or woman’s options, choice, control and/or power. These concepts are integrated with Bourdieu’s concepts of social fields to form this study’s conceptual framework, presented in the following chapter on research design and methodology.
Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This study explores factors affecting rural girls’ education in two districts in Tajikistan by comparing secondary school girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities in three schools that implemented the GEP and three schools that had not. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and methods I used to conduct this study. After presenting the research questions that guide this study, I discuss my conceptual framework, drawn from theories presented in the previous chapter, and how I used this framework to answer my questions. I also discuss the type of research and design used, the rationale for choosing this design, and the site/design components of this study.

Research questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What factors serve as obstacles or enablers to secondary school girls’ educational experiences and opportunities in rural Tajikistan?

2. How did the Girls’ Education Project (GEP) attempt to overcome factors hindering or limiting rural girls’ educational experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived to be most effective?

Conceptual framework

When exploring how schooling can be a means of maintaining and reinforcing the status quo (social reproduction) and/or a means of challenging and changing the status quo (empowerment), gender relations must be investigated from a holistic perspective. This approach requires taking into account multiple contexts at the national, district, school community and school level that affect gender relations. For this reason, I use concepts from Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) social reproduction theory as the foundation for my conceptual frame,
namely how individuals are influenced, affected, and shaped by different social environment or “fields”. With Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) social fields of community/society, family, and school as the foundation, I then added concepts from empowerment theories to my conceptual framework.

Although the term empowerment was not used by the Ministry of Education or Save the Children in any of the GEP documents, educational attainment and achievement through formal schooling is implicitly understood within the field of international development to be a form of empowerment for marginalized children, especially girls, in poor countries. Implicit is the understanding that as a child attains higher levels of schooling, she or he is increasingly better equipped to function socially and economically in society and will be “better off.”

For this reason, I use concepts drawn from several scholars working on empowerment theories within my conceptual framework, with “self” as the central concept. Within the category of “self”, I combine the term agency, commonly used by scholars writing about empowerment (Arnot 2002; Sen 1993, Mehra 1997; Acker 1987; Kabeer, 2001; Stromquist, 2002), with Stromquist’s (2002) four elements of empowerment: the cognitive (critical understanding of one’s reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income).

I use Kabeer’s (2001) notion of the origins and nature of possible critical inputs or resources for empowerment to frame how various factors may affect girls’ schooling either positively (as “enablers”) or negatively (as “obstacles”), depending on the circumstances. These critical inputs or factors are categorized as originating in the social fields of community/society, family, and school. Within each social field, I categorize possible factors as emotional, academic, or economic.
In this study, I conceptualize factors that serve to limit or restrict girls from continuing on to non-compulsory secondary school grades (10 and 11) as critical inputs serving to maintain and reinforce the status quo. Within this group of factors are those that prevent girls from accessing upper secondary grades as well as those that inhibit girls’ experiences of schooling. I conceptualize factors that enable girls to not only continue on into grade 10 and 11 but also to enhance their schooling experiences as critical inputs that challenge and/or defy the reproduction of the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling.

In my conceptual framework I also use Kabeer’s (2001) concept of the possible arenas of achievement or empowerment in conjunction with Malhotra et al.’s (2002) core central terms within empowerment: “options, choice, control and power” (p.5). These possible arenas are also categorized into three social fields of community/society, family, and school. Within each social field, I have listed some possible ways achievement or empowerment may be revealed. I conceptualize non-compulsory upper secondary school as an arena of achievement/empowerment.

In addition to the work of the scholars mentioned above, my conceptual framework was also informed by my Master’s study (Janigan, 2002) in which I explored key factors serving as enablers and/or obstacles for rural female students completing secondary schooling in Eritrea. The following diagram illustrates my conceptual framework.
**ORIGINS AND NATURE OF CRITICAL INPUTS/RESOURCES**  
(factors that serve as enablers or obstacles to academic achievement/empowerment, depending on the circumstances)

**COMMUNITY/SOCIETY**
- Emotional (appropriate behaviours and aspirations for females, appropriate age for marriage, appropriate roles for women within the family/community/society, degree of support/harassment/friendship from peers, role models)
- Academic (value of education for females, academic capabilities of females)
- Economic (appropriate paid work for women and economic decision-making)

**FAMILY** (immediate and/or extended)
- Emotional (perceptions of daughters’ academic capability, role models, aspiration for daughter regarding school, work, marriage)
- Academic (attitude toward value of education for daughter, allocation of daughters’ time to study)
- Economic (direct and indirect costs of schooling)

**SCHOOL** (teachers and/or staff)
- Emotional (attitude toward female students, perceptions of students’ academic capabilities, teachers as role models)
- Academic (quality of education, degree of support provided)
- Economic (cost of school fees, supplies, textbooks, and school uniforms)

**SELF**
- Elements of empowerment
  - agency
  - critical understanding of one’s reality
  - feeling of self-esteem
  - awareness of power
  - inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize
  - capacity to earn independent income

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**POSSIBLE ARENAS OF ACHIEVEMENT/EMPOWERMENT**  
(in terms of increased options, choice, control and/or power)

**COMMUNITY/SOCIETY**
- improved sense of role and responsibilities within the community, locally and/or nationally
- ability to politically organize and mobilize
- ability to take a leadership role
- ability to access paid employment, to make choices, and to control resources

**FAMILY** (immediate and/or extended)
- improved sense of role and responsibilities within the family
- greater degree of ability to make choices, to control resources and/or to participate in decision-making
- ability to take a leadership role

**SCHOOL**
- Opportunity and ability to access and attend school regularly (including post-compulsory and post-secondary levels)
- Opportunity and ability to develop academic and interpersonal skills

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*Figure 3: Conceptual Framework*
I used my conceptual framework to answer my research questions in the following ways. To answer question 1 regarding the factors affecting girls’ schooling, I designed and conducted the semi-structured interviews so that participants could discuss whatever they felt was affecting girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities in their school community and/or region. Through a multi-level data analysis process (described in detail later in this chapter), I analyzed data regarding factors affecting girls’ schooling from various sources using the key concepts in my conceptual framework to differentiate the factors, their origin in terms of social fields, and how they affect girls’ schooling (as enablers and/or obstacles depending on the circumstances). To triangulate this data, I first present data from adult participants at each school (in Chapter 5 for Rumi district schools and in Chapter 6 for Rasht district schools) followed by data from female student participants from all six schools (in Chapter 7). As will be seen, factors that limit or hinder girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities can be categorized as those serving to reinforce and/or maintain the status quo in the rural communities in which this study was conducted. Factors that enable or enhance girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities can be categorized as those serving to change the status quo.

To answer question 2, I collected data from several sources. I collected available documents regarding the Girls’ Education Project prior to and while conducting field work in Tajikistan. In the field I interviewed participants at non-school sites who had worked on or had knowledge of the GEP. These participants included Ministry of Education officials (both national and regional), Save the Children staff (both national and regional), and staff from the two local NGO implementing partners. When conducting research at GEP schools, I asked participants questions about the GEP activities implemented at their school and the effects of these activities on improving girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities in addition to asking questions regarding factors affecting girls’ schooling. To answer question 2, I used data from
project documents and interviews to construct a description of the project and its main activities (see Chapter 8). I used the social fields of community, family, school and self, identified in my conceptual framework, to analyse and present the findings.

**Research design: Mixed method research with a case study**

In order to explore the complexities involved in girls’ schooling in rural Tajikistan, a mixed method research design was developed for this study, with the GEP serving as a case study. A mixed method approach employs the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. This study is predominantly qualitative. However, quantitative data in the form of school enrolment statistics was also collected and analysed to complement the qualitative findings. As such, this study employs a complementary mixed method design whereby methods of one paradigm are used to enhance, elaborate and clarify the results from the other (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

Before discussing the rationale for choosing this research design, I will briefly describe the process used to develop this research. Save the Children provided me with a Scope of Work outlining the Girls’ Education Project which included a set of primary research questions as a guide (Appendix A). From June through August 2009, I designed a research plan based on a template provided by Save the Children. As I developed the plan, I would periodically send it to the Save the Children staff, including the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist and field staff in Tajikistan for their questions and comments until the research plan was completed (Appendix B).

I chose to use the research design discussed in this chapter for several reasons. As Greene and Caracelli (1997) state, “social phenomena are extremely complex so different kinds of methods are needed to understand the important complexities of our social world more completely” (p.7). Such is the case when trying to better understand how to improve girls’
educational experiences and opportunities in contexts where they may be limited or restricted, as I aim to do through this study. A mixed method approach to understanding issues related to girls and women in low-income countries is also advocated by the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) document (2000) which states, “a complete picture requires both narratives and numbers” (p.62). This research aims to provide more of a “complete picture” of the experiences of female secondary school students in rural Tajikistan through the collection of qualitative data (in the form of interviews and field notes) as well as through quantitative data (in the form of school enrolment statistics).

The reasons for having qualitative research methods dominant in this study are as follows. Within a qualitative paradigm individuals’ perspectives are understood to be sources of valuable knowledge (Patton, 2002). This knowledge illuminates how individuals make sense of their lives in a world where issues are highly contextualized, socially, culturally, and politically (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2007; Creswell, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Merriem, 1998). As Mason (2002) argues, qualitative research methodology enables researchers to

explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of [the] research participants, the ways social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate. (p.1)

Given the exploratory nature of qualitative research, this approach enables me, as researcher, to consider “the multiple meanings of individual experiences” and “meanings socially and historically constructed” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18), both which are critical to this study. Qualitative research is inductive rather than deductive in its approach (Merriam, 1998, p.7) and, as such, is well suited to be the dominant approach used in this study.

My research design was also greatly influenced by scholars within the field of gender, education, and development who have been calling for research that illuminates the narratives of girls and women on many different aspects related to girls’ education, requiring the use of
qualitative methods. For example Kelly and Elliott (1980) detail the need for research in many areas such as “how private and public sphere interact and how education mediates this interaction” (p. 3) and “family responses to schools in order to detect what constitutes genuine availability of schools to girls” (p. 12). Stromquist (2003) explicitly advocates for the use of qualitative methods in studies related to girls’ education when she states that

the tools of qualitative research have been instrumental in documenting the everyday experience of students in educational institutions, noting the sometimes mild but cumulative nature of many events that gradually yet inexorably shape individuals’ perception of self and their roles in society. (p.182)

The quantitative elements of this study are included for the following reasons. School enrolment statistics were collected and analysed to complement the narrative findings, to enhance an understanding of who is going to school and for how long. By including the collection and analysis of these statistics, comparisons can be made both within schools and across schools. This quantitative element was also included in the research design because one of the aims of the larger study (as explained earlier) was to try to assess how effective the GEP had been in improving the retention and attendance of female students in upper secondary school.

Having discussed my rationale for using a mixed method approach in this study, I now discuss the case study method, employed for the case study of the GEP. Yin (2009) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.18). This accurately describes the elements of this study related to the GEP. Furthermore I chose a case study design since it “is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

In order to answer the research questions regarding the GEP, I chose to collect data from three GEP schools and three schools that had not implemented the GEP for several reasons. I
collected multiple sources of evidence since, according to Yin (2009), multiple sources of evidence are “often considered more compelling” and “more robust” (p.53) than one source. These multiple sources of evidence enabled me to triangulated data to develop “converging lines of inquiry” that Yin (2009) notes is “the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence” (p. 115). When deciding on the number of schools to include in this study my decision was greatly influenced by three factors: the length of time that I could reasonably spend at each school; the desire to conduct research at pairs of schools (one GEP school paired with a non-GEP school of similar demographics and language(s) of instruction); and logistical factors relating to travel and accessibility.

**Site/Design components (Research population and data sources)**

The districts where this study was conducted were chosen by Save the Children, as articulated in the Scope of Work (see Appendix A). Save the Children identified the districts of Rumi (within the administrative area of Khatlon) and Rasht (within the administrative area of the Direct Rule District) as research sites. These sites were selected because the incidence of girls dropping out and/or attending secondary school irregularly is well-known, highly problematic, and more severe in Rumi and Rasht districts compared to other districts.

For this study I sought participants from school sites and non-school sites who can be categorized into three groups. The first group were female students in grades 9, 10, and 11, since female students’ perceptions and experiences lay at the heart of this research. The second group were individuals at the school-level such as Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers and community members. The third group of participants I sought for this study were people employed at organizations that had either funded or implemented the Girls’ Education Project. These were participants at non-school based sites and comprised of Ministry of Education officials and staff both nationally and regionally, UNICEF staff, and staff from three NGOs.
Selection of research participants at non-school research sites

I used purposeful sampling to identify potential participants at non-school sites based on the criterion that the individual had been involved in implementing of the Girls’ Education Project. Table 6 details who I interviewed from non-school based sites, including the relationship of their organization to the GEP and the date and location of the interview. In all cases, a Save the Children staff member identified the appropriate individuals and contacted them by telephone in order to introduce me and my research as well as to arrange an interview at a time and place suitable to them.

Table 6: Research participants at non-school sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of participant</th>
<th>Organization and relationship to GEP</th>
<th>Date and location of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Minister of Education</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Implementing partner</td>
<td>Sept. 4, 2009, Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, District Education Department (DED), Rumi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sept. 24, 2009, Kurgan-Tyube, Khatlon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, DED, Rasht</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct. 23, 2009, Gharm, Rasht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Project Officer, Programme Assistant</td>
<td>UNICEF, Funder</td>
<td>Sept. 7, 2009, Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEP Project Officer, National</td>
<td>Save the Children, Lead implementing NGO</td>
<td>Nov. 16 and 25, 2009, Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEP Project Officer, Khatlon*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sept. 10, 2009, Kurgan-Tyube, Khatlon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct. 16, 2009, Gharm, Rasht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEP Project Officer</td>
<td>local NGO (Rasht), Implementing partner</td>
<td>Oct. 29, 2009, Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former GEP Project Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six staff members</td>
<td>local NGO (Khatlon), Implementing partner</td>
<td>Sept. 17, 2009, Kurgan-Tyube, Khatlon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Save the Children office in Rasht closed after the GEP ended. I was unable to locate former staff.

Selection of schools

I selected two types of schools for inclusion in this study: schools that had implemented the GEP and schools that had not. All schools in this research study were from grades 1 to 11 as this was a criterion to be a GEP school. Rural schools had been the target of the GEP since the
majority of the girls who drop out or who are not attending school regularly live in rural areas. Therefore Save the Children selected rural rather than urban schools for this study.

Each school was selected as a research site through discussions with the Khatlon and Rasht District Education Departments (DED), the Save the Children project staff, and the local NGO project staff. GEP schools were first identified as research sites through discussions with Save the Children staff using criteria such as location, accessibility, and taking into consideration regional events such as a visit by the President of Tajikistan. As such, these research sites were purposefully chosen. In Rasht I randomly chose between two GEP schools that were considered accessible by the local NGO. (The President of Tajikistan was visiting Rasht when I was conducting this research. As a result, some schools were preparing for his possible visit and were inaccessible to me.)

Once a GEP school was selected for inclusion in this study, Save the Children facilitated a discussion with the Head of each of the District Education Departments requesting they identify a non-GEP school of similar demographics and language(s) of instruction as one of the GEP schools to participate in the study. As a result of this selection process, I expect that any bias that might appear would reflect GEP schools that were considered to have been more successful in their implementation according to the NGO implementers of the project.

One non-GEP school in this study had recently implemented other school improvement projects funded by international development agencies other than Save the Children. As a result, it can be assumed that this other project may have had a positive effect on female student enrolment and retention as improving the educational opportunities and experiences of girls is recognized as a priority for and critical to Tajikistan’s national development as articulated in government education policy statements and documents. It is important to understand that in
areas such as Khatlon and Rasht which had undergone a high level of devastation during the civil war, many development projects have been implemented.

As I conducted research at each school, I assigned each school a number for recording purposes in the order in which the data was collected. Based on travel logistics and time constraints, I conducted research at six schools: four in Rumi district (two GEP schools and two non-GEP schools) and two in Rasht (one GEP school and one non-GEP school). The table below details the school sites by district and language of instruction.

Table 7. School research sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Girls’ Education Project (GEP) school (language of instruction)</th>
<th>Non-Girls’ Education Project (GEP) school (language of instruction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rumi</td>
<td>School 1 (Tajik and Uzbek)</td>
<td>School 2 (Tajik and Uzbek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 3 (Tajik and Uzbek)*</td>
<td>School 4 (Tajik)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasht</td>
<td>School 1 (Tajik)</td>
<td>School 2 (Tajik)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*School 3 was identified by the DED as having only a Tajik language of instruction (to serve as a comparison for School 4). When I arrived I found that the school offered both Tajik and Uzbek as languages of instruction and there was no time to change school sites.

Selection of research participants at school research sites

At both GEP and non-GEP schools, I sought to interview the Director and Deputy Director, teachers, female students in grade 9, 10 and 11, parents of female students and community member who were involved in the school committee. While all schools in Tajikistan have a Parent Teacher Association which involves the community with the school, some GEP schools had a Community Education Committee which was a committee established during the implementation of the GEP. At GEP schools I also sought to interview any teachers who had been leaders of GEP activities, such as school clubs or camps.
Table 8: School staff research participants at school sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>GEP or non-GEP schools</th>
<th>School Number for study</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rumi GEP schools</td>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Director (male, Uzbek) Deputy Director (male, Tajik) Teacher – primary (school club leader) (female, Tajik) Teacher – secondary level (male, Uzbek) Teacher – gr. 6-9 (male, Tajik)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Director (female, Tajik) Deputy Director – Sports teacher (male, Tajik) Teacher and former Deputy Director during GEP – (female, Tajik) gr. 2, 5 - 11, Sports Teacher – gr. 1-4 (camp leader) – (female, Tajik) Teacher, English for Uzbek students (female, Uzbek) Teacher – Russian language (female, Uzbek) Teacher – gr. 5 to 11, Math (female, chairman of girls’ committee)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-GEP schools</td>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Director (male) Deputy Director (male) Teacher – gr. 5 to 11 Physical Education, grade 10 and 11 Military (male) Teacher – gr. 8 to 11, Chemistry (male) Teacher – gr. 5, 6, 8, 10, Math and Physics (male) Teacher – grade 3 (female)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>Director (male) Teacher - primary (female)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasht GEP schools</td>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Director (male) Deputy Director (male) Teacher (male, school club leader) Teacher (male, former Director) Teacher (female, former school club leader)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-GEP schools</td>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Director (female) Teacher (female, former Deputy Director for primary) Teacher, Chemistry (female, trained doctor) Teacher, English (female) Teacher(male, university student on practicum)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data collection procedures**

I collected data for this study in two stages. Prior to going to the field, I collected project documents from Save the Children to serve as contextual background information to understand as much as I could about the GEP before arriving in Tajikistan. While in Tajikistan, I collected the majority of my primary data through semi-structured focused interviews with participants. I also collected additional project documents and school enrolment statistics as data. I also collected data through my field notes.
To conduct the research in Tajikistan, Save the Children hired a female Tajik-English translator to accompany me to all my interviews, except the few that were conducted in English. I worked with one translator for the first two and a half months during which time we collected data from five of the six schools. With one day’s notice, the translator quit to plan her wedding. Another female translator was hired to assist me in collecting data at the sixth and final school. Save the Children also hired a driver and rented a vehicle to enable me to travel to the research sites.

I conducted the majority of interviews with the translator providing Tajik-English translation. I conducted interviews in English with the Save the Children staff and UNICEF officials. I began each interview by introducing myself and my translator, explaining the research and informed consent forms, which had been translated into Tajik and Russian languages. I began interviewing participants only after each participant had read, understood, and signed two copies of the informed consent letter. I gave each participant one copy of the informed consent letter to keep.

Research was conducted over six days at each GEP school and over five days at each non-GEP school. I planned for an additional day of data collecting at GEP schools to allow a little more time to schedule a meeting with CEC members, if possible. The timing of the research corresponded with the start of the school year.

I understood that building rapport was a critical throughout the process, particularly when at the school sites when people may be less used to dealing with an outsider such as myself. Throughout the process, I was open about who I was: a teacher and graduate student genuinely interested in not only what can be learned about constraints to girls’ schooling in Tajikistan but what can be done to improve the educational experiences and opportunities for girls. I also tried to be as sensitive as possible to the particulars of each situation and act
accordingly to the best interest of the participant. For example, when one director of a non-GEP school was reluctant to speak with me when I first arrived at her school, I responded saying I would do whatever she wished as I did not want to cause her any trouble. I explained in detail who I was and what I was doing. Within 5 minutes, the director became visibly more relaxed and agreed to speak with me.

Data collection procedures at non-school sites

A staff member from Save the Children requested meetings with all potential participants at non-school sites. My first meeting was with the Deputy Minister of Education (MoE) who was female. The purpose of the meeting was threefold: to introduce myself and my study, to conduct an interview and to request a letter of authorization from the Minister of Education which I needed before proceeding further. After the interview, the Deputy Minister of Education asked that I submit my informed consent letters, translated into Tajik, along with a letter from Save the Children explaining my research to officials at the Ministry of Education so I could obtain a letter of authorization signed by the Minister of Education. I received that letter one week later (Appendix C).

I also interviewed two other officials from the Ministry of Education: the Heads of the District Education Departments (DED) for Khatlon and Rasht. Both officials were male. I conducted these interviews when I was in each district collecting data at the schools.

All MoE interviews were conducted in Tajik at the officials’ offices and were audio-recorded, except for the interview with the Deputy Minister of Education when I took detailed hand-written notes. The interview with the Deputy Minister of Education was approximately 40 minutes in length. The interviews with the Heads of DED ranged in length from 25 minutes in Khatlon and 50 minutes in Rasht. During the interview with the Head of the DED in Rasht there were two older men present though the Head never introduced them to me and they did not
interact with us so they may have been there to witness what was happening. The Head of the DED also called for another employee who works on girls’ education issues in Rasht who joined us during the interview but said very little.

I interviewed two UNICEF officials together at the UNICEF office in Dushanbe before I started to collect school data. Since the Education Project Officer who had worked on the GEP was on maternity leave, I interviewed with her replacement, a female Tajik national, who was familiar with the project as well as the Progamme Assistant for Education, a female Tajik national of Russian ethnicity, who had worked with Save the Children during the implementation of the Girls’ Education Project. The interview was roughly 70 minutes in length, conducted in English, and audio-recorded.

I conducted interviews with the district staff at Save the Children Khatlon office and the staff of the two local NGOs in Khatlon and Rasht while I was in each of the two districts collecting school data.

**Data collection procedures at school sites**

Upon arrival at each school, I met with the Director of each school to introduce myself and my translator, to explain the study, to learn about the school, and to request an interview. I always conducted the interview with the Director first, in their school office. At one school I interviewed the director and deputy director at the same time otherwise I interviewed the director on his or her own. I conducted all school interviews in Tajik with the assistance of my translator. All interviews were audio-recorded.

In terms of selecting teachers to interview, I asked the Director at the three GEP schools to introduce me to any teachers who had been involved in GEP activities, such as the school club teacher leader. Since the number of teachers directly involved in the project was small, I also asked to be introduced to some secondary school teachers who had taught at the school
when the GEP was being implemented. At the three non-GEP schools, I asked the Director to introduce me to at least three secondary school teachers who would be willing to discuss issues related to girls’ education.

Once the Director introduced me to each teacher, I introduced myself and my translator, explained the study including informed consent procedures and the voluntary nature of their participation, and asked if the teacher would be willing to participate. I began the interviews only after each teacher had read, understood, and signed the informed consent form. Each teacher was given a copy of the signed consent form for their records. I conducted teacher interviews in either the office of the Director and Deputy Director or a classroom that was available.

Time constraints determined the number of teachers I could interview at each school as most teachers worked either the morning or the afternoon shift. I conducted teacher interviews only when the teacher was on break. After collecting data at the first school, it became clear to me that I would have time to interview approximately three teachers at each school as well as the Director and Deputy Director who are also teachers.

On the first day at the first school, after I learned about the school and conducted the interview with the Director, I asked the Director what would be the best way for me to introduce myself to female students in grade 9, 10, and 11, particularly those who had participated in any GEP activities. I explained that I did not want to interrupt their classes. The Director, who knew in advance that I was coming and understood the nature of the research, had pre-arranged for these female students to come together in one classroom to meet me.

With approximately 20 students in the classroom, I introduced myself and my translator to the group and explained why I was at their school. The Director and the teacher who had been the leader of the GEP school club were present during this introductory meeting. I handed each
student two copies of the informed consent letter, translated into Tajik, for their parent(s) or guardian(s). My translator read the letter aloud. I answered any question and provided extra explanations whenever any point was not clear so that each student could understand the conditions of their participation in the study: that it was voluntary, their parent or guardian need to agree with their participation by signing the consent form, that they could withdraw from the study at any time. (For other conditions, see Appendix D for the informed consent letter.) I asked the students to discuss their participation in the study with their parent(s) or guardian(s) after school and, if they wished to participate, to return the signed informed consent letter to me over the next day or two and I would set a time to interview each of them.

Once I had explained the study and the informed consent procedures, I wanted to build rapport with the students and give them a chance to get to know me a little. I began by explaining that I was trying to learn Tajik and would then pull out a little book with the Tajik words and phrases I had learned so far. I explained that, even though I was an adult, I was still liked learning and studying new things. I would then recite my very limited and poorly pronounced Tajik vocabulary consisting of basic greetings and the names of food. This often broke the ice as the students would laugh at my poor attempts to speak Tajik. Then I gave them a chance to ask me any questions. Each time a handful of students would ask me questions ranging from questions about my age and my family to questions about Canada in general and female students in particular. On one instance, a student asked me to sing Canada’s national anthem, which I did.

I followed this process of meeting with a group of female students from grades 9, 10, and 11 at each of the schools except one, where I was introduced to students in groups of two or three. At one school I met Tajik students in the morning and Uzbek students in the afternoon, according to the shift offered in the corresponding language of instruction. Occasionally the
group of students included a few grades 7 or 8 students which my translator and I only
discovered when we received their signed consent forms. At Rasht School 1 three female grade
8 students approached me in the school yard and asked if they could participate in the study. I
explained the study to them and gave them informed consent forms. All three gave me signed
forms the next day. I interviewed any student who returned the signed informed consent form.

The day or two after our initial meeting, students who wished to participate in the study
brought their signed informed consent forms to me. The vast majority of the students I spoke to
on the first day brought back their signed consent form. As I received each signed form, I would
write the name of the student and their grade number at the top of each form. My translator and I
then made a schedule for the interviews in the order that the students handed in their forms.

There was one incident of clear misunderstanding at Rumi School 3. Only one of the
Uzbek students whom I met with returned the signed consent letter to me at the beginning of the
afternoon shift the next day. All the others gave me back the consent letter unsigned saying they
did not want to participate in the study. While I found this to be unusual I thanked each of them
for meeting me on the first day. As this was happening, an Uzbek teacher who I had met the day
before, came in to tell me that there was a rumour spreading that I was a human trafficker and
that is why all but one of the Uzbek students refused to participate. I interviewed the one Uzbek
student who brought back the signed consent form.

Later that day, the Director called together all the female Uzbek students who I met with
on the first day to clear up the misunderstanding. Also present in the meeting was the one
student who I had interviewed. Once we discussed the misunderstanding and the student who
had already been interviewed explained what was involved in the interview process, the female
students asked to take home the informed consent forms once again. On the third day, almost all
the students returned with signed consent forms and I interviewed each of them.
Table 8 details the number of female student participants by grade, school, and district. I also included the number of female students registered in September 2009 to indicate the percentage of the female students who participated in the study. It is important to note that severe irregular attendance means that the school register can show far greater numbers than students who actually go to school regularly, as will be documented in the findings section.

Table 9: Number of female student research participants by district and school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Rumi</th>
<th>Rasht</th>
<th>Rumi and Rasht</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEP/ non-GEP school</td>
<td>GEP schools</td>
<td>Non-GEP schools</td>
<td>GEP school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Grade</td>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>School 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>1 (39)</td>
<td>0 (10)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>2 (37)</td>
<td>0 (51)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>5 (23)</td>
<td>0 (33)</td>
<td>3 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>9 (24)</td>
<td>10 (31)</td>
<td>8 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23 (71)</td>
<td>19 (103)</td>
<td>19 (56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number in parentheses indicates the number of female students registered in September 2009.

During the school visits I had two translators. One translator accompanied me on visits to the first five schools while the second accompanied me on the visit to the last school. My first translator spoke English fluently and, as mentioned earlier, spoke Tajik as her mother tongue language. My second translator was of Pamiri ethnicity, spoke Tajik as a second language, and was not as fluent in English as the first. While all the student participants at the last school visited spoke Tajik as a mother tongue language, the second translator struggled a little more than my first translator when informing me of participants’ responses. That said, I felt both translators did outstanding work given the circumstances.

Data collection instruments

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary data source for my study for several reasons. First, as Patton (2002) notes, “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that...
the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341).

Second, interviewing enables me to record individual voices. This is important since my aim is to understand individual participants’ perceptions and experiences and not to generalize participants’ responses, or represent them, as Mohanty (1988) warns against, as “a singular monolithic subject”. Rather than speaking ‘for’ these young women I want to provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Third, I also justify the use of interviewing as my primary data source as this method of data collection can be of benefit to the participants themselves. For example, Glesne (1999) argues that,

> by listening to students carefully and seriously, you give them a sense of importance and specialness. By providing the opportunity to reflect on and voice answers to your questions, you assist them to understand some aspect of themselves better. (p. 127)

I believe this is particularly important to these young Tajik women who voices are rarely, if ever, heard.

Since the writing of field notes is integral to the qualitative research process (Patton, 2002), I gathered other sources of qualitative data through writing of descriptive field notes. Within these field notes I captured my reflections, ideas, changes in thinking, and questions that arose as well as recording activities and interactions that occurred throughout the research process. These notes provide an important source of data since “thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting” (Patton, 2002, p. 437).

Quantitative data, in the form of school enrolment statistics, were collected from the Director or Deputy Director at each school. Five of the six school administrators had the yearly report with the registration statistics for the current school year (2009/10) and the previous year (2008/09). As this research was conducted at the beginning of the 2009/10 school year, the statistics for 2009/10 reflect September enrolment whereas the other reports reflect end of year enrolment. One school also had a 2007/08 report. Reports for the previous years had been
submitted by all the schools to the District Education Departments and were unavailable. School administrators did not have any documents tracking the number of female students who were brought back to school during the implementation of the project. However, participant responses provided qualitative data regarding instances when girls came back to school after dropping out or leaving school.

While enrolment numbers for all grades were collected, only the upper grade statistics are included in this study. Enrolment is disaggregated by sex and by language of instruction.

When using enrolment statistics to explore issues regarding girls in at the upper secondary school level, it is important to understand how enrolment is tracked and recorded in schools in Tajikistan. Each day the class coordinator, a teacher who is responsible for one class of students, records students’ attendance in the class register. Since all children must complete schooling to grade 9, all children are required to be registered up to that grade level and are expected to attend class regularly. When a student is absent for a few days, the class coordinator is required to visit the student’s house to find the reason(s) for the student’s absence and to attempt to get the student to return to school. At the end of the year, registration information is transferred from the class registers to the school’s yearly report which is submitted to the District Education Department. This includes reports of students who left the school and their reason for doing so. As for tracking student drop outs, an Amnesty International report (2009) notes that “there is no effective reporting mechanism between the school authorities and the district authorities in order to monitor the drop-out rate” (p. 34).

Quantitative data regarding student attendance did not appear to exist. Unlike enrolment that is well-documented in yearly reports, student attendance is only recorded in the teachers’ daily register. There is no place on the yearly report for recording information such as the percentage or rate of irregular attendance. Thus it was not possible to collect any statistics
related to irregular attendance for previous or current years. Amnesty International (2009) also reported the lack of an effective system to accurately track student attendance as well as other practises in regards to the inspection system that result in unreliable statistics. For example, “the educational departments of the local Khukumat issue advanced notices about their inspections to schools. As a result, teacher and school directors can mobilize children who usually do not attend” (Amnesty International, 2009, p.53).

The only data available regarding irregular attendance came from participants’ comments. For example, attempts were made to assess the degree of irregular attendance of female students in grades 9, 10, and 11 when student participants were asked about the number of male and female classmates registered in their class, thus serving to verify the statistics provided by the school administrators. When responding to this question, students often commented that the number of students attending class regularly was lower than the number registered. In all schools where this study was conducted, girls in grades 9, 10, and 11 were far more likely to be attending school irregularly when compared to their male classmates. For example, female students reported that they sometimes miss school if they are needed to do housework, to care for a sick family member, or to take care of guests who were visiting.

**Data analysis**

I analyzed the data inductively in several stages throughout the research process, with the overall aim of conducting and articulating “thorough, careful, honest and accurate” (Mason, 2002, p. 188) data analysis and reporting. While collecting the data in Tajikistan, I recorded possible emergent themes in my field notes. After completing data collection, I transcribed approximately three-quarters of all the interviews verbatim and employed someone to transcribe the rest. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I read through each transcript, noting any data pertinent to my research questions. I then read through each transcript a second time, began to
create codes based on emerging themes relevant to my research questions. I then entered data from the transcripts into a matrix I created.

During this process, I adjusted the codes as necessary. For example, I combined some codes together or created new codes as they emerged. Having discussed the generalities of my data analysis process, I now discuss how I analyzed data from the two distinct research sites: non-school sites and school sites.

For data collected at the non-school sites, I first analyzed participants’ responses individually. I then compared the individual responses to responses other participants at non-school sites to identify emergent themes.

For the school-based qualitative data, I analyzed the data by district rather than by pairs of schools with similar demographics, as initially planned, because I discovered during data analysis that variation in difference in data existed at the district level rather than between pairs of schools in a district. Also, in Rumi District, one school that was to serve as comparison school with a Tajik only language of instruction school turned out to be a school that had two languages of instruction: Tajik and Uzbek. Therefore, during data analysis, schools were grouped by district and by whether or not they had implemented the Girls’ Education Project. This meant that in Rumi, the two GEP schools were compared to the two non-GEP schools while in Rasht the GEP school was compared to the non-GEP school.

I first analyzed data from each school by considering the qualitative data from individual interviews. I then compared participants’ responses to identify emergent themes. This process involved several steps. I compared student participants’ responses first by grade and then across grades. I then compared results across schools first comparing results from GEP schools with results from non-GEP in each district and then comparing results across districts.
I followed a similar data analysis process for data from interviews with Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers, and community members by analyzing individual responses first, then comparing responses from participants at GEP schools with responses from participants at non-GEP schools in each district and then across districts.

The process for analysing the quantitative data is as follows. School enrolment statistics, disaggregated by sex and language of instruction (when applicable), were analyzed by examining the findings from each school individually in terms of enrolment in grades 8 through 11 and the progression of female students from grade 9 to 10 and then to grade 11. In terms of enrolment, data analysis included examining the number and percentage of girls and boys in each grade. (When exploring gender parity in this manner, it is critical to consider whether an increase in the percentage of girls is a result of an increase in the number of girls or rather, solely as a result of a decrease in the number of boys.) Findings were compared within and across districts, including a comparison of the findings from GEP schools with those from non-GEP schools.

I constructed six school profiles to illuminate the historical, social, and structural contexts of each school holistically. The profiles consist of data about the school, its history, and the school community with findings drawn primarily from the perspectives of the Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers, and, in a few instances, community members. School enrolment statistics provide a quantitative context. The statistics are presented as yearly enrolment of female and male students in grades 8 through 11 as well as progression of female students from grade 9 to grade 10 and 11.

Each profile also includes a simple map of the school compound based on descriptions from my field notes and photographs I took. The school maps are not drawn to scale or intended
to be exact replicas of the school compound but are included to show the school facilities. Data from my field notes was also used when creating the school profiles.

**Situating myself as researcher: “Subjectivity with transparency”**

The subjectivity of the researcher as integral to the research process is widely acknowledged by scholars (Harding 1987; Wolf, 1996; Bogdan and Bicklen, 1998; Glesne 1999). Creswell (1998) notes that “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher’s position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry” (p. 202). Gillespie (2001) refers to this as a “set of coordinates” and explains how it both necessarily informs and limits one’s “way of knowing”.

When positioning myself in relation to this research, I aim to provide what O’Leary (2004) describes as “subjectivity with transparency: acceptance and disclosure of the subjective positioning [of the researcher] and how it might impact on the research process, including conclusions drawn” (p.58). I am a white middle-class female Canadian graduate student with twenty years’ experience as an educator both as a primary school teacher and as a teacher trainer. I have lived and worked in Sub-Saharan Africa for nine years: as a volunteer teacher with an international NGO for three years (in Eritrea) and as a teacher trainer and materials developer on two large educational projects implemented by a U.S. NGO for two years each (in Ethiopia and Malawi).

For my master’s research, I conducted a qualitative study in 2001 with female students in their final year of secondary school in the rural school in Eritrea where I had taught five years earlier. In my study I explored why these young women were able to complete their secondary schooling while the vast majority of their female peers did not. It was my exposure, first as a village teacher then as a researcher, to the differences in the educational experiences and opportunities of girls and boys in rural Eritrea that sparked my strong interest to pursue further
work within the field of gender, education and development, and eventually lead me to this doctoral study.

Although I had not been to Tajikistan prior to conducting this research, my teaching and research experiences in diverse contexts, both rural and urban, in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Malawi, as well as my experiences with NGOs and project implementation, were invaluable in helping me navigate the research process and better understand the many complexities involved not only in gender issues and schooling but also project implementation.

During data collection I was acutely aware of my relationship to Save the Children and the way that participants may interpret that relationship. Both Save the Children and I understood that I was an independent researcher and not an employee of Save the Children. I explained this relationship to all I came in contact with as it was my aim for participants to feel comfortable to say what they believed rather than what they thought the Save the Children staff wanted to hear.

There is no doubt that I, as a researcher, benefited greatly from the relationship with Save the Children. For example, within my first two weeks in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, I had conducted an interview with the Deputy Minister of Education (MOE) and had received a letter of permission from the Minister of Education which was required to conduct this research. Besides facilitating interviews with national and regional MOE officials and staff at the various schools, Save the Children also provided me with a translator, driver and car. As a result of such strong logistical support from Save the Children I was able to travel to six rural schools in two districts and interview a total of 160 participants in three months. If not for the financial and logistical support provided by Save the Children, I would not have been able to accomplish as much as I did in such a relatively short time period.
Ethical considerations

In conducting this study I followed the procedures required by the Ethical Review Board at the University of Toronto and Save the Children USA. During formal interviews, I asked questions related only to my research objectives. I provided each participant with two copies of the informed consent form, required by the University of Toronto. The form had been translated into both Tajik and Russian. Participants received a form in which ever language they requested. With the exception of one Russian UNICEF staff member, all participants requested the Tajik version. I explained the contents of the consent form to all participants, stressing that participation in this study was voluntary and that even those who chose to participate could withdraw from the study at any time. Interviews were conducted after participants signed both copies. I received one copy and the participant kept a copy.

Throughout the research process I was also aware of the ethical issues relating to my position of power, authority, and privilege, as a Western outsider and a doctoral candidate. In an effort to conduct this study in an ethical manner, I tried my best to ensure that participants do not feel obliged or coerced to participate simply because I would like to interview them. I also tried to ensure that no one was pressured to participate by a third party such a parent, a teacher, a colleague or boss. I tried my best to be honest and respectful throughout the research process, prioritizing participants’ feelings and needs over my own. This applied to several aspects of the process, including where and when interviews are conducted as well as the types of questions I ask and how I ask them. I was especially concerned about female students’ participation since they were the most vulnerable participants in this study.
Limitations of this study

Several factors and circumstances limited this study to varying degrees. These limitations include issues of funding, timing, access to participants and statistics, being an “outsider,” language, power, and cultural norms.

Funding issues affected how the research was planned and conducted. Having been awarded a SUPER fellowship, I was required to plan the research collaboratively with Save the Children in alignment with the Scope of Work provided by Save the Children, as previously mentioned. (See Appendix A.) The Scope of Work set out the boundaries for this research, including limiting my time in Tajikistan to three months. This affected the number of schools at which I could conduct research and the length of time spent at each school.

School and national holidays also presented time constraints. I spent roughly one week at each school, limiting the time I had to build rapport with the participants at each school. The length of each interview was based on what seemed to be a reasonable amount of time, as I tried to disrupt participants’ regular schedule as little as possible. Time limitations meant that I interviewed participants at school sites once for 20 to 30 minutes each.

Given that I collected data from September through November, my access to people within the community in Rumi was greatly constrained as this time period coincided with cotton harvesting season. In these villages, many women, including girls who were not in school, work all day each day picking cotton while many of the men work on or manage the cotton farms. Although the timing of the research reduced and prevented access to a certain groups of participants, the timing was extremely beneficial to gain insights into the impact of cotton production on girls’ schooling.

As noted by Cook (1998), being an “outsider” conducting research has several inherent limitations. One limitation relates to issues of local language fluency. Given that I do not speak Tajik, I had to rely on my translators’ skills and abilities to enable me to communicate with my
non-English speaking participants. Therefore, I was unable to speak directly to most people I came in contact with during data collection, except for the NGO staff and my translator. Despite language constraints, I tried to interact directly with people as best I could. For example, accepting a teacher’s invitation, I slept at her home in the village. I went without my translator but with my Russian-English dictionary. Between using sign language and passing the dictionary back and forth, pointing to phrases in either Russian or English as appropriate, the teacher, her family and I were able to communicate quite effectively.

Even my translators faced some language constraints while conducting interviews. Tajik was the mother-tongue language of the translator who accompanied me to the first five school research sites. However, she struggled at times to fully understand a few student participants who spoke a local dialect of Tajik. Some student participants whose mother tongue language was Uzbek also spoke fluent Tajik while others did not. When a participant could not speak Tajik fluently, I had another student participant (one of their female classmates) translate from Tajik to Uzbek during the interview, with the Uzbek-speaking participants’ consent.

With a top-down system of authority in Tajikistan, I needed individuals, who I refer to as “gatekeepers,” to guide me through the research process every step along the way. Save the Children staff at the national and regional level introduced me to Ministry of Education officials (the Deputy Minister of Education and the Head of the Department of Education in both districts) and the local NGO staff; the Head of each DED granted me access to certain schools; each school Director introduced me to teachers they felt met the criteria for inclusion in this study; and the Directors and teachers organized my initial meeting with students and facilitated student interviews. Although I stressed that participation in this study was voluntary, it is highly probable that some participants felt that they were required to participate.
When conducting student interviews at the Rasht School 1, I was unable to interview student participants without a teacher being present. This teacher, who was my gatekeeper, sat in on all student interviews. He explained that the female students asked him to be there for the interviews but at times during their interviews some students looked over at him before or after answering a question, indicating that they were affected by his presence. Some seemed uncomfortable to have him in the room during their interview. A few times he prodded a student to answer and, once or twice, he answered a question himself on behalf of the student. Even when the teacher left the room for a few minutes, he asked another female student to sit in. Because of the teacher’s presence at student interviews, I did not feel comfortable asking the students at Rasht School 1 any probing questions. This circumstance definitely limited student responses. I also felt very restrained in what I asked students and was most concerned about not putting the student participants into a position whereby there could be negative repercussions resulting from their responses. (In contrast, the teacher who was my gatekeeper at Rumi School 4 encouraged student participants to “say everything you have in your heart” (teacher 188). This is likely the reason why the female students I interviewed at School 4 appeared to be more open to talking about their schooling experiences and the challenges they face.)

Also Rasht School 1 was the only school where I was not given access to any of the nine female students registered in grade 11 (despite repeated requests) and therefore I was only able to interview students in grades 9 and 10. One possible reason for not being able to speak to any grade 11 female students may have been because data collection corresponded to the wedding season when older female students have a great deal of household responsibilities. Another reason may have been that the gatekeepers feared what they would say.

An additional limitation of this study is related to the availability and reliability of school enrolment statistics. Cook (1998) notes how the availability and reliability of data is a common
barrier for researcher conducting studies in developing or low-income countries. In the UNESCO country report for Tajikistan, Briller (2007) describes how “obtaining reliable information is a problem in Tajikistan. Different sources report conflicting data even on basic demographics, not to mention major educational issues” (p. 2). D’Hellencourt (2004) believes the lack of reliable statistics on girls’ education is partially due to “common cultural practices related to marriage and birth registration baffle the collection of demographic data” (p. 3). DeYoung and Constantine (2009) note how educational data provided by Central Asian governments are “often inconsistent and contradictory” (p. 259). (See Chapter 4 for more on the reliability of education statistics.)

Despite attempts to access national or regional statistics related to this study from Ministry of Education officials, the only quantitative data I could access were enrolment statistics that the Directors at each school had. Directors at five schools had a copy of the enrolment statistics for the previous year whereas the Director at Rumi School 1 had a copy of the enrolment statistics for the two previous years. Some errors in addition were discovered and are noted when those statistics are used in this study.

Issues of subjectivity also may have presented some limitations for this study as they apply not only to myself, as noted in the previous section, but also to the participants. Lal (1996) point out how participants “are often not just responding to our agendas and to our questions, but they are also always engaged in actively shaping their presentations to suit their own agendas of how they wish to be represented” (p. 204). While participants may filter what they say for their own agendas, they may also give responses they think the researcher wants to hear. Participants in this study may have responded in ways they believed would please not only me, as the researcher, but also people in a position of authority over them.
Limitations related to subjectivity were compounded by two other factors: student participants were not used to talking to outsiders; and it was commonly understood that people within the context of this study are often reluctant to acknowledge, admit, or discuss problems they may have. Furthermore, these female students are customarily not asked their opinions publicly and are not used to speaking about themselves with a foreigner. As a result, most students, especially the younger participants, answered questions directly, usually in a sentence or two, rarely elaborating.

The culturally sensitive nature of certain subjects also posed another set of limitations. Participants, especially female students, may have provided some responses that were culturally “appropriate” rather than accurate. Participants may have purposefully avoided mentioning certain subjects. For example, students may have felt unable to freely discuss their teachers’ behaviour, their school cotton field labour, and/or their family’s economic circumstances.

Another area of limitations involves issues of power. As Wolf (1996) argues “the most central dilemma for contemporary feminists in fieldwork, from which other contradictions are derived, is power and the unequal power hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created, and re-created during and after fieldwork” (p. 2). As Warren (1988 as cited in Wolf, 1996) points out “although white females may have secondary status because of gender, they acquire authority and privilege through race, class, and Western culture” (p.8). This was certainly true for me. I was also aware of the authority and privilege resulting from my connection to Save the Children and UNICEF (as the project funder). I was very conscious of my position as a white, educated, single, Canadian women throughout my time in Tajikistan. I attempted to be sensitive to, and aware of these issues, throughout the whole research process.
Summary

In this chapter I discussed my conceptual framework as well as my research design. To develop my conceptual framework, I integrated concepts from Bourdieu’s (1972/1977) social reproduction theory regarding social fields with concepts from the work of Kabeer (2001), Malhotra et al. (2002) and Stromquist (2002) on empowerment theories. In this study I explore factors, considered critical inputs or resources, that serve as either enablers or obstacles to enhance or to hinder girls’ schooling within the contexts of the social fields of community/society, family, and school.

Using a mixed method approach whereby qualitative methods dominant the study and are complement by quantitative methods, I explore not only the factors affecting girls’ schooling in rural Tajikistan but also efforts taken through the GEP to address the factors that limit or hinder girls’ educational opportunities and experiences. In this way, the GEP serves as a case study.

This study was conducted at school and non-school sites. The school sites consisted of six schools, three schools that implemented the GEP and three that had not. Four of the schools included in this study were located in Rumi district. (Two of these four schools had implemented the GEP and two had not). The two other schools in this study were located in Rasht district. (One school had implemented the GEP while the other school had not.) I collected qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted at each school. Research participants at school sites included female students in grades 9, 10 and 11, teachers, Directors, Deputy Directors, and community members. I collected quantitative data in the form of school enrolment statistics from each school, as available.

Research conducted at non-school sites consisted of semi-structured interviews with individuals who had been involved in implementing the GEP. These participants included
Ministry of Education officials, UNICEF staff as well NGO staff. I wrote detailed field notes throughout the research process as a form of qualitative data.

The data were analysed in several stages. The qualitative data from the interviews at the school sites was first analysed individually. Participant responses were then compared to responses of other participants within their peer group. For example, student participant responses were compared first by grade, then across grades. I then compared findings across schools, differentiating between those schools that had implemented the GEP and those schools that had not. Finally, data were compared across districts.

The quantitative data were analysed in the following manner. School enrolment statistics for grades 8 through 11, disaggregated by sex and language of instruction (where applicable), were analysed by school. The statistics were also analysed to show the progression of female students from grade 9 through to grade 11 at each school, disaggregated by language of instruction (where applicable). Findings from these two types of analysis were compared by district, differentiating between schools that had implemented the GEP and those that had not.

This chapter also included a discussion of ethical considerations, how I situate myself within this study as the researcher, and the limitations of the study. The next chapter is the first of four detailing this study’s findings and presents the district, community, and school contexts of the schools in Rumi district.
Chapter 5: Rumi District: Setting the District, Community, and School Contexts

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this study explores the factors affecting schooling experiences and opportunities for female secondary school students in six rural schools located in two districts in Tajikistan, three that had implemented the Girls’ Education Project and three that had not. Rumi is one of the districts where this study was conducted. Having presented the context of gender and education in Tajikistan from a national perspective in Chapter 2, this chapter aims to set the district, school community, and school contexts as richly as possible and ends with a comparison of the contexts of the four Rumi schools included in this study. (Rasht District contexts are discussed in the following chapter.) Insights into factors affecting girls’ schooling are presented in this chapter from the perspectives of the Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers, members of the school Parent Teacher Association or Community Education Committee and the local NGO staff who implemented the GEP. (The perspectives of female secondary school student participants from both districts are discussed in Chapter 8.)

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section A contains district-level general and educational information about Rumi as well as findings from interviews with local NGO staff. I present the school contexts in Section B, beginning with a comparison of student enrolment in grades 1 to 11, disaggregated by sex, at the four Rumi schools in this study. Section B includes four school profiles constructed from qualitative findings and quantitative findings (in the form of enrolment and progression statistics). In each profile I categorize the factors affecting girls’ schooling into one of four groups: those related to community/society, family, school, or self. In Section C I summarize and analyse the findings across the four schools.
Section A: District context

**General information about Rumi District.**

Located in the southwest of Tajikistan, Rumi is one of the 24 districts within the administrative region of Khatlon (see Figure 4).Named in honour of the Tajik-Persian poet and philosopher Jaloliddin Rumi, Rumi is located in the lowland area of the Vakhsh River valley. The regional capital of Rumi is Kurgan-Tyube, located 100 km south of Dushanbe. The population of Rumi was estimated in 2008 to be 152,300 (Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2008, State Committee of Statistics, Dushanbe, 2008) [Russian]). Although little district-level information about Rumi is publicly available, there is available information about Khatlon, the region in which Rumi is located. Of the five administrative
regions in Tajikistan, Khatlon has the largest population estimated in 2008 to be 2,579,300 (Population of the Republic of Tajikistan as of 1 January 2008, State Committee of Statistics, Dushanbe, 2008 [Russian]). While the population of Khatlon is predominantly ethnically Tajik, a significant number of Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity also live in this region.

The region of Khatlon was largely unpopulated in the early 1900s. However, its population grew at a rapid rate beginning in the 1930s when Stalin began to forcibly resettle people from other areas in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Khatlon (Anderson, 1997). Recognizing that the plains of Khatlon had the ideal climate for cotton production, Stalin irrigated the land, created huge state cotton farms, and used forced resettlement to secure labourers for these farms. Forced resettled occurred from the 1930s through to the early 1960s (Anderson, 1997). As a result of this intense focus on cotton production, the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan became a major supplier of cotton to other Soviet Republics.

Many of the people forcibly resettled from within Tajikistan were from Rasht district (Anderson, 1997). During data collection, it was apparent to me that people maintain a strong connection to their place of origin and the corresponding regional religious and societal/cultural practices. Despite the fact that resettled families have been living in Khatlon for at least half a century, many participants in this study referred to them as “Gharmis” (since Gharm is the capital of Rasht district) or people from Rasht. This connection between Khatlon and Rasht is very significant for this study, as will become apparent in the findings.

It is this connection between Gharm and Khatlon which was likely the reason why people in Khatlon experienced the fiercest fighting during the civil war since Gharm was the center for one of the opposition parties during the civil war (as detailed in Chapter 2). This fighting had severe and devastating effects on life in this region, including schooling (which will be discussed in the next section).
The vast majority of the population in Khatlon is engaged in agricultural activities such as cotton production, raising livestock, and growing fruits and vegetables for home consumption and/or for sale in local markets. Established in the 1930s, cotton fields continue to dominate not only Khatlon’s landscape but also its local economy. Cotton fields labour is done primarily by females. Although it is illegal for children to work in the cotton fields, many children, especially girls, do so. Yearly cotton field work begins in May and is completed in early December. Cotton harvesting is the most labour intensive activity and occurs from September through November, coinciding with the first three months of the school year.

**Education in Khatlon region (which includes Rumi District).**

Accessing any regional and/or district level statistics from the Ministry of Education proved to be a challenge for me. Since I was unable to obtain any regional and/or district level statistics, despite my requests, I rely on data from UNESCO reports and documents. (Other potential data sources such as the World Bank provide only national statistics for Tajikistan.)

Khatlon is recognized as the region in Tajikistan with the greatest degree of “educational deprivation” (Global Monitoring Report, 2010, p. 163). One reason for this categorization is due to the low number of students who continue on past grade 9, the last compulsory level of education. According to the EFA mid-term national report (2007), only 48% of grade 9 students in Khatlon in 2005 went on to grade 10 and there is “considerable concern” regarding the steadily decreasing number of students continuing to grade 10 in recent years (p. 61). As a result of this decrease, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for grade 10 and 11 in Khatlon is among the lowest in the country at 41% (EFA mid-term national Report, 2007, p. 60). The GER is the number of students enrolled in a given level of education regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for that level of education (UNESCO,
Educational statistics disaggregated by sex show that Khatlon has among the lowest percentages of female participation in grade 10 and 11 in the country. Only 36% of female students in grade 9 in Khatlon continued on to grade 10 in 2007 (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114). The percentage of female students in both grades 10 and 11 in Khatlon were the lowest in Tajikistan in 2007 at 27% (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114). In comparison, 39% of students in grades 10 and 11 in Dushanbe, the capital, are female as were 52% of the students in Sughd and 76% of the students in Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114).

**District-level findings from local NGO staff.**

The staff at the local NGO in Rumi District that implemented the GEP provided insights into the situation regarding girls’ education within the district (see Chapter 8 for more details about this NGO). Several of the staff members, all of whom were women, spoke of how the civil war affected girls’ schooling in Rumi. One described the civil war’s effects on the quality of education and parents’ sense of security for their children, especially their daughters. She noted

> I think that because, after the civil war, the schools were in very poor conditions, no facilities, no [good] conditions in schools, parents were afraid to send their children to school, girls were frightened and the situation got very bad. (P52b)

She went on to explain how the civil war changed the fundamental structures of life and how education qualifications came to have no value. She stated that,

> after the Civil War, the thinking of people has changed due to changes in the structure of life. You see that unemployment has been increased rapidly after the Civil War. All whoever holding higher education or without any education, they became equal. They are in same situation. They don’t have job, whether you have education or whether you don’t, and everybody started migrating to Russia. They were not seeing the use and benefit of holding the diploma or certificate. (P52b)
As well as coping with the devastating civil war, people also faced a severe decline in their standard of living (as detailed in Chapter 2). Poverty was another important factor, raised by another staff member, affecting whether or not children went to school after the civil war.

She noted how

to my understanding, mostly poverty led the children to drop out from school and to find ways to survive and help their families. Instead of going to school, they would prefer to go wash some cars, to work in the cotton fields, to do some jobs so that they can earn some money and bring it home and to improve their situation. (P52c)

This high level of poverty not only at the household level but also at the state level meant that the education system became significantly underfunded and the conditions continued to deteriorate. As the quality of education declined, so too did students’ interests to stay in school. One staff member describes in the following statement how these factors, as well as restrictions regarding how much schooling girls should attain, affected female students in Rumi district.

After the civil war, the schools’ conditions became very poor. There was a high teacher turnover. The classes are not interesting anymore. The schools don’t have facilities or there are some young specialists [teachers], maybe they did not yet graduate or maybe they just became a teacher after completion of secondary school so they are not qualified enough. And all these create uninteresting class environment in schools. And some girls were of thinking that if, later on, we cannot further continue our study, why do we need to go to school? Because these girls didn’t see anything except their village, that kind of life, what they are having at school, that’s it. (P52a)

Her comment highlights the fact that girls understand that they will not be allowed to continue on to post-secondary education and are not exposed to life outside their village or to traditions, norms, and practices that differ from those of their village.

As well as these macro factors, the NGO staff also spoke of factors at the family level that affect whether or not a girl is allowed to attend grade 10 and 11. Mothers and fathers (and in
some cases older brothers) are the key decision makers when it comes to their daughters’ (or sisters’) education. One staff member described how

there are the categories of girls who depend on their parents’ decision and their parents don’t allow them to go to school, their brothers do not want them to go to school…Fathers in many cases and brothers also. And in some families when the brother says “no,” nobody can change his mind and decision. (P52a)

As for parental aspirations for their daughters, she commented that “in these villages, mostly what the parents, especially mothers, say is that if she will find a good husband, to build a family, to have children, that’s a future for my daughter” (P52a).

Difference between the attitudes of people who live in rural areas compared to those who live in or near to urban centers was also raised. One staff member noted that “those who are located close to a city, their mentalities differ. They are more civilized and modern and those are in remote area they are narrowed-minded” (P52d). Speaking of her experiences working with different groups of people within Rumi District, she noted how “particularly with these people who were resettled from Rasht, it’s very difficult to work with them” (P52d). She estimated that about half of the people in Rumi District were from families whose descendants were from Rasht.

Ethnicity was also mentioned as a significant factor affecting whether or not a girl might be allowed to go on to grade 10 and/or 11. Another staff member noted how parents of Uzbek ethnicity often allow their daughters far greater educational opportunities than many of parents of Tajik ethnicity. She noted that, “for example, for Uzbek ethnicity, the girls are studying up to grade 10 and 11. They have fewer barriers from the family side and even can go and continue to get higher education” (P52b).

Speaking about how some deny the existence of problems at school related to girls’ education, an NGO staff member described the tendency of people to not want to admit that
they have a problem due to the Soviet legacy. She noted how “in Soviet times, there were problems but these were never shared with the public.” (P52d).

Speaking broadly, one of the NGO staff reflected on her many decades of work with women and girls in the following statement which highlights the existence and effects of gendered norms and practices:

During 50 years of my experience I am working with women with girls and if you give them freedom they can express themselves in a best way but they are like in a frame. They can’t go out of frame. Myself I am observing it and I am sure if this frame will be taken out, they can perform much more better and they will be one the active women and girls in all the country. (P52d)

In summary, the NGO staff discussed several macro and micro level factors that affect girls’ schooling in Rumi. The macro level factors include the poor quality of the education students receive, how education qualifications had little or no value after the civil war, how parents were fearful to send their daughters to school after the civil war, how poverty can limit female students’ schooling, and restrictive norms and practices about female student not being allowed to go on to higher education. Micro level factors mentioned included parents’ (and in some cases older brothers’) attitude regarding what level of schooling female family members should attain, parents’ aspirations for their daughter. Factors regarding affect girls’ schooling in Rumi district also include whether a family lives in a rural or urban area, whether the family originates in Rasht or is of Tajik or Uzbek ethnicity.

Section B: The schools

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted in four schools in Rumi district. Two schools implemented the GEP and two did not. The schools differ in size and percentage of female students, as noted in the following table.
Table 10: Total enrolment in September 2009 of four Rumi schools by school and percentage of students by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rumi School</th>
<th>Number of students (grades 1 to 11)</th>
<th>Percentage of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - GEP</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - non-GEP</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - GEP</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - non-GEP</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two GEP schools have the largest enrolment with Rumi School 3 (GEP school) having almost twice as many students as Rumi School 2 (non-GEP school). Two schools (Rumi Schools 1 and 2) have roughly 10% more male students than female students while enrolment at Rumi School 4 (a non-GEP school) is at parity.

Rumi School 1 (GEP school).

Rumi School 1 is a grade 1 to 11 school located in a village that is approximately a 30 minute drive from the district capital of Kurgan-Tyube. The road from the district capital is a main road that is paved. The area consists of a flat plain with mountain ranges on each side, off in the distance. Cotton fields dominate the plains and in September many trucks were traveling on the main road with loads of picked cotton, full to overflowing.

While cotton production is the main large-scale agricultural activity in this area, many families also grow fruit and vegetables and raise cattle. When asked about standards of living and levels of poverty amongst the students’ families, one teacher described three levels: those families who have a “good” standard of living (above average), those families who are average and those who are living below the “poverty line.” The teacher stated,

talking about this village, roughly from 100 families, 10 are having a good living standard. The remaining, it is a mixture, who are coming under the poverty line and who are average. In my class I have 24 students, three of them are orphans. Four are coming from the very poor family…the families who have two or three cows and a vegetable garden they are not considered a poor family because from the vegetables itself, if they have big enough land, they are getting a good income. (P42)
In this school community, as elsewhere in Tajikistan, a student’s economic circumstances are greatly affected by whether or not she or he has lost one or both of her or his parents. In Tajikistan the term *orphan* describes a child who has lost either a father or a mother. According to one of the teachers, a family that has lost the father faces far greater economic challenges than a family that has lost a mother. He stated that “if the father is alive he can take care of a child but if the father passed away and [the child] has only a mother, the situation is much more difficult. The government is paying them some amount of money, compensation, some social benefit” (P42). Orphaned students also do not have to pay the yearly rental fee of 30% of the cost of each textbook.

The catchment area of the school consists of three villages: the village in which the school is situated, a village approximately a half an hour walk from the school and a third village 2 km from the school (approximately 40 min walk). A few parents in the further villages who own a car drive their young children as well as other young children from home to school each day.

According to the Director, the school serves 552 families in approximately 400 households within the three villages that make up the school community. Roughly 200 of the families (36%) are Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity. The other families are Tajik of Tajik ethnicity. The Deputy Director stated that approximately 50% of the families within the school community are Tajiks with ancestral origins in Gharm, Rasht, as a result of forced migration (see Chapter 2). Of the 22 student participants at Rumi School 1, 10 had at least one male family member (their father or brother) working in Russia. Since the school community includes Tajiks and Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity, the school provides classes in two languages of instruction: Tajik and Uzbek.
The school is located in a village and is a one-minute drive off the main road. A small stream runs along two sides of the school compound, with dirt roads and houses located on the other sides of the stream (see Figure 5).

Cotton fields border the other two sides of the compound. There is no fence around the school compound. However, several mature trees serve to enclose parts of the compound.

*Figure 5: Map of Rumi School 1*
There are several buildings on the school compound. The two school buildings are single story and white. The smaller building, built in 1961, was recently refurbished as part of the GEP, and contains five classrooms. The Director described how the older school block was transformed by noting how

in the other building of our school [the older school block] five classrooms were out of use. They were in very poor condition. The floor was destroyed completely. We had leakage. The ceiling was in a horrible condition because this school was constructed in 1961 and the roof was destroyed. There were no windows or doors. So with the support of the Save the Children and funding of USAID and involving parents and teachers, in collaboration with all of us together, we made a full renovation of that building….We were not having [glass in the] windows before. We just used to put some plastic. Now in all the school, in all the classrooms, we have [glass] windows. (P31)

The main school building was built in 1972 and includes the Director’s office, the staffroom, the resource center as well as classrooms. The resource center is directly across the hall from the Director’s office. According to the teacher that runs the school club, the resource center is one of the results of the GEP. The resource room, secured by a regular door and a door of steel bars, contains four desks each with a computer, and one laser printer. (Each computer is a different model indicating they were acquired at different times from different sources). Along the opposite wall of the room are two large wooden books shelves with a small number of books displayed on each shelf. A large portable radio/tape recorder was also in the center. The teacher who runs the club described how

we have good books and people can have access to books they can take it home and read it at home. Not only the students from our school have access to these books but also the students from the close schools also they used to come and take books for reading and to bring them back. (P22)

(The provision of books was not part of the GEP. When my translator and I looked at the books we noticed that they were old and not very appealing for youth.)

While the school has computers, power outages, common in rural Tajikistan, mean that students cannot always use the computers. When the electricity is off, students study from the
computer textbooks. During data collection, the school and neighbouring villages had electricity from 6 to 8 am and for two hours in the late afternoon.

Besides the main school building and school block, there are several other facilities on the school compound. A third building (which looks like a barn) is in very poor condition and thus unusable. There are two blocks of latrines, one for the girls and one for the boys, as well as a water pump. Near the stream in the corner of the compound is a small outdoor kitchen used to prepare a warm meal each day for the primary students, funded through the WFP school feeding programme (for details, see Chapter 2). Beside the kitchen is a long picnic table for children use while eating their food in bowls with the WFP logo. Primary students wash their hands in the stream before and after their meal.

The school yard is not paved. There are two very old basketball hoops without the netting, two rusted soccer goal (also without netting) and rusted volleyball posts with a well-worn volleyball net. Physical education classes take place in the yard year round.

The school has two shifts: morning and afternoon. The morning shift, attended by older students, is from 8 am to 1 pm while the afternoon shift is from 1 to 5:20 pm and is attended by primary students. Even though classes for the older students were to take place up to 1 pm each day, students were dismissed mid-morning during the data collection period. I do not know when school actually finished in the afternoon as it was the primary shift and I was not there.

School 1 has 29 teachers, 10 of whom are female. The female Deputy Director for primary, who ran the school club during the two years of the GEP and continues to do so, is the only female teacher from the local community. After finishing secondary school and university, she came back home to teach. All other female teachers at the school are from villages other than those within the catchment area, having married men from one of the three villages. (Once a woman marries, she lives in her husband’s village.)
The Director noted that in 2009/10 there was a shortage of four teachers and an even greater teacher shortage the year before. According to the Deputy Director, if the school was properly staffed in September 2009, the school would have 20 more teachers.

Teacher shortages have several repercussions for students. A grade 10 student described how English was a difficult subject for her because there was no English teacher when she was in grade 6 and 7. Her grade 10 English class is offered only twice a week due to the teacher shortage. A grade 11 student described how the teacher shortage affects the length of the school day when she noted that “nowadays we don’t have many teachers and by 10:30 am we are released from school and we go home” (P25). Due to the teacher shortage, some classes in 2009/10 were only offered in Tajik, disadvantaging students of Uzbek origin who don’t speak Tajik. As explained by a Grade 10 Tajik student,

the classes take place in Tajik language. All the classes, all the subjects and if the Uzbek students don’t understand then the teacher will translate it into Uzbek language to make them understand…Some teachers know [Uzbek], some don’t. Whoever knows they will translate into Uzbek also and explain. Whoever doesn’t, they will ask students because we are a few students who have grown up among the Uzbeks and we know both languages so we can help them to translate it into Uzbek language. (P38)

In addition to a teacher shortage, there was also a shortage of textbooks. Students rent textbooks from the school for four Somoni each (roughly $1 USD), although not all textbooks are available. A grade 11 student described how “we don’t have English textbook in this school and we are trying to find them in the market. About the textbooks, this library has some textbooks, [but] not all of them” (P43). One parent mentioned the shortage of textbooks in Uzbek language and how Uzbek students must study from textbooks in Tajik. However, the majority of the female Uzbek students I interviewed were not fluent in Tajik language.

The Deputy Director also spoke of a shortage of student spaces as well as classroom furniture. He noted that,
the older building was built for 340 students and now they have 900 students. Even three shifts are not enough, not enough student spaces, not enough classrooms. All the classes have 48, 38, 36 students in those classes. 100% [of the students] don’t come every day – 85% to 90% come every day. Some are sharing one chair for two students, three children to a desk made for two. (personal communication, September 16, 2009)

Besides participating in the GEP and the WFP hot meals program, Rumi School 1 was also a pilot school for a UNICEF-funded early childhood development project called the “Getting ready for school: A Child-to-Child Approach” that began in the fall of 2008 (see Chapter 2). This project helps to prepare children for grade 1 since there are no pre-schools in the school community. On Saturdays grade 4 students, led by the Grade 4 teacher, work with five and six year old children on basic math and literacy skills such as counting, listening to the older student read, and learning how to hold a pencil. The school has a well-furnished and well-resourced primary classroom which is likely the result of being part of this project.

In September 2009, 786 students were enrolled at Rumi School 1, 46% of whom were female and 54% male. Reflecting the ethnic make-up of the school community, students in the Tajik stream accounted for 60% of the student population with 40% of the students studying in the Uzbek stream. Of the students in the Tajik stream, 46% were female compared to 48% of the students in the Uzbek stream.

In Tables 11 and 12 I present the enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rumi School 1 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for three years: 2007/08, 2008/09 and enrolment at the start of 2009/10. In 2007/08 grade 11 was not offered at this school (see Table 11). However, grade 11 was offered in 2008/09 and 2009/10 (see Tables 11 and 12).
Table 11. Rumi School 1: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2007/08 (end of year) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik Girls</th>
<th>Tajik Boys</th>
<th>Tajik Total</th>
<th>Uzbek Girls</th>
<th>Uzbek Boys</th>
<th>Uzbek Total</th>
<th>Both Girls</th>
<th>Both Boys</th>
<th>Both Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71 (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>71 (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: in 2007/08 there was no grade 11 class offered at this school. The number in the brackets is the correct sum of the numbers.

Table 12. Rumi School 1: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/09 (end of year) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik Girls</th>
<th>Tajik Boys</th>
<th>Tajik Total</th>
<th>Uzbek Girls</th>
<th>Uzbek Boys</th>
<th>Uzbek Total</th>
<th>Both Girls</th>
<th>Both Boys</th>
<th>Both Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Rumi School 1: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/10 (September) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik Girls</th>
<th>Tajik Boys</th>
<th>Tajik Total</th>
<th>Uzbek Girls</th>
<th>Uzbek Boys</th>
<th>Uzbek Total</th>
<th>Both Girls</th>
<th>Both Boys</th>
<th>Both Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While not having grade 11 disadvantages both boys and girls, it creates a greater barrier to girls’ schooling than boys’ because boys are far more likely to be allowed to walk back and forth to a neighbouring school each day for grade 11. Thus providing grade 11 classes at this school has improved the educational opportunities for all students but has a greater impact for girls who face greater barriers to secondary school completion than boys.

Girls’ enrolment in grades 10 and 11 have increased significantly at Rumi School 1 from 4 and 0 in 2007/08 to 33 and 17 in 2008/09 and 20 and 24 in 2009/10, respectively. Other notable increases are as follows: the number girls in the grade 10 Tajik stream increased from 0 in 2007/08 to 20 the following year while the number of girls in the Uzbek stream increased from 4 to 13 during that same period; the number of girls in the grade 11 Uzbek stream doubled
from 6 in 2008/09 to 12 in 2009/10. Despite school administrators, teachers and community members commonly remarking that it is mainly Tajik girls who leave school after grade 9, Tables 11, 12 and 13 reveal that some Uzbek girls also leave school after grade 9, although to a lesser extent than Tajik girls.

In all three tables, more boys than girls were enrolled in grades 8 and 9 in both the Tajik and Uzbeks streams of instruction, with one exception. Boys’ enrolment in grades 10 and 11 fluctuated from 28 and 0, respectively, in 2007/08 to 9 and 24 in 2008/09 and 20 and 17 in 2009/10. However, while far more boys were enrolled in grade 10 in both streams in 2007/08, that pattern changed in 2008/09 and 2009/10 when an overall increase in girls in 10 and 11 resulted in variations equally present: some enrolment statistics show parity of girls and boys enrolment, some show more girls than boys, and some show more boys than girls.

According to the Deputy Director, the number of male students, especially those of Tajik ethnicity, who progress from grade 9 to 10 has decreased significantly as more than three quarters have left to work in Russia (see Tables 12 and 13). He noted other reported reasons why students left the school include moving to another district or school.

In Tables 14 and 15 I present the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11 disaggregated into four cohorts: students who started grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10. Table 14 presents statistics for students in the Tajik stream while Table 15 presents statistics for students in the Uzbek stream.

**Table 14. Rumi School 1: Progression of female students in the Tajik stream from grade 9 to 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Empty boxes in the table indicate that no statistics were available.
When exploring the progression of female students from grades 9 through to 11, the following is evident. The cohort of female students in the Tajik stream in grade 9 during the second year of the GEP (2007/08) was larger in number than other cohorts noted Table 14. Within the 2007/08 cohort, 20 of 21 girls progressed from grade 9 to grade 10 with 12 completing grade 11 (see Table 14). When comparing the number of female students in the Uzbek stream who were also in grade 9 in 2007/08, a higher percentage of Uzbek students went on to complete secondary school than their Tajik peers (twelve of sixteen students of Uzbek ethnicity (75%) compared to twelve of 21 of Tajik ethnicity (57%)). Approximately two-thirds of the female students in the Tajik stream who were in grade 9 in 2008/09 progressed to grade 10 the following year (see Table 15).

When the adult participants at Rumi School 1 were asked at what grade girls’ attendance and/or enrolment begins to be problematic, there were a variety of responses. Two teachers, including one who has run the school club for several years, noted that the problem of girls’ irregular attendance and drop out starts in grade 8 while another teacher believes it starts in grade 7.

Data from adult participants regarding issues related to girls’ schooling have been categorized into one of four categories identified in the conceptual framework for this study, as seemed most appropriate. The four categories are as follows: factors related to community/society, family, school and self. As will be seen, factors related to family appear to be predominant.
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.

Adult participants at Rumi School 1 made comments regarding the role of ethnicity and region of origin as well as marriage practices affecting female students that have been classified as factors related to community/society. Speaking not only about the differences between norms and practices regarding girls’ schooling for Uzbeks and Tajiks but also within these groups, a teacher noted that

there is a difference between the Tajiks and Uzbeks, with their mentally, with their vision. Even there is a difference between the Tajiks themselves depending on from which region they are coming from. They are based here, but originally some are from Rasht, some are from Kuljab, each has a different vision about the life, different structure of living so there is a difference among all these. Between the Uzbeks we have those who are open-minded and more developed and those who are still lagging behind with the old vision to life. It differs. (teacher, P44 - group interview)

As for marriage practices, the same teacher remarked that “our girls usually get married starting from 17 and after grade 9 we are facing problems with their coming to school” (teacher P44). Another teacher, who is the head of the school, club noted that girls in this community marry when they are 16.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.

The Director believes that many female students in the school community want to complete secondary school but their parents do not allow them to do so. He stated,

the majority of girls want to continue their education, yes, they want to be a teacher, they want to be a doctor but their parents don’t support them and that is why it is never getting realized. (P31)

This perspective was also shared by a male parent on CEC committee who participated in some visits to homes of girls attending school irregularly or who had stopped coming altogether. He described how,

mostly parents did not agree for their girls to come to school. They were saying that they are now grown-up and we don’t want them to be in school. [They were
saying], “what will they get out of this school? We don’t want them to study. We want to keep them home.” (male parent, P44)

A teacher at Rumi School 1 spoke of how many people in the school community do not value and/or see the benefit of secondary schooling for girls when compared to that of boys:

People are [saying] to invest for a boy a family will get a benefit because he will remain with us, so they support a boy. That is why there is a value of education for boys. They want him to study at school. They want him to graduate so that he will get work. He will support his family. He will remain with his family. It’s their own child. They want to invest in him but the girl is considered here as someone else’s property. [They say] “Why do we need to invest in her, for her education? After some time she will get married, she will leave this household. What will we get out of it? Nothing.” So they found it useless [to invest in a girls’ education]. (P42)

This teacher also spoke of how the educational experiences and opportunities of girls from rural areas differ from those living in urban areas. She attributed these differences to parental and familial attitudes towards girls’ schooling, girls’ labour outside the home, and aspirations for female members of the household. She noted how,

first of all, the girls from the village totally differ from the girls from the cities. The level of their knowledge differs because in the rural areas most of the parents, mother and father, uncles and brothers are creating barriers for girls and their education. First of all, the mentality of the urban area differs from the rural area. They don’t have to work in the field. They don’t have any work. It would not make sense for them to stay at home. What would they do? So they spend their time for study, for education. Here the knowledge differs from those of the rural area, starting from age 16, grade 9, girls don’t go to school. Here the parents don’t want them [to go to school]. They are saying our girls are now grown-up. There is no need for school anymore. (P42)

While some people in the school community believe Uzbek parents are more favourable to girls’ secondary schooling than Tajik parents, a female parent on the CEC committee stressed the importance of the parents’ level of education rather than their ethnicity. She stated that

in general, it doesn’t matter, he’s Tajik or she’s Uzbek. It much more matters on a parents’ level of education. If they are intelligent enough, it doesn’t matter. They will be active, everything will be alright, but if they are from lower level [of education], it will have its impact. (female parent, P44)
This parent also noted that many parents with daughters complain about the distance girls must walk to and from school while a male parent noted parental concerns about their daughters’ security during these walks. According to a teacher, distance is used by parents to as a reason to stop their daughters who have reached puberty from going to school:

[Parents say] “the girl is grown-up. We want to keep her at home” and the distance is one reason. It can be a good reason for parents [to keep their daughter home] and they have more concerns about the security of the girl rather than the time [it takes to walk to school]. (P44)

When asked what parents’ fear related their daughters’ walk to and from school, a female parent replied

it is more harassment from boys, I think, because even in elementary grades, even from a far distance [girls] are coming, it is not a problem. [Parents] are not afraid of dogs or something [like that]. But when she is growing up, now here the security issues are coming. They are not saying boys. They are not saying dogs. [They are saying] “They are grown-up girls and we are worried and they want them to stay home.”...When there are 3 or 4 in a group it is not an issue. They are coming but if one will stop [going to school] others will drop out. (P44)

This comment also reflects the importance of the number of girls who attend upper secondary school and how this may affect the attendance of other female students.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.**

The importance of the support and advocacy for girls’ schooling by the government, the school staff, and the CEC members is evident in the following comments. These comments are from the school leaders (the Director, Deputy Director and CEC member), highlighting the importance of the attitudes and actions of such leaders.

From a government policy level, the Deputy Director of primary who runs the school club noted how Presidential statements supporting girls’ secondary schooling has influenced her and other school staff. She stated that “our President quoted that even for girls the education is up to 11th grade and that’s why we try to follow up his sayings and to bring girls back and to keep them until grade 11 in the school.” (P22)
When discussing girls dropping out of school prior to the GEP, the Director noted how special efforts were made so that the school did not create barriers to girls’ schooling. He stated that,

[the situation for girls in upper secondary] was very difficult before the project. Even in the Soviet time we had the cases of girls dropping out. We used to go and try to convince them. It was very difficult with the girls and they were not regularly attending the classes, just before the graduation, one or two months before, they used to come by force and to take the last exams just to pass and to be registered as a graduate….They were not capable [of passing] but we were supporting them and making them to pass, so to attract them, not to create barriers, to support them. (P31)

According to the Director, school attendance policies are enforced differently for male and female students so as not to create barriers for the female students. He pointed out that,

with the boys we don’t have a problem [with attendance] because we have some kind of sanction against them. We say [to the boys] “if you have more than 35 absence days in the year you will just be dismissed from the school.” So we have a kind of punishment against the boys and it is very strict and tough and we warn the parents and boys. It works. All of them, they are now in the school. They are trying to be regular students. But with the girls we cannot do that because if you will put sanctions [on them] they will just stop coming. (P31).

Besides adapting school policies to reduce barriers to female students’ schooling, the Director also spoke of how he advocated for one female student to ensure she went to university. He described how,

there is a teacher in this school, I am the one who brought her back from the cotton field and took her papers to the university to support her to continue her education and she was one of the successful ones. She graduated and now she is the best teacher in this school. (P31)

This is the one female teacher at Rumi School 1 who is from the local community and thus a role model for female students at the school.

The Director also noted how he and others at the school are concerned about the lives of the girls in the school community. They understand the importance of education in light of the practises of early marriage and divorce. He noted how,
we see that when girls are not covered by education in grade 10 and 11, the number of young marriages is increasing, the percentage of divorce is also increasing. Girls are being far from reproductive health and all these things lead us to want to cover girls to grade 10 and 11 so we can overcome the existing problems. (P31)

Actions of other school leaders, such as community members, also appear to be factors related to the school that affect girls’ schooling. For example, a male parent who was a CEC member described how committee members would visit parents who were not sending their daughter(s) to school and to advocate on their behalf. He recalled how,

we used to bring them examples. For example, at the village level, we say “you will see that if your wife or daughter-in-law is sick you don’t want to show her to a male doctor. You need a female doctor. So just think about it, if you will not allow your daughter to study so where will we get the female doctors. Let her study, let her finish.” (P44- group interview)

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self

Very few of the comments made by adult participants at Rumi School 1 could be classified as factors related to the self. As noted earlier, the Director mentioned how many female students want to stay in school past grade 9 but are kept home by their parents, indicating the girls’ motivation and attitude towards their schooling. However, a female parent on the CEC committee noted that some girls stop going to school because they are weak students, and as such are not interested in staying in school. She noted how,

there were some cases because of not performing well or not having enough knowledge, the girls were dropping out. The girls themselves were saying “we are embarrassed to be in the class because I cannot even read properly so I feel shy and embarrassed and I don’t want to go to school.” (P44- group interview)

This comment could also be classified as a factor related to school because, besides referring to girls’ motivation and attitude towards their schooling, it also could indicate how some student in grade 9 are not acquiring basic skills such as reading.

It is evident from the findings that adult participants at Rumi School 1 recognize many challenges to girls schooling in their school community and have made efforts to address these
barriers. Some of the results of these efforts over the last few years can be seen in enrolment statistics that show an increase in the number of female students in grades 10 and 11 than in earlier years. Having implemented GEP activities for two years, Rumi School 1 staff and community members have been actively involved in identifying and addressing barriers to girls’ schooling (as will be discussed further in Chapter 8). As a comparison, findings from Rumi School 2 (a non-GEP school) will now be discussed.

**Rumi School 2 (non-GEP school).**

Rumi School 2 is located a 30 minute drive from the district capital along the main paved highway. As with Rumi School 1, cotton production activities were evident in the area surrounding the school. In addition to observing many trucks loaded with cotton while traveling daily to and from the school, I also observed cotton drying on paved road leading to the school. A family had laid out its cotton to dry. The cotton filled the household’s paved yard, spilling out onto the road, covering half the road. From a distance, to a Canadian such as myself, the cotton looked like snow, especially when primary school children were walking through the cotton, which was up to their mid-calf.

As in many other rural communities in Tajikistan, male members of the school community migrate to Russia for seasonal work. Five of the 17 student participants at Rumi School 2 had at least one immediate family member (father or brother) working in Russia. One participant mentioned that her father and all four brothers work in Russia.

During the civil war, the villages within this school community were greatly affected by fighting. As a result, beginning in November 1992, people in the community had to leave and the school was shut. The school re-opened in January 1993 after people slowly began returning to the area. The Director described how,
during 1994, 1995, 1996, things were very bad. There were homeless people. The situation was very difficult. We had a lot of orphans. We had refugees coming back to this place and [they were] very poor people. The condition was very bad. (P55a)

Describing the time when people began returning home, the Director noted how “it was just one family coming back [at a time], slowly, slowly, year by year. It wasn’t that all they came back all at once” (P55a). This continued to be the case from early 1993 to 1998, one year after national reconciliation.

According to a male parent member of the Parent Teacher Association, peoples’ perceptions of the value of education were greatly affected by the civil war and the severe decline in the economy. He noted that “the civil war which took place changed the thinking and mentality of people. Some were scared because of a not secure situation. Some were thinking that even if they do study there are no job opportunities, so why study?” (P81 – male parent 1)

Rumi School 2 serves school-age children from four villages: two villages that encircle the school, one village four kms east of the school, and one village four kms west of the school. According to the Director, approximately one-fifth of the school population (100 students) comes from the two villages 4 kms away. It takes the Director 35 minutes to walk from his home in one of those villages. The Director spoke of how students who walk from the farthest villages are often late for their first class, as was confirmed by some student participants. A teacher estimated that 30 to 35 percent of the families within the school community are from families that had been forcibly resettled from Rasht decades earlier.

The school is located a very short distance off the main road, at the end of a paved road with ditches on both sides. Houses surround the school compound. A chain-link fence encloses the compound. Several mature trees stand are in front of the school, providing much-needed shade during the heat of the summer and fall (see Figure 6). Drainage ditches line the paved walkways to the school blocks and were bone dry in late September when I visited the school.
The main school building is square, with two floors and many windows. Through the main doors is a large foyer with doors that lead to an outdoor quad. The quad is partially paved with unkept grass and a few young trees. In the quad are a table, four chairs, and a metal water container with a tap and a basin used for hand-washing. A water hose leads from the school into the quad. (I did not ask about toilets but assume there were toilets at the school.)
Built in 1989 to replace the old school, the main school building contains a Director’s office with an outer office for the Deputy Director, 24 classrooms, a staff room, a large conference hall, and a gymnasium. Many windows with glass panes make the hallways and classrooms bright. The Director pointed out that although small repairs have been done from time to time with the help and support of the PTA, no major renovations have been done since the school was built thirty years ago. I was unable to see the gymnasium as I was told that it was in an unusable condition.

While the hallways and classrooms looked to be in good condition, there were large cracks in the walls and ceiling of the Deputy Director’s office where I conducted interviews. The linoleum in the office was very worn, cracked, and missing in some places. The wooden chairs were rickety and worn. The Director described how

parts of the school building are in an emergency condition…the majority of the roof is spoiled…if it rains you will see that the floor is full of water…we repaired the roof in a way that [when it rains] the water goes into the hall and not the classroom. (P55a)

Each December, stoves are set up to heat 12 elementary classrooms. Fueled by either wood or coal, each stove has a pipe directing the smoke out of the classroom. The Director, with support from the PTA, hopes to acquire 12 more stoves so that all classrooms can be heated during the bitter cold of winter.

Primary students from grades 1 to 4 get a hot meal daily as part of the WFP school feeding programme. A male parent, who cooks the meal, described how the community contributes to these meals: “we are receiving some beans and we are trying, from the families who can provide support, who are in a good situation, they will give some carrots, onion, potatoes, for preparing this hot meal for the children.” (P81 male parent 1)

Rumi School 2 has a seven-member PTA. The practice of having a PTA at all schools in Tajikistan dates back to the Soviet times, when the English translation of “PTA” was the Fathers
and Mothers Committee. According to the Director, during the Soviet period the State ensured that the school was in good condition and the PTA “were just coming, meeting teachers, and asking about the performance of the students” (P55a). The current mandate of the PTA is to oversee the school’s physical condition. The Director described how,

> the Chairman of this Parent Teacher Association will come to school. He will check before the new academic year will start [and determine] what is the condition of the school, what will the school need, what is to be renovated, to prepare the school for the winter season, what kind of work should be done. So, he keeps checking and tracking. They will buy some stoves for the school for the wintertime….They will buy cement, they will by some necessary materials for the renovation. They will bring it and we teachers, by ourselves, will do the renovation work. (P55a)

The PTA consists of the Director, a teacher or the Deputy Director, and five parents, with one of the parents serving as the Chairman. Some members are of Uzbek ethnicity and some of Tajik ethnicity. The PTA usually has one female member. The Director explained that usually it’s only one member, because whatever problems we have in the school, a man can handle it, not a woman, because most of the women are the housewives. Yes, it’s just one member is a woman. Sometimes it can be two. If there are any problems with the girls, the women can talk to them and can solve [the girls’ problems]. Otherwise, mostly it’s men because they can handle the problems. (P55a)

The school offers classes in two languages of instruction: Tajik and Uzbek. Classes in both languages of instruction are conducted in each of two shifts. Students in grades 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 attend the morning shift from 8 am until 12:15 while students in 2, 3, and 4 attend the afternoon shift from 12:15 to 4 pm.

Rumi School 2 has 25 teachers, 15 of whom have degrees from the pedagogical university. I do not know the number of female teachers at the school. Since very few female teachers in the other schools in this study hold university degrees it is safe to assume that most, if not all, the 15 teachers with university degrees are male. In my week at the school I did not
see many female teachers. Most teachers I interviewed were male despite my requests to interview an equal number of male and female teachers.

Both the Director and the Deputy Director graduated from this school. While the Director worked at another school before returning to this school 11 years ago, the Deputy Director has worked at this school for 31 years. The Deputy Director noted proudly that “70% of the teachers in this school were my students” (P55b).

According to the Director, there are enough student spaces at the school but not enough teachers. In addition to a shortage of elementary teachers, the school also does not have English, Russian, and Tajik language teachers and a Computer teacher for the secondary school level. Despite the teacher shortage for certain classes, these classes still appear on the timetable. A grade 11 student described how,

we have a lot of gaps between the classes because in our timetable Russian language is there [in the timetable] but we don’t have a teacher so we spend time outside. Sometimes maybe they merge the classes and we will take it together. In order not to waste time we will go for the next class and we will sit with some others. (P59)

To address the challenges caused by the teacher shortage, some classes are combined, bringing together students in both language streams and requiring translation throughout the class to ensure students’ understanding. For example, the only Physics teacher, who is Uzbek, described the difficulties involved in teaching a class that combines students who speaking either Uzbek or Tajik.

To gain admittance into many of the university programs, students must have taken Russian language classes. However, Rumi School 2 does not have a Russian language teacher. Therefore, students who want to go to higher education transfer to schools that offer Russian language classes. One such school is roughly 3 kms away and another is 7 km away.
During interviews with adult participants at Rumi School 2, several comments were made regarding the lives of male students. While female students work in the cotton fields, boys also have work to do. According to one teacher, some boys work in the rice fields for 10 to 15 days at the end of September which may cause them to miss school. He also described how boys make bricks to earn money: “Usually they do it after class, but most of the time they are working during summer vacation when they are free…usually the boys, even though they work, they are in school, just maybe one is not coming” (P74).

Ethnic differences were also mentioned in relation to boys’ schooling. One teacher pointed out that male students of Uzbek ethnicity are more likely than male students of Tajik ethnicity to transfer to another school that offers all the subjects a student needs to gain entrance to university. He stated

we have fewer Uzbek boys in the school [than Tajik boys] because most of them are joining another school. They are going to district schools or some other schools...[This happens in grades] 10, 11 mostly because we don’t have some classes. For example, Russian language we don’t have, so they are going to a better school. (P74)

Teachers and student participants at School 2 noted that some Uzbek students who plan to go on to higher education switch from the Uzbek language stream to the Tajik stream because there are no higher education programs offered in Uzbek in Tajikistan. When asked why there were only three boys in the Uzbek stream of grade 11, a female Uzbek student in grade 11 described how

the eight boys from the Uzbek class moved to the Tajik class to continue their education, they want to study in Tajik language. In Tajik class now we have only two Tajik boys. The rest left the school. (P82)

One teacher described how, over the last decade, many of the male students will try to get admitted for higher education and if they fail to do so, they will leave for Russia to work as a migrant laborer rather than do military service. Another teacher spoke about how each year
three or four male students will continue on to post-secondary education. He stated that “out of 35 [students], 3, 4 will go for the higher education. Some may be engaged in vocational training institutes. Some will take some driving courses. Some will go to Russia. Some will be back for the farming” (P74). He described how the local vocational training institute accepts students after they have completed grade 9 to take one of four courses: a driving, engineering, welding, or computer course. He also noted that “the parents of these four students [who go on to higher education] are educated, so they are encouraged by their parents to continue their education...‘educated’ means that they have a university degree.” (P74)

Some male students at Rumi School 2 also leave for Russia rather than complete secondary school. One Uzbek student in grade 11 at Rumi School 2 described how,

most of [the boys] go to Russia...Starting from grade 8, grade 9, they leave. Sometimes they study up to grade 11. They will finish school. Those who have finances and ability to continue their study will go to university or institutes but those from poor families just leave to Russia...Sometimes they come [home] to visit. Sometimes if the age for [their] marriage is coming, [they say to themselves,] “okay it is time for me to get married.” They will come. They will marry. They will stay for one month and they will leave. And some who are school-age, they are coming to finish school. (P61)

In September 2009, Rumi School 2 had a total enrolment from grades 1 to 11 of 508 students, 45% of whom were female and 55% male. Student enrolment in each stream of instruction was roughly equal, with 253 students enrolled in the Tajik stream (41% of whom were female) and 255 in the Uzbek stream (50% of whom female). Of the student population, 65 were receiving support or “compensation” from the government because they were either orphaned or from a poor family with four or more children attending school.

The following tables present enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rumi School 2 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for two years: 2008/09 (Table 16) and enrolment at the start of 2009/10 (Table 17).
Table 16. Rumi School 2: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/09 (end of year) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik</th>
<th></th>
<th>Uzbek</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17. Rumi School 2: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/10 (September) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik</th>
<th></th>
<th>Uzbek</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These two students were of Uzbek origin and transferred into the Tajik stream to prepare for possibly continuing their education at the tertiary level.

In both the Tajik and Uzbeks streams of instruction in 2008/09, there were more boys than girls in grade 9 and, when this cohort progressed into grade 10, this continued to be the case. However, there are instances when boys’ enrolment is very low and girls’ enrolment is significantly higher. For example, there were 3 boys compared to 16 girls in 2008/09 in the grade 10 Uzbek stream and this difference in enrolment continued as the cohort progressed into grade 11; in 2008/09 in the grade 11 Tajik stream, there were 3 boys compared to 9 girls. This raises questions regarding the boys: Have they left this school to attend another secondary school, to attend vocational training, or to work as migrant labourers in Russia?

Table 18 and 19 present the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11, disaggregated into four cohorts: students who started in grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10. Table 18 presents statistics for students in the Tajik stream while Table 19 presents statistics for students in the Uzbek stream.
Table 18. Rumi School 2: Progression of female students in the Tajik stream from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These two students were Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity who transferred into the Tajik stream to prepare for possibly continuing their education at the tertiary level.

Table 19. Rumi School 2: Progression of female students in the Uzbek stream from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When considering the cohort that was in grade 9 in 2007/08, significantly fewer female students in the Tajik stream progressed to grade 11 than their peers in the Uzbek stream. Only 2 of 9 female students in the Tajik stream completed grade 11 (see Table 18) compared to 15 of 16 female students in the Uzbek stream (see Table 19). During interviews, I discovered that the two female students in the Tajik stream were ethnically Uzbek and transferred into the Tajik stream to be better prepared to continue on to higher education. Therefore, one cannot assume that students in the Tajik stream in grades 10 and 11 are of Tajik ethnicity. This supports the finding that there appears to be less resistance, if any, to girls completing secondary school for some parents of Uzbek ethnicity when compared that demonstrated by some parents of Tajik ethnicity, particularly those with families who originate in Rasht.

When discussing issues relating to girls’ schooling, the Director’s responses differed significantly compared to responses from other adult participants at Rumi School 2. The Director, when asked about irregular absences of students, described how,

last year we had the problem that after grade 9 five girls [one Uzbek and four Tajik] did not come to school. They stopped…We had three boys who left the
school, but just because they went to continue their studying in a vocational training institute...For this year, the year just started, it’s the beginning of the annual academic year and we don’t have any problems at the moment. (P55a)

He also noted that all the female students who were in grade 9 in 2008/09 have progressed to grade 10 for 2009/10. (It is important to note that the Head of the District Education Department selected this school for inclusion in this study specifically because of their problems with girls’ irregular attendance and/or dropout rates.)

Other adult participants contradicted what the Director said regarding the irregular attendance of students, particularly female students. A male parent and PTA member commented that “from grade 1 to 5 the attendance [of female students] is good. They are active, coming to school, but starting from grade 6 to upper grades here the problems start with absenteeism and mostly in grade 8 it becomes worse” (P81, male parent 1). An elementary teacher mentioned that a few girls in grades 6 or 7 attend school irregularly and irregular attendance of female students “after grade 8” significantly increases (P73).

When describing how male students in upper secondary grades change schools to access classes needed for university entrance (as mentioned earlier), a grade 8 to 11 teacher described how “boys are changing [schools], girls are not, because girls are hardly coming to the school which is close by to their houses and if it’s a bit far, they will not go at all” (P74).

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.

During interviews with some of the adult participants at Rumi School 2, ethnicity appeared to be a major determinant affecting girls’ schooling that could be classified as a factor related to community/society. In regards to female student attendance, a teacher called attention to difference between attendance rates of female student who are of Tajik ethnicity compared to those of Uzbek ethnicity. She stated,
usually the Uzbeks come all the time, just during the cotton picking season, they’re missing school, they don’t come. But the Tajiks, over the year, they are not regular students. Whenever they have a new dress, they come to school to show it, otherwise, they don’t come at all. (P73)

The chemistry teacher also mentioned students’ ethnicity when he described how “in grade 11 in Uzbek class, we have a lot of girls in the class compared to the Tajik class in grade 11” (P74). Finally, as noted earlier, the only two female students in grade 11 in the Tajik stream in September 2009 were Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.

Adult participants at Rumi School 2 mentioned the following factors affecting girls’ schooling that have been classified as relating to family: parents’ attitudes regarding the value of girls’ schooling, older brothers’ attitude regarding their sisters’ schooling, household responsibilities (including cotton field labour), and poverty (lack of warm clothes in winter).

Describing dominant attitudes amongst parents in the school community regarding the value of education for girls and boys, a teacher responded that “for the girl, education is not a primary importance. It has secondary importance, but for the boys some the parents value education more, rather than for a girl” (P74). The chemistry teacher mentioned multiple reasons why parents in the community limit their daughters’ schooling and how female students attend school regularly “until grade 8.” He stated that

some of the parents are against their daughters’ education. I have been into some houses and talked with some parents. They told me that “my daughter is grown-up and I don’t want her to go to school…They say that “now she’s grown-up.” They don’t care about compulsory education. They say “she has a lot of things to do at home. She should help me. She should work. She’s grown-up. I don’t want her to go to school.” (P74)

A female teacher from the local community, who teaches grades 8 to 11, discussed how some families limit their daughters’ educational attainment. She stated that,

the major problem is from the parents’ side. They don’t understand education and its importance for the girls. The majority of the people, the Tajiks living in this
area, are the Tajiks who came from Rasht, from Gharm. Most of them are religious people. That’s why they don’t allow their daughters to come to school. (P73)

She also spoke about how some families don’t register their daughters in school at all:

Those girls who are not registered in school and are staying at home, when they reach their teenage [years], they have nothing to do. They are not in school. They don’t know how to make themselves busy, so they get involved in some bad actions or activities with the boys, having phone games, they don’t behave properly. (P73)

While some female students’ parents in the school community do not allow their daughters to complete secondary school, some female students have older brothers who are against their secondary schooling. A female Tajik teacher at Rumi School 2 offered her opinion as to why some older brothers are against their sisters schooling. She noted that,

most of the boys in this area, they are going to Russia or they are going to the city, and if they are meeting in the city, and big cities, of course they will see some girls with their bad behavior. [The girls] don’t behave well, and [the boys] think that is the school that is spoiling them. [The boys think that] to keep a girl at home, it’s safer. She will not be spoiled. When you give her freedom, she goes to school, that’s the thing that’s spoiling the girl. (P73)

(In this context “spoiled” might be referring to a girls’ sexual behaviour as Harris (2000) notes how in Khatlon “spoiled” is used to describe “an unmarried girl who is not a virgin” (p. viii).)

In regards to household responsibilities, a male parent on the PTA discussed how the problem of girls’ irregular attendance starts in grade 6 because parents want them to work at home. He noted that

there is a lot of work in the houses and life is difficult….They are helping their parents to work in the vegetable garden….The girls are more obedient than the boys. You should know that it is difficult to convince a boy because they are less obedient. Even if you ask them not to go, they will go to school and do not help. But the girls are more obedient. (P81 male parent 2)

Having to work in the cotton fields was often mentioned by participants as a reason why girls attend school irregularly, particularly during the cotton harvest season which coincides with the first three months of school. A grade 8 to 11 teacher described how,
now we have the cotton [picking] season… the actual work is done by girls in the cotton fields, they are picking the cotton. So most of the girls during this season, they are not regular [school attendees]. They are coming once in a week, once in one and a half week. For example, in my class now I have five absent girls [out of nine]…in my Grade 9 class, I asked one, “Where are the girls? Most of them are missing today.” [The students] told me they are in the cotton fields. (P74)

He also noted that “April is a problematic month because [the girls] will start working with the new cotton” (P74). (When asked about his male student’s attendance that day, the teacher responded that only one of the 11 boys were absent due to illness.)

A lack of warm clothing during winter was also given as a reason for students’ irregular attendance, especially those from poor families. This appears to apply to both female and male students. The Director noted “the poor ones, usually they don’t come in winter because when the rain and snow will start, maybe they don’t have proper clothes to come to school, so that’s the season when they are absent in the school.” (P55a) A teacher described how students say “we don’t have proper shoes, we don’t have a winter coat” when asked why they are not coming to school in the winter. He described the extent of student absences by noting,

for example, if there are 100 students, if 30 are missing, it’s a big number….most of these are poor families, and it’s an approximate number. If you check on a daily basis, one to one, it may go even higher, sometimes up to 50, 55 %. (P74)

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.**

Very few comments made by adult participants at Rumi School 2 have been classified as those related to school. However, one teacher spoke of how the school staff can “force” absent students to return to school since schooling is compulsory until grade 9 (P73). She also explained how the lack of opportunity to access higher education reduces her student’s motivation to study and how just a few students of her grade 11 students are active. She went on to describe how

in grade 6, 7, and 8, in the Tajik class, [students] are trying to study. They are trying, I can see it, but they don’t have enough knowledge to perform well…When they go to the upper grade, they do not study. That’s the problem in
this village. Every year, just three or four [students] get admitted to higher education from this area. The others go back to their farm. (P73)

Her comments also seem to indicate how many students are not acquiring the academic knowledge and skills needed to be successful as they progress to upper secondary school. The school uniform policy for female students can also affect upper secondary school students’ schooling as will be discussed further in the next section.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.**

Students’ motivation and response to the school uniform policy appear to be two factors related to self that can be derived from interviews with adult participants at Rumi School 2. From evidence already discussed, it is clear that a students’ motivation affects her schooling experiences and opportunities. The two female Uzbek students in grade 11 who transferred into the Tajik stream so as to improve their chances of going on to higher education provide an example of highly motivated female students. In contrast, the earlier comment that students who are not able to perform well academically stop trying once they reach upper secondary grades.

In regards to the effects of the school uniform policy for female students, a teacher described how peer pressure to dress “nicely” affects female students, especially those in the upper grades. The school uniform for female students at Rumi School 2 consists of a white shirt with black trousers and skirt. However, many female students come to school wearing a traditional dress, a long loose-fitting dress with trousers. Traditional dresses range from those made from simple inexpensive material, to those made with more expensive material, sometimes decorated with small shiny reflective pieces. The teacher described how a female students’ demand for a fashionable, more expensive traditional dress from her parents can serve as a reason for parents not sending their daughter(s) to school. She noted how some of the girls come once in a while with good dresses, expensive ones, and the other girls will feel bad. They will go back home and insist that her parents
get a nice dress also, so that in front of [her peers] she will not look bad, and if the parents cannot afford it, if the family is poor, then they will say, “I don’t need you to go to school if you are asking me to do these things. We are not able to afford, you better stop going to school, and don’t ask me for such kind of thing.” (P73)

In summary, comments made by adult participants at Rumi School 2 appear to indicate how factors related to family significantly affect girls’ schooling when compared to other types of factors which parallels the findings from Rumi School 1. However, the Director at Rumi School 2 denied that there were any problems related to girls’ attendance and retention at his school despite recognition of several issues by the Head of the District Education Department and other adult participants in this study. We turn now to the second GEP school included in this study.

**Rumi School 3 (GEP school).**

Rumi School 3 is located in a village approximately 30 km south from Kurgan-Tyube, the capital of Khatlon, and 3 km (a 45 minute walk) from Kolkhozabod, the district capital of Rumi. As with other school communities in Rumi, cotton production dominants the local economy resulting in a high demand for female labour especially during the harvest, from September to December. Some participants at Rumi School 3 mentioned that boys work in the cotton fields, however their number is very small compared to the number of girls who do so. (During data collection, I observed many women and girls picking cotton. On one or two occasions I saw a boy working in the cotton fields.)

The majority of the adults in this community are farmers, with many having a small plot of land on which they grow vegetables. Many also own a couple of cows and some sheep. According to the Director, there are no “rich” families in the villages that make-up the school community and most families have the same standard of living. However, the Director said there are many “very poor” families in one village that the school serves.
Seasonal labour migration of male family members was also apparent within this school community as one-third of the 18 student participants at Rumi School 3 had at least one immediate family member (father or brother) working in Russia. One student participant had three brothers working in Russia.

Within the school community, there are a few types of paid employment available for women besides cotton field work. A teacher who is the Head of the Girls’ Committee described how some women may work in a kindergarten or as a tailor. She noted that “if they are in a poor financial situation, they go and work, but if life is a bit better and there is no need for a woman to work, she will not work” (P104). Comparing her working situation to other women who also married into this village, as she did, the Head of the Girls’ Committee noted that,

to marry a person from this village, maybe out of all the girls who are in a similar situation [as me], one or two are allowed to work. I am one of those examples. Others, they are not allowed even to go out of the house, they just stay home…[when asked if they can visit each other] It depends on family. Some are going visiting [each other]. In some the husband will not allow them to go anywhere. Whatever the husband says, she will just obey them. (P104)

The school’s history dates back to 1936 when it was established as a primary school (grades 1 to 4). In 1964, the school expanded to include grades 5 to 8 and then expanded again to include grades 9 to 11. The Director noted that “during Soviet time, most of the parents [of current students] did not complete school. They just studied up to grade 4, 5. They don’t have even have a secondary education.” (P87)

While the civil war is recorded to have begun in 1992, unrest occurred in areas such as Rumi district even before Tajikistan’s independence in 1991. During the unrest before and during the civil war, some school community members fled, taking refuge elsewhere, while those not in danger stayed. People who stayed were of Uzbek ethnicity and Tajiks whose family originate from Kulob or Sugd. The Director spoke of shootings and houses being burned down. As a result of the fighting, she noted that there are many orphans in the area. She also described
how she had to flee and lost all her possessions. As for schooling during this time, the Director noted that,

from 1990 until 1997 the situation was very bad. One year the school was not operating at all. It was closed up...and then they opened, but the classes were not taking place fully...[it was closed] October, November, December [1992], January ... in February [1993] it was open....by 1994, already 80 percent of the people, they were back. (P87)

She also pointed out that “in some years between 1990 and 2000, there were no classes in grade 10 and 11” (P87).

School 3 consists of two school compounds: one for primary students (grades 1 to 4) and one for secondary school students (grades 5 to 11). (See Figure 7.) Primary students attend classes in old school blocks while secondary school students attend classes in an impressive, newly-built school across the road from the old school blocks.

A six foot high iron-bar fence encloses the secondary school compound. The new school building contains the Director’s office, the staff room, 22 classrooms, and toilets. At the time of data collection the toilets were non-functional as the school did not have running water. There is a small water pipe located in front of the school from which students drink. Both school compounds are surrounded by houses with small plots of lands, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens.

There are 38 teachers at the school, 25 of whom are female. The Director is female and Deputy Director is male. According to the Director, “some retired people are working in the school as teachers” (P87). The Director has been working at this school for 22 years, first as a teacher, then as the Deputy Director, and as the Director since 2005. The Director noted the lack of local teachers (those from the villages immediately surrounding the school) as problematic for three reasons: First, students lack local role models to inspire them to become teachers. Second, local teachers are more committed to the school that their children attend. Third,
teachers who live close to the school spend more time at school than teachers who must walk an hour to and from school daily.

Figure 7: Map of Rumi School 3

The school has two shifts of classes: students in the Tajik stream (grades 5 to 11) attend school in the morning from 8 until 1:05 pm; students in the Uzbek stream (grades 1 to 11) attend school in the afternoon from 1:05 until 6:05 pm as do primary students in the Tajik stream (grades 1 to 4). In the following academic year, Uzbek students will attend school in the
morning while the Tajik students in grades 5 to 11 will attend school in the afternoon. A few times a year, all students come together to celebrate holidays.

The school administration collects money from students’ parents twice a year to cover various school costs. The Director described these costs and how they are determined as follows:

money for curtains, for flowers, for textbooks…Every family has 5, 6 children, and every book [costs] money….In September we get the money [from them] for the textbooks. In May, they give money for [school] renovations….For the renovation, we will call parents. We will sit. We will discuss about it and they will themselves decide how much money, and we at the time also [discuss money], with the parents, for the firewood for the winter. (P87)

Students from poor families are not required to give money to the school for anything except textbook rental fees, which all students and teachers must pay. The Director explained that,

before, we had the experience, for poor families, for orphans, not to collect money for renting the textbooks. We tried somehow to help them, to support them, but now the school is having a lot of debts to the Ministry of Education, so starting from this year, that’s why the textbook rental is compulsory. Everyone has to pay the rental fee. (P87)

As for the textbooks, the school had sufficient numbers of Tajik textbooks but a shortage of Uzbek textbooks. According to the Director, “for grade 9, 10, 11 there are no textbooks available in the Uzbek language….For grade 5, 6, 7, the Ministry published only 5 or 6 books for 5, 6 subjects, in Uzbek language…in total, that’s it.” (P87)

As part of the curriculum, grade 9 and 10 students receive vocational training once a week in the district capital 3 km away. While vocational training has been in the curriculum for many years, these courses were not available to students for several years but were offered again staring in 2007/08. Students choose between two types of courses. Female students choose between a sewing course or a course enabling them to be a kindergarten teacher. Male students choose between a welding or driving course. In previous years Grade 11 students also received vocational training.
The school has received and continues to receive support from several international development agencies. Several years earlier, before the new school was built, latrines were built with support from Save the Children. The new secondary school, which opened in June 2008, was built by support from the German Development Bank (KfW). The KfW also provided the school with 10 computers. German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), a private international enterprise owned by the German Federal Government, provided the school with 12 coal-burning stoves. The school received four sewing machines and an oven through the GEP. At the time of data collection the school was participating in the WFP school feeding programme and UNICEF’s Child-to-Child Early Childhood Education pilot project.

The following comments shed light on issues related to boys’ schooling at Rumi School 3. Many participants indicated that most of the male students come every day. Comparing girls’ and boys’ schooling at Rumi School 3, a Tajik teacher explained how

for boys it differs. Those who are interested and have good knowledge and are interested in continuing education, because they have plans for future to go to higher education, they will stay [in school]. They will finish grade 10 and 11. But those who are weak students, they know that they will not go for higher education. They will finish grade 9 and they will leave to Russia. (P88)

The Director described how some male students who are 15 or 16, and in some cases younger, leave to work in Russia. She said “the father will call ‘come’ and they just go. They go to Russia and they are staying there. It is very good for men, they have two wives, one in Russia, and here” (P87). Men who work in Russia come home for visits. The Director noted that these men come home “in two years, one time” and how “they are coming just to make a woman pregnant and to go again” (P87).

While some male students drop out of school to work in Russia, others leave for a few months and then return to school. The teacher and the Head of the Girl’s Committee described how,
some grade 9, 10, and 11 boys go to Russia for 2 or 3 months during the school year and then come back. If the boy is going to Russia for 2, 3 months, they keep being registered in this school, but if they go for a longer time, they will take him out of the [school] journal. (104)

In September 2009, 910 students were enrolled at Rumi School 3 from grades 1 through 11, 52% of whom were female. The 627 students in the Tajik stream accounted for 69% of enrolment with 283 students (31% of enrolment) in the Uzbek stream. Disaggregating the enrolment statistics by language of instruction and sex reveals that 45% of the students in the Tajik stream were female compared to 66% of the students in the Uzbek stream.

The following tables present enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rumi School 3 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for two years: 2008/09 (Table 20) and enrolment at the start of 2009/10 (Table 21).

**Table 20. Rumi School 3: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/09 (end of year) by sex and ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik Girls</th>
<th>Tajik Boys</th>
<th>Tajik Total</th>
<th>Uzbek Girls</th>
<th>Uzbek Boys</th>
<th>Uzbek Total</th>
<th>Total Girls</th>
<th>Total Boys</th>
<th>Total Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 21. Rumi School 3: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/2010 (September) by sex and ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Tajik Girls</th>
<th>Tajik Boys</th>
<th>Tajik Total</th>
<th>Uzbek Girls</th>
<th>Uzbek Boys</th>
<th>Uzbek Total</th>
<th>Total Girls</th>
<th>Total Boys</th>
<th>Total Both</th>
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<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enrolment statistics for 2008/09 and 2009/10 show that there were more girls than boys enrolled in the Uzbek stream from grades 9 to 11. In the Tajik stream, there were more boys than girls enrolled in grades 8, 9 and 11 in 2008/09 and in grade 9 and 11 in 2009/10. While most of the enrolment statistics show a difference of 10 or less when comparing the number of boys and girls in a grade, at times the difference between the number of boys and girls in a grade
is much more extreme. For example, in 2008/09 there were only three female students in the Tajik stream in grade 11 compared to 10 female students in the Uzbek stream (see Table 20). In the Tajik stream in 2009/10, there were 39 boys enrolled in grade 9 compared to 14 girls (see Table 21).

The following tables present the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11 disaggregated into four cohorts: students in grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10. Statistics for students in the Tajik stream and the Uzbek stream are presented in Tables 22 and 23, respectively.

Table 22. Rumi School 3: Progression of female students in the Tajik stream from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23. Rumi School 3: Progression of female students in the Uzbek stream from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While only 12 of the 24 female students in the grade 9 cohort from 2007/08 in the Tajik Stream continued into grade 11, this was a significantly greater number than one year earlier when only three female students continued to grade 11 (see Table 22). When exploring the transition from grade 9 to 10, it is evident that all the female students in the grade 9 cohort in 2008/09 in the Tajik stream progressed to grade 10 whereas three female students from the Uzbek stream left the school after grade 9 (see Table 22 and 23 respectively).

Many female students at Rumi School 3 attend school irregularly or are absent, especially during the first three to four months of school when many female students must pick
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.

Factors related to community norms, ethnicity, and religion appear to serve as factors enabling and/or limiting girls’ educational experiences and opportunities, depending on the circumstances. For example, a Tajik teacher who is the Head of the Girl’s Committee described widely-held community norms regarding girls’ schooling once a girl completes grade 9. She commented that

It’s a village. It has its own rules, culture and tradition. They say that “the girls are grown-up, it’s a shame [for them] to be in school at this age. They go to the cotton field. They work in the fields. They will get married. That’s it”. (P104)

When discussing her students’ absences from school, an Uzbek teacher who has taught in the school for 20 years, remarked that female students of Uzbek ethnicity rarely absent from class. She stated that “most of them [Uzbek girls] finish grade 11. Maybe one or two will stop after grade 9 but it is very rare” (P93).

Several times during her interview, the Director mentioned the impact of the rise, in the post-independence period, of the influence of religion on ideas about girls’ schooling. She stated that,

for me, because I’m living here for a long time and working in this area, in my village, the great problem is because of religion. This is the impact and influence of religious thinking…[People] bring examples from the Koran and they rely on the religious sayings, “according to Islam a girl should not study, should stay home.” They say like this. And also, I noticed that recently in this area, girls started putting on the hijab, covering themselves, and I don’t like it at all. And I don’t allow them to come to school in such dress code. (P87)

When speaking of which girls attend school irregularly or drop out, the Head of the Girls’ Committee noted that “there are two cases. The ones that are poor and the ones that are religious
and they don’t come to school….Even though the poverty is a big issue, I think the religious issue is greater” (P104). Religious factors also can be classified as those related to family.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.**

Factors affecting girls’ schooling that relate to the family, as mentioned by adult participants at Rumi School 3, include parental attitudes regarding their daughter(s) schooling, parental aspirations for daughter(s) as well as the economic and religious circumstances of the family. Several adult participants described how some parents do not want their daughter(s) to complete secondary school. The sports teacher who teaches grade 5 to 11 pointed out that some parents consider their daughter(s) to be grown-up once they have finished grade 9. She stated that,

> it takes a lot of effort to go to talk to families, to parents, and here most of the time the mothers say, “oh my girl, she has grown-up, I don’t want her to go to school any more. Why does she need school? Why does she need education?” Here the parents create barriers for girls to come to school. (P88)

The Director described how,

> in this village, we have a small part of the village they don’t want the girls to go to school. Starting from grade 8, they don’t want them to go to school. In some families, even the case is starting from grade 4, they don’t want to go to send them to school. One, two families, even for grade 1 they don’t want a girl to be in school…One of the reasons was that [parents say] “our girls are now grown-up and we don’t want them to go to school” or “what they will do being two more additional years in school. What will they get? What will she get being two years, just spending time in school?” (P87)

The Deputy Director described the difficulties he has explaining to “uneducated” parents the need “for their daughters to have knowledge, to finish school” (P97). He noted that these parents “don’t have an understanding. Here is the problem, especially after the Civil War, new kinds of thinking appeared that the girls should not study” (P97).

Parental decision regarding the age at which their daughter(s) marries can also affect her schooling. In this school community, some girls marry at 16, thus ending their secondary
schooling. All girls should be married by 21 years of age. Many marriages are arranged by the family, some with the consent of the bride-to-be. One grade 10 Tajik student described how,

> there are some girls who will choose [their husband] by themselves. They will love someone and choose by themselves. In some families the parents will choose but mostly they ask the girl if she agrees with their choice and also there are some cases even when the girl does not agree, the parents will force her.

(P89)

Some adult participants mentioned the ethnicity of the parents when discussing parents who keep their daughter(s) from completing school. For example, an Uzbek teacher stated, “it is difficult to deal with the Tajik parents….Even some of the families they don’t want children to come to grade 1, both girls and boys” (P93).

Others call attention to parents described as “religious”, such as the Director who, when speaking of girls’ schooling, said

> in this area, especially with the religious people, they don’t allow them to go anywhere. They are hold up in their houses. They don’t see even neighbour house. When they are coming to school, when they get a chance to go out of the house, they cannot behave well. (P87)

She also noted that “boys are allowed to go out”.

Poverty was another factor at the family level affecting girls’ schooling mentioned by adult participants. An Uzbek teacher thought poverty and religion were reasons why some parents in the school community don’t send their daughters to school. She stated,

> sometimes it is the religion, sometimes it is the poverty, sometimes they say “what is the use of being in school?”…[Some families] are extremely poor. Sometimes they are not even able to pay for their rented books in the school. So they cannot afford the child to be in school. (P93)

The Director said that “the children of this village are not coming to school because of the poor financial situation in the families” (P87). The teacher and former Deputy Director said that some students are absent from school because they do not have winter shoes or coats but they are usually absent for only a day or two because winter is not so harsh in this location when compared to other places in Tajikistan.
Some parents who allow their daughter(s) to stay in school have concerns regarding female school uniforms. The Head of the Girls’ Committee mentioned how some parents of girls in grade 5 and up won’t allow their daughter to wear the school uniform. These girls wear traditional dresses to school. She also mentioned how some female students have begun to wear a hijab to school which is not allowed.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.

The adult participants at Rumi School 4 spoke of their efforts to advocate on behalf of their students, especially female students, to keep them in school. When describing her efforts to convince some parents to allow their daughters to stay in school past grade 9, the Director recalled how some parents are well aware of government policies regarding compulsory schooling. She described how,

when we are going to some families and we are talking to them and trying to complain why your daughter is not coming to school, some of them even have a copy of this Law of Education and they underline the sentence where it’s written that’s the compulsory education up to grade 9, “so what do you want from us? Just read it.” (P87)

A teacher described how

we are working with the girls to be regular in the schools, because with the boys we don’t have much problems, they are coming every day. And right now we are working also in order make the attendance rate of girls better in the school. When we compare the level of knowledge between the girls and the boys, the girls have better knowledge, they are more active. But unfortunately, their attendance is not good in the school. (P88)

Flexibility in the female school uniform appears to be one way to less a potential barrier to education for some students. A mother of a grade 11 female student at Rumi School 3 describes the school uniform and the religious reason older girls wear a traditional dress. She notes that

we have some mullahs, religious people, in the village. They don’t want the grown-up girls to wear the school uniform, to wear the [black] skirt, the [white] shirt…This is not something new. For many years, this has been an issue. Some
girls are coming in Tajik [traditional] dress. Some are coming in [the black and white] school uniform….The traditional dress that they are wearing, it should be very simple. It should not be the shiny materials, the expensive ones. This is the requirement. (P113)

A Girls’ Committee was recently established at Rumi School 3, apparently in recognition of the need to address issues related to girls’ schooling. A teacher who serves as the Head of the Girls’ Committee mentioned how she gathers approximately 400 female students in grades 5 through 11 to discuss different issues affecting their schooling. Topics discussed include appropriate behaviour and school uniforms, amongst others. In relation to students’ irregular attendance, she also noted how there is a segment of the school population “who show up for a while, then don’t then come back, [such as] girls during cotton picking season” and boys who go to Russia (P104).

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.**

Of the comments made by the Director and teachers at Rumi School 3, female students’ motivation (or lack of motivation) to stay in school past grade 9 is the main factor they mentioned that could be categorized as pertaining to “self”.

The sports teacher described the types of resistance she experienced when visiting the homes of female students no longer attending school. She highlighted how difficult it was for her to ascertain precise reasons why girls stop coming to school and how some girls do not want to continue in school. She recalled how

I’ve talked to the mother. I’ve talked to the father of those girls. According to their talking, the parents are not against her education. The parents are agreed that the girl will continue her education and come to school. But the girl herself, when I talked to the girl she said, “I don’t want to go to school.” And, I don’t know, first of all when I talked to the mother, the mother said that “she’s grown-up. Why [should she] to go to school?” and I was talking to her and I explained that “yourself, you didn’t study in the school. Now you don’t know anything. You don’t know even how to sign some papers. This is all because of not studying. Okay, let your girl at least to finish this basic secondary education because it is compulsory up to grade 9. So let her finish her school. At least when
she will be a mother she can teach her children writing some letters or she will learn by herself how to sign some papers. This is the basic that she should know about it.” After talking with the mother, I saw that she changed her mind. She agreed that the girl will come to school and continue her education, but the girl herself said, “no, I don’t want to go to school.”(P88)

Students’ level of motivation to complete secondary school was perceived by the Director and teachers to be greatly affected by their aspirations and/or expectations for their post-secondary education. For example, one teacher linked the lack of opportunity for girls to go to higher education with their lack of motivation to stay in school. She noted how “the problem of the Tajik nation is that not all the girls are continuing into higher education. That’s why they don’t have interest even to complete the secondary education” (P88).

Students, male and female, who continue on past grade 9 in this school aspire to continue on to higher education. Since there are some female students in upper secondary grades this implies female students’ motivation to continue on to post-secondary education. The Director also noted that,

if you have the certificate from grade 9, not in all places, they can accept you having this basic secondary education …This is also a reason for some students to be in grade 10 and 11. They want to get the certificate of grade 10 and 11 to be accepted for some jobs or some courses. (P87)

As for factors that relate to self, the Director of Rumi School 3 also spoke of how some female students at her school resist parental controls regarding their school uniform. They want to wear the school uniform though their parents make them wear a traditional dress. She described how “we have some girls in our school, when they leave the house, they’re in traditional dress. They will go to their friend’s house. They will change into the school dress and come to school” (P87). In changing their clothes they students resist and reject their parents’ norms regarding the school uniform.

In summary, there is quantitative and qualitative evidence that significantly fewer female students of Tajik ethnicity at Rumi School 3 continue in school past grade 9 than their Uzbek
peers. While adult participants at Rumi School 3 noted how community/societal factors such as poverty and religion negatively affect girls’ schooling, they attribute family-level factors related to ethnicity, religion and economic circumstance as having the greatest effects on girls’ school experiences and opportunities. School-level factors such as visits by the Director and teachers to the homes of absent female students as well as running a Girls’ Committee provide examples of advocacy for girls’ schooling that is taking place at Rumi School 3. Finally, as in the two earlier school factors, factors related to self are those regarding the students’ motivation (or lack of motivation) to complete secondary school as well as their aspirations for their future education.

The fourth school in Rumi district included in this study will now be profiled.

**Rumi School 4 (non-GEP school).**

Rumi School 4 is located roughly a 35 minute drive south from Kurgan-Tyube, the capital of Rumi district. As with all other Rumi school communities in this study, cotton production dominates the local economy and lifestyle. However, in this community, families who provide labour in the cotton fields are not only entitled to collect the dried stalks at the end of the season for firewood but are also given a plot of land cultivated to grow wheat. Since bread is a staple food, access to such land is of great value. As for the amount of money female students earn from their cotton field labour, the Director noted that it is “not even enough for buying clothes” (P166).

According to the Director, this community, consisting largely of Tajik families who originate from Gharm, Rasht, was greatly affected by the civil war. (Gharm was the center for the opposition forces during the civil war; see Chapter 2.) From 1992 into 1994 many young men from the school community were killed. The Director described how during the civil war this area was “totally burned out” and “many houses were destroyed” (P166). Everything was taken from the Rumi School 4, including the doors, and a neighbouring school was burned.
down. People who fled this school community during the fighting began returning in 1994 and continued to return over the next six years. As a result of the devastation caused during the civil war, the Director considers many families to be “poor” and noted that “they still have lots of problems” (P166).

The school is located in the center of a village. A large school compound contains two school blocks and many trees (see Figure 8). Grape vines cover a long trellis, stretching over the paved road into the school compound. In one section of the compound are four large upright truck tires half buried in the ground, old metal monkey bars, and other metal structures for primary students to play on.

The school has 28 teachers, eight of whom are women. Three female teachers teach upper secondary grades and five teach primary grades. Only one of the three female secondary school teachers is from the local school community and she has a secondary school education. The other two female secondary school teachers married into the school community and each has a college education. The school is short eight teachers. The Director has worked at this school for 14 years and was beginning his third year as Director in September 2009.

As with the other schools in this study, School 4 has a set of computers for computer classes but, due to power outages, students are not always able to use the computers. A grade 10 student described how the schedule for computer classes is adjusted to align with the times when the school (and community) has electricity, which is early in the morning and late in the evening. She noted that,

we do not have electricity all the time, and sometimes they put the computer lesson in the first class, and we usually come at 7:00 o’clock. We have electricity until 8:30 and so we have to come earlier, and usually we come at 7:00 o’clock in order to study with electricity, and then later if the electricity will go, we study with some [computer] textbooks. (P171)

This school also has a shortage of chairs and tables.
School 4 has participated in several school improvement projects funded by international development agencies. The school implemented Participation, Education, And Knowledge Strengthening Project (known as the PEAKS project), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The PEAKS project was a four-year project implemented
from 2003 to 2007 by various NGOs (including Save the Children) in Tajikistan and three other Central Asian countries. The project had a broad mandate that included providing school communities with grants to repair school infrastructure as well as in-service teacher training. Through the PEAKS project other activities were also implemented such as the Save the Children model of the Community Education Committees, C-EMIS, and school clubs also implemented in the GEP (see Chapter 8 for a description of GEP activities). A UNICEF project provided the school with three sewing machines and other support so that sewing classes were offered to female students in grades 9 to 11. (Although the school still had the sewing machines, sewing classes were no longer taking place.) The school was also participating in the WFP school feeding programme and the UNICEF Child-to-Child pilot project.

When discussing boys’ schooling, the Director and a teacher spoke of how male upper secondary school students attend school regularly and how parents value education for their son(s). For example, the Director stated that “the boys [in grade 10 and 11] are active and they come to school…Usually the parents are open-minded about the boys. They are coming to school. They say it’s useful for them for the future, not like the girls” (P166). A teacher described how “these people are very serious about their boys. They want them to come to school. They just want the girls to stay home” (P188). According to this teacher, 16 students completed grade 11 in 2008/09 and went on to university. All were male.

In September 2009, 580 students were enrolled at Rumi School 4 from grades 1 to 11, 50% of whom were female. The following tables present enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rumi School 4 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for two years: 2008/09 (Table 24) and enrolment at the start of 2009/10 (Table 25).
Table 24. Rumi School 4: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/09 (end of year) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Tajik</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25. Rumi School 4: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/10 (September) by sex and ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Tajik</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This school was identified by the Head of the District Education Department as a school with problems relating to girls’ enrolment and retention. However, the enrolment statistics for all grades in both years show either parity or more girls than boys, except for enrolment in grade 9 in 2008/09 (see Tables 24 and 25).

The following table (Table 26) presents the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11 disaggregated into four cohorts: students in grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10.

Table 26. Rumi School 4: Progression of female students in the Tajik stream from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade 9 cohort</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grade 9 cohort in 2006/07</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade 9 cohort in 2007/08</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade 9 cohort in 2008/09</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade 9 cohort in 2009/10</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 90% of the female students from the 2007/08 grade 9 cohort finished grade 10 and continued into grade 11 (see Table 26). This cohort of students was much larger than the cohort one year earlier and one year later. This may be as a result of the implementation of
school-based projects (other than the GEP) as well as the efforts of the Director and other school staff to encourage girls’ secondary school completion, as will be discussed in the next section.

According to the adult participants at Rumi School 4, female students’ attendance, academic performance and retention begins to become problematic at the upper secondary level. For example, the Director described how,

beginning from grade 1 up to grade 4, the girls are very active in school, unlike the boys. Beginning from grade 4 up to grade 11, the girls are very passive, but in grade 10 and 11, they are the most passive. (P166)

He also noted that, starting in grade 8 and up to grade 11, some female students who are registered do not attend school “at all.” A teacher stated that,

beginning from grade 9, when they are in grade 10, periodically they stop [coming to school]. About 57 girls are registered in school but just 20 of them come to school. 57 of them were registered [in grade 11], but then some of them drop out, they stop coming, and up to grade 9 they are more active, but then beginning from grade 10, they are very weak. (P188)

The extent to which the cotton harvest interrupts female students’ attendance was clearly stated by one teacher who said “it’s just now that they started to come again to school, November. In September and October it was very difficult” (P188). This teacher also noted that, in winter, there is very low attendance in grade 10 and 11 when “only three or four [students] sit in a class” and these are usually only the male students (P188).

There is a very clearly understood norm within this school community regarding who can go on to university: it is acceptable for male students and unacceptable for female students to attend university. In the past seven years no female student has gone on to post-secondary schooling and therefore no female student will. This was articulated by the Director as well as by several of the grade 10 and 11 students. For example, a teacher explained how,

in my 18 years of experience, I’ve never seen any girls who go and continue their education, besides one girl. She was Uzbek and I know she continued her education at a higher level. No one else continued. The Uzbek girl’s father was a
The only option available to young women in this school community after they complete their formal schooling is to take a sewing course that is held in the home of the sewing teacher. When they complete the course they get a certificate. The Director said that some parents allow their daughters to take such a course because “they are in a house” (P166).

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.**

Gossip also plays a role as a means of enforcing norms and practices, particularly in regards to the lives and behaviour of young women in this community. The presence and effect of gossip within the school community was mentioned by the Director, teachers, and several students. For example, the Director described how older female students speak with their male teachers and himself when at school but not when they are outside of school. If an older female student spoke with a male in the street, even her teacher or school director, she would become a subject of gossip within the community. The Director described how,

> when the girls come to school, they are so nice, they usually say “hi,” “hello” with all of us. We have a very good relationship. But if I go to the village and if one of the girls in grade 10 or 11 meets me in the street, she even can’t say hello to me, because, for example, I am the Director, she is small, she is a child, even if she says hello to me, or stops with me for a couple of minutes and somebody sees it, it would be a very big problem. Everybody would say, “oh, look at this girl. She’s standing with a boy. She’s standing with the Director of the school.” (P166)

The presence and effects of gossip is also mentioned in the next section.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.**

The Director explained that many parents believe that their daughters are “grown-up” by grade 8 or 9 and should therefore no longer be attending school. However, they use other reasons to justify why their daughters stop going to school. He noted that
mostly parents talk about the problem that they haven’t any schooling materials and we have the problem with clothes and everything. Even those who think that their daughters are grown-up or something like this, they don’t say that to us. They can’t say that really. Even if they think that, they didn’t say it to us. (P166)

The Director also stated that,

usually when we talk to the parents they say, “why do they need this additional education? We have a lot of housework in our house to be done” and also, there will be some gossip among the community, and if the young girls in grade 10 and 11 go to school, there will be some gossip in the community. (P166)

As noted earlier, a teacher described how many parents’ attitudes regarding the value and benefit of secondary school completion for their sons differs greatly when compared to their attitudes towards secondary school completion for their daughters. She stated while many parents demand that their sons go to school, “they just want the girls to stay home” (P188).

According to adult participants at Rumi School 4, girls in this school community commonly marry at 17 and this norm affects parents’ aspirations regarding their daughters’ education and future. When discussing how parents arrange their daughters’ marriage, the Director stated “the girls do not have a choice because their parents do everything. And this is the biggest problem why they don’t let them come to school because…all the decisions are made by the parents” (P166).

The Director noted that allowing a school uniform for female students to be a traditional dress is largely due to the make-up and demands of the parents. He pointed out that,

most of the people are from Gharm and these people don’t listen to any kind of orders or instructions. Even if they let their girls go to school, they want them to wear the long dress, with long sleeves, and they don’t want them to wear something European. (P166)

The Director noted that a demand for such a dress can either cause the parents to be less able to afford school and/or reduce the parents’ desire to send their daughter to school. He noted that,

the parents, for example, of grade 10 and 11 students, they say, “our clothes are not equal to the clothes of the other students. My daughter doesn’t have clothes like the clothes of the other girls in school and that’s why I don’t want her to go to school.” (P166)
“Open-minded” was a word commonly used by the Director, the teacher and the student participants to describe the small minority of parents within this school community who allow their daughters to continue past grade 9. The Director also described how strong these parents are to go against the dominant societal beliefs within the school community regarding girls’ schooling, which are brought to light through gossip. Referring to the family of a grade 11 student, the Director said,

her family is very strong. Her father doesn’t listen to any gossip. He is so strong that he never listened to any kind of gossip, and his daughter comes to school all the time. She never has any absence. All the time she is at school. He is very kind and a very strong person. He’s so kind and clever. Everybody knows him and everybody knows his situation as well. (P166)

When asked about the families of female students who continue on to grade 10 and 11, the Director noted that,

it’s not like they are the children of doctors or some other knowledgeable person or educated person, it’s usually they are the children of those students who were very active at school in the period of the Soviet Union, those who were active in grade 10, the upper classes. (P166)

However even those parents who were described as “open-minded” may be swayed by the pressure of gossip if few girls are attending classes, especially in grades 10 and 11. The Director noted that,

those parents who are open-minded about their girls going to school, they want their children to be educated, but they think there are only two or three girls in the class, “so why are you going?” Then the community members gossip [and say] “oh, the others are not going, so why is your daughter going to school?” (P166)

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.

It appears that the Director and teachers at Rumi School 4 use government policies to support their advocacy efforts for girls’ schooling in this school community. As per school policy, the teacher who is the class coordinator must visit the homes of absent students to discover the reasons for their absence and when the student will return to school. However,
according to the Director, “when the teachers visit the houses of the students, the parents always promise ‘yes, yes, my daughter or my son will come tomorrow or after tomorrow.’ They just promise but there is no result” (P166). When visiting the homes of female students in grade 10 and 11 who are absent, the Director refers to “a special order of the Ministry of Education about girls’ education” and tells these parents that they really should send their daughter to school. He described how the Ministry of Education “doesn’t want us to go to visit the house of the children and to force them to come, but they say that we want you to encourage the girls to come to school” (P166). The Director described how, in the period immediately preceding my research visit to his school, he went to the homes of 20 female students. He stated that “they are registered, but they are not coming at all, so I went to their houses and I brought all of them back to school” (P166).

The Director mentioned his concern regarding how younger female students are affected by the irregular attendance of older female students. He noted how,

absence is always a problem for us. If we didn’t force the students of grade 10 and 11 to come to school, if we didn’t visit their houses, and if we didn’t explain and force them to come to school, the effect will be on the other school children. The effect will be on the students of grade 9 or 8, or the effect will be on their younger sisters. (P166)

At Rumi School 4, the more “modern, Western” school uniform for girls, consisting of a white shirt, a black skirt and trousers, is required for primary students. To reduce or eliminate barriers to girls’ schooling related to the school uniform, female students in grades 5 to 11 are allowed to wear either the “modern, Western” school uniform or a traditional dress, consisting of a long unstructured dress with trousers, made from a certain type of inexpensive material with the colour and pattern chosen by the school. The Director explained that,

Our main purpose is also this one. We teachers are only against the kind of situation when, for example, the girls come to school, and when they have very expensive dresses. We are against these things, and we say, “don’t wear such
kind of things, they are very expensive, the other girls look to you.” I want you to
be equal to the other ones. (P184)

As for the school infrastructure, the Director described how the lack of heaters and glass
in the windows of upper grade classrooms negatively affects the teaching environment and
causes students, especially female students, to miss school. He noted that,

when the winter comes, then again they have a reason [not to go to school], that
it’s very cold. We don’t have any glass in the windows in that building, but in
this building [for primary classes] we have heaters in the class, it’s warmer. But
those classrooms, they are very cold in the wintertime and they use this reason as
well, that the classroom is very cold. [Primary students attend school] But the
upper grades, it’s very difficult, because they have a time when there are only
three or four students in a class for grade 10 and 11….they are usually boys.
(P184)

A teacher at Rumi School 4 described how additional activities such as sewing classes,
supported by international development assistance, helped keep female students in school. She
noted that,

mostly in this territory, the people come from the Gharm region, and they are sort
of hard and difficult people. Before it was that [girls] studied up to grade 7 and 8,
and then they stopped, but then later we got some support from UNICEF and
from other NGOs. They brought us three sewing machines and we work with the
sewing machines and the girls, they became encouraged to come to school at that
time, but now again, we have big difficulties again with girls coming to school.
(P188)

The advocacy undertaken by the Director and teachers at Rumi School 4 could help
explain the higher level of female enrolment in grade 10 and 11 at this school when compared to
the other Rumi schools in this study. The Director pointed out that,

if we teachers didn’t play any kind of role in this situation, if we didn’t do
anything, the parents are like this. It doesn’t matter what age the girl is, it doesn’t
matter what grade it is, nothing matters. They just want them to get married and
they just marry them off…They just want to keep them home. They don’t want to
hear some kind of gossip, some kind of talk. They just want to get them married
as early as they can so then they will be free of such kind of gossip of the
community. (P166)
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.

Factors that affect girls’ schooling related to self, mentioned by adult participants at Rumi School 4, were related to female students’ motivation and interest in attending school. According to the Director, “the [female] students want to come to school but the parents are against it. They want them to just be at home…no gossip” (P166).

Adult participants described problems of peer pressure regarding who wears what to school. Female students who wear traditional dresses made from expensive material can cause their female peers to feel shame if their family cannot afford such material. This feeling of shame has caused some female students to demand that their parents provide them with a traditional dress made of material comparable to that of their female peers. If a family is poor, and cannot afford such a dress, a female student may not want to go to school wearing her “inferior” dress.

The cold weather during winter was also mentioned as a factor affecting female students’ irregular attendance and drop out. The Director noted that there is an increase in students’ absences during winter, especially for female students. He also stated that while this was a valid reason for some students to be absent in winter, other students and/or families use their lack of warm clothes in winter as an excuse not to attend school. He stated that, for some students, it’s really like this. They haven’t any warm clothes to come to school, but for some of the students it’s just a reason. They don’t want to go to school, so they use the reason that they don’t have warm clothes and so they can’t come. (P166)

In summary, adult participants at Rumi School 4 described several factors affecting girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities. Perhaps one of the strongest barriers to secondary school completion for female student in this school community is the well-known fact that girls simply do not go on to post-secondary education which, when coupled with dominant norms that consider a girl to be “grown-up” by 15 and the effects of gossip that
support that norm, results in few female students being able to attend grade 10 or 11. Factors at
the school-level include governmental school policy which is used by the Director and teachers
to advocate on the behalf of female students. Very few factors related to self are mentioned by
adult participants whereas factors related to family dominate this profile as they have done in
the three previous profiles of schools in Rumi.

**Summary of findings**

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to set the context of this study at the district
level and to present findings from adult participants to answer question 1 by exploring factors as
critical inputs affecting girls’ schooling within each of the four Rumi school communities in this
study. In this chapter I used quantitative and qualitative findings to explore the status quo in
terms of who is registered in upper secondary school, attending school regularly, and
progressing from grade 9 to grades 10 and 11. Findings presented in this chapter confirm that
most female students in these four school communities leave school after grade 9. However,
there are a few female students in each school who do not conform to the status quo by
continuing in school past grade 9.

In attempting to answer why this is so, I categorized factors affecting girls’ schooling
into three social fields of community/society, family, and school as well as the category of self. I
consider factors that limit or restrict girls’ schooling to grade 9 to be maintaining and
reproducing the status quo. These factors work to enforce the systematic disadvantage of girls
not only in terms of accessing non-compulsory secondary school grades but also how they
experience schooling. In contrast, I consider factors that enable girls’ non-compulsory
secondary schooling, not only to access school but also to succeed in and enjoy school, to be a
form of empowerment given that they challenge the status quo. These factors work to help girls
overcome the various barriers that prevent them from completing their secondary schooling.
Findings presented in this chapter show how these barriers exist within community/society, family and school.

Adult participants at all four Rumi schools in this study spoke of factors related to family as having the greatest role in determining whether or not a girl is allowed to continue in school past grade 9, depending on her circumstances. These factors included the ethnicity and place of origin of the family, the family’s economic circumstances, and parental aspirations for their daughter(s). Whether or not a girl’s mother and/or father (or other influential family members) believes that girls are “grown-up” by grade 9 and no longer need to go to school appears to be central as to whether or not a girl is allowed by her parents (or family) to continue in school past grade 9.

According to participants, factors related to community/society also appear to significantly affect parental and familial decision-making regarding girls’ schooling largely in terms of supporting and maintaining dominant norms and practices (which reproduce the status quo). Adult participants spoke less about factors related to school than those related to community/society and family. However, school leadership appears to play a significant role in whether or not issues related to girls’ schooling are identified and addressed. Comparing the leadership at the two non-GEP schools provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. The Director of Rumi School 2 denied that there were any issues to be addressed at his school despite evidence to the contrary. In contrast, the Director at Rumi School 4 spoke passionately about the barriers to girls’ secondary schooling in his school community and what he and his staff were doing to help girls stay in school and do well. Teacher shortages and a lack of local female teachers (to serve as role models) were also mentioned by adult participants as factors affecting negatively affecting girls’ schooling.
Adult participants at all four schools spoke of how individual students’ interest in and motivation to stay in school also greatly affects whether or not a female student continues in school past grade 9. These factors were categorized as critical inputs related to self. However, a student’s interest and motivation to stay in school is a moot point if her parents (and other key influential family members, such as an older brother) do not agree with her going to school.

In the Chapter 6 that follows, I describe the context for Rasht district and present findings from adult participants at the two Rasht schools (one GEP and one non-GEP) included in this study regarding factors affecting girls’ schooling. In Chapter 7, I compare findings across schools and districts as well as between GEP and non-GEP schools to deepen our understandings of the factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling in these different sites.
Chapter 6: Rasht District: Setting the District, Community, and School Contexts

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings regarding the context of the two Rasht schools included in this study, particularly the factors affecting female secondary school students’ schooling experiences and opportunities, as was done for the Rumi Schools in the previous chapter. Data presented in this chapter, as in the previous chapter, have been drawn from interviews with the local NGO staff from implementing partners of the GEP as well as the Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers, and members of the PTA or CEC at each school. This chapter is divided into two sections. Section A contains the district context of Rasht. In Section B, each school is profiled.

Section A: District context

General information about Rasht District.

Rasht District is located in mountains of central Tajikistan (see Figure 9 on the following page). Gharm, the capital of Rasht District, is located on the banks of the Vakhsh River that flows from Kyrgyzstan in the north down through Khatlon region in southwestern Tajikistan. Rasht District is part of the administrative region known as Direct Rule District (DRD) and, as such, is directly ruled from Dushanbe, the administrative capital of RSD. The population in Rasht is predominantly ethnically Tajik. Rasht district, as well as the whole area, is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides. Some remote villages are inaccessible by road in the winter.
The people of Rasht, and Gharm in particular, are known as the most religiously conservative people in Tajikistan. As with other areas where fighting occurred during the civil war, the people of Rasht suffered greatly. This area was the home of one of three opposition parties: the Islamic Rebirth Party (Akiner, 2001). Since the end of the civil war fighting between government forces and insurgents has occurred periodically in Rasht district, as recently as the fall of 2010 (Asia Plus, 2010; ICG, 2011; WFP, 2011).

**Education statistics for Rasht**

Since district-level education statistics are not publicly available, regional statistics from RSD will be presented. Education statistics for RSD (which includes Rasht District) and Khatlon (which includes Rumi District) are very similar.
Both sets of statistics show that children in these districts, especially girls, are more educationally disadvantaged than their peers in other regions in Tajikistan. Only 51% of students in RSD continued from grade 9 into grade 10 in 2005. In that same year, only 37% of grade 9 girls continued on to grade 10 (compared to 36% in Khatlon) (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114). RSD had the lowest GERs at the upper secondary level compared to other regions in Tajikistan. Only 40% of all 16 and 17 year olds in RSD were in grade 10 and 11, the appropriate grade for their age (compared to 41% in Khatlon) (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114). Of the children who attended grade 10 and 11 in RSD, only 26% were female (compared to 27% in Khatlon, 39% in Dushanbe, and 76% in GBAO) (UNESCO, 2008, p. 114).

While some vocational training opportunities exist in Gharm, the district capital of Rasht, students have had to leave the region to attend university. However, at the time of data collection, the Ministry of Education was constructing a branch of the pedagogical university in Gharm where students will be trained to become teachers.

**District-level findings from local NGO staff**

Findings from interviews with the staff of the local NGO implementing partner of the GEP in Rasht provide valuable insights into girls’ educational experiences and opportunities at the district level. The NGO Director described issues regarding female students’ irregular attendance and drop out in Rasht when she first began working on the GEP in 2006 by recalling that “up to grade 6 girls were coming to school. Starting from grade 7, problems arose” (P114). By the time girls reach grade 7 they begin to go through puberty. Reaching the age of puberty causes some parents to consider the girls to be “grown-up.” At that age, according to the NGO Director, some girls become more focused on the next step in their life, finding a husband, and become less interested in school. She noted how,
in general, up to grade 5, everything is okay, but then it starts in different grades. It’s not particular grades. This is the process you can see, depending on the psychology of parents, or when the girl is physically growing. [Her parents] see that she is grown and they don’t let her go to school. And also, the psychology of girls sometimes, because in this culture, they think that once you reach some age, you need to think about the husband. The girls also themselves are choosing that path. (P114)

She commented that in 2006, when the GEP began, “there were 13 or 14 projects working [in Rasht] but nobody was working particularly with girls’ issues.” (P114) She also noted that members of the Hukumat, the local government, denied that there were any problems regarding girls’ schooling: “When we were talking about girls’ issues in the school, from the Hukumat side, everybody was saying that we don’t have problems. All girls are coming to school.” (P114)

The NGO Director spoke about the on-going conflict between government forces and insurgents in Rasht and how the conflict is related to a group(s) of religiously conservative people who reject changes to their customs and traditions (the status quo), such as those related to girls’ education. She noted that

the conflict of this Rasht region is an Islamic political conflict. I can say that even up to today, the conflict is not solved in this region. It’s still going on. Why? Because we still have these mutual hating groups in this area. We have a lot of these religious leaders in this area. They don’t want any kinds of reforms to be taking place in this area. Even during the Soviet time it was very difficult to make some changes because the people want to keep their own customs and traditions. (P114)

She went on to say that “because of the custom and tradition, if a girl wants to come to school, there are lots of family members, like [her] grandpa, grandma, some uncles, aunties, brothers, who will not allow her to go to school.” (P114)

When asked which family member(s) decide how much schooling the girls in a family may attain, the NGO Director explained what occurs in Rasht and how the high degree of labour
migration by male family members in this district affects girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities. She described how

sometimes even the brother’s opinion is more important than the parents. And even in some cases, the opinion of the uncle from the mother’s side is very, very important. Not the uncle from the father’s side, but the mother’s brother, is very important. That’s the tradition. Because of this tradition they keep it. And also, we have the [labour] migration … it affects a lot. We have this migration problem. For example, the girl is 15 years old and she has never seen her father. That’s why she is kept far from the father’s family. She’s growing up with the mother’s family and so the uncle plays an important role and is the main decision-maker…. The brother because maybe he’s earning the money [working in Russia], that’s why he has an important role in decision-making. And in the case of uncle from the mother’s side, it’s according to Islam that after the father, an uncle from mother’s side, he’s the second person who plays an important role in the life of the girl. (P114)

As for the female students, the NGO Director noted how girls and women in Rasht are not accustomed to speaking to others outside the family and that one needs to gain their trust in order for them to open up. She noted that

One more difficulty in this part of the country is that the women or the girls are not talking much….during the seminars also we found out that some girls are very talented, very knowledgeable, but because of this barrier, they cannot talk. You need to get their trust so that they will be open and start talking…one thing is here from childhood, they used to put a barrier between the person and the outsider, that’s why the best is to get their trust, to try to get their trust so girls will talk. And after the Civil War it affected a lot. They became more closed up. (P114)

When in Rasht, particularly in rural areas, the norm of women wearing a traditional dress and scarf is extremely important. The NGO Director, when providing advice prior to beginning data collection in Rasht School 1, explained that the way girls and women dress is one of the “rules” of the communities. She noted that

if you don’t wear a scarf, nobody will say anything, but to put it on will make you close to them. They will respect you. [They will say] “oh, even the foreigner, she is here, and she is putting on our dress. She is following our rules. For example, people from the Hukumat are coming dressed in a western way. Everybody says “yes, yes,” but they will not follow. It has already created some problems and barriers. (P114)
(The need for me and my translator to wear a traditional dress and scarf while visiting schools in rural Rasht was clearly understood by everyone I met and I learned of this early on in the planning process.)

As for school-level factors affecting girls’ schooling, the NGO Director also mentioned the lack of female teachers in rural Rasht as problematic. An NGO staff member who has worked on the GEP in both Rumi and Rasht spoke of how unqualified teachers, who are not able to teach effectively, can be a reason for students’ lack of motivation to attend school. She recalled how,

we have unqualified teachers. For example, sometimes when I’m sitting in the class, I see that they cannot create an interest for a child in the class. They have a stick, or they are using a ruler and sometimes they are beating students. Because I was sitting and observing and the child was innocent. It wasn’t his fault. It was just a tiny issue and she started treating him badly. This is also the reason [for students’ non-attendance]. But when we are going to school, we are collecting information according to our forms. But they never accept such kinds of reasons, like bad treatment of students in school, uninteresting lessons. (P162)

Another NGO staff member noted how poverty and religious factors interconnect in Rasht to serve as barriers to girls’ schooling. When asked why some parents were not sending their children to school, he replied

it was the poor condition of the family and also the religious situation. This June some parents didn’t want the education of their children because if the girls were to attend the school and if the girls were to get higher education [they think] she couldn’t get married. (P118)

He also spoke of how early marriage, divorce, and labour migration affects the lives of young women in these communities. He noted how

there were some families that married their daughter at an early age, 17, 18 years old…the cases happened that being married at an early age they got divorced. Also it happened, at an early age they got married but the husband is leaving to Russia and he is not coming back for several years and it is very hard time to have this kind of life. (P118)

As for opportunities for paid employment, women have few options. He noted how
in these villages the only opportunity [for paid employment] is at the school, to be a teacher or to work in the school, and also in the villages there is a medical clinic and only one or two can work as a nurse. [They can also work] as a tailor staying at home. (P118)

Findings from interviews with the staff of the local NGO that implemented the GEP highlight how widely-held cultural and societal traditions (greatly influenced by religious conservatism) linked to issues of poverty, early marriage practices, divorce and labour migration interconnect and affect the lives of many girls in rural Rasht. Each factor affects girls’ educational experiences and opportunities in some way and, when taken together, can create great barriers for girls’ education. Having explored issues of girls’ education in rural Rasht broadly, I now present findings for each of the Rasht schools that were part of this study.

Section B: The schools

This study was conducted in the two schools in Rasht district. In this study these are named Rasht School 1 (a GEP school) and Rasht School 2 (a non-GEP school). The following table details the total enrolment for September 2009 for each school, disaggregated by sex.

**Table 27: Total enrolment in September 2009 of two Rasht schools by school and percentage of students disaggregated by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rasht School</th>
<th>Number of students (grades 1 to 11)</th>
<th>Percentage of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - GEP</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - non-GEP</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In September 2009, the total enrolment in Rasht School 1, the GEP school, was almost twice that of Rasht School 2, the non-GEP school. Female students accounted for a greater percentage of the total student population in School 2 (47%) than in School 1 (43%).

**Rasht School 1 (GEP school).**

Rasht School 1 is located 18kms from Gharm, the center of Rasht district, in a village just off a main road. Families in this area raise livestock, such as cows, sheep, goats, and chickens. They grow fruit such as apples, pears, peaches, grapes, watermelon, persimmons, and
pomegranates as well as walnuts. Families also grow vegetables, herbs, and wheat. Regarding the division of labour in the home, a grade 9 student noted that “milking the cow is a girl’s job and taking the animals to the field is a boy’s job” (P130). Some male students miss a day of school once a month when it is their turn to take the villager’s animals out to a pasture to graze. Weddings traditionally occur in September and October in this school community.

The Director and other teachers mentioned that, although people within this school community were poor, the economic situation has improved since the period immediately following the civil war. This improvement is attributed to factors including remittances sent from the men and boys working in Russia to their families. Describing the effects of a family’s economic circumstances on children’s schooling, a teacher noted that,

> a few years earlier, the living standard was very low and all the efforts of all family members were directed towards surviving or for living. Education was not a priority. They were going to the field and harvesting wheat. They were more involved in work. And I think that within the years after the Civil War, the living standard has improved a bit and things are getting into the right places. (P124)

For example, the teacher and the former Director noted that “during this last 10 years the salary of the teachers has increased 15 times” (P116). However, despite these increases, teachers’ salaries are still very low.

Rasht School 1 was built in 1952 for 252 children. More classrooms were built over the years as the school’s population grew. During the Soviet period, students living far from the school went to and from school on school buses provided by the government.

Fighting during the civil war occurred in the villages neighbouring the village in which Rasht School 1 is located. A teacher described the situation during the civil war as follows:

> Sometimes some groups of fighters were passing closely, but actually the fighting was not going on [in this village]…And the people of the village established a group of people during the night time, they were like a security group. They were checking the village. (P124)
During the civil war, people did not leave the area and the school never closed. However, the school community was greatly affected for a long period of time by what was happening in the nearby villages. One teacher recalled that,

people didn’t leave the place. They stayed here, but they were scared. Only the old men and the women stayed in the village. The young men used to go to the mountains, hide there, and in the night time come back so that nobody would see them….Almost for 10 years [it was like this], starting from 1993 up to 2003, it took us 10 years to get healed from this. (P116)

He also noted teachers worked without salary during some of the war years, demonstrating their commitment to their community. He stated that,

for three years I’ve worked here in this school without any salary. In our account it was recorded that we received salary for such a year, such a month, but we did not receive that money until now. We did not get any payment for three years….1993, 1994, 1995, more than three years. We just worked free of charge for the sake of this land, for the sake of the children, because we didn’t want the school to be closed up. We didn’t want the literacy rate to go down. (P116)

Although the civil war officially ended in 1997, people struggled for many years before life began to return to what one teacher described as a “normal situation.” Commenting on the effort it took to resume regular schooling, the teacher stated that,

step by step, and slowly, slowly, everybody could get back to school, but it required a lot of support of the Education Department, the local government, to get the school back to the normal life…After 1998, 1999, it started being back to the normal situation when the government had already a stable strategy to improve the situation in the country and the school started being back to the normal way. (P124)

The school is located a few minutes drive off the main road in a small village. The road into the village and to the school ascends up the slope of a hillside as the road turns from paved to dirt. This road serves as a divider between two villages: The village in which the school is located is on one side while another village is on the other side. A small river runs down the hillside beside one of these villages. The river is 2 to 3 metres wide, depending on the water level at the time of year. The school also serves a village on the other side of the river. The bridge to and from this village is unstable and unsafe. The school community is planning to
build a more secure bridge, as part of an international development project, so that children from that village can safely come to school each day.

As mentioned earlier, Rasht district is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and landslides. In the spring, the river can flood, damaging villages within the school community. An earthquake in 2006 caused damage to 50 percent of the houses in the area. Damage to the school was so extensive, it had to be rebuilt. (During the data collection period, Tajikistan experienced minor tremors from two earthquakes centered in Afghanistan, neither of which caused any damage.)

The school’s catchment area consists of four villages: the village in which the school is located, the village just across the road, the village across the river and a village 4 km from the school. This last village has a grade 1 to 9 school. According to the Director, the only children from the village 4 kms away who attend Rasht School 1 are boys, due to the distance they must walk. Some of these male students travel to and from school by bicycle while others walk for 1.5 to 2 hours. The farthest some female students travel to school and from school is 2 kms, a 40 minute to one hour walk each way, depending on the age of the student.

A low-rise metal fence with a gate encloses the school compound, which consists of four one-storey school blocks and a full-size soccer field (see Figure 10). One school block is unusable as it is very old with huge cracks caused by earthquakes in the walls and ceiling. The two newly-built school blocks are used for upper grades while the primary school block has recently been renovated. The new school blocks have new chairs and desks. The school block for upper grades has a computer room with twelve computers. GEP provided the school with new desks and chairs as well as one of the computers.
Tajik is the sole language of instruction, reflecting the demographics of the villages within the school’s catchment area. The school has two shifts: the morning shift from 8 am to 1 pm and the afternoon shift from 1 to 6 pm. There are 30 classes of students (10 at the elementary level and 20 from grades 5 to 11).

The Director noted that some grade 1 to 11 schools in other villages do not offer certain subjects taught by qualified specialist teachers that students must take to gain entrance to a post-secondary institution. Despite a teacher shortage, Rasht School 1 has some qualified specialists teachers teaching these subjects. For this reason, some students living outside the catchment area choose to attend Rasht School 1 even when their village school offers classes up to grade
For example, the Director described how a grade 1 to 11 school outside the school’s catchment area does not “have teachers for Physics, Algebra, [and] Russian language so their students join our school…According to the Law of Education, any child has the right to study in any school he wishes, so when they come we cannot reject them” (P127). He also noted that male students from the village 4 kms away begin transferring into Rasht School 1 from grade 7 upwards due to the teacher shortages in their local schools.

The Director and all teachers at school are male except for two teachers. The Director, who graduated from this school, has worked at the school for a total of 11 years, four as the Director. The two female teachers both teach elementary classes. One has a university degree in history while the other completed medical college but works as a teacher because she lives near the school and, due to the teachers shortage, employment was available for her at the school.

The school’s PTA consists of 22 members, 5 of whom are women. A teacher and PTA member described the group’s activities as follows:

The committee is tracing the facilities and conditions of the school. Whenever there is a lack of firewood for the winter time or some other necessities, the committee will talk with the people in the village in order to resolve the problems, to collect some firewood for the winter. With the support of this committee, a small stadium has been open for the wrestling and people come and have some wrestling exercises and some competitions. (P128a)

The stadium referred to in this quote is a room within the unusable school block with mats on the floor for wrestling, an activity done by male students.

In 1997/98 a secondary vocational education course in teacher training was run in this community, sponsored by the Hukimat, the local government, and was offered to address the problem of a teacher shortage. In the one year the course was offered, 35 local students were trained as teachers.

Rasht School 1 has participated in and continues to participate in some international development projects. The Girls’ Education Project provided the school with a computer, desks
and chairs, as well as assisting in the renovation of two school buildings. The school was part of the WFP Take-Home Rations programme that provided girls from grade 5 to 11 with a large bag of flour every two months as long as they attended school regularly (see Chapter 2 for more details). This program also helped establish and foster a connection between the family of the female student and the school staff as a family member had to come to school to carry the bag of flour home.

The school is currently participating in two development projects: the WFP school feeding programme and a European Commission-funded civil society project (EU Non-State Actors and local authorities), implemented by Save the Children and the same local NGO that worked on the GEP in the Rasht schools. The civil society project included activities that were also implemented during the GEP. According to a teacher involved in the civil society project, the school, in collaboration with the school community, has been “conducting surveys, establishing the committees, conducting some training, attracting children to school, and tracing the attendance rate in the school” (P124). This teacher described the school improvement plan that had been developed for 2009/10, under the framework of this project. He stated that “the goal is to improve the situation in the school, the quality of education, to stabilize the regular attendance rate and to attract girls to school” (P124). The three main tasks identified in this plan were to collect firewood for heating the school during the winter, to build a secure bridge across river, and to strengthen relationships between parents and the school.

Labour migration of males was also mentioned by adult participants at Rasht School 1 as greatly affecting life in the school community. A teacher noted that “most of the boys are leaving because there is really a need in each family because of a poor financial condition to let boys migrate to Russia…they are migrating to Russia after finishing grade 11” (P124). He also mentioned that many students, starting from grade 5 upwards, are distracted from their studies
by the electronics, such as cell phones, CDs, and DVD players, that their parents who work in Russia, (usually fathers) buy for them.

Divorce was also mentioned by adult participants and is understood to be a hardship not only for the divorced woman but also for her family. One teacher noted an increase in the number of divorces in the school community because husbands working in Russia spend long periods away from home leaving their wives to raise their children. (Many families have four, five, or six children.)

Employment opportunities for women in the school community are very limited in part because of widely-held societal norms about women working outside the home. A female teacher described how, when there was a vacancy for a school cook, no women, even those who were very poor, applied for the job. She recalled how one woman said “I understand [there is a job] but I am not allowed. If I do it, I will be a subject of discussion in this area for everyone” (P115 from field notes). The teacher added that, in this area, there is an understanding that “girls should not work, even if they are very poor.” A male teacher who was in the room at the time said “she’s right” (P124 from field notes). The female teacher’s comment also reveals the presence of gossip within the school community.

As for the educational opportunities and experiences of secondary school male students in Rasht School 1, a teacher described how

sometimes there are boys that, after grade 9, will go to some vocational training courses so they will stop the school. Otherwise, if in the village there are some mentally sick boys, they may be kept away from the school, but others are all enrolled in school and they are coming to the school. (P115)

Another teacher noted that “many boys” have gone on to higher education from this school (P116).

In September 2009, 762 students were enrolled in grades 1 to 11, 43% of whom were female and 57% male. The following tables present enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rasht School
1 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for two years: 2008/09 (Table 28) and enrolment at the start of 2009/10 (Table 29).

**Table 28. Rasht School 1: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/2009 (end of year) by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 29. Rasht School 1: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/2010 (September) by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in these tables, more boys than girls were enrolled in grades 9, 10, and 11 in both academic years (2008/09 and 2009/10). In some instances the differences between the number of boys and girls was quite extreme. For example, in 2009/10 nine girls were enrolled in grade 11 compared to 39 boys. When comparing enrolment statistics for grade 10 from 2008/09 and 2009/10, roughly three times more female students were enrolled at the start of the 2009/10 school year than in the previous year.

The following table presents the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11 disaggregated into four cohorts: students in grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10.

**Table 30. Rasht School 1: Progression of female students from grade 9 to 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in 2006/07</th>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in 2007/08</th>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in 2008/09</th>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in 2009/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30 shows that female student enrolment decreased by one, from 10 to 9, for the grade 9 cohort in 2007/08 as students progressed from grade 10 to 11, respectively. With only
nine female students in grade 11, this cohort was half the size of the cohort one year earlier.

There were almost three times more female students in grade 10 from the cohort in grade 9 in 2008/09 compared to the cohort in grade 9 in 2007/08.

When discussing schooling during the Soviet period and the civil war, adult participants at Rasht School 1 described various aspects of girls’ schooling. For example, a teacher noted how “in the 1970s and 1980s, the girls [from this school community] were not very involved in higher education, but after the civil war, some finished medical college. After the civil war, the situation changed” (P116). Another teacher commented that

after the Civil War, there was a period that there was a mess going on and the girls were not available in schools….I would say that [families] had lots of problems and education was not the priority at that time. (P124)

One teacher described how “after the Civil War, [girls’] participation at this school became weak and bad and so they dropped out of school, and when the [GEP] project came, it helped a lot” (P115). (See Chapter 8 on the GEP.) The Director noted that

there was only one year, [1994], when the school did not have girls in the upper grades, but the rest of the years, sometimes we had four, sometimes six, sometimes ten, sometimes five, but now, in the school this year, we have 29 girls in the upper grade. In grade 10, [there are] 29. In grade 11, [there are] eight. (P127)

The Director noted how girls without an education face particular problems when he described how

after the Civil War, the thing was that, even if the girls would get married, their husbands were in Russia for a long time. They did not have an education. They were not able to work anywhere. Husband is in Russia. The situation was very bad. (P127)

While the Ministry of Education, the Director, and several teachers recognized that there continued to be problems associated with girls’ attendance and retention. The Director noted that the problem of irregular attendance and drop out of girls was primarily with female students
who stop going to school after grade 9. However, other teachers noted that the problem of female students not coming to school or dropping out begins when they were in grade 8.

In contrast to these opinions, some teachers mentioned that problems related to girls’ attendance and retention have been “solved.” After identifying the how factors related to poverty and religion can negatively affect some girls’ educational opportunities and experiences, this teacher stated the following: “I would like to say that at the present time problems related to the poverty and to the religious aspects are solved. They don’t affect us anymore. Everybody is enrolled in the school and attracted to school.” (P116) The school accountant and PTA member also spoke about how problems of girls’ schooling have been “solved.” He pointed out that before, [during Soviet times], we didn’t have any girls kept away from the school, everyone was engaged in the school and finishing. But some years after the civil war, the parents did not want their girls to be in school in grade 10 and 11 but now these problems have been solved and we don't face any difficulties. (P128c)

This notion of “we had a problem but now it is solved” could be attributed to the Soviet legacy as it was common to identify a problem, include it in a five-year plan, and then publicly stating that it was solved or overcome in less time than planned.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.

Adult participants at Rasht School 1 made comments reflecting shared norms within the school community that affect girls’ schooling. For example, a female teacher commented that, “the people’s mentality is so narrow in this area. They don’t let girls step out of the house. It is so difficult to change their minds. Change is not happening because they don’t want it” (P124 from field notes). (This point could arguably also be classified as a factor related to family.) Another teacher thought that “once you get some girls to come [to school], others will come” (P124 from field notes).
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.

Several factors affecting girls’ schooling related to the family were mentioned by adult participants at Rasht School 1. These factors included parental education and/or mentality, the economic circumstances of the family, and the influence of religion on parental attitudes towards their daughters’ schooling. Commenting on the parents who allow their daughters to complete secondary school and those that do not, the Director distinguished between those who are “intelligent,” such as teachers, and those who are “poor.” He described how “we have some intelligent cluster [of people] in our village, who send their children, especially girls, to school. Most of the people don’t send their girls or children to school due to their poor financial situation” (P127). A teacher also identified a subsection of the population who want their daughters to complete secondary school: “the parents who are working as teachers or who are working somewhere else. They are educated so they want the same for their children, daughters as well” (P115). The Director also spoke of two female students from the school who were attending university: one was in second year and one in fourth year. One of these students is the daughter of a teacher at the school and is studying in the pedagogical university to become a teacher.

Since schooling costs are multiplied by the number of school-going children in a family, many families in this school community face high costs related to schooling as many have four to six children who could be in school at the same time. For poor families, these costs are too high. Detailing the cost of schooling a teacher described how,

as an average, if to count, the simplest school dress, the simplest bag and items, maybe it will cost 300 Somoni per year [approximately $70 USD], per one student. That’s a very simple average…within one month you will see that the shoes are spoiled, and he needs a new pair and, again, it’s an additional cost. (P115)
Another teacher noted how, that for some families, “even [providing] the school dress was a great problem for them” (P127).

As in other school communities in this study, female students from poor families were asking their parents for dresses made from expensive material, the kind of material that girls from better off families wear. A girls’ demand for an expensive school dress provides some parents a reason to keep their daughter(s) from going to school.

However, while some families genuinely cannot afford school costs, some adult participants believe some families use poverty as an excuse not to send their daughters to school. For example, a teacher and former Director described how some parents of female students who were not attending school “were finding excuses like they don’t have a school dress. [They said] ‘we don’t have shoes, we cannot buy school items, some stationery’” (P116).

Besides poverty, adult participants mentioned other reasons why some parents limit their daughters’ secondary school education. One teacher noted how “parents believe an extra two years of school won’t change anything” (from field notes). The teacher and former Director mentioned the influence of religion on parents’ attitudes toward girls’ schooling by describing how,

we are a very religious people. [Some parents] think that the girl that goes to school, she will study, she will take off her scarf, the sleeves [of her dress] will be shorter. That kind of thinking they had. That caused the problem that the girl is not coming to school. These are the excuses…The poverty and the religious issue are almost the same. (P116)

Finally, distance to school is a factor that could be categorized as related to family and school. In this school community, if a girl is allowed by her family to go on to post-secondary education, she is more likely to attend medical college than university as its programs are shorter in duration, cost much less to attend, and are located close to the girls’ home villages. A girl who attends medical college will live at home, whereas a girl who attends university must to
live away from home. Many parents in this school community do not want their unmarried
daughter(s) living away from home.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.**

Adult participants at Rasht School 1 mentioned the following factors affecting girls’
schooling that can be classified as related to school: distance to schools and the educational
institutions, the Presidential Quota and other government policies, and efforts by the school staff
to advocate for girls’ schooling within the school community.

Distance to a school and/or other educational institution is a barrier to schooling that is
much greater for girls than for boys in this school community. As mentioned earlier, it is
appropriate for boys to travel several kilometers to attend a neighbouring school whereas this is
considered inappropriate for girls. Some girls in this school community are able to attend
medical college but not university due the differences in location of these institutions. However,
the teacher and former Director pointed out that even though the Ministry of Education was
building a branch of the pedagogical university in Gharm, he doubts whether parents would still
be willing to send their daughters to university even if the institution was located close to their
homes. He noted that “there will be opportunities for girls to study, but the thing is that here a
bit of the mentality is narrow” (P116).

Government support to girls’ schooling was mentioned by the Director who noted that
the Presidential Quota system reserves 14 places each year for girls from Rasht district, three
places at the medical university. (In Rasht district, there are 112 schools, including elementary,
general secondary schools from grades 1 to 11, and secondary schools.) The Director also
described how, when visiting the homes of absent female students, he would cite the direction
from the Ministry of Education that compulsory schooling was supposed to be up to grade 11
starting in the 2009/10 academic year, even though there was great uncertainty as to whether or
not this actually was to happen. (During data collection, many Directors and teachers mentioned that compulsory school was to be extended to include grade 10, although many were uncertain as to when this was to be implemented.)

School policy regarding female students’ school uniforms is another school-level factor affecting girls’ educational experiences and opportunities. Rasht School 1 adopted a new policy in 2006 to address problems related to girls’ school uniform. This policy, as described by the Director, requires female students in upper grades to wear a “simple dress, same colour, pattern, and material [that] doesn’t cost a lot” (P127) and was implemented at the start of the GEP. According to a teacher, the selection of a girls’ school uniform is within the control of the Director while the school uniform of the male students is set by the Ministry of Education. (The uniform for male students, consisting of a suit jacket, trousers, white shirt, and tie, is uncontroversial.)

The Director and other staff described advocacy efforts undertaken by the school staff, as well as NGO staff during the GEP, with the school community. When talking to parents and other community members, the teacher and former Director recalled how we were trying to explain, for example, a girl will get married, she will have two or three children, suddenly she is divorced. It will be very difficult for a woman to be in such a situation. And according to the Tajik saying, she will be lost. She will be left without anything. No house, nothing. She doesn’t have an education. She doesn’t have any skills. No way to earn any money. Two or three children, no husband, she’s lost….she will go back to her parents’ house. It will be again on the shoulder of the parents. And if she has some education, she will not rely on parents. She will not be a headache for the parents. She can just earn money, and she can have her own life. (P116)

The Director described how when the [GEP] project came, women from the project, they went, they talked to the families, the women members of the families. It was good that they could discuss, they could raise the problems, discuss about the problems. If, as a man, I would go, I would never have such a talk and try to find out the problems of the family. For example, I have a Deputy Director. She is a teacher of elementary grades. Whenever we have such house visits, we involve her also. We take her
with us. For example, I talk to them. I will discuss the things, but she also will have a separate meeting with the female members of that family to discuss the things separately, because maybe with me they might not be open and talk very freely, but with the girls, the women of that family, she will have her own discussions. (P127)

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.**

Very little was said during interviews with adult participants that could be classified as factors related to self, except for how some girls feel shame when they are unable to wear dresses of comparable material to other better off female classmates. It was mentioned that a few female students have gone on to either medical college or university which implies that these students were motivated to complete secondary school and continue on.

In summary, there are segments of the school staff who recognize some problems associated with girls’ attendance and retention at Rasht School 1 and some who believe the problems have been solved. Of the four categories used to differentiate the factors affecting girls’ schooling, factors related to family appear to be most significant, particularly parental attitudes towards their daughter(s) secondary school completion as well as the religious and economic circumstances of the family. Gender norms within the school community appear to severely limit girls’ post-secondary education as well as employment outside the home, which in turn, likely lessens perceived benefit and value of secondary school completion for many parents and even some female students. However, for those advocating for girls’ secondary school completion, such as the Director and school staff, the additional two years of school is understood as a means of helping students cope with the potential hardships in life that make women particularly vulnerable, such as divorce. Adult participants at Rasht School 1 mentioned very little that could be classified as factor related to self. It appears that without the advocacy efforts of the government, through its policies, and the school staff, very few girls in this school community would be allowed to complete secondary school.
Rasht School 2 (non-GEP school).

Rasht School 2 is located within a village on the slope of a valley alongside a steep mountain range. The school dates back to 1948 when it was established as an elementary school. In the following year, the school was expanded to grade 7. In 1952, in response to the community’s demand for more grades to be offered, the school was further expanded to become a general secondary school (up to grade 10 during the Soviet period and to 11 after Tajikistan’s independence). Some additional classrooms were built in 2000.

During the civil war, many people from the village fled for their safety while a few stayed at home. The school was closed for three months, from February to April 1993. According to the Director, “18, 19, 20 of February 1993, the war was going on in this area and they were the hardest days” (P138). While the newer section of the school was closed up for a period of time, the older section was used to house refugees from Kurgan-Tyube, the capital of Rumi District. The Director’s husband and two other men from the village were killed during the civil war. The school re-opened in April 1993 as people who had fled began to return to the village. The Director recalled how “people were not away for a long time, they started coming back soon but they were frightened. The situation was not secure….We say the war finished but the situation wasn’t secure and stable” (P138).

The devastation caused by the civil war, combined with the loss of economic stability that existed during the Soviet period, resulted in significant changes within this school community, especially regarding women and paid employment. Many teenage boys and men have left and continue to leave the community to work in Russia due to economic necessity.

The absence of older boys and men from the school community due to labour migration, along with the decline in economic security at the household level, affects the lives of every member of the family. Before the civil war, the vast majority of women in this community did
not work outside the home. However, once the civil war ended, women needed to earn money to ensure their family’s survival. A female teacher described how the radical changes in daily life led to radical changes in societal norms and practices regarding women working outside the home. She noted how, prior to the civil war,

> it was very rare that you would see a female working, whether it is school teaching or other positions….I was the only one working in this school and no other female was teaching in the school at that time. But after the civil war, things have changed….the female teachers who are now teaching in this school, their husbands were killed during the civil war. None of them have a husband. They’re alone. So this is the condition that forced them to choose another way. So I think also the same, that only when the people will really understand the necessity and need [for females] to be educated, that it will change their minds and they will come [to school]. (P155)

After the civil war, working in the school became one of the few sources of employment for women needing to earn money. One teacher noted that “the school is only one place that provides some opportunities to be employed. That’s the only opportunity to work. There are no other places” (P155). However, another teacher spoke of women who worked as shop assistants and those without an education who travel to Gharm daily to work as cleaners or dishwashers.

Another radical change within the community has been the increase in the number of divorces. This reality has forced some people to think differently about the importance of girls’ education as well as women’s employment outside the home. As a result of the difficulties young women and their families face when divorce occurs, some young divorced women in this community are allowed to study at the nearby medical college in Gharm. One teacher explained how,

> as a teacher, I can force [girls] one day to be at school, two days, just by force, but I cannot change their thinking, their mind. Only they themselves with the environment, with the condition, they can accept and make changes and come [to school] by themselves…Now these changes are happening because several young families have been divorced in this village, and, for others, it was a bad experience and [an] example to follow this way now that three or four girls of this village are studying in the medical college in Gharm…They are in need of some nurses in this village. (P155)
Located in a village a 15 minute drive along the main road from the district capital of Gharm, the school is another five minute drive off the main road and up a gently sloping hill. The school compound is enclosed by a fence with an adobe entrance with two metal gates: one for pedestrians and the other for vehicles (see Figure 11). Within the compound are two school blocks, two small buildings, a gazebo, and a Soviet World War II memorial. The main school block is an old, one-storey building, with very narrow corridors, low ceilings, and small rooms.

**Figure 11: Map of Rasht School 2**

The main school block contains the Director’s office, the teacher’s room, and several classrooms. The other school block, also one-storey, was built in 2000. The gazebo provides
shade for the students during school breaks as do the many trees within the compound. While it was clear that the two small buildings are not latrines, I did not ask what they are used for. (There may have been latrines on the compound but I didn’t ask about them.)

School 2 has 15 classrooms. Although the school has eight computers, only five were working and the school, like the village, does not have electricity from 9 am to 5 pm each day from October through March. When there is no electricity, students in computer class copy notes from the blackboard or textbook.

Tajik is the language of instruction as the school community consists solely of Tajik families. There are two shifts at the school: Students from grades 8 to 11 attend the morning shift from 8 am to 1 pm while students from grades 1 to 7 attend school in the afternoon from 1 to 5:10 pm.

The female Director, who attended this school as a student, is the first female Director. She has worked at the school for 11 years: two years as the Director, three years as the Deputy Director, and six years as a teacher. She has a certificate from the pedagogical vocational training institute and, at the time of data collection, was a 5th year student in a branch of the pedagogical university in Gharm. She became a widow during the civil war and attributes this as one of the reasons she was recruited to be the Director. She noted how she didn’t have a traditional home life because she was a widow and it was thought that, because of her home life, she would have more time to devote to the demanding job of Director.

In 2009/10, the school had 27 teachers, nine of whom were female. At the time of data collection, one of the female teachers was on maternity leave (which is for two months before and two months after delivery). Of the nine female teachers, three had completed higher education. One of these three teachers, the chemistry teacher, is a doctor who married a man from this village. She was asked by the Director to teach at the school as she was not working
since there was no vacancy for a doctor in the village. One of the female teachers, who was originally from Gharm and who married a man from this village, began her work at the school before the civil war as a secretary. She began working after the death of one of her children. Her husband was killed in the civil war. After the civil war, widowed with five children, she completed a vocational training course and became a teacher.

School 2 did not have enough teachers in September 2009 to deliver a full timetable of classes for all grades. To reduce the effects of the teacher shortage, the Director “convinced” some teachers to teach several subjects, although this was not easily done. Nor was it easy for the Director to retain newly-qualified teachers. She pointed out that,

for those teachers teaching more than one subject, 3 or 4 subjects, it is very difficult for me to convince [them] because nobody wants to take this task and difficulty. Sometimes I am convincing them, sometimes even bribing them, that I will provide your lunch, I am asking my family to bring their lunch so they will not leave school otherwise they will not come back. Some of them are young ones, they are just starting [to teach] and I am trying to find some ways to keep them and to motivate them. (P138)

The staff at Rasht School 2 conducts two meetings with students at the end of each week: one with upper grade students who attend school in the morning and one with primary students in the afternoon. The female teacher who was the former Deputy Director of primary described the nature and purpose of these meetings as follows:

Every class has a notebook where they are registering what was happening during the week in the class. How many students did not come to school, what was the reason and [the class leader] will report in front of the whole school….If we have a list of students who are coming late, then we will call them, and in front of everyone, we will ask the reasons why they are not coming. And also, in the same notebook, they have records of the good students in the class, those performing well, who are active in the school and also about weak students. And each class is reporting about their class, what kind of students they have, weak ones, strong ones, active ones….And those who are coming every day to school, who are active and performing well, in front of all, we are expressing our gratitude so that they are an example for others. (P161)

The practice of conducting this type of meeting was first established during the Soviet period.
According to the Director, there is little involvement of the community with the school, even regarding the school’s physical maintenance. However, she noted how community members supply firewood to the school during winter to ensure that the school’s stoves have fuel, which is of critical importance. The local government, the Hukumat, supports the Director and teachers by actively promoting the completion of secondary schooling for all students. One teacher noted how “the Hukumat is giving instructions to the community, to the school, to go and to somehow to convince the parents and bring the children back to school” (P161).

Many girls in this school community marry after completing grade 9 while boys marry when they are older. Speaking about marriage practices in this school community, the Director noted the following:

When a girl completes grade 9, for 2 or 3 months she will stay at home and then she will get married, at 17, something like this. There are some families where the girl of 40 is not married yet and there are some families where a girl of 17 already has some children. There are also some families where two girls, the youngest is married but the eldest is still home and not married yet. (P138)

In terms of international development assistance, as well as participating in the WFP school feeding programme, Rasht School 2 was part of the WFP’s Take-Home Rations program for female students in grades 5 to 11 (for details of the program see Chapter 2). While Rasht School 2 was initially considered for inclusion in GEP, the school was not selected to participate.

Adult participants at Rasht School 2 made the following comments about boys’ schooling. One teacher noted that “the boys try their best to regularly be in school and also their level of knowledge is very good” (P156). Compared to female students, many more male students finish grade 9 and then take a one-year vocational training course, such as a driving or welding course. It is also not unusual for some male students to continue into higher education.
For example, at the time of data collection, three male teachers from the local community were beginning their first year of teaching at Rasht School 2 having just graduated from university.

In September 2009, 413 students were enrolled from grades 1 to 11, 47% of whom were female and 53% male. The following tables present enrolment in grades 8 to 11 at Rasht School 2 disaggregated by sex and ethnicity for two years: 2008/09 (Table 31) and enrolment at the start of 2009/10 (Table 32).

**Table 31. Rasht School 2: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2008/2009 (end of year) by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 32. Rasht School 2: Student enrolment (grades 8 to 11) 2009/2010 (September) by sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2008/09 an equal number of girls and boys were enrolled in grade 8 and 10. In 2009/10 an equal number of girls and boys were enrolled in grade 10. When boys’ enrolment was greater than girls’ enrolment, it was commonly greater by a quarter to one half. The only instance when girls enrolment was greater than the boys was in grade 9 in 2009/10 (59% girls and 41% boys) (see Table 32).

The following table presents the number of female students who progressed from grade 9 to 10 and 11 disaggregated into four cohorts: students in grade 9 in 2006/07, in 2007/08, in 2008/09, and in 2009/10.
Table 33. Rasht School 2: Progression of female students from grade 9 to 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 cohort in 2006/07</th>
<th>Grade 9</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9 cohort in 2007/08</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9 cohort in 2008/09</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9 cohort in 2009/10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of female students from the grade 9 cohort in 2007/08 decreased by one quarter (from 12 to 8) as they progressed from grade 10 to 11. With eight students from this cohort having progressed to grade 11, this cohort was the same size as the cohort from one year earlier that also had eight female students in grade 11. It appears that the number of female students in all three cohorts (the grade 9 cohort in 2006/07, 2007/08, and 2008/09) are roughly the same size. There was a decrease of almost one-third in the number of female students in the grade 9 cohort in 2008/09 from grade 9 to 10. The number of female students who enrolled in grade 9 in 2009/10 is significantly higher at 24 than the previous year and perhaps the year before that.

Adult participants at Rasht School 2 gave a range of responses regarding the irregular attendance of female students. One teacher commented that irregular attendance of female students “is mostly for grade 9 but sometimes it happens for grade 8” (P156). Another teacher stated that “until grade 9 everyone takes school seriously. Everybody is studying. Then it’s changing and the problems start” (P161). The Director noted that “the girls don’t come actually to grade 10 and 11” (P138).

A few female students from Rasht School 2 have gone on, after grade 9, to take a three-year vocational training course at the nearby medical college. These students live at home with their parents and walk to and from the college daily. As one teacher pointed out, “after the completion of this vocational training, [these students] will have completed secondary education, not higher education” (P161). The fact that this course is not a form of higher education is likely the reason why these young women are allowed to pursue this type of study.
In 2008/09 two female students from the school attended medical college whereas five female students did so one year earlier. After completing their program, these young women can work in their home village as nurses. Rural communities are very poorly served in terms of healthcare and there appear to be vacancies for nurses.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.**

Many parents want to ensure that their daughters do not become the subject of gossip and rumours by not conforming to norms and practices of the local community. For example, one teacher described how families in the school community just want to keep the tradition. They want to follow the rules and they don’t want the rumours and gossip among the community about their family and about their daughter and they don’t want their daughter to be the subject of discussion in this village. (P155)

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.**

Primary factors affecting girls’ schooling related to the family that were mentioned by adult participants at Rasht School 2 are as follows: parental attitudes towards the value and benefit of girls’ secondary school, marriage practices for girls, the family’s economic circumstances and the daughters’ household responsibilities. One teacher described parents who don’t allow their daughters to complete secondary school as “narrow-minded” while those who allow their daughters to attend grade 10 and 11 are described as “open-minded.” The teacher felt that whether a parent was narrow- or open-minded depended on their level of education, even though all parents in the school community would have completed secondary school under the Soviet system. According to this teacher, girls not allowed to complete secondary school come from families where the parents don’t have education, that’s why. They themselves did not study. They are not educated. They are very narrow-minded, that’s why their children don’t attend grade 10 and 11. Mostly, the reason is because the parents are not educated, so it affects the children’s lives….everyone [has] secondary education, but they are narrow-minded and their mentality is low, that’s why here
now in school, children are studying in grade 10, and 11, because their parents are open-minded and they value education. (P161)

Some parents consider their daughter(s) to be “grown-up” at 15 as was mentioned by the Director. She described how

some of the parents think that once a girl has finished grade 9 she is already grown-up. They are not much [in agreement] that a girl at this age should be in school…They are not understanding. They don’t understand. And they don’t want to understand. (P138)

This statement illustrates how firmly the Director believes these parents hold on to this belief.

Some parents in the school community prioritize the importance of their daughters’ marriage over her schooling. One teacher recalled how, “[parents] are telling us that there is no use for a girl to study and to be educated because they see that husband and marriage is much more important than school” (P161). Commenting on how many parents in this school community think attaining higher education would have a negative effect on their daughters’ marriage opportunities, one teacher noted that

most of [the parents] didn’t want to give [their daughters an] education…It is our tradition. I don’t know why but some of them think that the woman must sit at home and do only home things. The woman should only be a housewife. Before it was such, [women] who can get education cannot make it in this village. [Men] didn’t want to marry to a girl with higher education. If the girl finished grade 10 and 11, there will be no problems to get married, but those who will finish the higher educational institutions will face some problems. (P155)

Two teachers mentioned the concerns many parents have about the nature and extent of their daughters’ interactions with boys. One noted that,

in my personal opinion, I think in this village most of the people express unwillingness for their daughters to go to school related to the boys issues. They know that boys tease girls. Sometimes they don’t behave appropriately. That’s why they don’t want their daughters to be in school. (P156)

Girls who go to school have many more interactions with boys than girls who stay home. The teacher added that
there are some parents having the mind that if the girl stays home, they won’t face any problems, it will be fewer problems for them. Better to keep her home and to avoid some other problems. (P156)

Even the provision of much-needed flour, through the WFP’s Take-Home Rations program, did not provide enough of an incentive for some parents to keep their secondary school-age daughters in school. A teacher noted how parents have a good understanding that by keeping the girl from school, they will not receive this sack of flour which can help them. And even that could not attract. They just want to keep the tradition. They want to follow the rules and they don’t want the rumours and gossip among the community about their family and about their daughter and they don’t want their daughter to be the subject of discussion in this village. That’s why they just reject the sack of flour. They reject everything and they continue keeping their girl at home. (P155)

Two teachers thought that the costs associated with secondary school and higher education completion were too prohibitive for many parents. One teacher noted that when [parents] can afford to get their children admitted to university, to afford their studies being done in the city, to pay for their food, their dress, to cover all the costs of education, then the situation will be changed. In my personal opinion, it’s a money issue. There are some cases where parents want their children to be admitted to university. First year they can afford, the second year there will be a lack of money, and a student who is full-time will be transferred to a part-time student, and hardly some of them can graduate from university, because in between they are again facing problems with money….In grade 10 and 11, first it is related to the dress, clothes, school dress. Second, it’s the textbooks, because now textbooks are also very expensive. One textbook sometimes costs 6 Somoni [$1.50 USD], they can’t afford [it]. (P161)

Due to the high direct costs of university, most rural parents and students do not even consider higher education as a possibility.

Several teachers mentioned female students’ household responsibilities as a factor affecting female students’ attendance and academic performance. A teacher noted that girls have a lot of housework to do. Once girls are in grade 5 or 6, they become responsible for the housework, such as looking after younger siblings and cousins, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the family’s animals. Their household responsibilities increase as girls get older, especially once they are in upper secondary school. One teacher described how “parents do
some of the work at home, but most of the time they spend visiting each other, neighbours, relatives. Most of the work is done by girls” (P155). Another teacher noted that “most of our girls from the village are spending a lot of time for the household and they don’t spend much time for studying and preparing for class” (P156).

While many families in this school community do not support higher education attainment for female family members, there are some exceptions. The Director spoke of three female students who recently graduated from Rasht School 2 and are now attending university. One of these students is the Director’s niece. As for the other two, both of their mothers have a strong desire to ensure their daughters receive higher education and both were the head of their household. (One student’s father was dead and the other student’s father was in jail.)

*Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.*

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school include the quality of education students receive, government support for students attending university, school uniform policy and advocacy efforts undertaken by the Director and other school staff. A shortage of teachers and other circumstances that severely affect the quality of education at a school cause some parents to consider their daughters’ upper secondary schooling to be a costly venture with little value and/or benefit. One teacher commented that,

the major reason that the parents don’t want their girls to be in grade 10 or grade 11 in this village, in general, [is that] we don’t have all teachers available in this school for all the subjects. We go, we invite girls, we attract them to school, we bring them here but they don’t get much knowledge being in grade 10 and grade 11 because not all the teachers are available so the level of knowledge is not increasing being two years in this school. That’s why the parents don’t see the difference between the girl who finishes grade 9 and the girls that stay two additional years in the school. And also, they don’t see an opportunity for the girls to go into higher education after completion of grade 10 and grade 11. That’s why they make a decision that it is better to stop after 9, being two additional years in school for grade 10 and grade 11, they will have some additional costs. They have to provide the school dress. They should provide shoes, pay for the textbooks. They will have some other costs. (P155)
As regards to female students’ uniforms, Rasht School 2 has implemented the same uniform as Rasht School 1. Female students are required to wear a traditional dress made from inexpensive material of the same pattern and colour, as chosen by the school. One teacher remarked that “now it is very good that the girls have a simple uniform and that everyone is in the same level dress. The problem with the school dress is a bit getting resolved” (P156).

The existence of the Presidential Quota has helped some female students who graduated from Rasht School 2 to go on to university, despite widely-held community norms against female students acquiring higher education. According to the Director, three female students from this school received the Presidential Quota and are attending a higher education institution.

One teacher mentioned that the limited fields of study available to students through the Presidential Quota system meant that her daughter, who wanted to be a lawyer, could not pursue her dream because no places were allocated for students to study at the law school. Spaces were allocated for the pedagogical university (for teacher training) and foreign language institutes.

Advocacy for girls’ schooling by the Directors and teachers takes many forms at Rasht School 2. For example, the female Chemistry teacher, who is a doctor, hopes to be a role model for her female students by telling them her life story. She said

I am always telling them that they should study. I am telling them “for example, look at me. I studied and I am married.” They think that if they study, they will not get married. When I finished [secondary school], I studied then I came back. I was working as a doctor in Gharm and after that I got married, after two months. I married someone from this village and my husband told me I cannot go and work in Gharm. [He said,] “You can work in this village but you cannot work in Gharm.” (P158)

(She works as a teacher because there was no vacancy for a doctor in her village.)

When trying to convince parents to allow their daughters to complete secondary school, the school staff argue that education is a form of insurance against the uncertainties of the future. For example, one teacher has told parents the following:
In case your daughter gets married at an early age, then who knows what will happen. In case she will not be happy and she’ll get divorced, don’t you think [about] what will happen to your daughter? So let her first finish her school and education and then think about marriage. We try to explain it this way to parents...When I’m talking to them, some say, “yes, you are right, I will send my daughter” but most of them are just lying because the girls do not come back. Only a few girls come back, but most don’t come back. (P161)

The importance of the leadership of the Director is also evident in the following statements illustrating why she believes schooling is so important for girls in this community.

She stated that

you never know what life can bring. For example, if a girl gets married, if something will happen, she will get divorced, or [she will have] some other difficulties. How she will deal with this? If she has some basic education, she has her school certificate, maybe somehow it will help her to stand against the difficulties and deal with them. (P138)

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.**

Adult participants at Rasht School 2 made several comments reflecting factors affecting girls’ schooling that could be classified as those related to self. Students’ motivation and interest in their schooling was mentioned several times as was as how the students are affected by other family members, including their older brothers. Other factors related to the school uniform.

The Director also used this argument during my introductory meeting with female students in grades 9, 10, and 11. At this meeting the Director told the students the following:

You think you will get married and a bright future is waiting for you but you never know what will happen to you. Maybe you will get divorced. Then what will you do? You cannot work. You cannot go to higher education. As a mother, my advice to all of you, if your parents or your brothers don’t want you to be in school, don’t listen to them. You should struggle for your own life. Don’t listen [to them], say that you want to come to school, to study. (P138)

The teacher who was the former Deputy Director of primary noted that many female students’ academic performance declines as they progress from the primary to the lower secondary school. She pointed out that

the elementary girls are coming. They are studying. And it’s very difficult in grade 10 and 11 because [the girls] are already grown-up. Some don’t listen to
the teachers at all….in grades 1 to 4, kids are very obedient. They are studying. They don’t miss classes. Every day they are in class. From grade 5, you will see changes in students because starting from grades 1 to 4 they have only one of two teachers that are teaching for all subjects. But starting from grade 5, they will have different teachers for each subject, so you will already see changes [in the] performance of the student. Some they are getting weak and each year they get weaker. (P161)

Some teachers at Rasht School 2 spoke of the range of female students’ regarding their schooling, as some students have a strong desire and interest to stay in school while others do not. One teacher noted how

some girls wanted to come to school, and if I must be at their home, she’s looking for me. She’s waiting for me. “My teacher is coming and I must say to my mother and I go to school.” But some girls themselves don’t want to go to school and they never waited for me and they wanted their parent do such that they didn’t come to school. Some girls want [their teacher to visit their home], like these girls in 11th grade. (P155)

However, this teacher also said “it’s not that the parents are creating a problem for them being in school, it’s just their wish. [Some female students] don’t want to come. They lose interest and they don’t come” (P155). Another teacher noted that some female students

don’t want to come to school. It’s because of their desire or wish, and also some teachers are being strict and demanding a lot during the class, and those students who are weak, they are not attending the class…

The teacher who was the former Deputy Director for primary described how various factors, including those related to community/society, family, and school, affect female students’ motivation and attitude towards their schooling. She described the reasons for problems with girls’ education as follows:

First of all it can be a dress issue for the school, because there is a competition between the girls going on in the school. Some they are seeing others dressed well, and they are embarrassed and they don’t want to come to school in a simple dress, they want to also to have a good dress and nice dress. Second also, the parents don’t see the use or the benefit of [their daughter] being in grade 10 and 11. Between [those who finish] grade 9 and between those who finish grade 10 and 11, they don’t see the difference and the benefit. That’s why they say there is no use to study in grade 10 and 11. And also, one more issue, is marriage. Instead of studying grade 10 and 11, the parents want their daughters to get married at an early age. That’s why they don’t send them. And also, that’s why some parents
create problems. They don’t allow their daughters to come to school and because of all the issues, this is also affecting the girls. When you look at the girls, their behaviour towards the school and their opinion is changing. They are not any more taking it serious. Now they are getting used to life out of school, and they don’t want to be in school. (P161)

The ultimate effect of the intersection of multiple factors that serve as barrier to girls’ schooling is to reduce female students’ motivation to attend regularly school which, in turn, greatly inhibits their academic performance and attitude towards school. However, the Chemistry teacher noted that “if [girls] really have an interest to study, they will find time [to study], even at nighttime” (P158).

In summary, adult participants at Rasht School 2 spoke predominantly about factors related to family as having the greatest effect on whether or not a girl is allowed to continue in school past grade 9. Parental attitudes regarding the value and/or benefit of girls’ secondary schooling and marriage practises for girls are shaped and informed by community/society- level norms and practices (or traditions). The family’s economic circumstances also significant influence parents’ decision-making on girls’ secondary schooling. The influence of a girl’s older brother was also mentioned as an important factor related to family that affects girls’ schooling either positively or negatively depending on the circumstances. Adult participants also mentioned how the quality of education, government policy (in terms of Presidential Quotas and school uniforms for females) and advocacy efforts by school staff affect girls’ schooling in the local community. As in all other school sites, adult participants spoke of the importance of individual students’ interest in and motivation to stay in school as critical inputs related to self that significantly affect girls’ schooling.

**Summary of findings**

The aim of this chapter (as well as the preceding chapter) is set the context of this study and to present findings to answer research question 1 regarding the factors affecting girls’
schooling in two rural school communities in Rasht from the perspective of the Directors, teachers, community members and NGO staff. In this chapter, I presented findings regarding the district, school communities and school contexts of the two schools in Rasht qualitatively and quantitatively. The descriptions of both schools in Rasht provide evidence that most female students in these communities leave school after grade 9, thus conforming to the status quo regarding schooling. As stated in Chapter 5, I consider factors that limit or restrict girls’ upper secondary schooling to be critical inputs that serve to maintain and reproduce the status quo. In contrast, I consider factors that enable girls to attend and fully participate in grades 10 and 11 to be forms of empowerment as they challenge the status quo.

Adult participants in Rasht described how factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family have the greatest impact on whether or not a girl is able to defy the status quo by continuing on to grades 10 and 11. The main factors related to family mentioned by adult participants were parental attitudes as to the value and benefit of non-compulsory education for their daughter(s), economic circumstances (especially in regards to the number of school-age children), and in some cases, the attitude of the older brother towards his sister’s schooling. These factors play out in different ways for each girl, depending on the circumstances.

Participants mentioned how norms and practices regarding girls’ schooling with in the community/society are greatly influenced by the religiously conservative nature of the major of the population in these communities. As a result, many girls conform to the status quo by leaving school after grade 9.

When speaking of school factors, adult participants mentioned how factors such as distance to school, advocacy by school staff, school uniforms, and government policies affect girls’ schooling. Adult participants also mentioned factors that I have classified as those related to self: the degree of interest and motivation a girl has to go to school. This includes how she
reacts to and is affected by the school uniform policy. All the above mentioned factors may enable or limit girls’ schooling depending on the circumstances.

In the following chapter, I compare this chapter’s findings with those from Chapter 5 at the district and school levels. I also introduce female students’ perspectives in the following chapter when I compare their descriptions of a typical day.
Chapter 7: Comparing Districts, Schools, and Female Students’ Daily Lives

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this study explores female secondary school students’ educational experiences and opportunities at GEP and non-GEP schools in the two districts in Tajikistan with the lowest female enrolment in grades 10 and 11. In this study, factors that inhibit girls’ secondary schooling are conceptualized as critical inputs that maintain and reinforce the status quo (that girls leave school after completing grade 9) whereas factors that enable female students to continue on to non-compulsory secondary grade (grades 10 and 11) are thought to be critical inputs that are empowering because they challenge and may change the status quo for girls’ secondary schooling.

In this chapter, I bring the two previous chapters together by comparing the contexts of two districts included in this study as well as findings from the six schools. By comparing school-level findings within and across districts, I aim to deepen our understanding of the similarities and differences in the norms and practices regarding girls’ secondary schooling in these different rural settings by exploring how adult participants discuss the ways girls’ secondary schooling experiences and opportunities are restricted or enabled.

This chapter consists of four sections: In Section A I compare of the contexts of Rumi and Rasht districts while in Section B I compare enrolment, school contexts, and the factors affecting girls’ school as mentioned by adult participants in the two previous chapters. These factors are conceptualized as critical inputs serving either to restrict or enable girls’ secondary schooling, depending on the circumstances. As in the two previous chapters, factors are divided into three social fields of community/society, family, and school as well as factors related to the category of self. In Section C I compare findings from GEP and non-GEP schools. In Section D I transition from presenting the perspectives of adult participants to presenting those of female
student participants by discussing findings regarding a typical day in the life of female students.

I conclude with a chapter summary.

**Section A: Comparing the contexts of Rumi and Rasht Districts**

In this section I first compare the key features of the two districts, followed by a comparison of the all six schools in terms of total enrolment, language of instruction, grade 10 and 11 enrolment in September 2009 and school contexts. In Table 34 below I compare the key features of Rumi and Rasht Districts.

**Table 34: Comparing the key features of Rumi and Rasht Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Features</th>
<th>Rumi District</th>
<th>Rasht District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative region</strong></td>
<td>Administrative region&lt;br&gt;Khatlon&lt;br&gt;(Rumi is one of 24 districts)&lt;br&gt;Population estimated at 152,300 (2008)&lt;br&gt;Population well-known to be religiously conservative</td>
<td>Administrative region&lt;br&gt;Direct Rule District (DRD)&lt;br&gt;(Rasht is a semi-autonomous district)&lt;br&gt;Rasht was the home of an Islamic opposition party during the civil war and fighting occurred in the district (Periodic fighting between government forces and insurgents is currently on-going)&lt;br&gt;Population well-known to be religiously conservative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Rumi is one of 24 districts located with the administrative region of Khatlon (the largest of the four administrative regions in Tajikistan), Rasht is a semi-autonomous district within DRD. The landscape of both regions is also distinctly different. Rumi District is located on plains bordered by mountain ranges and is one of the main cotton growing areas in the country. Rasht District is located in the very mountainous Rasht Valley area where some remote villages are separated by large mountain ranges.

Rumi District has a larger and more ethnically diverse population than Rasht District. People of Tajik and Uzbek ethnicity live in Rumi whereas the population of Rasht is predominantly made-up of people of Tajik origin. (Some student participants in Rumi District described themselves as Uzbek and Tajik due to their parents’ ethnic origins.) A significant percentage of families of Tajik ethnicity in Rumi District trace their family origins to Rasht as their families were forcibly resettled from Rasht by Stalin many decades earlier.

The population of Rasht is well-known to be religiously conservative (see Chapter 2). This appears to be one reason why fewer female students at the Rasht schools in this study attend grades 10 and 11 than at the Rumi schools. During data collection I saw how women living in the rural areas in both districts wear traditional dress and scarf. However these norms of dress for women are much more strictly followed in Rasht than in rural Khatlon.

Restrictive norms and practices regarding women working outside the home are greater in some communities in Rasht and Rumi than in others. This restrictive climate also applies to barriers towards female secondary school completion. The existence of the WFP Take-Home Rations program for upper secondary female students in Rasht reflects how problems relating to female secondary school completion is greater in Rasht District than in Rumi District. (In Rumi District, female Uzbek students have few barriers to secondary school completion and are more likely to be allowed to attain a post-secondary education than their Tajik peers.) It appears that a
significant number of families living in the school communities in Rumi District whose families originate in Rasht maintain religiously conservative traditions, norms and practices regarding gender relations, particularly regarding girls’ secondary schooling.

Labour migration and divorce are significantly affecting many aspects of life in these school communities. The lack of employment opportunities and the difficult economic conditions of many households has caused many teenage boys and men in both districts to leave Tajikistan to work in Russia. While mentioned by some participants in Rumi schools, it appears that migration of male members of families and the incidents of divorce are having a greater effect on families within Rasht District when compared to those in Rumi District. Adult participants in this study, especially those in Rasht District, attribute the increase in the number of divorces to the effects of male labour migration.

In terms of educational contexts, Khatlon region (where Rumi District is located) is noted to have the worst conditions in the country. As noted in Chapter 2, the Global Monitoring Report (2010) describes Khatlon as the area with the greatest degree of “educational deprivation” (p. 163). It was in this region that fiercest fighting occurred during the civil war. As a result, this region experienced the greatest destruction of school infrastructures when compared to other regions in Tajikistan.

A comparison of educational statistics show that Khatlon and RSD (where Rasht District is located) have almost identical GER rates for students attending grades 10 and 11 (41% for Khatlon and 40% for Rasht) as well as for female students attending grades 10 and 11 (36% for Khatlon and 37% for Rasht). Both these sets of rates are the lowest in the country.

Section B: Comparing findings from Rumi and Rasht schools

In this section I first compare statistical data for the six schools in this study regarding total student enrolment, female enrolment, and female student progression from grades 9 to 11.
One of the limitations of this study was that I was only able to collect school statistics for two school years, as discussed in Chapter 4. Therefore, while the enrolment statistics presented in this section show evidence of some possible trends more data are required to confirm these trends. Second, I compare district-level findings from adult participant interviews regarding factors affecting girls’ schooling by discussing those related to community/society, family, school and self. Third, I compare statistical data from GEP and non-GEP schools.

**School enrolment and school contexts**

In table 35 I present total student enrolment (grades 1 through 11) for September 2009 for all six schools in this study. The data are disaggregated by district, school, and sex (in numerical and percentage form).

Table 35. Total student enrolment for all schools (grades 1 through 11), September 2009, by number and percentage of female and male students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percentage of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumi</td>
<td>1 - GEP</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - GEP</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasht</td>
<td>1 - GEP</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As evident in the above table, student enrolment is significantly larger in the three GEP schools (ranging from 762 to 910 students) than in the three non-GEP schools (ranging from 413 to 580 students). This fact could indicate that Save the Children chose larger schools as project schools. When comparing the percentage of female and male students enrolled at the six schools, four have a higher percentage of boys than girls. The only school which has a higher percentage of girls than boys is Rumi School 3, a GEP school.
In Table 36 on the following page I compare the six schools in this study in terms of total enrolment, language of instruction, grade 10 and 11 enrolment in September 2009, and school contexts. As can be seen in the table, there were more female students in the Uzbek stream than the Tajik stream in schools with two streams of instruction (Tajik and Uzbek), except at Rumi School 1 where there was an equal number of students in both streams. (These statistics are for the start of the 2009/10 school year and some of these students may drop out over the course of the year.) When comparing female enrolment within the Tajik stream only, the percentage of female students in grade 10 and 11 at the Rasht Schools ranged from 31 to 45% compared to a range of 32 to 57% at the Rumi Schools. (Some of the students in the Tajik stream in the Rumi schools were of Uzbek ethnicity.)

In terms of school contexts, all six schools had a teacher shortage and participated in the WFP hot meals for primary students program. The WFP Take Home Rations program was only implemented in Rasht Schools, indicating that the problem of girls’ attendance and retention was more acute in Rasht than Rumi. There were very few, if any, female teachers from the local school community at most of the six schools. Thus, girls within these communities had few local female role models who work outside the home since teaching was one of the few employment opportunities for women.
Table 36. A comparison of all schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>School and language of instruction</th>
<th>Grade 10 and 11 enrolment and percentage of female students (September 2009)</th>
<th>School context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Rumi     | School 1 (GEP) Tajik, Uzbek       | 81 students (total) 54% female 41 in Uzbek stream 54% female 40 in Tajik stream 55% female | - Male Director  
- 10 of 29 teachers are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- Only one female teacher is from local community  
- School blocks have been refurbished  
- WFP school feeding programme  
- UNICEF child-to-child pilot school  
- An estimated 50% of Tajik students’ families originate from Rasht |
|          | School 2 Tajik, Uzbek             | 68 students (total) 43% female 43 in Uzbek stream 49% female 25 in Tajik stream 32% female | - Male Director  
- 25 teachers, few are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- School in very poor condition  
- WFP school feeding programme  
- An estimated 30-35% of Tajik students’ families originate from Rasht |
|          | School 3 (GEP) Tajik, Uzbek       | 113 students (total) 57% female 52 in Uzbek stream 65% female 61 in Tajik stream 49% female | - Female Director  
- 25 of 38 teachers are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- Few female teachers are from local community  
- School has a Girls’ Committee  
- New school building  
- school feeding programme  
- UNICEF child-to-child pilot school |
|          | School 4 Tajik                    | 76 students 57% female | - Male Director  
- 8 of 38 teachers are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- Few female teachers from local community  
- school feeding programme  
- UNICEF child-to-child pilot school  
- “many” students’ families originate from Rasht |
| Rasht    | School 1 (GEP) Tajik              | 123 students 31% female | - Male Director  
- 2 teachers are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- school feeding programme  
- WFP Take Home Rations program  
- EC, Save the Children civil society project  
- Vast majority, if not all students’ families originate from Rasht |
|          | School 2 Tajik                    | 42 students 45% female | - Female Director  
- 9 of 27 teachers are female  
- Teacher shortage  
- school feeding programme  
- WFP Take Home Rations program  
- Vast majority, if not all students’ families originate from Rasht |
Female enrolment and progression from grades 9 to 11 across Rumi schools.

Quantitative findings, in the form of school statistics disaggregated by sex, provide valuable insights into who is enrolled in a given school year. Further insights are gained by investigating the number of female students in a particular cohort who progressed (or did not progress) from grade 9 into grades 10 and 11. However, both these sets of findings must be understood within the context in which the statistics were collected and reported, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Enrolment statistics from the four Rumi schools in this study are compared in Figures 12 and 13. The percentage of female and male students in grades 1 through 9 at each school remains consistent one year to the next (at parity or close to parity). However, there is a significant reduction in percentage of female students in grade 10 and 11 at all schools from one year (2008/09) to the next (2009/10). For example, the percentage of female students in

\textbf{Figure 12. Percentage of female and male students in Grades 1 to 9 in Rumi schools (2008/09 and 2009/10)}
grades 1 to 9 remained the same over the two years for Rumi Schools 2 and 3 but there was more than a ten percent drop in the percentage of females in grades 10 and 11 during that same period at both schools. Given that the 2009/10 statistics reflect enrolment at the start of the school year, the gap between the percentage of female and male students likely widened during the year.

As noted earlier, when examining enrolment statistics as the percentage of female and male students in the upper secondary grades in a given year, it is critical to consider what is happening to the male students. During interviews, participants spoke of some male students who leave school after grade 9 to work in Russia or to undertake vocational training. Other male students change schools to access classes required for entrance to higher education programs that are not offered at their school. A reduction in number of male students can result in an increase in the percentage of female students without any increase in the number of female students, which can be misinterpreted to signify an increase in girls’ enrolment.
When comparing female students’ progression from grade 9 to 11 in the Tajik stream with that of female students from grade 9 to 11 in the Uzbek stream, it is evident that female students in the Uzbek stream are far more likely to continue on to grade 11 than female students in the Tajik stream. Table 37 shows that there was roughly a fifty percent decrease in the number of female students progressing from grade 10 to 11 in GEP Schools 1 and 3. The decrease was even greater at School 2, especially since neither of the two female students in grade 11 were ethnically Tajik (see asterisk for Table 37).

Table 37. Progression of female students in the Tajik stream from grades 10 to 11 (cohort of students who were in grade 9 in 2007/08) at four Rumi schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 10</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1 - GEP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3 - GEP</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These two students were Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity who transferred into the Tajik stream to prepare for possibly continuing their education at the tertiary level.

Several adult and student participants in this study also commented that, in Rumi district, female students of Uzbek origin face fewer cultural/societal barriers regarding secondary schooling completion than female students of Tajik ethnicity.

Table 38. Progression of female students in the Uzbek stream from grades 10 to 11 (cohort of students who were in grade 9 in 2007/08) at four Rumi schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 10</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1 - GEP</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3 - GEP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several adult and student participants in this study also commented that, in Rumi district, female students of Uzbek origin face fewer cultural/societal barriers regarding secondary schooling completion than female students of Tajik ethnicity.

Table 37 and 38 show that if a female student is allowed to continue in school past the level of compulsory schooling (grade 10), she may not continue on to grade 11. The number of female students in the Tajik stream who stopped going to school after grade 10 was significantly higher than their peers in the Uzbek stream. Except at Rumi School 4, approximately half or more of the female students in the Tajik stream who completed grade 10 did not continue on to
grade 11 whereas at the schools offering Uzbek language of instruction the number of female students who went on to grade 11 decreased only by one.

Thus, from these quantitative findings I draw the following three conclusions regarding the status quo regarding who goes to school and for how long, if these statistics are accurate. First, there is parity or near parity for female and male student enrolment up to grade 9 in all four schools. Second, in grades 10 and 11 male students account for the vast majority of those enrolled when compared to female students. Third, female students of Uzbek ethnicity are more likely to continue on into non-compulsory secondary school grades than female students of Tajik ethnicity.

**Female enrolment and progression from grades 9 to 11 across Rasht schools.**

Using data from Rasht School 1 (a GEP school) and Rasht School 2 (a non-GEP school), I compare the percentage of female and male students in the compulsory level of schooling from grades 1 through 9 (in Figure 14) with the percentage of female and male students in grades 10 and 11 (in Figure 15).

![Figure 14. Percentage of students in Grades 1 to 9 in 2008/09 and 2009/10 in Rasht by sex](image)
In Rasht School 2, the GEP school, there are almost ten percent more boys than girls enrolled in grades 1 through 9 (54% boys vs. 46% girls). This gap was far wider in grade 10 and 11 when almost 70 percent of students were boys. By contrast, Rasht School 1, the non-GEP school, had almost ten percent more girls than boys enrolled in grades 1 to 9 (54% girls vs. 46% boys) but this situation reverses in grade 10 and 11 when there were ten percent more boys enrolled than girls (55% boys vs. 45% girls).

There were significantly fewer female students in grade 11 at both schools than male students in 2008/09 and 2009/10. Female students accounted for 30% of the grade 11 class in Rasht School 1 in 2008/09 and 19% in September of 2009 compared to 35% of the grade 11 class in Rasht School 2 in 2008/09 and 36% in September of 2009 (see Tables 31, 32, 34 and 35.)

Reasons given by participants regarding why female students were attending school irregularly or dropping out after grade 9 varied between Rasht School 1 and 2. Participants at Rasht School 1 commonly cited poverty as the greatest barrier while the former Director mentioned barriers relating to poverty and religion as equally important (specifically that parents...
fear their daughters who study at school will abandon the traditional way of dressing by no longer wearing a scarf and/or wearing a dress with shorter sleeves). (See details regarding the limitations of conducting interviews at Rasht School 1 in Chapter 4.)

In Table 39 I compare the number of female students from the cohort who were in grade 9 in 2007/08 who continued on from grade 10 to grade 11 at both schools. Since I could only access two years of enrolment statistics, this was the only cohort that could be traced as such.

Table 39. Progression of female students from Grade 10 to 11 (cohort who were in grade 9 in 2007/08) at two Rasht schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rasht School</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 10</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (GEP)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (non-GEP)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of female students in grade 10 from the cohort who were in grade 9 in 2007/08 is roughly the same at both schools. As this group progressed into the next academic year, 9 of 10 students from the GEP school (90%) continued on to grade 11 whereas only 8 of 12 students from the non-GEP school (66%) continued on.

Enrolment statistics across districts

By comparing the percentage of female and male students in grades 1 through 9 and the percentage of female and male students in grades 10 and 11 in the Rumi and Rasht schools the following became evident. The percentage of female and male students in grades 1 through 9 across all schools is similar. Rumi Schools 3 and 4 had parity or near parity in both 2008/09 and 2009/10 while Rumi Schools 1 and 2 and Rasht Schools 1 and 2 had roughly six to ten percent more boys than girls enrolled in those two years (with the exception of September 2009 enrolment statistics at Rasht School 2 that shows eight percent more female than male students).

When comparing the percentage of female and male students in grades 10 and 11 in 2008/09 and 2009/10 across districts distinct differences became evident. In the Rumi Schools
in 2008/09, female students comprised between 60 and 62 percent of the students in grades 10 and 11. In the following academic year, female students at these schools accounted for 46 to 52 percent of the students in grades 10 and 11. In Rasht Schools in 2008/09, female students comprised of 24 and 43 percent of the students in grades 10 and 11 at Schools 1 and 2, respectively. In the following year, the percentage of female students increased from 24 to 31 percent in Rasht School 1 and from 43 to 45 in Rasht School 2. This evidence confirms how the challenges to keep female students in school until the end of the secondary cycle are greater in Rasht than in Rumi.

A comparison of the progression of female students from grade 10 to 11 in Rumi and Rasht schools shows the following. Female students of Tajik origin in Rumi District who had continued on to grade 10 were significantly less likely to progress to grade 11 than their Uzbek peers. With the exception of Rumi School 4, the percentage of female students who continued on to grade 11 was fifty percent or less. In the Rasht schools, where Tajik is the only language of instruction, significantly more female students at the GEP school continued from grade 10 into grade 11 than their female peers at the non-GEP school (12 out of 13 continued on to grade 11 at the GEP school compared to 8 out of 12 at the non-GEP school).

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society.**

Differences in the contexts of Rumi and Rasht result in girls facing different types of community/society factors that can serve to limit or restrict girls schooling. These include topographical and socio-economic differences as well as socio-cultural differences in norms and practices regarding girls’ and/or women’s lives.
Rumi.

Rumi school profiles show how the cotton growing industry severely affects the lives of girls and women in all four school communities. Families need to have at least one member work in the fields to be allowed to collect the dried stalks at the end of the harvest which provides essential fuel for winter. Families in the Rumi School 4 community are also given access to a wheat field when a family member works in the cotton fields. Field labourers are girls and women. As a result, the vast majority of female secondary school students at these four schools work in the cotton fields. The greatest demand for labour in the cotton fields occurs during the harvest period (September through to early December) which corresponds with the first three months of school.

Thus cotton field labour could be a factor that restricts and/or limits girls’ schooling in the following ways. Girls from very poor families must leave school after grade 9 to work in the fields to earn an income, even if the income is extremely low. Some female students are absent from school, especially during the harvest period. Since the harvest period is three months long, some female students miss most of the first third of the school year which, year after year, would severely impede their learning and schooling experiences. Other female students attend school but also work in the fields for half the day when not in school. Given the physically hard nature of cotton field work, especially cotton picking, these female students’ learning and schooling experiences are negatively affected by this work.

It seems that the academic participation and achievement of many girls in these four school communities is severely impeded by their cotton field work. Their irregular school attendance and poor academic performance (due to their cotton field labour) likely provides evidence to some parents and community members that girls should no longer be in school thus reinforcing the status quo that girls leave school after grade 9.
Rasht.

Communities in Rasht district appear to uphold more conservative norms and practices regarding girls’ and/or women’s lives than communities in Rumi (as noted in literature in Chapter 2). Since Rasht District was a center for one of the opposition parties during the civil war, participants at both schools spoke of the effects of the civil war for the school community, particularly how security issues increased the need for females to stay at home. Parents’ security concerns for their daughters persisted even after the official end of the civil war in 1997 due to periodic fighting and insecure conditions.

Within the two school communities in Rasht District there appears to be a significance difference in the social acceptability of women working outside the home. Rasht is a mountainous area where cotton is not grown so field labour is not an employment option for girls and women in this district. Within the school community for Rasht School 1, women generally don’t work outside the home which may a reason why there are only two female teachers working at the school whereas more women appear to work outside the home in the school community for Rasht School 2. Also it appears that it is acceptable for widowed women to work outside the home within the Rasht School 2 community, as was the case for the Director and at least one of the teachers. There also appears to be more restrictive traditions regarding older girls going out of the house to go to school within the school community of Rasht School 1 compared to the Rasht School 2 community.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family.

In both districts, factors related to family appear to play the most significant role in whether or not a girl is supported and encouraged to complete secondary school. Parents, as well as influential family members, provide (or withhold) emotional, academic, and economic support for girls to attend and succeed in secondary school, depending on the circumstances.
Adult participants at the four Rumi School communities repeatedly discussed how parental and familial attitudes regarding boys’ and girls’ schooling differs greatly. These attitudes differ depending on whether the girl comes from a poor family, a religiously conservative family (often referred to as those from Gharm, Rasht), whether she is Tajik or Uzbek, whether she has an older brother who influences decisions about her schooling. Distance from home to school also affects parental and familial attitudes regarding girls’ schooling.

Some parents within all four Rumi school communities believe that by grade 9 their daughters are “grown-up” and thus see no value and/or benefit in their daughter(s) completing secondary school. These beliefs are related to parental aspirations for their daughter(s) as well as the belief that girls should not attain higher education. These beliefs and attitudes maintain and reinforce the status quo. According to the adult participants in this study, these parents are more likely to be of Tajik rather than Uzbek ethnicity and in most instances these parents are from Tajik families forcibly resettled from Rasht decades earlier. (As mentioned earlier, people living in and from Rasht have long been described as conservative and highly religious compared to people from other areas in Tajikistan.) All four school communities include many families that originate from Rasht as noted in Table 40.

Table 40. Estimated number or percentage of families in Rumi school communities who originate from Rasht

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rumi School</th>
<th>Families that originate from Rasht</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>50% (estimated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30 to 35% (estimated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“the majority of Tajiks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“many of the families”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental and familial ethnicity also appears to affect attitudes towards girls schooling in the following way. According to adult participants, some parents of Uzbek ethnicity within these school communities want their daughter(s) to complete secondary school. (This attitude
may be informed and influenced by the fact that upper secondary schooling is compulsory in Uzbekistan, as noted in Chapter 2.)

The economic circumstances of the family also affects whether or not a girl is permitted to attend school past grade 9. Poor families with many school-age children are less able to afford to send their children to non-compulsory secondary school than one with fewer school-age children. Some poor families may allow their son(s) rather than their daughter(s) to attend grade 10 and 11. It appears that it is only the boys from the poorest families who leave school after grade 9. Adult participants also described how some secondary school students, especially females, are absent in the winter due to a lack of warm clothing.

*Rasht.*

It appear that the key issues affecting girls’ secondary schooling in Rasht is whether or not parents value and/or see benefit in their daughter(s) continuing in school past grade 9. Most do not therefore few girls are permitted to be registered in and regularly attend non-compulsory secondary school.

Female students in upper secondary school at both schools were described by adult participants as being the children of those in the community who are “educated” and/or “open-minded.” In both communities boys were expected to finish secondary school unless they were very weak students and/or their family needed them to migrate to Russia to seek employment.

Despite the barriers in both school communities, some female students from each school have gone on to higher education. Two female graduates from School 1 are currently in university (one is the daughter of a teacher at the school) compared to three from School 2 (one is the Director’s niece). In both cases, participants described these women’s parents as “educated” and “open-minded”. These parents value higher education for their daughters whereas many parents in their school community do not.
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school.

*Rumi.*

School leadership, the quality of education students’ receive, the presence (or lack of presence) of female teachers as role models, and female students’ school uniform policy appear to be factors that affect girls’ schooling related to school. When comparing findings from the four Rumi schools, there were significant differences in the school leadership, particularly the way the Director not only acknowledged (or did not acknowledge) issues negatively affecting girls’ schooling but also sought to address these issues. For example, the Directors at the two non-GEP schools (Schools 2 and 4) differ greatly in their attitudes regarding girls’ low enrolment and irregular attendance in grade 10 and 11. The Director at School 2 denied that there were any problems (despite the fact that the Head of the Khatlon Department of Education explicitly stated that this school faced great challenges getting girls to enroll and attend grades 10 and 11) whereas the Director at School 4 spoke in detail about barriers to girls’ upper secondary schooling and steps that he and his staff were talking to address them. The effects of the school leadership appears to be of significant importance as the attitudes of these Directors regarding girls’ education issues was commonly reflected in the teachers’ responses at their corresponding schools. If the Directors’ and teachers’ responses were accurate reflections of their attitudes then it is likely that female upper secondary school students in general at Rumi School 2 were receiving less support from the school staff than female upper secondary school students at Rumi School 4.

All four schools also have a teacher shortage which negatively affects the quality of education students’ receive, including the length of the school day and the amount of time students may be unsupervised. I believe all these circumstances likely have greater negative implications for girls’ upper secondary schooling experiences when compared to that of boys’
because many parents believe that grades 10 and 11 is of little or no value and/or benefit for girls.

When considering female teachers as role models, female teachers account for one third or less of the teachers at Schools 1, 2, and 4. Female teachers account for 66% of the teachers at School 3. However, very few female teachers at all four schools are women who come from a village within the school community. Only one female teacher at both School 1 and 4 comes from the school community and has completed a university degree. Most of the female teachers at all four schools cannot teach secondary-level grades because they have not completed a university degree.

**Rasht.**

When comparing the two schools in Rasht, there was a significant difference in the ratio of female to male administrators and teachers. At Rasht School 1 the Director was male as were the vast majority of teachers. Only two teachers were female. However, the Director of Rasht School 2 was female as were one-third of the teachers (9 of 27 were female). Given the conservative and restrictive norms and practices regarding teenage girls in these two communities, it is likely that parents would be more willing to send their teenage daughters to a school with a significant number of female teachers than one with few female teachers.

There was a significant difference in the way issues regarding girls’ education was acknowledged (or not) and the way these issues were being addressed (or not) at the two Rasht schools. Some teachers and members of the PTA at Rasht School 1 commented that any issues they once had regarding girls’ education have now been “solved.” In contrast, the Director and teachers at Rasht School 2 spoke candidly about the many barriers to schooling for female secondary school students and the ways they were advocating for their female students to not only complete secondary school but also to go on to higher education.
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self.

**Rumi.**

When adult participants at the four Rumi schools spoke about why some female students continue on into non-compulsory upper secondary school while most do not, they commonly mentioned the importance of individual students’ interest and motivation to stay in (or leave) school. Some girls were “interested” in school while others were not. Some were motivated to stay in school while others were not. A few adult participants described how female students whose academic performance was low did not want to be in school. Some participants described how female students who knew that they would not be allowed to continue on to post-secondary education lost interest and motivation to complete secondary school.

Female students’ responses to the school uniform policy also affected whether or not a girl was motivated to come to school. For example, poor girls who could not afford a traditional dress made from the same types of expensive material as their better off peers feel shame and don’t want to go to school. These students are painfully aware of what their clothing represents in relation to their socio-economic status. In this circumstance, what they wear to school negatively affects their self-esteem. The experience of school then becomes disempowering.

**Rasht.**

At both Rasht Schools adult participants mentioned the importance of female students’ motivation and interest to stay in (or leave school) after grade 9 which are factors related to self. How female students’ handled issues related to school uniforms were also commonly mentioned as an important factor affecting girls’ schooling.
Summary of cross-district comparisons

The cross-district comparisons provide evidence that many similar factors affect girls’ educational experiences and opportunities at the upper secondary school level at the schools in each district. Constraints to girls’ schooling include factors that are economic, ethnic, historic/political, and socio-cultural factors. These factors are complex, multifaceted, and often interconnected. While there are some differences at the school level within each district regarding issues of girls’ schooling, how they are acknowledged and addressed (largely in relation to school leadership), the major differences become apparent when comparing districts.

Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society

While some economic factors are the same across districts, there are significant differences regarding demands for and acceptability of female students’ labour. In Rumi District, many female students earn money by working in the cotton fields to pay for their school expenses. While this work helps students and their families to cover their school costs it may also inhibit students’ school attendance and academic performance, especially since the greatest demand for their labour during harvest season coincides with the first three months of school. Each family must supply a female labourer to work in the cotton fields to be allowed to collect the stalks at the end of the season to be used for firewood. In some communities, like in Rumi School 4, the family also gets access to a wheat field. Cotton is not grown in Rasht District and there are no other similar types of paid employment for female students in Rasht. However, there are also much more restrictive norms regarding girls and women working outside the home within rural Rasht District when compared to rural Rumi District.

Differences in norms and practices regarding girls’ secondary schooling across ethnic groups are evident in the findings from rural Rumi District, which is more ethnically diverse than Rasht District. The population of three of the four school communities in Rumi District
consist of Tajiks who are either of Tajik or Uzbek ethnicity. (While adult participants identified as of either Tajik or Uzbek ethnicity, some female participants identified as of both Tajik and Uzbek ethnicity based on the ethnic origins of their parents.) Within these three communities, female students of Uzbek ethnicity are far more likely to be in grades 10 and 11 than female students of Tajik ethnicity. It is also far more socio-culturally acceptable for a female student of Uzbek ethnicity to pursue her studies at a college or university.

Socio-cultural differences amongst people who are of Tajik ethnicity are also evident in all four school communities in Rumi District. The most often referred to difference was between Tajiks whose families trace their origin back to Rasht District and those who do not. Many Tajik families who were referred to during interviews as “Gharmis” or “from Rasht” appear to uphold traditions, norms and practices from Rasht, including those relating gender relations. The socio-cultural factors of this group are also interconnected to historical, political and/or religious factors. The findings in Chapters 6 and 7 reflect the fact that the population of Rasht District is well-known to be religiously conservative and this conservatism extends to some of the families whose trace their family origin back to Rasht. Religious conservatism, which was also spoken of as culture, is evident in certain issues such as in issues relating to school uniforms for female students.

In both districts, boys are far more likely to attend school regularly and complete secondary school compared to their female peers. This disparity reflects the fact many parents in both districts believe that secondary school completion is valuable and beneficial for their son(s) and is of little or no value and benefit for their daughter(s). Within communities with people of Uzbek ethnicity, female students of Uzbek ethnicity are far more likely to be allowed by their parents to attend school regularly and complete secondary school compared to their female peers who are of Tajik ethnicity.
Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family

Parental perceptions of the value of education, and its benefits (or lack of benefits), is related to decisions regarding whether or not to cover the costs associated with sending a child to school, especially past grade 9. These perceptions play a key role regardless of whether or not the family can afford to send their child to school. The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 provide evidence that the majority of parents in these school communities believe that their sons should be registered in and attend grades 10 and 11 regularly whereas the same is not true for their daughters. This reflects the dominant societal norms in these communities regarding who should go to school and for how long.

Within all school settings, poverty played a role in limiting some female students’ opportunities to continue in school past grade 9, particularly for female students from very poor families with several school-age children. Within each school community, most families appear to have similar economic circumstances with a small segment of families considered very poor. Since students and their families buy school uniforms, pay for textbook rentals, and make contributions to the school, some families cannot afford to cover these costs. Some families in all school communities receive remittances from family members (usually the father and/or brother(s)) who work in Russia, greatly improving the family’s economic situation.

The poor economic circumstances of the vast majority of families in rural Rumi and Rasht rules out the possibility of students pursuing post-secondary education, especially university, regardless of the students’ academic capabilities. This reality is especially true for female students when economic factors intersect with other factors (ethnic, historical, cultural/societal, and/or religious) that may serve to limit female students’ educational opportunities.
In all school communities, there are parents and family members who believe that once a
girl reaches grade 9 at 15 years of age, she is “grown-up” and should no longer be attending
school. Some parents have their daughter marry a few months after completing grade 9. The
belief that a girl is “grown-up” at 15 is interconnected with an increasing concern for a
daughter’s safety as she transitions from a child to a woman as well as efforts to ensure she does
not become a subject of gossip within the community. The very small number of female
students enrolled and attending grades 10 and 11 means that those students who do are
exceptions to the status quo.

Gossip serves as a powerful tool to control and monitor girls’ behaviour so that girls
(and those within the family who make decisions about her schooling) conform to the norms and
practices deemed acceptable by those who spread the gossip. Gossip, or the threat of gossip, can
causes parents who are in favour of their daughters’ secondary school completion to change
their minds and stop allowing their daughters to go to school.

Parents who allow their daughter(s) to attend grades 10 and 11 were commonly
described as “open-minded” in contrast to those who do not, who are commonly described as
“narrow-minded.” The level of the parents’ education appears to be a factor as to whether they
are open- or narrow-minded. Given that everyone had to complete grade 10 during the Soviet
period when these parents were in school, it is noted that some of these parents did not attend
school regularly, thus acquiring a lower level of academic skills, knowledge, and capabilities
than other students who may have gone on to become teachers, managers, doctors, etc. It is the
daughters of these “educated” people, especially teachers, who are most likely to be registered
in and regularly attending grades 10 and 11 regardless of their ethnicity.

Parents in both districts are concerned about the distance their daughters must walk to
school as well as issues related to female students’ school uniforms. However, these two factors

appear to hinder girls’ schooling in Rasht to a greater extent when compared to girls’ schooling in Rumi. In regards to the walk to school, parents in Rasht are concerned about their daughters’ safety, specifically in relation to being harassed by boys and potentially becoming the subject of gossip within the community. It seems that ensuring that female students’ school uniforms follow religiously conservative norms (very loose fitting, with long sleeves and a head scarf) is present to a greater degree in Rasht than in Rumi.

In Figure 16 on the following page I present characteristics of families most and least likely to allow their female family members to complete secondary school, derived from this study’s findings. Each characteristic corresponds to one of the above mentioned factors related to family

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to school**

School leadership appears to play a significant role in whether or not the school staff as a whole are willing to recognize and address issues that serve to marginalize female students’ upper secondary school experiences and opportunities. In both districts there were some schools whose staff, led by the Director, acknowledged barriers to girls’ non-compulsory schooling while the staff at other schools denied the existence of any barriers despite evidence of the contrary.

**Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self**

The key factor related to self was mentioned consistently by adult participants at all six schools in this study was female students’ motivation and interest to stay in (or leave school) after grade 9. In turn, female students’ motivation and interest to stay in (or leave school) was greatly influenced by the school uniform policy for girls.
**Figure 16: Characteristics of families most and least likely to allow their female family members to complete secondary school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least likely to allow daughter(s) to complete secondary school</th>
<th>Most likely to allow daughter(s) to complete secondary school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Mother and/or father described as “very religious” and/or “narrow-minded”</td>
<td>- Mother and/or father described as “open-minded” and/or “educated”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tajik families who live in and/or originate from Rasht</td>
<td>- Tajik families who do not originate in Rasht, Gharm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Families of Uzbek ethnicity (with some exceptions)</td>
<td>- Families of Uzbek ethnicity (with some exceptions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother and/or father who do not believe that girls are “grown-up” at 15 and should therefore no longer go to school</td>
<td>- Mother and/or father who do not believe that girls are “grown-up” at 15 and should therefore no longer go to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother and/or father who perceive grade 10 and 11 attainment to be of value for and benefit to their daughter (education commonly understood as a form of insurance for the future)</td>
<td>- Mother, father and/or older brother(s) who perceive grade 10 and 11 attainment to be of value for and benefit to their daughter or sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parental aspirations for a better life for daughter which includes higher education and/or excludes marriage at 16 or 17</td>
<td>- Parental aspirations for daughter (and/or older brothers’ aspirations for sister) which exclude higher education and/or include marriage at 16 or 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Families that are willing and able to cover the direct costs of schooling (school fees and/or bribes, school supplies including textbook rental, school uniforms)</td>
<td>- An extremely poor family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother, father and older brother(s) who ignore gossip related to girls’ schooling</td>
<td>- A poor family with several school-age children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother, father and/or older brother(s) not concerned about doing what their neighbours do regarding girls’ schooling</td>
<td>- Mother, father and/or older brother(s) who are greatly influenced by gossip related to girls’ schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother, father and/or older brother(s) who are greatly concerned about doing what their neighbours do regarding girls’ schooling</td>
<td>- Mother, father and/or older brother(s) who are greatly concerned about doing what their neighbours do regarding girls’ schooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section C: A typical day in the life of a female student in Grade 9, 10, or 11

To understand female students’ lives and schooling experiences, student participants were asked to describe their typical day. Descriptions of students’ daily life provide insights into the norms and practices (status quo) regarding girls’ schooling in these communities, amongst other things. This section consists of a discussion of the descriptions provided by female students in Rumi, followed by those provided by female students in Rasht and ends with a comparison of the descriptions across districts.

In rural Rumi

When comparing students’ descriptions of their typical day from the four Rumi schools, there were many similarities. In rural Rumi, where the economy, landscape, and lifestyle are dominated by cotton production, the vast majority of student participants, when describing their typical day, spoke of activities at home, school, and in the cotton field.

Student participants in grade 11 provided more detailed accounts of their daily life than their younger counterparts although their daily activities and the time they are engaged in them were often identical. For this reason, the following descriptions from two grade 11 students from different schools are presented as examples of typical day for female secondary school students in rural Rumi. A student from Rumi School 2, who attends school in the morning, described how,

in the morning, I will wake up. I will milk the cow. I will prepare the breakfast [for the family]. Then I will have my breakfast. Then I will get ready and go to school. I have to move [leave the house] by 6:30 or 7:00. Then I take my classes and come home. At 12:30 or 1:00 I will get home and have my lunch. Then I will go to the cotton field [and work] until 6:00. [After I come home from the cotton field] I will wash my face and hands. I will change my clothes. Then I will prepare dinner. Then I will have dinner. Then I will do my homework. I am also a tailor. I do some sewing. Then I will have my sleep. (P61)
The following description was provided by an Uzbek student from Rumi School 3 who attends school in the afternoon. She noted how,

in the morning I will wake up at 6 o’clock. I will sweep the yard, clean the house, wash the dishes, do the housework. At 8 o’clock I go to the cotton field. At 12 o’clock I come back from the cotton field. I am coming to school. I am taking my classes. [After school] I am looking after my nephew and niece. I have my dinner. I do my study then I go and have my sleep. (P109)

While the vast majority of students’ descriptions of their typical day in Rumi were strikingly similar, there was one main difference. Data collection at Rumi School 1 coincided with Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, whereas the other three schools were visited after Ramadan. Students’ descriptions of a typical day during and after Ramadan differed in one way: During Ramadan students mentioned waking up very early each morning to pray and eat before sunrise. Descriptions of students’ cotton field work were the same regardless of whether or not data was collected during Ramadan, as the cotton harvest cannot be postponed.

Only a few of the students interviewed in Rumi do not work in the cotton field. Of those who said they do not work in the cotton field, one works in a shop, one takes care of her younger siblings, and one works as a cleaner. Of the 75 students interviewed in Rumi, seven mentioned watching TV in the evening.

These examples of a typical day highlight how, if these students were not attending school, they would likely spend their days doing housework and working in the cotton fields as do their female peers who are no longer students. Having discussed a typical day for female students in grades 9, 10, and 11 in rural Rumi, a typical day for female students in rural Rasht is presented next to serve as a comparison.

**In rural Rasht**

As was the case of student descriptions in Rumi schools, student descriptions of their typical day were extremely similar in rural Rasht regardless of which school students attended.
When speaking of their typical day, students in Rasht schools described activities at home and at school. The following quote from a grade 10 student at Rasht School 1 is presented as an example of the day in the life of student participants in Rasht. The student stated:

I will wake up and pray. I will sweep the yard, wash the dishes, [and] clean the house. I will have my breakfast, dress up and come to school. After coming back home, I will have lunch, wash the dishes, [and] do the housework. When I finish all the work I will have a rest for a while, have some sleep. I will wake up. I will cook dinner, have dinner and then sleep. (P135)

Several female student participants in Rasht spoke of an increase in their housework in the fall when it is not only the wedding season but also time to harvest the vegetables from the family gardens. A grade 11 student at Rasht School 2 noted how in August and September her workload increases “because of vegetable garden. And also, it’s close to winter time, end of autumn, we need to clean out the vegetable garden” (P157).

Of the 30 students interviewed in Rasht, only two (both grade 9 at Rasht school 2) mentioned having free time when describing their typical day. One said that “sometimes I see my friends” (P148) while the other said “sometimes my auntie’s daughter, who is my neighbour, is coming or I am going to them, so as not to be bored we meet each other.” (P143). (None of the students in Rumi mentioned having free time or visiting friends when describing their typical day.)

**Comparing typical days for female students in Rumi and Rasht**

When comparing student descriptions of their typical day across districts, there is one distinct similarity and difference. In terms of similarities, school activities account for a significant portion of the students’ day outside their home. Given that students in grades 9, 10, and 11 range in age from 15 to 18, school provides an important social environment at this stage in their personal development.
The major difference in students’ typical days across districts is a result of where students live. The vast majority of students in this study who live in Rumi mentioned doing activities at home and at school as well as working in the cotton fields each day. Cotton production is critical to the well-being of every household on the plains of rural Rumi, requiring many girls and women to work as field labourers. Thus economic circumstances dictate that it is not only appropriate but also necessary that girls and young women in Rumi work outside the home. As a result, female labour in the cotton fields has become the status quo. In contrast, students who live in Rasht only mentioned daily activities at home and school. None spoke of working outside their home. Since cotton is not grown in the mountainous area of Rasht District, the demand for female cotton field workers is non-existent. Furthermore, there appears to be stricter and more conservative norms and practices in Rasht regarding teenage girls working outside the home.

Summary of findings
In this chapter I compared findings from Rumi district (drawn from Chapter 5) and Rasht district (drawn from Chapter 6) in terms of the district contexts as well as factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling. I also introduced female student perspectives by comparing a typical day in the life of a female upper secondary school student in both districts.

A comparison of the district context reveals several significant differences. Rumi district is located on plains cultivated for cotton production while Rasht district is located in a very mountainous area. Cotton field labour is done by girls and women. In Rasht, few women work outside the home. People of Tajik and Uzbek ethnicity live in Rumi whereas ethnic Tajiks account for the majority of the population in Rasht. While both districts were greatly affected by the civil war, the fiercest fighting occurred in Rumi. During the civil war, Rasht was the center
for one of the opposition parties. (See Chapter 2 for more details.) Rasht is known to be the most religiously conservative area in the country.

While there are many major differences between the two districts, there are also several important similarities. In both districts, due to the lack of employment opportunities, many teenage boys and men work in Russia as migrant labourers. Divorce is occurring in both districts and has more severe repercussions for the woman than the man.

Another significant similarity between Rumi (located with Khatlon region) and Rasht (located with DRD) becomes evident when comparing regional education statistics. Khatlon and DRD have the lowest GER for grades 10 and 11 in Tajikistan (40% for Khatlon and 41% for DRD). Khatlon and DRD also have the lowest GER for females in grades 10 and 11 in the country. In Khatlon, 37% of girls who are the appropriate age for grades 10 and 11 are enrolled whereas the figure is 36% in DRD. (This evidence is why the GEP was implemented in these districts and why Save the Children chose these two districts as sites for this study.)

Perhaps the most significant similarity at the district level for this study is the link between Rumi and Rasht in terms of the population. As discussed in Chapter 2, many families were resettled from Rasht to Khatlon region, where Rumi is located, between 1930 and the early 1960s. As a result, there is a significant percentage of the population in Rumi whose family originates in Rasht, many of whom appear to maintain the local traditions, norms, and practices associated with Rasht (or Gharm, the district capital), including those related to girls’ secondary schooling.

In this chapter, I also compared school contexts and statistical data (namely, female enrolment and progression from grades 9 to 11) as well as findings drawn from interviews with adult participants. Both sets of data were compared within and across the two districts included in this study revealing differences and similarities in girls’ experiences and opportunities related to schooling.
I then compared a typical day in the life of a female student in Grades 9, 10 or 11 which revealed other important differences and similarities. The major difference between how female students in Rumi described their typical day when compared to those in Rasht was in terms of the work they did outside the home. The vast majority of female students in Rumi work in the cotton fields whereas female students in Rasht do not work outside the home.

While there was only one major difference in these descriptions, the similarities were numerous. With the exception of time spent working in the cotton fields for female students in Rumi, time at school accounts of a significant portion of female students’ time outside the house. All students spoke of their household responsibilities in terms of cooking and cleaning (although the amount of housework a girl does depends on the number of young females at home, especially sister-in-laws who traditionally are responsible for the bulk of the housework). Of 97 female students in grades 9, 10 and 11 interviewed only two mentioned “sometimes” visiting friends or a female cousin. If these female students were not allowed to go to school, they would spend their days at home or, if in Rumi, at home and in the cotton fields.

In the following chapter, I present female students’ perspectives regarding factors affecting girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities in their school and community. These findings not only confirm many of the findings drawn from interviews with adult participants but also deepen our understanding of girls’ experience through their first-hand accounts.
Chapter 8: Female Students’ Perspectives on Factors Affecting Girls’ Schooling

Introduction

In this chapter, I present female students’ perspectives on the factors affecting girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities within their school community. As in chapters 5, 6, and 7, the findings drawn from female student participant interviews are grouped into the categories articulated in my conceptual framework: community/society, family, school or self (see Chapter 4). All the factors mentioned are shaped and influenced by culture, which reflects common norms and practices (the status quo) related to all aspects of life, including girls’ schooling. Findings from female student participants support and extend our understanding of the status quo regarding schooling and how various factors, as critical inputs, inhibit or enable girls’ educational experiences and/or opportunities, depending on the circumstances. As in the earlier chapters, factors that restrict or inhibit girls’ secondary schooling are considered to be maintaining and reinforcing the status quo that girls should leave school after grade 9. Factors that enable and support girls’ secondary schooling are considered to be challenging the status quo and, in this way, to be a form of empowerment.

During their interviews, students often mentioned two or more factors together, reflecting how factors overlap and are interrelated. When this overlap occurred, I attempted to maintain the integrity of the quote by including all factors the student mentioned. I then categorized the quote according to the factor which appeared to be most predominant. When writing up the findings, I moved findings to more appropriate sections within the chapter as necessary.

I discuss factors affecting girls’ schooling in the following order. Those related to the community/society are discussed first followed by factors related to the family and school. Finally I discuss factors related to self. Students spoke most often about factors related to their
family since it is the key-decision maker(s) in the family who determine how long a child goes
to school as well as how regularly they attend. (Factors related to school are presented in greater
detail in Chapter 9 which focuses on the Girls’ Education Project and its activities.) I end the
chapter with a profile of a grade 11 and a summary of the findings.

Factors relating to the community/society

When considering all findings, there appear to be three main factors relating to
community/society that significantly affect girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities. The
first to be discussed is the dominant belief that a girl is “grown-up” by the time she is 15 and
should therefore no longer go to school. The second factor relates to gossip and rumours and
how they are used to reinforce and perpetuate the dominant belief just mentioned. The third
factor is the degree to which people are affected by what their neighbours do, particularly in
relation to girls’ schooling.

Dominant belief: A girl is “grown-up” by 15 and should no longer go to school

As mentioned in all school descriptions and many interviews with students, there are a
significant number of people in all the school communities included in this study who believe
that by the age of 15 girls are considered “grown-up” and therefore should no longer be
attending school. For people who subscribe to this belief, schooling for girls beyond grade 9 is
not necessary or appropriate. In terms of a girl acquiring a post-secondary education, many
people in these school communities believe that not only is it not necessary or appropriate, it
would be to the detriment of the girl and her family as it would severely limit or completely
eliminate her marriage prospects. According to the data, the belief is most commonly-held by
people or families described as “religious.”
Students often mentioned this dominant belief when speaking of gossip and rumours related to girls’ schooling in their school communities. As such, this belief will be discussed further in the next section.

_Gossip and rumours_

“Gossip” and “rumours” were the two most commonly used words when female student participants spoke of their schooling and that of their female peers, reflecting both the strong presence and influence of gossip within these school communities. The gossip they referred to appears to support the dominant belief that girls are grown-up by 15 and should no longer attend school. Gossip is also used to maintain and reinforce appropriate female dress codes as well as behaviours. In the section, topics for gossip are discussed first followed by how, when, and why people gossip.

A grade 9 Tajik student in Rumi School 4 described how her schooling, which does not conform to this dominant belief, is a common topic of gossip which her parents hear often. She noted that,

I wish to go to grade 10, but if our parents also agree to let us come to school, our neighbours gossip. They say to my parents, for example, to my father, “why do you let your girl go to school? She is already grown-up.” (P170)

Another student, a grade 11 Tajik also at Rumi School 4, described what is said to her mother about her schooling. Speaking about the start of the school year, she said, “I had difficulties, because my neighbours gossip usually, and they talk about so many things. They say to my mom, ‘why does your daughter go to school? Why do you let her go to school?’ It was difficult” (P172). She also noted that “usually when these women sit together, if they have some sort of events or something, they gossip about the girls (P172).

Another grade 11 student at Rumi School 4 noted that

there is a lot of gossip in the street, and if somebody sees me in the street going to school, they come and say to my parents “oh, we saw your daughter. She goes
to school. She’s on the way to school,” and such kinds of gossip makes it very difficult for us. (P176)

The following Tajik grade 10 student at School 4 described the kind of gossip she has experienced. She noted how

it was hard for me because when I’d dress and go out of my house, the neighbours usually would gossip. [The would say] “look at this girl. It seems that there is nothing [for her] to do in the house. She is going to school. Why is she going to school?” And then when I go especially to play volleyball, usually the neighbours gossip. But my parents agree with me. They let me go to school. (P174)

(Student participants at Rumi School 4 were most vocal and articulate about how gossip affects their schooling experiences and opportunities. As mentioned in Chapter 4, these students were encouraged by the school staff to “speak from their heart” which may be one reason that they responded the way they did.)

When asked whether or not the female children of the people who gossip to her parents attend school, the grade 9 student at Rumi School 4 replied “It’s not like they stopped coming to school completely, [their daughters] come and then again after two weeks they don’t come, and then again they come” (P170).

Gossip regarding the school uniform occurs for female students who are of Tajik or Uzbek ethnicity. A grade 11 Uzbek student in Rumi School 1 explained the type of gossip she experienced when trying to wear the modern school uniform to school. She describes how

in upper grade, myself I have bought this school dress, the white shirt and the black skirt and trousers but we cannot wear it because outside the women in the village will say “look at this girl. She is into this age and she is putting on this dress.” That is why we cannot put on this dress…We just don’t wear it because of the outside and one or two women started talking, [saying] “look at this girl. What she is wearing?” and when these two will talk, I don’t pay attention but slowly, slowly all the village will start talking about it. And they will say “look at this girl. She is doing it purposely to show her figure to the guys, to make it visible.” (P37)

Thus she and others conform to the dress code (that they wear a traditional dress rather than the school uniform) to avoid being the subject of gossip.
Such was the case for a grade 10 Tajik student in Rumi School 2, who stopped wearing the black and white school uniform in Grade 2 due to the gossip. Discussing the people in her community who gossip, she explained that

mostly they think that girls are not coming to school for study, they just want to show themselves, not for the purpose of getting knowledge. That’s why they don’t want girls to go to school….Some of those women who have studied, or are educated, of course, they support girls, they don’t say bad things, but those who are not, they will say [bad things]. (P71)

A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 explained how her participation on the girls’ volleyball team has caused some people to gossip about her (and her team members). She describes how

I’m a member of the volleyball team in school and usually we have competitions between our school and school number [X], and school number [Y] or we usually go to Kurgon-Tubbe to the centre, and these things bring lots of gossip. When they heard that [they say] “oh, this girl, this girl, the daughter of such and such people, she is going to the centre. She goes so many places or she is travelling.” This is very bad for me….They want us to be in our houses. The want us to be just quiet in our houses. (P172)

Many students mentioned gossip related to female students and higher education, particularly in relation to their marriage prospects. For example, a Tajik student at Rumi School 4 noted that

in our village, people do a lot of gossip[ing]. People say so many things like “all these girls go to school.” For example, “if you continue your studies at a higher level at university, nobody will marry you.” They say, “Oh, this girl moved to a city, moved to a center, she continued her studies and nobody will marry her.” (P173)

A grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 also described similar type of gossip about the two young women from her school community who continued their education past grade 11. She noted how

we have only two girls from this village who continued education after school. One of them is in nursing school in the district in Rumi and the second one is getting some training in school #[-] but she is planning next year to get this Presidential Quota and to continue higher education…There are a lot of rumours and gossip about those girls, that they are studying now…especially in the
village we have a lot of religious people so once a girl is going to study they understand it wrongly….some of the religious people in the village they are saying that the girl should be covered [by wearing a hijab], not go out of the house, stay at home, do the housework and not study at all. (P90)

Although a few of the students mentioned that people would say negative things to them about going to school, most described the gossip affecting them indirectly through their parents or grandparents. For example, when asked who is gossiping and whether it was the women, the men, or the old women, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 responded “all of them.” She added that

the people [who gossip] don’t say things to me. They usually say to another, and another says it to another, something like this. And then they heard about this. Very few girls usually go out of their houses in our village. They usually stay in their house. (P178)

The extent to which gossip permeates social networks is evident in a statement made by a Grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 who noted that “even in Russia [my brother ] heard about the gossip and that’s why he doesn’t want me to go to school” (P173).

Gossip appears to play a significant role as a mechanism for controlling and monitoring female students’ behaviour in a manner deemed appropriate within the status quo. In this way gossip appears to be used as a tool to maintain and reinforce this belief as the status quo. (Gossip and rumours will be discussed further in regards to how family members react or are influenced by gossip.)

*How what others do affects girls’ schooling*

Several students at various schools mentioned how, if other girls were allowed to go to school then their parents would allow them to go to school. Conversely, if other female students stopped going to school, they too would have to stop. Such is the case for two grade 11 Tajik students at Rumi School 4. One student notes that “my mom says to me ‘if the other girls go to
school, you can go also. But if they don’t go to school, then you will not go to school either.’

”(172, T, School 6, gr.11). Another grade 11 student at the same school described how

my parents agree that I should go to school, and they want me to go to school, but sometimes when they hear the gossip of the neighbours, they became against these things. And if my friend or my classmates don’t go to school, then they say that they would forbid me also. (176, grade 11, T, school 6)

An Uzbek grade 11 student in Rumi School 3 explained how she was in school specifically because her female classmates were allowed to go to school. She recalls how “my mother says ‘if your friends are studying so also you can go and study.’ Otherwise they wanted me, until grade 9, not to join school anymore but my friends were coming so she let me come to school” (P108). A Grade 11 Tajik at Rumi School 4 described facing a similar situation when she explained that “my grandmother says ‘if your friend goes to school, you go also, but if your friend doesn’t go, you don’t go’ ” (P172).

It appears that distance to school becomes an issue for female students (and their parents) largely in relation to gossip as girls physically mature and that, for some parents, having their daughter accompanied to school by other female classmates significantly reduces their apprehension about sending their daughter to school. Such was the case for a female classmate of a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 whose father would only allow her to go to school if she walked with other girls. The grade 11 student described how she and some of her peers

paid a visit to one of my classmate’s house. Her father didn’t want the girl to be in school for grade 11. Then the teachers asked us to pay a visit and to check, and we talked to her and she told us that my father is saying, “If other girls go to school, then I will let you go, but alone you will not go to school.” Then we told her, “let’s go, because we are also going to school, you can join us.” And the father said “ok, if the girls are coming to school, after Eid, I will let you go to school”. Then the Director during Eid paid a visit to the same house and talked to the father. And after two days of Eid, the girl joined the school. (P95)
The discussion in this section also reflects the importance of conforming to the status quo as well as space to change the status quo. If a few girls attend upper secondary school grades than this opens up the possibility of other girls being allowed to continue in school.

**Factors relating to the family**

From the findings it appears that there are four main factors related to family that may serve as an enabler or obstacle to a girl’s educational experiences and opportunities at the secondary school level in the communities in this study: the ethnicity and region of origin of a girls’ family; the key decision-makers’ attitude regarding the value and benefit of secondary schooling for girls (which is closely interrelated to aspirations for her); how the key decision-maker(s) reacts to gossip aiming to maintain the status quo (that girls stop going to school once they finish grade 9); and the family’s economic circumstances. The first three factors center on the key-decision maker(s) within the family because it is this person who decides whether or not a child goes to school, how regularly they attend school, and for how many years.

**Ethnicity and region of origin**

The ethnicity and region of origin of the family of students in this study appears to greatly affect how much schooling is thought to be sufficient and appropriate for female family members. Ethnicity will be discussed first followed by the family’s region of origin.

As detailed in Chapter 5 and 6, there are Tajiks of either Tajik or Uzbek ethnicity in three of the six school communities in this study (at Rumi Schools 1, 2, and 3). Female students of Uzbek origin are more likely to be enrolled in grades 10 and 11 and more likely to attend school regularly than their female peers of Tajik ethnicity. Many families of Uzbek ethnicity (with some exceptions) believe that girls should complete secondary schooling. Thus there appear to be different norms and practices regarding the value, benefit and importance girls’ schooling linked to ethnicity in these school communities.
As well as ethnicity, the region of origin of a student’s family also appears to significantly influence the key decision-maker(s) views on schooling for female family members. Participants in this study commonly spoke of a distinction regarding norms and practices related to girls’ schooling between families of Tajik ethnicity whose region of origin is Gharm, the capital of Rasht District, and those whose family originates in other locations. (As noted in Chapter 2, families were forcibly resettled from Rasht to Khatlon so there are many families in the Rumi school communities in this study whose region of origin is Rasht.) These norms and practices serve to set the status quo, thus significantly influencing the family’s key decision-maker(s) views on how long female members should go to school and whether they should attend school regularly. As noted in Chapter 2, families who originate from Rasht District are known to be highly “religious” and conservative, with these orientations affecting norms and practices (status quo) as to the appropriate level of schooling for girls.

The following quote serves as an example of how these families were often described by student participants. A grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 described how the number of female students in her class has decreased since grade 9, which she attributes to religious influences. She stated that

> when we were in grade 8 and 9, there were a lot of girls in our class. Maybe we were 20 or even more than this, but at that time, we also had some girls coming from the village called [name of village] which is a bit far from here [a 20 minute walk]. And in that village, they have a lot of religious people, and they didn’t want their girls to come to school and the number of girls [in class] decreased. (P95)

This quote corresponds to findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 regarding the orientation of people described by participants as “religious.” The influence of religion will be discussed further in this chapter when interconnected to other factors.

While many families living in Rasht and whose ancestors originate there share similar conservative views on girls’ schooling, there was a notable exception. A grade 8 female student
at Rasht School 1, whose grandparents were from Rasht and whose parents spent many years in Dushanbe, is allowed to take the bus to Garm each afternoon to study English at a USAID-funded program. This is very unusual behaviour for a girl in this school community and challenges the norms and practices (status quo). Within the Rasht School 1 community (and Rasht School 2 community), girls are usually allowed to spend their time at home or at school. However, this student’s parents value this language learning opportunity and have aspirations for their daughter that differ greatly from the norms and practices of the major of the school community in Rasht. (Findings from this study indicate that it is common for girls in rural Rasht to marry after grade 9 (either immediately or shortly thereafter) and not take on any employment outside of their home.)

Key decision-maker(s) perceptions of the value and benefit of grade 10 and/or 11 for daughter or sister as well as aspirations for their daughter or sister

Whether or not a female student is permitted by her family members to continue in school past grade 9 depends on the key-decision maker’s perceptions of the value and benefit of the additional years of schooling not only for the child but also for the family. These perceptions are strongly interconnected to the key decision-makers’ aspirations for the future life of their female family member, including at what age she should marry. Student participants commonly identified their father, mother, and/or older brother(s) as the key decision-maker about their schooling. A few students also mentioned their uncles’ influence regarding these decisions. As will be seen, the key decision-maker(s) appears to be significantly influenced by the attitudes held by the majority of families in the community regarding norms and practices (status quo) related to girls’ schooling, particularly regarding what level of schooling female family members should complete. (As noted earlier, the regions of Khatlon, where Rumi is located, and
RSD, where Rasht is located, have the lowest enrolment of female students in grades 10 and 11 in the country.)

One possible indicator of the key decision-maker(s) perceptions of the value and benefit of grade 10 and 11 for female family members is the degree of support they provide to the student. This support affects how regularly a student can attend school and for how many years.

Findings from student interviews reveal a range of support from family members: At one end of this range are a few grade 10 and 11 students who described how their key decision-maker(s) want them to complete secondary school and go on to higher education. Many student participants, especially those in the post-compulsory grades of 10 or 11, spoke of the support and encouragement they receive from various family members because without this support they could not be registered in school. At the other end of this range are grade 9 students who describe how the key decision-maker(s) in their family support them to complete grade 9 but will not allow them to continue on.

*Students with a great deal of family support for their education.*

Some student participants spoke of receiving a great deal of support from the key decision maker’s in their family, and in some cases, other family members. Since three-quarters of the students in this study were in grade 10 or 11, the key decision-makers in their family already value these students’ schooling past grade 9 by letting them stay in school. To provide greater insight into the students’ life circumstances, details regarding the student’s family have been included when they were both available and appeared to be significant. (Some students provided very short answers with little detail during their interview while others, usually the older students, provided greater detail.)

Some students spoke of the great deal of support and encouragement from the key-decision maker(s) in their family as well as other family members. Several grade 10 and 11
students spoke of the support they receive from their parent(s) who are “educated” or “open-minded,” several of whom are teachers. (These findings correspond to those in Chapters 5 and 6.)

The following is an example of the type of comments many students made regarding support they receive from their parents and other family members. A grade 9 Tajik student at Rasht School 1 noted that her parents “say go to school. Take your classes. Study” (P131).

When describing the support she receives from her family, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 also says her mother “is open-minded. She lets me go to school” (P181). This student, who is the youngest of seven children, also spoke of the support she receives from other family members. She stated “I want to come to school and I say this...And my sisters also want me to go to school, and they say ‘let her go.’ …Also my brothers want me to go. And they also say [that]” (P181). Her three brothers who work in Russia support her by sending her money to pay her school costs. (Although this student said she has a father, she didn’t mention anything more about him in the interview.)

Students often spoke of their parents’ or family’s aspirations for them when discussing the support and encouragement they receive regarding their schooling. In some case the aspirations are framed broadly by their key decision-maker(s). For example, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 noted how her parents “want me to be a knowledgeable person” (P175). A Tajik grade 9 student at Rasht School 1 described how her parents “want me to study but I don’t know what they want me to be” (P131) and this was the reason she was certain that she would be allowed to complete secondary school. A Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi School 3, who is the eldest of five children, described how there was no issue about her continuing her schooling into grade 11 because “my father was saying ‘go to school. You should learn. It will help you in your life’.” As for her father’s aspirations for her, this student says her father will
allow her to choose what she would like to do: “He says ‘whatever you will choose, just do that’” (P112).

Some students spoke of how their key decision-maker(s) aspires for them to have a better life than their parents or, in some cases, their older siblings or relatives have had. The following examples illustrate how some key decision-makers are willing to go against the status quo by allowing their daughter or sister to continue in school past grade 9 because they believe the additional years of schooling may or will help her in the future. For example, a mother of a Tajik grade 10 student in Rumi School 4 believes that schooling beyond grade 9 will provide her daughter an opportunity for a better life than she has had. The student stated “my mother says, ‘go and study. Look at me. I didn’t study and what have I found for myself? Life is very difficult now for me’” (P177). As for her father’s support, the student noted that “he is open-minded that I come to school and when he knows I don’t go to school, he forces me to go. He says ‘go to school’ ” (P177). A Tajik grade 9 student in Rumi School 2 noted how her older siblings’ lives have affected her mother’s aspirations for her when she recalled how

my mother says I have to study. My mother says that “two of your sisters got married. They didn’t study. Now they have children. What is the use of that? They were not ready at the time to get married. It was not the proper age. You have to study. Go and study.” And my mother said, “none of you [children] is studying. One got married, the second is in Russia. So I want you to study.” (P62)

A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 described the effect her cousin’s life has had on her father’s attitude in regards to her education. She noted how

my father’s family are all educated and a cousin of mine got married and she was not educated. She didn’t continue her education and now she has a very big problem in her family. That’s why my father says, “I want my daughter to be educated. I don’t want her to get married until she’s educated.” (P176)

While some students spoke broadly of their parents’ aspirations for them, other students spoke of their parents having more specific aspirations for their daughter. Some students spoke of their parents wanting them to be a teacher, tailor, translator, nurse or housewife. However, the
most common parental aspiration for students in grade 10 and 11 was for their daughter to be a “doctor” (either by attending medical college or university). (As mentioned in Chapter 6, a two-year medical program at a local college is not a form of higher education and is considered by some families in these communities as a socially acceptable form of education for girls.) An Uzbek grade 11 student in Rumi School 3, whose four older siblings all completed grade 11, commented, “I want to go to nursing school,” and “my mother wants that too.” As for her father, this student said “He dreams a lot. It is his wish that I be a doctor” (P106). A Tajik grade 9 student at Rasht School 1 noted how she was being encouraged to do well in school not only by her mother and father but also by her aunt, who is a tailor, and her uncle, who is a doctor in Gharm. With aspirations to be a tailor and a doctor, this student describes how “my uncle says ‘if you study I will let you to be a doctor. I will help you.’ And my auntie says ‘I will help you to be a tailor’ ” (P125).

Of all the students who were interviewed, only one, a grade 10 Tajik student at School 4, described her parent’s aspirations for her both in terms of her marriage and post-secondary education. She noted how

I’ll continue my studies as long as my parents agree and let me...My parents decided to marry me to the son of my uncle, the professor, and now he is studying in Kazakhstan and they want me, after I graduate secondary school, to go and study at the medical faculty, then after graduating from the medical faculty at the university, we will get married and then I can work there. I’ll live there and work in the town. (P171)

While some students, such as those just mentioned, described how their parents and other family members agree that they should attend school, several others spoke of a tension that exists in their family because some family members support their secondary schooling while other family members do not. This tension will now be discussed.
Students whose family members disagree about her education.

While most of the grade 10 and 11 students stated early in their interview that they had the full support of all family members, later on in the interview several described tension existing between their mother (who is against their secondary schooling) and their father (who supports their schooling). Such was the case for a Tajik student in grade 10 at Rumi School 1 whose mother did not want her to attend school past grade 9. She described how my mother was telling me she was against my education. She said “now you are a grown-up girl. You don’t need to study anymore. You should help me at home and that’s enough. You don’t need to go for further studying.” I am helping my mother but my father supported me. He said “no, you should go. You should finish your study and I will let you even to go for higher education.” He would like me to be a doctor. (P38)

Another student, a Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi School 4, spoke of how her mother sometimes prioritizes the completion of her housework over school attendance while her father encourages her to go to school and do well. She states that her father says “go to school. Learn some skills and abilities.” And sometimes my mother says, “you have to do some kind of work.” For example, housework. [My father] usually says, “don’t do it now, first go to school and then after school you can do it.” (P179)

Besides disagreements between their mother and father, a few Tajik students mentioned disagreements between their parents and another family member. Two spoke of how their uncle and parents disagreed. For example, when discussing challenges she had when going to school past grade 9, a Tajik grade 10 student in Rumi School 4 stated

I had a problem with my uncle. He didn’t agree. He said that I shouldn’t go to school. Then I started to cry, saying “I don’t want to go to the cotton picking any more. I want to go to school. School is very important for me. I will gain some knowledge and everything for me.” And then my father agreed with me….My mother agrees with me. She says, “we didn’t study and what did we get from it? We didn’t study. We don’t have any knowledge. You should study. You should go to school. You have to go to school.”…My father agreed. He says, “just go to school, but after secondary education, you will not go to any other university or college. I don’t want you to continue your higher education.” (P187)
Two students in this study described a disagreement between her parents and one of her grandparents. A Tajik grade 9 student in Rumi School 2 noted that her grandfather disagreed with her continuing into grade 10. She notes how

I have a lot of interest to continue my studies, but my grandfather is a bit against it. He doesn’t want me to go to school, but my father is supporting me. He says, “you should go, you should finish your studies.”…My mother says, “okay, if they are against it, if they are fighting because of this, they don’t want you to study, just be obedient and listen to them and stop your schooling.” But my father says, “she is my youngest one, and I like her very much and I want her to finish her studies.” (P63)

Another student described how her grandfather supported her secondary schooling but her grandmother did not. This Tajik grade 11 student at Rumi School 4 noted how “mostly my grandfather is open-minded. He usually says, ‘go [to school]. Don’t miss your class. Be active.’…My grandmother does not agree with my going to school, but my mother and my grandfather agrees with it” (P186).

While the students just mentioned were able to gain enough support within their family to continue in school, some in grade 9 knew that they would not be allowed to continue in school past grade 9. These students’ situations will be discussed in the next section.

Students whose parents are against their secondary school completion

Several students in grade 9 described how, despite their desire to stay in school, their parents, and in some cases other family members, will not allow them to do so. This was the case for a Tajik student in grade 9 in Rasht School 2 who said “I want to study but my family doesn’t want me to continue” (P142). The following are a few additional examples from students, all of whom expressed a desire to stay in school. A Tajik grade 9 student in Rasht School 1 described how “maybe [I will] finish grade 9. That’s it” (P137). When asked whether she would continue in school, a Tajik grade 9 student in Rumi School 4 noted that “my mother does not agree….My parents say ‘if there is an Arabic Institute, or something like this, you can
go, we are open-minded, but to the other [types of study], no’” (P170). A Tajik grade 9 student in Rumi School 4 described how her father and uncles will not allow her to continue her schooling. She stated that

I wish to go to grade 10 and even to 11, and even to go to higher education, to university, but my father and my uncle are against it. They don’t want me to go….my uncles are from the family of mullahs and they won’t let me go. (P169)

When asked about her mother’s perspective on her schooling she stated “my mom didn’t say anything. Whatever my father says, my mom agrees” (P169).

It was not only students in grade 9 who knew they would not be allowed to go on in school, some grade 10 students also knew that it would be their last year of school. For example, a Tajik grade 10 student in Rumi School 2 stated that “I’m in grade 10. I want to study. I want to finish grade 11, but I don’t think I will because my family will not let me…Both my mother and my father want me to stay home.” When asked whether her family allows her to attend school regularly she answered, “I’m trying to come every day, but my family doesn’t allow me to go every day. Most of the time they are telling me not to go to school….Maybe one day a week, I miss school. (P71)

Describing the situation for other female classmate, a grade 10 Tajik student in Rumi School 1 spoke of her experiences during house-to-house visits to try to get her classmates to return to school. She noted that

we paid the visits to their houses and we talked a lot to their parents because the girls themselves they wanted to come [to school], they had an interest to come but because their parents don’t allow them, they obey them. They don’t have any other choice and they just stay home. (P40)

1 According to Niyozov (2001) a mullah “is a knowledgeable [male] person in Islam. The mullahs served as sources of reference in worldly and religious matters” (p. 227) while Harris (2000) notes that a mullah is “a self-styled local religious leader. He does not necessarily have any religious education, nor has he perhaps even read the qur’an. Any man can call himself a mullah and then dictate to others how to live” (p.x).
While parents were commonly mentioned by students in this study as the most influential member of their family in decisions related to their schooling, several students also spoke of the significant influence their older brother(s) has on this matter. Of the students who mentioned their older brothers’ influence on their schooling, the vast majority had an older brother(s) who were against their sisters’ schooling, as will be discussed in the following section.

*Students whose older brother(s) are against their secondary schooling*

When speaking of their schooling experiences, several students of Tajik ethnicity mentioned how their older brother(s) has a great deal of influence within their family. A number of Tajik students noted that their older brother(s) is against their secondary school completion. What is most significant is the way these students spoke of the tension between their parents (who want them to go to school) and their older brother(s) (who do not). The following examples of students whose older brother(s) disagree with their secondary schooling illustrate how factors such as the perceived value and benefit of secondary schooling, aspirations for their sister, and the effects of gossip on girls’ schooling opportunities are all interconnected. (It is important to note that approximately 25 percent of all student participants in this study do not have an older brother.)

Some students described how their brother(s) did not want them to go to school past grade 9 but their parents, as the key decision-makers, allow them to continue their education. For example, when discussing her transition from grade 9 to 10, a Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi School 3 (with three older brothers) noted that

my brothers did not much agree, but my mother was saying [to them] that instead of sitting home and being illiterate, it’s better if she studies, because she will need it in the future. My mother and my father, they agreed. My brothers did not much agree, but anyway I’m in school. (P96)
A grade 10 student of Tajik ethnicity studying in Rumi School 4 described the tension between her parents who support her secondary schooling and her brother who does not. She stated that

my parents are open-minded of my going to school and they want me to study up to grade 11 and even they want me to continue my study at a high level at university as well…but my brother does not agree. He says that we live a bit far from the school [a 15 to 20 minute walk], and if you listen you will hear lots of gossip on the way to school, and myself, I really want to study and to continue. My wish is to become a doctor and I want to study in a medical faculty.

When asked who has more influence, her parents or her brother, she notes that

my parents have more influence. Usually I listen to my parents more, and even my mom she usually encourages us, even to my father and my brother, she says “that I have only two girls, you have five boys, don’t say anything to them.” She always helps us, she always encourages us. (P171)

A grade 10 student at Rumi School 2 knew that she is only allowed to be in school because her older brothers, who are against her secondary schooling, are working in Russia. She stated that

my parents will allow me to finish grade 11, but my brothers don’t want me to go any more for studying….Because they are in Russia, I’m going to school. If they were here, they would not let me go to school. All the time they are saying “those who study, they got education, what’s the benefit? What are they doing now? They got nothing out of it.” So they won’t let me come to school. But because now they are in Russia, I can come and be in school…. My mother and father want me to finish school. I tell them I have an interest. I want to be a journalist. I want to continue my education. My mother says “in my opinion, I would like you to, but I know that your brothers will not allow you. They decide.”

She notes how one of her brothers is “strict” and is “coming soon because we want him to get married, so when he is here he will not let me go to school” (P69).

Describing what some of her peers told her about the influence of their older brothers on their schooling, a Tajik student in grade 11 in Rumi School 1 spoke of the level of control some brothers have within the family. She stated how “mostly the girls want to come to school but when they ask a couple of times from their brothers to come or not and when the brothers didn’t let them they lose their interest of coming to school” (P32). “Those [brothers] who don’t want
their sisters to go to school do not believe in their sisters” (P181), noted a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4.

In an effort to better understand how and why some older brothers appear to play a significant role in decisions regarding their younger sisters’ schooling, I have included the following explanations from two NGO staff members who have worked in both districts. One replied:

that’s a culture issue. The tradition, for example, if the brother will allow the sister to go to school, then the friends will mock him and make jokes “oh your sister is going to school, so”. For example, “my sister is not going to school. She is obedient and what kind of sister you’ve got, she’s going to school. What a brother you are!” (P162)

The other noted that,

sometimes in Rasht, in Khatlon as well, the parents, even grandmothers, grandfathers, are allowing the girls to go to school, even despite the mullahs, but older brothers are stopping them from going to school. I don’t know really what to say about these older brothers. Perhaps they didn’t continue their study, they have no education and they think that why. Perhaps they’re educated, and saying “see, I have this higher education but I am working on the plot of land, what about my sister, if she does the same.” Perhaps they think about the current situation, economic because there is no job after even completion of higher university…Perhaps I think that they think that “my sister knows how to read, how to write. That’s it. And she should be a very good wife, and she should be busy with domestic work, to be a mother.” (P165)

While some female students in this study have an older brother(s) who are against them completing secondary school, far more students in this study have parents and/or other family members who are against them continuing their education after grade 11. These students’ circumstances will be discussed in the following section.

Students whose family members are against their post-secondary education

Many of students in this study spoke of their desire to continue their education at the college or university level. However, most knew very clearly that, while the key decision maker(s) in their family may allow them to finish secondary school, they would not be allow to
study any further regardless of their academic capabilities and/or desire. This was the case for the majority of the grade 10 and 11 students in this study regardless of their ethnicity.

Several students made simple statements about how they will not be allowed to study past the secondary level. For example, an Uzbek grade 11 student at Rumi School 3 said “my family will not allow me to go to higher education” (P108). A grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 2 stated that

I want to be a journalist. I like it very much, but my parents, they don’t agree. They don’t want me to study. I have an interest to finish school to be a journalist, but my parents don’t want me to do it. (P69)

Other students spoke of how the norms and practices within their family and community regarding girls’ schooling, specifically what level of schooling is deemed appropriate for girls, affects their opportunities (or lack of opportunities). An Uzbek student in grade 10 at Rumi School 1 says that her father agrees that she finish secondary school but then study no further. She stated “the understanding of my father is [that] if a girl knows how to sew, to be tailor, [that] is more than enough for her. She should stay home” (P28). A grade 10 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 notes how her father and uncle believe post-secondary education is not appropriate for girls when she stated

[my parents] don’t want me to go to higher education at all….It is more my father and my uncle and my mother is just obeying whatever they are saying….They agree that I will finish grade 11 but further, they don’t want me to go. [My father] says that it is not good for a girl to go for further education. (P90)

A grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 4, whose father is teacher, also stressed the norms of the village restricting her future desire for more education. She noted that,

My mother is also open-minded. She says, “just go, and later you will use that achieved knowledge.” I want to continue my education at the higher level. I want to study in university to be a journalist or a doctor.

She later added, “[My father] won’t let me because in the village, it’s not allowed [for girls] to go to university” (P182).
Another grade 11 Tajik student at the same school noted that despite her desire to continue her studies past secondary school, the norms and practices of her community serve to make her desire a moot point. She stated “I wish to continue my studies at the university, but in our village, it’s not like this. We are not allowed to go and to continue our studies” (P181).

Several students spoke of how their older brother(s) is against their studying past secondary school. When speaking about her older brother’s opinion on her education, a Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi School 4 notes the local norms and practices regarding higher education for girls. She notes how

My older brother does not want me to continue my studies after secondary school….My mother wants me to continue my studies… My brother has more influence in my family [than my mother]….He says that no girls from our village continue their education and you also must sit at home. (P185)

A Tajik student in grade 11 in Rumi School 3 wants to become a doctor. While she thinks she could convince her parents to allow her to continue her studies, she knows that her brothers do not want her to study further. She described how

I need to study to be a doctor so that I can help sick people…. [My parents] are not much agreed that I will go to higher education….I think that I can convince my father and mother, they will agree, but here is my brothers. I have the brothers who are against it, and it will be difficult to convince my brothers. (P96)

A Tajik student in grade 11 at Rumi School 4, mentions her mother, who is a nurse at the medical center in the village, as the family member most supportive of her schooling. She mentions how “my mom is very open-minded with me and my ideas” and she “always says, ‘go to school. Study well. Don’t go and waste your time for nothing. Don’t lose your time for nothing. Spend your time effectively. Study hard.’ ” However, she notes that her brother “does not want me to continue my studies”. Speaking specifically about girls, her brother says that “nobody from our village continues their education and you also must sit at home.” (P185)

While the majority of students interviewed, especially those in grade 10 and 11, knew that they would not be able to go on, a few mentioned having at least one key family member
who supported their further education. For example, a grade 10 student at Rumi School 2 described how her mother (of Tajik ethnicity) would like her to continue her studies after secondary school while her father (of Uzbek ethnicity) would not. She noted that

I want to study. I want to go to higher education, but they will not let me do that…actually my mother, she wants me to study. All the time she says “I want you to study,” but my father doesn’t want, and he’s telling me “just stay home, don’t study. Finish your school and stay home. (P70)

Describing how her older brother advocates within the family for her to be allowed to continue her education, an Uzbek grade 11 student in Rumi School 3 stated

I like studying, especially because I want to be a doctor but my father says he will not allow me to be a doctor or to study but my brother he says that I will let her study so I don’t know…My mother she says that she wanted me to be a tailor. [She says] To be a doctor for a girl is not good. (P94)

A Tajik grade 10 student at Rasht School 1 noted that, although her brother, father and mother supported her secondary schooling, they held a difference of opinion regarding her further education. Her brother, who is a teacher in neighbouring school, tells her to study “maybe to be a doctor.” Her father supports her post-secondary schooling while her mother is against her doing any more schooling. She said “my mother wants me to be nothing. She doesn’t want me to study. My father says study. Maybe once you will need [what you learn]” (P129).

When asked if going on to higher education is not encouraged because there are no jobs once you complete your education, a Tajik grade 10 student in Rumi School 3 said

it is not about getting a job or not getting a job. It is mostly because in the village most of the girls don’t study. It is society’s influence and my father says “you see, in this village girls are not studying, you also don’t study.” (P90)

In summary, students in this study described how factors relating to key decision-makers’ perceptions of the value and benefit of education as well as aspirations for the female family member affect their schooling experiences and opportunities. These factors play out within some students’ families to prevent them from going on to grade 10 and/or 11. The small percentage of female students who are allowed to complete secondary school then face these
barriers when seeking to go on to post-secondary education. In addition to factors at the family level related to the value and benefit of education as well as aspirations for the female family member, how key decision-makers within the family are affected by and react to gossip about girls’ schooling also appears to be of significance, as will be discussed in the following section.

**How key decision-maker(s) are affected by and react to gossip about girls’ schooling**

As noted earlier in this chapter, gossip has a strong presence within the school communities included in this study, serving to maintain and reinforce the status quo regarding the appropriate level of schooling for girls. At the family level, key decision-makers are affected by and react to gossip in different ways. Some students described how key decision-makers in their family ignore the gossip while others are significantly affected and influenced by it.

The following are examples of how three Tajik students in grade 10 or 11 at Rumi School 4 describe their fathers’ reaction to gossip that supports limiting girls’ education to grade 9. (As noted earlier in the school description of Rumi School 4 in Chapter 5, there is a clear understanding within this school community that no female students will pursue any education past the secondary level.) All three students describe their father as “open-minded.” Each student noted how her father ignores the gossip and will allow her to finish secondary school. For example, a grade 11 student noted how her father ignores the gossip and values her further education when she stated the following:

My father is very open-minded, and even if there is any kind of gossip, he usually says “don’t listen to this gossip. They just lie.” And he doesn’t pay attention to that gossip. He usually says “I am very open-minded. Go study. Get knowledge.” And then he says he wishes that I would continue my studies and be a doctor. (P176)

Of these three students, two mentioned that, while their father supports her secondary schooling, he will not allow her to continue past grade 11. Such was the case for a grade 10
student whose “open-minded” father is more exposed and affected by the gossip than her mother because he is out and about in the village, unlike her mother who stays home. She stated that

[my father] says, “just go to school, but after secondary education, you will not go to any other university or college. I don’t want you to continue your higher education.” And people gossip. If I go to school, I have some problem with these things. My mother is a housewife and she is always in the house, but my father goes out and he hears all sorts of gossip. People say lots of gossip….My father doesn’t listen to the gossip. He says, “just go and just study and get knowledge for yourself.” (P187)

While these students’ fathers ignore the gossip, parents and other important family members of other female students pay more attention to the gossip. This causes some parents to question their decision to allow their daughter to continue in school. As a grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 noted,

[My parents] are just open-minded up to grade 9, and then they don’t allow me to go to grade 10 and 11. And this is mostly because of the other people around, the neighbours, and because of the gossip. But if there wasn’t any gossip, my parents may agree and let me go to school….With the boys [her brothers], they are very open minded. They let them go to school. They want them to be very active, but they are against girls going to school. They are very serious regarding this situation. (P170)

While this student knows that her schooling will end after she completes grade 9, the following Tajik student in grade 10 is uncertain as to whether her father will allow her to finish secondary school. She believes that gossip has a very strong and negative influence on her father’s perceptions of the importance and appropriateness of her schooling as illustrated by the following quote:

I wish to continue my studies. I like it, but I don’t know what it will be like in the next year. I don’t know about these things. And even my father is quite open-minded that I continue my studies and I will study here in the school, but in our village, people do a lot of gossip[ing]. People say so many things like “all these girls go to school.” For example, “if you continue your studies at a higher level at university, nobody will marry you.” They say, “Oh, this girl moved to a city, moved to a center, she continued her studies and nobody will marry her.” And when my father heard these things, it changed his mind. (P173)
As seen in this section (and supported by findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6), gossip can play a significant role at the family level to hinder or limit some students’ secondary school experiences and opportunities. While some students attribute the influence of gossip as the reason why the key decision-maker(s) in their family limited their schooling to grade 9, a few grade 10 and 11 students described how their parent(s) and/or brother(s) ignores the gossip and allows them to complete secondary school. It appears as if, for some parents, the presence of this gossip enables them to vividly demonstrate their “open-mindedness” within the community by not conforming to dominant norms and practices that limit girls’ schooling to grade 9 which is part of the status quo.

**Economic circumstances**

As is the case in many low-income countries, the economic circumstances of families within the school communities included in this study affect girls’ schooling opportunities and experiences. When exploring the economic factors at the family level, student participants in this study mentioned economic factors affecting their schooling that have been classified as direct and indirect costs of schooling. Direct costs refer to money spent for school-related items, such as the rental fees of textbooks, the cost of school uniforms and warm clothes for winter as well as money for school repairs and, in some cases, bribes. Indirect costs, also known as opportunity costs, refer to time associated with schooling that could otherwise have been used for labour. Indirect costs include the time students spend in school, walking to and from school, and doing homework. Before discussing these findings, several broad economic aspects drawn from findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 will briefly be discussed first.

The economic circumstances of a student’s family are affected by whether the student is an orphan (a child is considered an “orphan” if one of her or his parents is dead), whether or not the students’ parents are divorced, and whether or not she lives in a female-headed household.
The economic circumstances of students in this study also depend on whether or not her family has land on which to grow fruits and vegetables. If her family grows fruits and vegetables, do they grow enough for their own consumption or do they grow enough to also sell? The economic circumstances of families differ depending on whether or not the family owns animals such as cows, ox, goats, sheep, and chickens. Families with more animals are economically better off than those with few animals. A few of the students in this study came from families who did not own any animals. Some students’ families receive remittances from a family member(s) working in Russia (usually the father and/or brother(s)) while some students do not.

If the family lives in a cotton producing area, the family’s economic circumstances will be affected by whether or not a daughter(s) and/or daughter-in-law(s) work in the cotton fields. Besides money earned from the work, the family of the female cotton field worker is entitled to collect the dried cotton stalks at the end of the season to use for firewood, which is considered a very valuable commodity. Depending on where they live, a family may also have access to a field for growing wheat if a family member works in the cotton field (as was the case for students at Rumi School 4).

Female students who have one or more family members working in Russia are likely coming from better familial economic circumstances than female students who do not. One-third of student participants at Rumi Schools 2 and 3 mentioned at least one close male family member (their father or brother) working in Russia, while the figure was closer to 50% for the student participants from Rumi Schools 1 and 4. It is common practice for Tajiks who work in Russia to send remittances back home to family members. Therefore, students with one or more member of their family working in Russia may be better off economically than their peers.
Direct costs associated with schooling

Only a few student participants spoke of their family’s economic constraints related to secondary schooling. One such student was Tajik and attended Rumi School 4. She noted the problems her family has covering the costs of schooling for the six school-age children in her family by stating

we have a problem with textbooks, with clothes, with shoes and usually, after the cotton picking, the money we earn for cotton picking, we use it for buying clothes for us. And whenever we haven’t anything to wear, we usually miss all our lessons. This is because we haven’t anything to wear and we will stay until we find the money and we buy something to wear [she is referring to winter clothes]. (P177)

This student, like the majority of students at the Rumi Schools in this study, used the small amount of money she earns working in the cotton field to cover some of her school costs.

The effect of not having enough money to buy warm clothes for winter was also mentioned by a grade 8 Tajik student at Rumi School 1 who noted “those girls who have good warm clothes they come to school [in the winter]. Whoever doesn’t have, they don’t come to school” (P29).

When analyzing the family circumstances of students at Rumi School 4 it became evident that almost three-quarters of the female grade 11 students interviewed (8 out of 11) were the youngest child in their family and thus they have no other siblings requiring school costs to be covered. Several grade 11 students interviewed at Rumi School 4 also have at least one brother working in Russia. Two of these students have four brothers in Russia. It appears that families with only one school-age child and/or a family member(s) working in Russia are in a better financial position to cover the cost of schooling than families with several school-age children that do not receive remittances from family members working in Russia.

While a few students noted the challenges their family has in covering the costs of primary and secondary schooling, a small number of grade 10 and 11 students, whose key
decision-maker(s) has aspirations for them to attain some form of further education at a college or university, spoke of the high direct costs associated with this level of education. For example, a Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi School 3, who aspires to be a doctor, notes how “my mother and father agree for my being in school and also they are saying, ‘if we can afford, we will see,’ they will let me go to higher education as well.” She also said that her father wants her to be a doctor and her mother wants her to be “whatever is [her] choice” (P95).

A Tajik grade 11 student in Rumi school 4, whose father is a comptroller for an electric power station, described how her options for further schooling will also be determined by financial considerations. She noted how “my mother wants me to be a doctor, and she always says this to my father.” She describes her father as “open-minded of my wish [to be a doctor].” She also noted “I want to study at the Medical College. We don’t have enough money for covering the tuition at the university….for the Medical College we can afford it” (P176).

It appears that for female students who want to go on to higher education, the cost of further education is beyond their family’s capability to afford. When these economic factors are coupled with local norms and practices regarding girls’ higher education, higher education likely seems completely out of the question for these students.

How household responsibilities and/or cotton field work affect students’ schooling

During interview students spoke of two types of responsibilities that they had that affected their school experiences: doing housework and working in the cotton fields. Student responses related to housework will be discussed first followed by those related to cotton field labour.

When describing their typical day, all the students in this study mentioned housework they complete each day. Some students then went on to describe how their housework negatively affects their schooling by reducing their study time at home and/or by impeding their
attendance. For example, a Tajik grade 10 student at Rumi School 4 described how housework
affects her studies at home by stating

if you don’t have any work at home, you just sit quiet and you can concentrate on
all your lessons and study at school, but if you have lots of work to do in the
home, your mind is only focused on your house and housework. (P173)

While household responsibilities were commonly mentioned by all students regardless of
which district they lived in, the amount of housework each student has largely depends on the
make-up of the family, specifically the number and ages of females in the household, as well as
the size and circumstances of the family. For example, household responsibilities for a female
student differs depending on whether she is the eldest daughter and/or the only daughter,
whether she has any sister-in-laws living with her family (who customarily take on the bulk of
the housework), and/or whether her mother supports her schooling and allows her to complete
her housework when not in school.

Several students or their older sister have had to miss a significant amount of school
when their mother was ill. For example, a Tajik grade 8 student at Rumi School 2 described the
difficulty she had attending school regularly when she was in grade 7 due to her mother’s
illness. She recalled how

until grade 6, I was going to school every day. I finished grade 6. When I was in
grade 7, my mother got sick and so I couldn’t go to school anymore because she
was in the hospital. I used to cook food, go to hospital to visit her, and even
though I have some sisters-in-law, but still we had a lot to do so I couldn’t go to
school every day. I was going [to school] 10 days then having breaks, didn’t go
much, then the police came to my house. They wanted me to get back to school. I
started going again, but I was not a regular student. So this year they told me that
they will not accept me for grade 8, they wanted me to study grade 7 again. Then
I said, “I’m going to my aunt’s house and I’ll study in this school, and then I’ll
get a certificate and then go back to my school.” (P67)

Another student, a Tajik grade 11 student at Rumi School 4, described how her older
sister had to leave school after grade 9 because her mother was ill. She noted that

this was the time when my mother was sick and was in the hospital, and my
sister, she’s older than me, so she had to take care of my mother. Nobody was at
home and people used to go to visit my mom and there was nobody to help with all the work and everything and so our teachers came to our house a couple of times and they want my sister to go back to school, but usually we say that it’s impossible because our mother is sick. (P185)

A few students mentioned having to miss school for various reasons such as preparing for a wedding or when guests come to visit. A Tajik grade 9 student at Rumi School 4, who has only one younger brother, described instances when she must miss school. She stated sometimes I miss school for a special reason…For example, if we have some guests in our house, my mom is alone and I have to help my mom with the housework, and sometimes I have to do some work that a man does….we are building a house for ourselves and then usually if there will be some covering of the roof, or there will be some work like inside and outside the building…my mom needs help from me, and I help doing such kind of work. (P169)

Seasonal differences in the amount of work needed to be done at home were mentioned by students such as a grade 9 student at Rasht school 1 who noted that “springtime is the season when we [girls] have a lot of work to do at home. For example, in winter it is just feeding the animals, preparing food, and sleeping. There is nothing much to do at home” (P130). Since data collection at this school occurred in mid-October, many weddings were either being planned or taking place, increasing the workload of many of the girls and young women in the school community. This workload may account for why I was unable to meet with any of the female students in grade 11 although nine were registered in school. Several weddings were happening on the weekend data collection began.

While every student interviewed mentioned having household responsibilities, the majority of students in Rumi spoke of working in the cotton fields each day before or after school, depending on which school shift they attend. Many of these students spoke of how their cotton field work affects their schooling. Before detailing the effects of this work on their schooling, findings regarding why these students do this work, what the work is like, and how what they do with the money they earn will briefly be discussed before presenting how this
work affects their schooling. (In contrast, none of the students in Rasht spoke of having any work responsibilities outside their home.)

It appears that families living in cotton field areas are obligated to having female members work in the cotton fields. The following quote from a grade 11 student at Rumi School 3 illustrates the cycles of cotton field work as well as the pressure put upon families to supply labourers. She notes that

it’s a long work with the cotton because we start with planting it, then picking the cotton, and when we finish picking the cotton, then we collect the stalks, and from each family, the [cotton] farmer is coming to the house and asking people to go because we started already working, like harvesting the cotton, we cannot leave it in the middle, so someone from the family should go and work on the land to finish the work until all the cotton is picked and to collect the stalks. (P96)

When speaking of their cotton field work, Rumi students described the large amount of time spent in the cotton fields, especially during the harvest, as well as the nature of the work, amongst other things. Students consistently spoke of working in the cotton fields seven days a week. For example, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 described how she works Monday to Saturday after school and “on Sundays, from morning to evening I am in the cotton field, from 7 or 8 in the morning” (P90). A Tajik student in grade 10 at School 1 described several aspects of her work including how it differs during Ramadan. She described how when we work for a long time, it’s hard and it’s tiring. Just because of Ramadan we don’t work much. They release us earlier. We spend less time in the field. If it is not Ramadan, the work starts at 7 morning until 11. From 11 until 3 there is a break to come back home have lunch and after 3 again go until sunset….We work spring, summer and autumn. (P26)

One student, a grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 2, described what she does in the summer during her school break from June through August. She noted how we go in the morning until 11 [a.m.] we are in the cotton field during vacation time. We come back home at lunchtime, have some rest, have our lunch, and then again after lunch we go back again to the cotton field until the sunset. (P65)
This student also described how the cotton field work affects the attendance of the nine girls and ten boys in her class at the time data was collected (in September). She stated that

maybe 6 to 10 students are coming to school at harvest time, but the others will not come. They will go to the cotton field…We are 18, 19 in the class. Sometimes we have 6 or 7 and the others go for the cotton. (P65)

Given that it was very hot and dry in the afternoons when I started data collection at the school, I asked what it was like to work in the cotton fields in the afternoons as this student does. Her answer reveals the pressure placed on each family to supply female labourers for work. She stated

it’s hot, but what to do, I go anyway picking the cotton, because they are telling us that we have to go and to pick. We go there because of the stalks for the firewood, and in order to get [the stalks], first we have to collect the cotton. As soon as we pick the cotton, then we can take it. (P65)

A grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 similarly noted that “it is tiring [work] but we have to do it” (P112).

There are three types of benefit a cotton field worker may receive for their labour, depending on the area: receiving money per kilo of cotton picked, being able to collect the dried stalks at the end of the season, and being able to access a wheat field. Of these benefits, money earned was consistently ranked by student workers as the least important of these three benefits because what they earn is so little. For example, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 noted that “the most important is the stalks from the field. The wheat field is second. [Money earned is third because] it is a little money” (P186). Her classmate noted that “the wheat field is the most important for us. The second most important is the stalks, and the third is the money.” (P187)

Regarding her cotton field work, a grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 explained that “the cotton is for the government and the stalks are for ourselves…For the cotton [work] me and my sister are going, then to collect stalks, all the family goes” (102). A grade 11 Uzbek student
at Rumi School 2 noted how “we are only working for the firewood, otherwise we would not go to the cotton field” (P60).

A few students were explicit about how much they earn working in the cotton fields. For example, a grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 2 stated

in the cotton they don’t pay us well. We just get one Somoni, two Somoni only for several days [work]. We are almost dead after this work and we are just getting one or two Somoni…For four days [work], I receive 10 or 11 Somoni [approximately $2.50 to $2.75 USD]. (P77)

A grade 10 student at Rumi School 4 noted that after five days of cotton picking she gets 20 Somoni [approximately $4.50 USD] which she uses “usually for school materials, like pens, pencils, textbooks and sometimes for some clothes. (P187)

A grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 2 described how she earns roughly $14 to $16 USD a month for three months. She stated that

whenever I submit my picked cotton, I’m getting paid for that. Every 15, 16 days I’m taking the cotton and I’m getting paid. Once I got 32 Somoni [$7.30 USD], once 35 Somoni [$8 USD]. On Sundays, when there is no school, in the morning I’m picking up to 20 kg of cotton, and when I’m in the school, I’m going after lunch and picking 15 kg. (P62)

An older student, a grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 3, described earning the same amount of money per month ($14 to $17 USD) for three months work. She stated that “in ten days they are paying me 20 or 25 Somoni. I don’t give this money to anyone. I spend for myself, like I will buy some dresses or whatever I want to eat.” When asked whether she uses the money she earns for school she answered, “for stationary, I spend that money or sometimes if they collect some money in the school. They will ask to collect some money and I use that money” (P94).

A grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 1, who works in the cotton field every day, spoke about the repercussions of missing cotton field work. She said how “if [the female
students who work in the cotton fields] will miss the job, the person who is controlling them he will scold them.” She goes on to describe that

it’s difficult when you work in a field to come to school and when we miss the work in the field they are scolding at us so it’s difficult…When there is an urgent thing to do in the field [my older sister] replaces me. (P26)

As for how they use the money they earn, students commonly spoke of covering their schooling costs and buying small items such as food. Many students give the money to their parents who then give them money for school costs as needed. When asked what she does with the money she earns from working in the cotton field, a grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 responded, “[I use it] for life. If I need something for myself I spend it. I will give it to my parents if there is something needed to buy at home for life they can use this money.” She uses her money to pay for her textbooks but her parents pay for her school dress. She also noted that there is “no other way to earn money in the village but [picking] cotton” (P92). For example, a grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 3 explains how “I take this money home. I use it for note books, for textbooks.” When asked if she uses this money to buy her school uniform she answered, “Of course not because it is very little” (P109). A grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 3, who has worked in the cotton fields since grade 6, said that “For example, we have some Eid holidays. Sometimes I buy something new for these holidays for myself.” She described how “the first money that I will receive for picking the cotton, it is matching with the start of school and I pay for the rent of my textbooks.” When asked if she also uses the money to buy a school dress, she added “it is just enough to pay some school fees. That’s it” (P103). A grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 notes

I use the money for my textbooks, to buy some books and bags and school materials, and if there is any left, we use it for our life and for eating, for family and such kind of things. It’s not that much [money], but it depends on how much you collect. (P170)

A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 commented that
my father usually says “use all that money for yourself, for your expenses. When your classmates or your friends go to the cotton field, go with them, and earn the money for yourself only.”…I buy clothes for myself. When I see a classmate of mine wearing something new, I want also to wear such kind of clothes. (P179)

Having discussed the nature of the cotton field work, why students do the work and what they do with the money they earn, findings regarding how the physical labour of cotton field work affects female students’ schooling will now be presented.

Several students spoke of cotton picking as hard and tiring labour. When asked to describe cotton picking several students described how painful the work is to their fingers and hands. For example, a grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 2 she held out her hands and described how “the fingers and the hands here it will get a pain” (P60). A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 described how the difficulty is when the cotton is not grown at all, when it is not open at all, and when you collect it, it hurts your fingers and it hurts your hands….when we come from the field we are very tired and then we enter to the school. (P179)

Describing what it is like to pick cotton seven days a week, a grade 9 student at Rumi School 4 gestures to her waist as she says I tie a bag here and I collect it with my hands and I put it here in that bag…[The cotton boll, the part of the plant that surround the cotton] scratches your hand. [Cotton] is very difficult to collect. Very hard. Usually you’ll scratch your hands….You come home and you are very tired. (P170)

A grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 notes that [cotton picking] is very difficult work. You have to pick each and every [bit] of the cotton. They are very small and you have to pick all of them and you have to carry them in your bag and then you have to carry them to the place where they collect them. It’s very difficult but we have to do it because we are five children in our family, so we have to work, and eat and have some money for our books and schooling. So that’s why I have to go and to pick the cotton. (P187)

This student also described how her cotton field work affects her schooling when she stated I haven’t enough time for my studies. Just imagine, I’m at school until lunch, then after lunch I am in the cotton fields, we have just in the evening time, and it’s hard because when I come back from the cotton fields I am very tired. So, I just do some of my [school] exercises and I fall asleep. (P187)
Many spoke of being obliged to work in the cotton fields. Such is the case for a grade 10 student at Rumi School 4 who stated:

I don’t like the field work at all. It’s very hard work. I have some kind of disease. I can’t stay in the sunshine for a long time. What can I do? I have no older sister. I have no sister-in-law and that’s why I’m forced. I have to go and I have to work there. Of course, after, I became very tired. (P173)

In contrast, a grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 described how different her life is now that she no longer works in the cotton fields because she needs to help her mother at home. She explained that:

I was working before in the cotton field, but this year I’m not working, I’m helping my mother with the housework because my sister-in-law has gone to her parent’s house. She is pregnant. She will stay for a few months there, and my mother has some problems with the heart, so I’m helping her at home. But my sister is going to the cotton field… it’s better to stay home than to work in the cotton field. …most of my friends are working in the cotton field and they are coming tired from the work and they don’t have much time and power to make their study. But for me, because I’m not working in the cotton field, I have much more free time to spend on my studies. (P96)

Besides the physical demands of cotton field work, female students’ attendance is also negatively affected by such work. Of the few students who spoke of missing school to pick cotton, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 noted that:

It’s difficult [to go to school] especially when it is the cotton picking season, we have to go to the field. Mostly we’re in the field and we can’t go to school at that time. (P185)

Another grade 11 Tajik student at the same school described how she has “no other difficulties with going to school] besides the cotton picking and then straight after completing that season, again we are free and we come to school”. (P179)

While a few students mentioned how they miss school especially in the first three months of school, many more spoke of how their female classmates miss school. For example, when speaking about her female classmates, a grade 10 Tajik and Uzbek student at Rumi School 2 noted how “mostly, during September, October, they are not coming [to school], but when
winter comes, the cotton work will finish and they will come back to school.” When asked what
happens in class to students who miss most if not all of the first two months of school, she noted
that “of course, they will not understand anything. Their level of knowledge is very low,
but….just for the sake of being registered they are showing up once in a while in order to get the
certificate” (P70).

A grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 described how the cotton field work affects the
attendance of female students in grade 10. She stated

Our teachers are very open-minded, as well as the students, but the parents don’t
let their children go to school. Mostly they send their children to the cotton fields
to collect the cotton….The [female] students in grade 10, usually they come to
school, but with lots of absences. For example, in one month they are in the
cotton field, and then again they come back to school, then again they are in the
cotton field, and it’s like this. (P170)

These various economic factors affect the key decision-maker(s) attitude regarding the
value and benefit of schooling for all its school-age family members, especially those who are
female.

**Factors relating to school**

When speaking of their school experiences, some female students spoke of Presidential
Orders that they believe has helped them and other female students stay in school longer. Some
also spoke of the support they receive from teachers and/or peers. Both of these sets of factors
have been classified as those relating to school.

**Government policies that support girls’ upper secondary schooling**

As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 5, the government had issued a Presidential Order
declaring that the school cycle was to be extended by one year to grade 12, with grades 1
through 10 being compulsory. While the school staff at all the six schools in this study were
uncertain as to when this order would become official policy, the Director and teachers at Rumi
School 4 were using its presence to encourage parents and other key decision-makers to keep their female family members in school longer.

Some students, such as a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4, whose father died in the civil war and whose mother was against her finishing secondary school, spoke of the significance of this order, how it is being enforced, and its effect on girls’ schooling. She described how the government has repeatedly broadcast a “special program on TV” about the Presidential Order over the last six months to increase public awareness of the changes that will be implemented. This student described how

after the Presidential Order on bringing the girls back to school, after all this instruction saying [girls] have to study up to grade 11, don’t just marry them at early ages, and something like this, they had meeting in the community and in that meeting the community members learned and they understand, and they say to the parents, they force them to allow their children to come to school. And this really helped them. Even the police said that, “we will take a penalty from you if you do not let your children go to school, because this is a Presidential Order. So you have to do this. You have to allow your children to go to school.” And this helped us. (P172)

She also described how the community supported the Presidential Order when she stated

Five of my classmates already got married, and looking at such kind of issues, the community members want to strengthen the President’s instruction. They want to strengthen them. They want to work and to fight against such kinds of problems. (P172)

From this quote it is clear that the school and community leaders at Rumi School 4 recognized the importance of having a clear statement from the government to help them advocate with parents to keep their daughters in school longer, even if the implementation date of the order was uncertain.

The effect of this government policy can be seen in the example of a Tajik Grade 10 student at Rumi School 4 who spoke about how the extension of compulsory education to a higher grade has forced her parents to allow her to stay in school and delay her marriage. She noted how
I am very open-minded. I like to study. I like to go to school, and I’m happy that I’m in school and I heard about the Presidential Instruction on making the study compulsory up to grade 12. I am very happy with this. Otherwise, if it’s not like this, and if I wasn’t allowed to continue my study or if I didn’t go to school, they would marry me. (P173)

Some students also mentioned the effect the Presidential Quota, detailed in Chapter 2, has on their schooling experiences as a means of opening up the possibility of them continuing on to university. Some teachers use the Presidential Quota to encourage their female students to do well in school. For example, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 described how mostly the school encourages us. They say that if you learn hard, they will give you a Presidential Quota in order for you to continue your study at a higher level, but I have a big wish also, I usually sit and do all my exercise even with a candle. (P173)

Thus, government actions such as the Presidential Order and the Presidential Quota reflect the government’s attempts to address inequalities in regards to girls’ schooling both at the upper secondary and post-secondary levels. This study provides evidence of how some school staff and community members use these government policies to attempt to improve the educational experiences and opportunities for girls in their school communities.

The degree of support a girl receives from female classmates

Some students, when speaking of their classroom experiences, noted the support they receive from female peers. Since there were few female students enrolled in and regularly attending grades 10 and 11, the support of female peers was described by several students to be of great importance to them. For example, a Tajik student in grade 10 at Rumi School 3 described how she was only one of three girls in her class:

In my class we were 12 girls in grade 9 and for the grade 10 I was the only girl who was going to school. There were none. Then later on after a few days one girl joined me and now we are just three girls. (P89)

A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 1, who hopes to be a lawyer in the future, describes how she and her fellow female students “perform well” regardless of the number of
female students in the class. However, she also notes that it is better for her when there are more female students in her class rather than just a few. When asked what the difference was when there were many girls in class and when many or most are absent, she replied

there isn’t a big difference if we are more or few for our study. It’s the same. We perform our study well whether we are few or more but when we are more its better because we can come together we can study together and get advice from each other…We receive lots of support from girls in the class. We usually ask the girls about all the study difficulties. When we miss class, we come and ask about it from the girls rather than the boys and if there are no girls [in class for that lesson], we don’t ask the boys, we just go to the teacher. Actually the girls are more supportive…Sometimes you hesitate to ask the teacher, thinking that then maybe he will not give me a good mark and I will [be seen to be] passive in his eyes. It is easier to deal with the girls in class. (P32)

This factor will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter when student participants discuss the effects of GEP on their schooling experiences.

**Factors related to self**

Factors related to self are presented as follows: students’ motivation related to being in school, students’ aspirations, how students are affected or influenced by what others in the community do, and how students are affected by and react to gossip.

**Students’ motivation regarding her schooling**

During their interviews, the vast majority of students spoke of how much they “like” or “love” their studies and learning as well as other aspects of being in school. Many responded as did a grade 10 Tajik student at Rasht School 1 who said “I like studying. I like everything in school” (P126). Several students listed their favorite subjects while some mentioned the importance of the social aspects of school. For example, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 said “I like to study and I like to spend time with my friends” (P90).

Students’ enjoyment of school and learning appears to be the major factor motivating them to attend school regularly and do well academically as well as to want to continue in
school past the compulsory level. Such is the case for a grade 8 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 who said, “I love being in the school. I don’t want to be absent from school” (P122).

Many students, such as the student just quoted, mentioned how they would be at home if they were not allowed to go to school. Many also stated that they would rather be in school than stay at home. For example, a grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 noted “I wanted to come to school after grade 9. I don’t want to stay home. I prefer to continue studying” (P99). Another grade 11 Tajik student at the same school said

I like everything in school. First of all, coming to school, seeing your classmates, having classes, learning from the lessons, getting some knowledge you will be prevented from being involved in bad things. We have good teachers. They are teaching well. I’d rather be in school than sitting at home. (P96)

A grade 11 Tajik student at Rasht School 2 noted that

the days that I’m not in school, I feel bored and I don’t like staying home. I like school very much. When I am in school I feel glad. We have good teachers in school. I like to meet my friends. I like to meet teachers. I like to go to my classes. (P139)

The importance some students place on the role of school in their lives is illustrated by the following experiences of students at Rumi School 4. A grade 11 Tajik student stated “I like to come [to school] and see my friends, my classmates. We are not allowed to visit our friends. This is the only place that we can meet our friends and our classmates” (P179). As for seeing the girls she grew up with who stopped going to school after completing grade 9, this student noted how “I don’t go to visit them. If I see them in the street, we talk, but I am not allowed to go to their houses” (P179). A grade 11 Tajik student, whose father wants her to go to school and whose mother wants her to stay home, emphasized that “my only happiness is to go to school. I want to go to school and I want to learn” (P180).

In a similar manner, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 described how she was determined to keep going in school even when many of her female peers left school. When
asked why she was still in school, she replied, “I am convincing myself to at least finish grade 11 and to learn something, even if I will not go for further education” (P90).

Some students spoke of a tension between feeling obligated to miss school to do housework and wanting to not miss any school. A grade 8 Tajik student at Rasht School 1 commented that both her mother and father encourage her to go to school and do well. She noted how, “for example, sometimes even if I say ‘I have some housework [to do]. I cannot go to school.’ They scold me. They say go to school” (P122). [She also said “I love being in school. I don’t want to be absent from school.”]

While female students who perform well academically may want to stay in school past grade 9, there is some evidence that those who are academically weak may not want to continue in school. Several students in this study mentioned female peers who were weak students and who did not want to continue in school. Given that students who are often absent from school will likely have poor academic performance, it is no surprise that female students in Rumi who have had to work intensely in the cotton fields for the first three months of school (many who began this work when they were in grade 6) may be weak students. A female Uzbek grade 11 student at Rumi School 2 mentioned how some of her female peers’ low academic performance influenced why they stopped going to school. She noted that

they dropped out. These are the Tajik girls. Starting from grade 9 they already were irregular students. For grade 10 also they were coming not regularly to school, sometimes coming, sometimes not but now don’t come at all….Some they say, “I will get married.” Some say, “my father is not allowing me to come” and I think they also were not having a good academic performance and maybe that was also a problem. (P59)

A Tajik student in grade 10 at Rumi School 3 described how, during a house visit the girls who were no longer going to school described themselves as “weak students” and this was one reason why they did not want to continue on into grade 10. She noted

when we talked to these girls, [and asked] why are you not coming to school? First of all, they were weak students. They were not preforming well in school
and this was one of the reasons they were not interested in coming to school and being at home it means they will work in the cotton field. (P90)

A grade 8 Tajik student at Rumi School 1 describes how she has some female peers who don’t come to school and who don’t want to come to school. She noted that

I have some friends. They are my age. They don’t come to school. They just stay at home….Their parents don’t allow them but they themselves also they don’t want to go to school. They don’t want to study.

(When asked whether some boys her age were also staying home she replied, “no, the boys are coming to school.”(P39))

Some student participants mentioned how some boys harass girls and this can be one reason why some girls do not want to go to school. (This factor was also mentioned by adult participants, as noted in Chapter 5.) For example, a grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 1 noted that

some [students don’t go to school] because of their parents, they don’t want them to go and some because the boys are disturbing them on the way to school, teasing them and that’s why, after that they lose interest to come to school…[The boys] will comment. Also they will pull your bag and pull your hair….in the village if women or people see some things they will make out of it rumours and gossip and a lot of it…even if we have questions related to our study we cannot ask a boy because people will understand it in a wrong way. For example, when we are in class we talk to them. As soon as we will leave the school, if I see him outside [we act like] I don’t know him, he doesn’t know me. We don’t talk at all. (P36)

When asked how she copes with this teasing, the student’s friend, who was in the room to be interviewed afterwards, said “she is fighting with the boys when then do like this.” The student then added “I will tell my father if someone is teasing me outside…My father when he sees him outside, he will scold him” (P36). She also described how teachers advise female students on how to dress to reduce the likelihood of boys teasing them. She noted how

the teachers are telling us all the time “do not put more make-up [on] or look stylish to come to school” and then the boys are teasing them. The teachers say “you should be more humble”, but still the girls they do [wear make-up and dress stylishly]. (P36)
A Tajik student in grade 11 at Rumi School 1 noted that some of her female peers use being teased by boys as an excuse for why they no longer go to school. Describing conversations she had with female students who had stopped going to school, she noted how they explained that guys are bad in a school. [The girls said] “they are teasing us and we don’t want to go back to school.” But we talked more deeply and we found out that this is not because of guys but because the parent did not agree. They didn’t want to send their girls [to school] and they used to say that our girls now are grown-up and we don’t want them to go to school. (P25)

It appears that some female students in the school communities in this study want to complete secondary school while others do not. While a few of the female students who want to complete secondary school are permitted to do so, many others are not. Several students in this study described how some of their female peers want someone to advocate on their behalf to allow them in stay in school. For example, a grade 11 Tajik student from Rumi School 3 described how she participated in some house visits to girls who were no longer going to school and how the girls wanted someone to visit their homes and to advocate on their behalf. She noted how we felt very good, especially the girls who came back to school, they were very happy. They were asking all the time, “please come to my house, talk to my parents, explain so that I can get back to school too.”…Usually the girls want to come but their parents don’t want them to come and sometimes the parents talk to the daughters badly, so as to not go to school, in a way that they don’t allow them to go to school, they talk badly and the girl doesn’t have any other choice, and she is asking classmates to pay a visit and talk to parents. (P96)

A Tajik grade 10 student at Rumi School 1 spoke of a similar situation when she noted that sometimes the girls are asking if the teachers could come to their houses and ask them to come to school, to ask parents so that they [the girls] can come back to school. (P26)

Such was the case when a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 went on a visit to the home of a female peer who was no longer coming to school. She said “we found out that the girls they want to come to school but their parents don’t allow them to come to school” (P90).
Students’ perceptions of the value and benefit of schooling and their aspirations

Students in this study, particularly those in grade 10 and 11, perceive some value and benefit in finishing secondary school, often closely linked to their aspirations. Some students continue in school to gain knowledge and skills that they think will help them in the future. For example, a grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 1 spoke about the importance of acquiring skills and knowledge through schooling as a form of insurance for the future when she states:

we have to do some work with parents to explain that it’s better to [for girls to] finish school, because you never know what will happened in future. It’s not good to get married early. It’s better to get education first which can help them in the future. (P30)

A grade 11 Tajik student in Rumi School 3 spoke about how an educated mother can help her children. She noted how:

for example, in future, if you have a child and the child will ask, “please help me mother,” and if you are not educated, what kind of help can you give to your child? These kinds of parents [who keep their daughters from finishing secondary school], they have said that “the girls will study and what? She will get nowhere and what will she get out of it?” (P96)

Several of the students, especially those in grade 10 and 11, aspire to go on to study at the medical college or university to become a doctor, lawyer, teacher, journalist or translator. Some students do not want to further their education. Such is the case for a grade 10 Tajik student in Rumi School 1 who said “I like to study” as a reason that she continued to grade 10 and notes that her older sisters (who got married at 18) encourage her to complete secondary school. She states:

I want to be a housewife…when I will be in my twenties I want to get married…I don’t want to continue to study [past secondary school]. I consider myself as a fieldworker and I just want to stay home….This year I will finish and I will go to 11 grade then I finish and then stay home. (P26)

While some students are motivated to complete secondary school, others are not. Students in this study also spoke about their peers who leave school because they do not
perceive the extra years of schooling to be of value or benefit to them. For example, a grade 9 Tajik student in Rumi School 4 noted how

I usually come to school, and then after school I go to the cotton fields, but there are some girls who don’t come to school at all. They are just in the cotton field and they usually say to me “why do you want to go to school? Why do you go to school? There is no point. There is no benefit from school.”(P170)

Other students mentioned how the norms and practices regarding girls’ education within their community limit their aspirations. A grade 9 Tajik student at Rumi School 2 spoke of her life path being greatly influenced by her ethnicity. When asked about what she would like to do in the future, she replied

nothing because most of the Tajiks are becoming nothing in the future. I am one of them. I have a wish to be a doctor, but I know that Tajiks, most of them, are becoming nothing. So I’m part of them. (P65)

It appears that some female students in these school communities are not motivated to finish secondary school because they know they cannot continue on to higher education. A grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 described how

the experience here is that until grade 9 everyone is trying to study well. They are encouraged to study. They have an interest. But once you will be in grade 9 then the problems will start, the sayings will start. You will not go for higher education. There is a problem also for the grade 10 and 11. All this affects you in a way. A student is losing interest in the school because everyone is reminding you that you will not go for higher education so your interest [in school] is disappearing. (P90)

A grade 11 Uzbek student from Rumi School 2 noted that her female peers who stop going to school “said, even if we study, if we come to school, anyway we are not going to higher education. [Our parents] will not allow us to go” (P72). A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 spoke of how the norms of her school community determine that no girls are able to pursue post-secondary education. Since no female students have been allowed to continue their studies in the past, she too will not be allowed to study further, despite her desire to do so. She noted that
I want to continue my education. I want to go and study, but in our territory it is not like this at all, we are not allowed to continue our study….No, nobody [who is female] from our village has studied [past secondary school]. (P179)

A grade 9 student participant at the same school noted, when speaking about her love of school and learning, that “I’m very sad. It’s a pity that we [girls] are not allowed to continue our studies at a higher level at university. It is not in our tradition” (P170).

For some students, being prohibited from gaining paid employment once they are married is given as a reason why they see little value or benefit in completing secondary school. When speaking about the house visits she had participated in, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 1 described the reasons her female peers gave for not wanting to finish secondary school. She noted that

I have talked to a lot of girls. Even during my vacation I have met a lot of girls and some don’t want [to go to school] because they don’t want. When I talked to them they were saying “what for I need to go to school? What for I need this education? I don’t need it.” I feel bad and I feel sorry for these words and I get angry but they say this….When I am talking to them, some say, “ok. I will get marry. They will not allow me to work. What for I need this education? And why should I go to school? And this reminds me of the story of my life, of my parents, but I still say that if you have your diploma in your hand maybe one day you will need it. This is life. (P25)

It appears that some female students who stopped coming to school can be convinced to return to school, with the encouragement and support of female peers and school staff. A grade 11 Tajik student from Rumi School 1, a GEP school, spoke of visiting the homes of six female classmates to encourage them to return to school. She reported that, during the visits, all six students felt that there was no value in completing grade 10 and/or 11 since they would not be going on for further education. She described how

I visited six homes and in all the girls said they don’t want to go to school…They just used to say “we are not going to continue our education at institutes or universities so why should we go?” We talked to them and said “even if you are not going to continue anymore but you should at least complete your schooling years. Maybe one day you will need it.” I don’t know how it could change their way of thinking. They came back to school again. (P43)
Thus, student perceptions regarding the value of and benefit of upper secondary school completion vary amongst the female students in this study. Since upper secondary school is non-compulsory it is no surprize that the female student participants in Grades 10 and 11 expressed how they value their schooling and believe that the additional two years of schooling will be of benefit to them in the future. Other student participants described how the norms and practices regarding schooling that limit girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities negatively affect their perceptions of the value and benefit of grades 10 and 11 as well as those of their female peers.

**How students are affected by and react to gossip**

When speaking of their schooling experiences and opportunities, the vast majority of the female students in this study described the pervasiveness of “gossip” and “rumours” within their school community that serve to maintain and reinforce a status quo that had girls leaving school after grade 9. “Look at this girl” was a common phrase used by adult and student participants when describing gossip in the school communities in this study. Data from student interviews indicated that there was not one distinct group within the community who gossip but that gossip is spread by men and women alike. For example, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 described how “people say lots of gossip” about girls and their schooling. While people say gossip to her father, he ignores it. She noted that “those mothers who don’t let their girls come to school, usually they do the gossiping” and “some of them say things to me such as ‘Oh, you are already a grown-up girl. Why do you go to school?’” (P187).

Student participants spoke of how they and their family members ignore the gossip. When asked if people say negative things to her about her going to school, a grade 10 Tajik student at Rumi school 3 stated “they do say [things] but we don’t pay attention” (P90). A grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 4 said
we just ignore [the gossip] and we go to school. Most of the old people, not all of them are bright, and not all of them are knowledgeable and not all of them are kind, even if they are old. There are some old women who have less understanding, so we don’t pay attention to them. (P172)

While this student ignores the gossip, her mother is more affected by the gossip. She noted how noted that “when my mom hears this [gossip], she becomes against my going to school….They just gossip and we can’t do anything” (P172).

Some female students fear becoming the subject of gossip and conform to this norm by ending their schooling once they complete grade 9. It appears that these students are rewarded for their conformity by not becoming the subject of gossip. Such is the case of a grade 11 Uzbek student in Rumi School 1 who described how she has been affected by the gossip. She stated

I used also not to pay attention to the talks of these women and one or two times I also tried to wear [my school uniform] because in the school it is okay. We just don’t wear it because of the outside and one or two women started talking, [saying] “look at this girl. What she is wearing?” and when these two will talk, I don’t pay attention but slowly, slowly all the village will start talking about it. And they will say “look at this girl. She is doing it purposely to show her figure to the guys, to make it visible”…My parents and my family, it is okay for them if I wear my school dress but when the people they start talking, for the girl, it is so easy to accuse her and make gossip and rumours about her. So it is better to avoid the gossip. (P37)

Although she had attempted to ignore the gossip and wear her school uniform, in the end she felt she had to conform in order to avoid being the subject of gossip.

Thus female student participants from all school communities described the pervasive nature of gossip and rumours used by community members to support the status quo that girls should leave school after grade 9. Gossip and rumours served as a form of social control and monitoring in these communities. How students (and their parents) respond to the gossip appears to be of great importance. Some students are able to ignore the gossip and continue in school past grade 9 while others conform to the status quo by leaving school after grade 9 so as to not be the subject of gossip.
How various factors affect the life of a Grade 11 student in Rumi School 4

The following profile and extract from one student interview serves as an example of how student participants commonly discussed various factors in an interrelated and overlapping manner. This student is Tajik and is the youngest of six children, all of whom completed grade 11. She has three older sisters, two of whom are married while one is divorced. She has two older brothers, who are both single and who went to work in Russia upon completing grade 11. She lives about 5 to 10 minutes walk from school with her father, mother and divorced sister. He father completed some post-secondary education at an “electrical college”. She doesn’t know how much education her mother attained.

She works in the cotton field May to December (as described earlier) and earns money that her father lets her spend for herself. As a result of her cotton field work, her family gets access to a wheat field and collects the dried stalks at the end of the season for firewood. She likes going to school. She says “I like to come and see my friends, my classmates. We are not allowed to visit our friends. This is the only place that we can meet our friends and our classmates.” When asked about any difficulties she has, she mentions the cotton field work but that when the work in the cotton field is over then she “just goes to school and home and there is nothing else to do” which is good for her.

Researcher: So your brothers and sisters all finished grade 11 and you are in grade 11. What do your mother and father say about education for you?

Participant 180: [My parents] want us to be educated. They say, “just go to school.” And previously, before they even wanted me to go and continue my studies at a higher level. But then, after grade 7, when I grow up, they changed their mind.

R: Is that what you would like to do, to continue your studies?

P: I want to go and continue my studies, and my father is also open-minded, but the other men in the village gossip. They say to my father, “Who else from the village goes for [post-secondary] studying besides your girl? Why would your girl go to the town to continue?”

Later in the interview she reveals that
P: My mother, mostly my mother, is against it. She doesn’t want me to go to school, but my father is very open-minded. He wants me to go to school.

R: Does this make it difficult sometimes, that your mother wants you to do work at home, and she wants you to stay home?

P: Yes, it’s difficult because I have to do the housework and my only happiness is to go to school. I want to go to school and I want to learn.

R: And what about your brothers? Do your brothers agree with you finishing secondary school?

P: No, they do not agree that I go to school. They don’t know now that I am going to school. They are in Russia.

R: Your brothers went to grade 11. Why would they not want their sister to go to grade 11?

P: They say, “if you go to school there will be lots of boys there,” and again there is lots of gossip.

R: So is most of the gossip about the girls being out and there are boys around?

P: Yes.

R: But your father was the most important decision maker in your family so that you could finish grade 11? Because sometimes I hear that in other families, the older brother has more influence than the father.

P: My father’s words and opinions are more important than my brother’s. (P180)

This excerpt illustrates how student participants commonly discussed various factors as interrelated. This student spoke of the importance of school for her as it allows her to be with friends who she would otherwise not see. She also described the tension within her family as her mother and brothers do not want her to complete secondary school while her father supports her desire to stay in school. She believes her brothers are greatly influenced by the gossip. She also mentioned the way her cotton field work and household responsibilities affect her schooling experiences and opportunities. It appears that the two most important factors allowing her to stay in school are her father’s positive attitude towards her schooling along with her desire to continue her studies.
Summary of findings

In this chapter, I discuss the findings regarding factors affecting girls’ schooling from the perspective of female students in grades 9, 10 and 11 from all schools included in this study. These findings reinforce and enhance our understandings of the status quo regarding schooling as well as factors mentioned by adult participants in earlier chapters.

I structured this chapter in the same manner as Chapters 5, 6 and 7 with factors categorized as those related to community/society, family, school and self. Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to community/society include the effects of the dominant belief that by grade 9 a girl is grown-up and should no longer be in school, the presence and effects of gossip and rumours, and how what others do affects girls’ schooling. Factors related to family include the ethnicity and region of origin of a girl’s family, key-decision maker(s) perceptions of the value and benefit of grade 10 and 11 for their female family members as well as aspirations for them, how key-decision makers are affected by and react to gossip, and the economic circumstances of the family. School-related factors affecting girls’ schooling include government policies supporting girls’ secondary school completion (through a Presidential Order) and higher education participation (through the Presidential Quota system) as well as the support female students receive from female classmates. Factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self include girls’ motivation regarding her schooling, female students’ perception of the value and benefit of their schooling and their aspirations as well as how female students are affected by and react to gossip.

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this study explores female secondary school students’ schooling experiences and opportunities at GEP and non-GEP schools in the two districts in Tajikistan with the lowest female enrolment in grades 10 and 11. The purpose of the study is two-fold: to explore factors as critical inputs that serve to restrict or limit girls’ secondary schooling (as a means of maintaining and reinforcing the status quo) or that serve to enable girls’ secondary schooling (as a means of empowerment by challenging the status quo) and to explore how the GEP sought to improve girls’ secondary schooling.

In this chapter I present findings from three GEP schools to answer the following research question: How did the Girls’ Education Project (GEP) attempt to overcome factors hindering or limiting rural girls’ educational experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived to be most effective? When conducting interviews at GEP schools, I asked participants for their perspectives on the GEP. (Less than half the student participants I interviewed had participated in GEP activities.) Rather than being an impact evaluation of the GEP, this study sought to explore participants’ opinions of the project more than one year after it had ended.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I describe the project components and main activities. The second section consists of a discussion of the genesis of the GEP as well as a description of the primary funder, project implementers, and where the project was implemented. In the third section I discuss findings related to the social fields of community and family and those related to social field of school and the category of self. In this section I also compare the findings from GEP schools with those from non-GEP schools. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the findings and discuss my reflections on the GEP.
Description of the Girls’ Education Project

As articulated in the Save the Children project proposal (2006), GEP activities were developed to support the Republic of Tajikistan’s National Strategy on Education Development (2006-2015). The project aimed to address the following government objectives: Objective 1.6 – improve the base of information on the status of girls in the education system; Objective 2.3 and 4.5 – improve participation of the community, parents and children in education planning, monitoring and management; Objectives 4.1, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 – introduce inclusive and child friendly attitudes and practices to combat discrimination that acts as a barrier to the inclusion of especially girls in mainstream education; and Strategic Goal 4 – advocate, on the basis of practice, at the district, provincial, and national level, changes in policies, reforms and practices on quality and inclusive education accessible for all children, including all girls.

The GEP consisted of specific goals categorized into four components: to establish and support school clubs, to establish and support Community Education Committees (CECs), to develop and disseminate policy and best practices guidelines, and to implement a coordination mechanism with the Ministry of Education. The aim of each component (as detailed in a Save the Children GEP document) will now be presented followed by descriptions of the main activities.

School clubs

The GEP school clubs were established to “strengthen girls’ capacity to claim their rights for quality education; to develop an action plan to combat discrimination and make home, school and community more child (girl) friendly and bring girls back to school” (Save the Children, 2006). While all schools in Tajikistan are “instructed” by the Ministry of Education to have a school club, a Save the Children staff member notes that, “in reality they are not functioning. You see them only in papers” (P52). The GEP sought to support government-
required school clubs for the purposes of improving girls’ educational opportunities and experiences as well as providing extracurricular activities for students.

The school clubs consisted of male and female student members (from grade 7 and higher) as well as one teacher. Each club had a student and a teacher leader. Initially students were asked to become club members. As the clubs became active, students asked to join. It appears that the clubs at the GEP schools in this study had roughly 20 to 30 members.

School club members participated in a range of activities. Participants in this study mentioned participating in seminars on various topics including how to help female students stay in school, hygiene, and sanitation. (These seminars were likely only for female club members, given the topics discussed.) Club members, both female and male, participated in drawing activities and debates related to these topics. They created and performed plays on these topics as well as giving speeches to the rest of the school. Club members visited neighbouring GEP schools to meet other school club members and discuss their respective activities. School club members also participated in public awareness campaigns in collaboration with the CEC to encourage community members to allow their daughters to stay in school and attend school regularly.

Female school club members participated in house-to-house visits to the homes of female students who were absent from school. During these visits, the club members spoke with the absent student to find out why she was not attending school and to encourage her to return while the teachers, school administrators, and/or community members spoke with her parents. Prior to the GEP, a teacher alone would conduct such visits. The extent of female student absences in rural communities meant that one teacher could be required to make many visits, if they followed the policy.
**Sewing classes**

Under the GEP project, schools were given sewing machines to enable female students to learn sewing skills. All female secondary school students participated in sewing classes as part of the curriculum.

**Camp**

There were two types of camp activities for female students conducted within the GEP: overnight camp at an urban center and day camp at schools. The overnight camp involved bringing secondary school girls from different GEP schools together at the district center for several days. In Rumi district, the first camp session was held for three days with approximately 55 student participants and the second camp session was for 5 days with 60 student participants. In Rasht district, three one-week camp sessions were conducted with 20 students participating in each session.

During camp sessions, NGO staff trained students on topics such as gender issues, child rights, and reproductive health. Students played games and created plays on themes related to these topics as well as being taught problem solving and facilitation skills. Some students participated in more than one camp session. A female teacher at Rasht School 1 who participated in the GEP camp activity described how

> during the day we conducted a lot of exercises. There was a lot of talking on some subjects and also we did group exercises…did some interactive games…The main subject was attracting girls to school. And for example, the session was given to groups: What will you do if the girl from your class is not attending the school? How would you attract her [to come to school]? (P115)

Day camps were held at GEP schools for female secondary school students daily for one month during the summer school break. This enabled female students who were not allowed to attend overnight camp to participate. Students at each school chose either baking or sewing as the camp activity. The necessary materials were provided by the GEP (sewing machines and
material for sewing activities or an oven and baking materials for baking activities). During the day camp, students also participated in seminars on same topics as those covered in the overnight camp (gender issues, child rights, and reproductive health). A teacher at Rumi School 3 who was the day camp leader described what took place at her school when she said the following:

Once when I entered into the class and some talks were going on. The subject was about the period time for the girls, about behavioural issues, and about the “teenage” time. The talks were around this subject, and also about their rights. There were some group exercises. They would make some group exercise and present to each other, and also there was some topics about hygiene. (P98)

At the end of the day camp session, students from the camp exhibited what they had made at a conference held in the district center.

**Community Education Committees**

A Community Education Committee (CEC) was established at each GEP school “to involve girls and women in increasing awareness about gender and education (problems and solutions).” The CEC consisted of approximately 16 members from the local community. Members included religious leaders, active women, and four student members from the school club, with the School Director serving as the committee’s leader. The CEC’s mandate was to “develop action plans to improve the attitude and support of parents, teacher and all others involved in education and the upbringing of girls in school, home, and community.” (CEC members were trained by Save the Children and the local NGO implementing partner on how to implement and manage the Community-based Education Management Information System discussed in the following section.)

The CEC’s mandate and focus differed greatly from those of existing Parent Teacher Associations, which commonly consists of male community members and focuses primarily on
the maintenance of school facilities. (See Rumi School 2 profile in Chapter 5 for a description of its PTA membership and activities).

**Policy and best practices guidelines**

The aim of the policy and best practices guidelines was to develop measurement tools and practices to involve school community members, including students from the school club, in collecting data on girls’ enrolment, attendance, and motivation to accurately determine the problems constraining girls’ education. The measurement tools and practices developed by Save the Children and used in many Save the Children projects in developing countries is known as the Community-based Education Management Information System (C-EMIS). In contrast to Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) which enable Ministries of Education to document quantitative information nationally and regionally, C-EMIS are managed by community members, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, to systematically collect quantitative and qualitative data at the household level regarding who is and is not going to school and why. Once collected, this data is analysed by the CEC members who then develop action plans to improve educational inclusion for all children, especially those most marginalized. These plans are known as Community School Improvement Plans (CSIPs).

A staff member of the NGO in Rumi described the C-EMIS activities conducted by CEC members as follows:

They were mapping the village area and then they were dividing the area and selecting which group should visit which houses and collect information, to find out the reasons, difficulties, why students are not coming to school. It was a bottom-up approach…And when we found out the reasons why students are not coming to school then we made a plan [ranking the difficulties] according to their importance. And the school and committee put all the efforts at first to overcome the most difficult issues and reasons…For example, the reason which is applied for most students, it would have more priority to be solved first. (P52)

As part of the CEC, student members of the school club also participated in data collection and analysis in an effort to better understand all the issues from all perspectives. Staff
from both local NGO implementing partners stressed the importance of including students in the process. An NGO staff member in Rumi noted that

when we are conducting our surveys, the adults were going to the families and obviously not all the families will say the truth and are willing to talk. They would say “we don’t want our children to go to school” but what’s behind that, they don’t say. They reject to participate and here the peer-to-peer strategy worked. The student from the committee would go and talk to the child and find the reason why she is not coming to school. (P52)

A staff member from the implementing partner NGO in Rasht also stressed the importance and benefit of using the peer-to-peer approach when she stated “the children used to take the forms and go and collect information and the good thing, when you go and talk to a child, usually they cannot lie. They are being honest and giving the correct information” (P114).

In addition to data collection and analysis activities, CEC members also participated in the systematic tracking of student absences. A female parent member of the CEC at Rumi School 1 described how

every day we were recording the absence of girls in this school. We had a journal for each class and we appointed a responsible girl who was checking attendance of girls in the school. Every day she was recording [the absences]. Then by the end of the week we were counting how many days in a week she was missing class and then we would visit her house and try to find out what were the reasons she was not coming to school. We had house-to-house visits, like people from the committee, the classmates, the girls from the same class and we were paying a visit, talking to them and trying to find out what were the reasons [for their absences]. (P44)

To support GEP activities, small grants were provided in the first year of the project both for communities ($1000 USD) and for the school clubs ($600 USD). According to a Save the Children staff, “UNICEF removed this component in the second year” (P165). To receive a small grant the CEC and the school club had to submit a proposal for funding to Save the Children detailing the organization’s proposed activities and the associated costs. Communities were also required to make contributions in cash or kind (sometimes 50%, sometimes 80%) to cover the cost associated with their activities. According to the Save the Children staff member,
“when the communities learned that they were not getting funding for these projects from the GEP [in the second year], they came up with the resources themselves” (P165).

According to Save the Children (2008), C-EMIS was first developed and implemented within a Save the Children project in a village in Nepal in 2000 resulting in a significant increase in enrolment. Impressed with the results, the Ministry of Education expanded the project. By 2003, 40 village communities in Nepal were using the C-EMIS. A year later C-EMIS was introduced in Tajikistan (and other Central Asian countries) through the PEAKS project, as discussed in the school profile of Rumi School 4 presented in Chapter 5.

**Coordination mechanism with the Ministry of Education**

The aim of the coordination mechanism was to jointly plan and make decisions as well as share experiences and what was learnt. This included Save the Children training Ministry of Education staff regarding a variety of GEP activities, such as C-EMIS. Since the working relationship between the Ministry of Education and the implementing NGOs was not a focus of this study, this component is not discussed in detail.

**The genesis of the Girls’ Education Project (GEP)**

According to the Save the Children staff, attention to girls’ education in Tajikistan became a priority in response to the 2000 United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women, with a target being to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015 (P165). As noted in Chapter 2, the first study related to girls’ education in Tajikistan was conducted in the early 2000s by the Ministry of Education, with support from UNICEF (2003 UNICEF report). According to UNICEF staff, the first set of activities aimed at improving girls’ educational opportunities and experiences began in the fall of 2004 in Isfara, an ancient city in the most northern province of Sughd, as a result of the concern and support of the female former Deputy Speaker of
Parliament who was from Isfara. These UNICEF-funded activities were implemented by a local NGO in 13 schools located in “religious, conservative” communities in Isfara.

The Girls Education Project was an expansion of the activities that had been implemented in Isfara. Since NGOs are a relatively new type of organization in Tajikistan, the majority of local NGOs are considered to be “weak” (P20a). For this reason, UNICEF put out a bid for an international NGO to be the lead implementer of the GEP. Save the Children won the bid. A UNICEF staff member commented that “Save the Children has a very good experience and ability to work on the community level and frankly speaking we can hardly find other NGOs working with the community” (P20b). Thus, recognizing the need to challenge the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling in certain districts, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with UNICEF, Save the Children and some local NGO partners, implemented the GEP in select schools.

**Project funders and implementers**

UNICEF was the primary funder of the GEP. The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established by the United Nations on December 11, 1946 to provide food, clothing, and healthcare to children in Europe and China (UNICEF, 2012b). UNICEF’s mandate was expanded in 1950 to include long-term support to women and children in developing countries. In 1953 UNICEF became a permanent part of the UN system and its name was changed to the United Nations Children’s Fund, with the acronym remaining the same.

Currently working in 191 countries, UNICEF’s mission is “to work with others to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, disease and discrimination place in a child’s path” (UNICEF, 2012b). UNICEF’s main focus is to promote and advocate for children’s rights, with an emphasis on girls’ education, including achieving the Millennium Development Goals.
Basic education and gender equality is one of UNICEF’s five focus areas (the others areas are child survival and development, children and HIV/AIDS, child protection, and policy advocacy and partnerships). Government donations account for two-thirds of UNICEF’s funding while the rest is from private groups and individuals.

Save the Children was the lead implementer of the GEP and provided some funding to the GEP. The Save the Children Fund was established in Britain in 1919 to assist starving children in post-war Austria and Eastern Europe (Save the Children, 2012a). In the years that followed, separate national Save the Children organizations were created in many developed countries with the mandate to assist children living in dire circumstances and to advocate for child rights. In 1977, the national organizations merged to form the Save the Children Alliance. The Alliance currently consists of 29 member organizations and works in over 120 countries (Save the Children, 2012b).

Save the Children receives funding from public donations as well as from bilateral and multilateral development agencies, such as USAID and UNICEF. According to the Save the Children Alliance website, Save the Children “is a US$1.4 billion global organization” (Save the Children, 2012b) with the largest percentage of its expenditure (21%) going to its work in the South and Central Asia region (Save the Children, 2012c).

Save the Children began working in Tajikistan in 1992 and currently works on child protection, food security, and education projects (Save the Children, 2012d). While Save the Children US and UK at one time functioned separately in Tajikistan, the two organizations recently merged in an effort to increase effectiveness and coordination of their efforts and now work together out of one office to implement various projects and programmes, such as the GEP.

Amongst the various projects Save the Children implemented prior to the GEP was a large education project, funded by the European Commission. According to a Save the Children
Staff member, this project aimed to increase the educational experiences and opportunities for girls and disabled children by implementing the same community-based activities later implemented in the GEP, such as community mobilization and establishing child-led organizations at school. This project also included teacher training activities not implemented in the GEP (P165). As well as being the lead implementer of GEP, Save the Children also provided some funding to the GEP (P165). According to the NGO staff member in Khalton, Save the Children provided 20% of the funding for GEP (P52).

The local NGO partner chosen by the Ministry of Education to implement the GEP in Rumi and two other districts was established in 2001. I do not name the local NGOs in this study in an attempt to maintain their anonymity. All five staff members are women who had previously worked for Save the Children. These women were encouraged by Save the Children to establish this NGO. This NGO works mainly on projects within the education sector at the school level. Besides the GEP, they have also worked on projects with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Soros Foundation. At the time of data collection in the fall of 2009, UNICEF was providing funds directly to this NGO to continue some school activities initially implemented during the GEP.

This NGO served as the local implementing partner for the GEP in the first year of the project (2006/07), working with 26 schools in three districts. The three districts were Rumi and Vakhsh (in Khatlon region) and Rudaki (in Direct Rule District), just outside the capital city, Dushanbe. According to the NGO staff, in the second year of the GEP Save the Children alone implemented the GEP in Rumi as its other projects had ended and it need to do so to keep its local office open and staff employed.

The local NGO partner that implemented the GEP in Rasht is led by a woman who grew up in Rasht and later lived in Dushanbe. According to the Director, USAID is their main partner as the NGO has worked on several long-term USAID-funded projects. This NGO facilitated the
establishment of 13 civil society organizations in Rasht. As for its work on the GEP, this NGO implemented GEP activities in eight schools in Rasht for both years of the project (2006/07 and 2007/08).

Where the GEP was implemented

As mentioned earlier, the districts in which the GEP was implemented were selected by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. Save the Children conducted baseline surveys related to girls’ education to identify which rural schools within the selected districts had significant challenges in girls’ attendance and retention. Evidence from the surveys was used by Save the Children to select schools for inclusion in the GEP. Table 41 indicates the administrative areas and districts in which the project was implemented as well as the number of GEP schools in each district.

Table 41: Number of GEP schools by administrative area and district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Area</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of GEP Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>B. Gafurov</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isfara</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>Rumi</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vakhsh</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Rule Districts</td>
<td>Rudaki</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rasht</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This study was conducted in the districts of Rumi and Rasht.

Findings related to the Girl’s Education Project

In the following section, I discuss findings from data collected at three GEP schools regarding the GEP and aspects of the project that were perceived by participants to have improved girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities. I first discuss finding regarding how GEP activities have affected the community’s involvement in their local school, including parental involvement. I then present findings related to the school and individual level under the following headings: increased enrolment of female students in grades 10 and 11; benefits from including female students in house-to-house visits; sewing classes enhance schooling for female
students; school clubs and their effects on female student participation in school; and the “best”
GEP activity: Camp. At the end of each section, I compare the findings from GEP schools with
findings from non-GEP schools.

Findings related to community and family

Participants at each school, particularly the School Directors, spoke of the benefits to
improved school-community relations that they attributed to various aspects of the GEP. The
Director at Rumi School 1 felt that, thorough GEP activities, community members
increased their sense of responsibility regarding the school rather than believing that the state
was the sole entity responsible for their school. He described how

before they were of the idea that the school is the government property so the
government should take care of it…but when the project came, when they started
supporting, when they were allocating some funds trying to improve, it helped
also to conduct the public awareness campaign among the community and to
explain to them “you see, the outsiders are coming and doing for us and we are
the inhabitants of this place. How come we are sitting here and not doing
anything?” So here was should also contribute and have our own share. In this
way it could change a bit the way of their thinking and I can bring an example.
The year before, even the migrants who are in Russia they invested $200 dollars
in this school and we did all this window [repair] exercise in this school…Before
[the GEP] nobody contributed to this school. (P31)

Besides an increase in community involvement in the maintenance of school facilities,
GEP activities resulted in parents becoming more involved in the daily life of the school, even
one year after the project ended. This is evident in the following statement made by the
Director:

With this project we conducted a public awareness campaign among this
community…And [the parents] were not even having the basic understanding
that this is my child and that will be for the benefit of my child. This helped us to
involve parents more in our day to day school activities. And now you can see
that every day one to two parents for sure they will come to school. They will
have a talk with the teachers. They will check what is going on. (P31)

The Director at Rumi School 3 also spoke in a similar manner about the improvement
she has seen in school-community relations since the GEP. She noted that, although the Parent
Teacher Association was in existence before the project, parental and community involvement in the life of the school greatly increased as a result of the CEC activities. While the community at Rumi School 3 benefited by having a new school built, the Director spoke of how the seminars, conducted as part of the GEP, helped increase community members’ involvement with the school. She also stressed the importance of including religious leaders as CEC members in activities to improve girls’ schooling. She described how we have a Parent Teacher Association which is registered. Before the project, the parents were not involved in the school at all. We had a lot of trainings in the frame of the project, and especially when we constructed the new school [under the frame of a German project], the vision of the parents has been changed about school….Best of all, the greatest thing that I did, that I could involve also the religious old man from this area to be involved and to help us. (P87)

As well as improving educational opportunities for girls, the School Director at Rumi School 3 also noted benefits of the GEP regarding improved community relations, across ethnicities and sexes. Through the CEC activities, community members of Tajik and Uzbek ethnicity came together, who more than a decade earlier had been in conflict. (As noted in Chapter 5, during the civil war many Tajiks in Rumi fled for refuge elsewhere while other Tajiks and Uzbeks stayed in their homes.) CEC activities also provided a forum for men and women to work together to identify and address issues limiting or restricting girls’ schooling. She described how during the [GEP] training or seminars, when we invited people from this community, Uzbeks, Tajiks, everybody was coming here and we were offering a lunch. All of them they would sit together, they would have their lunch. They would talk to each other. It helped them to create a good relationship between them. Now we have so many trainings and workshops and we gathered together, we talked and now we are used to each other and when we didn’t see each other for 2, 3 days, we were already missing each other and now women, men, everybody is free in talking, in conversation, we are having a good relation now. It helped us a lot. (P87)

A teacher at Rasht School 1, who had previously been responsible for the school club, spoke of improved relations between parents and the school as a result of including more people
in the house-to-house visits as part of the GEP. When speaking of impact of GEP activities, she noted how

the connection between the school and the parents became stronger. For example, before [the project] the class coordinator was going to the houses and talking to [parents of girls who were absent from school], but with the project, not only the class coordinator, but also we used to send some four people, a group of people. As a group we were going and visiting these houses and having a lot of talks with the children, with the families, with the parents, convincing them to send children back to school. (P115)

Convincing parents to send their daughter(s) to school often required several visits as noted by the Director of Rasht School 1 when he noted how “we paid visits several times to the house to bring girls to school but it took a long time to get the girls back to school to be a regular student in the school” (P116).

This Director also spoke of the importance of involving female NGO staff and teachers in the house-to-house visits to overcome challenges regarding norms and practices as to who should be talking to whom. He described how

the woman is an important person in the family, and when the project came, women from the project, they went, they talked to the families, the women members of the families. It was good that they could discuss, they could raise the problems, discuss about the problems. If, as a man, I would go, I would never have such a talk and try to find out the problems of the family. For example, I have a Deputy. She is a teacher of elementary grades, whenever we have such house visits, we involve her also. We take her with us. For example, I talk to them. I will discuss things, but she also will have a separate meeting with the female members of that family to discuss things separately, because maybe with me they might not be open and talk very freely with me, but with the girls, the women of that family, [the Deputy] will have her own discussion and talk. (P116)

When comparing community and parental involvement at GEP and non-GEP, it appears that community and parental involvement is limited to the PTA which consists primarily, if not solely, of men and has a mandate that predominantly focuses on the up-keep of the school infrastructure. Several school blocks at non-GEP schools were in need of repair and refurbishment as the conditions in the school were very poor and in some cases unsafe. Two of
the three GEP schools in this study had school blocks refurbished as they had previously been unusable. (Rumi School 3, a GEP school, had brand new facilities for their secondary school.)

Within GEP school communities, CEC members advocate for girls’ school through community meeting with some members participating in house-to-house visits to encourage parents to allow their daughter(s) to stay in school and/or attend regularly. In contrast, house-to-house visits at non-GEP schools are conducted solely by the teacher responsible for a particular class. Given the extent of student absences in the upper secondary grades that I observed during data collection, I doubt that many teachers are able to follow the policy tracing absent students as intended. Having others participate in the house-to-house visits definitely helps teachers in several ways as many teachers in this study spoke of the difficulties of teaching when a significant proportion of the class attend school irregularly.

**Findings related to school and self**

In the following section, I present findings regarding the benefits of the GEP that are related to the categories of school and self together as they are interconnected. I categorize the findings as follows: increased enrolment of female students in grades 10 and 11; benefits from using the GEP model of house-to-house visits; sewing classes enhance schooling for female students; school clubs and their effects on female student participation in school; and the “best” GEP activity: Camp.

**Increased enrolment of female students in grades 10 and 11**

Without access to baseline data in the form of enrolment statistics for all the schools in the study in the year prior to the start of the GEP project, it is not possible to understand the possible effects of the project on female enrolment as would be the case if this study were an impact evaluation. That said, quantitative and qualitative findings provide evidence that there has been an increase in female enrolment in grades 10 and 11 in the three GEP schools included...
in this study. (For quantitative evidence, see the analysis of enrolment statistics and the progression of female students in grades 9 to 11 for Rumi School 1 and 3 in Chapter 5 and Rasht School 1 in Chapter 6.)

Qualitative evidence of such an increase was provided by adult and student participants in all three GEP schools in this study. I will first discuss findings from Rumi district before turning to findings from Rasht. In Rumi district, the Director of Rumi School 1 reported that 30 female students had returned to school during the duration of the project. The Directors of other two GEP schools could not recall the total number of females who returned to school during the two years the project was implemented. However, participants from the GEP schools spoke of increased female enrolment in grades 10 and 11. The parent of a Grade 11 female student at a Rumi School 1 noted, “two years ago we were not having any single girl in grade 11. Now you see we have girls in this grade” (P44). When summarizing the impact of GEP activities in Rumi School 3, the Deputy Director spoke of the importance of the improved relationships between the school staff and the parents which has resulted in increased participation of girls in school. She described how

two ethnic groups are studying [in this school]. For example, the Uzbeks are always coming to school. They don’t miss the school. But the Tajiks from Rasht, it’s very difficult to attract them to come to school. That’s why this project on gender issues, [the NGO staff] came to the school. They conducted different activities. They established the parent teacher committee. They conducted some meetings, seminars and parents also were involved. It was easier now to get girls back to school after these activities. With the help of this project, the girls were brought back to school. Before the project, it was very difficult to get girls back to school. For example, in grade 11, we only had one or two girls studying regularly. After the project came in, we got connected to parents, and the situation has been changed for the better and now girls are coming to school. (P97)

The Head of the District Education Department in Khatlon (where Rumi is located) also noted an increase in female students’ enrolment at GEP schools. He stated that “in these 8 schools
where the project was implemented, the number of girls is now increasing. It was 10, now it goes to 12, 14, 15” (P58).

In Rasht, participants at the GEP school made similar remarks about increased female enrolment as a result of the project. For example, the Director of Rasht School 1 noted that before the project we had [girls in grade 10 and 11], but only a few, maybe 5, 6. There was one year when the school did not have girls in the upper grades, but the rest of the years, sometimes we had four, sometimes five, sometimes six, sometimes ten, but now, in the school, this year we have 29 girls in the upper grade. In grade 10, [there are] 29, and in grade 11, [there are] eight. (P116)

Even though the project ended in the previous year (2008), there appears to be less resistance from parents to send their daughter(s) to grade 10 than there had been before the GEP was implemented.

The former Director of Rasht School 1 also spoke of the overall impact of the project on girls’ enrolment and attendance after describing the various activities that took place at school and in the community. He noted that there were house-to-house visits, talking to the parents of the girls. Here [the NGO staff] have conducted a meeting with the teachers of the school, and also in the teahouses, in the social places, where people meet they conducted some meetings with the community people. Due to these kinds of activities, the girls were attracted to school. Also, we had some girls who were not regularly attending the school. Sometimes they were coming and sometimes they were not coming, but after these activities, they became regular students in the school…[Because of the] influence of the community, the NGO and the teachers, the parents, they worked with the girls, and by the end the girls’ mentality of thinking has been changed and they became active in the school. (P116)

This former Director appears to stress the importance of the girls’ “interest” in school as a primary factor affecting their school participation.

When considered along with the quantitative findings, these statements appear to indicate that there has been an increase in female enrolment in grades 10 and 11 at GEP schools.
They also show the significance and importance of even a small increase in female student enrolment in grade 10 and 11.

Having discussed participants’ perspectives on increased female enrolment as a result of the GEP, I will now compare findings from GEP and non-GEP schools regarding the progression of female students from grades 9 to 10 and 11. Tables 42 and 43, below, show the number of female students in the Tajik and Uzbek stream of instruction, respectively, who progressed from grade 10 to 11 by GEP and non-GEP schools. These students were in grade 9 in 2007/08 which was the second year that GEP activities were implemented at three of the six schools in this study.

**Table 42: Comparing progression of female students in the Tajik stream at GEP and non-GEP schools (cohort of students who were in grade 9 in 2007/08)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEP/Non-GEP</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 10</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEP</td>
<td>Rumi School 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumi School 3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rasht School 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-GEP</td>
<td>Rumi School 2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumi School 4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rasht School 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These two students were Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity who transferred into the Tajik stream to prepare for possibly continuing their education at the tertiary level.

As noted in Table 42, findings from GEP schools are as follows: 60% of the female students in grade 10 in the Tajik stream in Rumi School 1 and 50% of the female students in grade 10 in the Tajik stream in Rumi School 3 progressed to grade 11. However, 9 of the 10 female students at Rasht School 1 who were in grade 10 continued on to grade 11. A significant number of female students at Rumi School 1 and 2 did not complete their upper secondary schooling whereas almost all the female students at Rasht School 1 did.

At the non-GEP schools roughly 90% of female students in grade 10 in the Tajik stream at Rumi School 4 and 67% of female students at Rasht School 2 progressed to grade 11. However most of the female students at Rumi School 2 did not continue on to grade 11. Rumi School 4 appears to be exceptional amongst the non-GEP schools in terms of girls’ secondary
school completion. (This school had a Director and lead teacher who appeared to be working very hard to assist their female secondary school students to stay in school. These progression statistics support this finding.)

Table 43: Comparing progression of female students in the Uzbek stream at GEP and non-GEP schools (cohort of students who were in grade 9 in 2007/08)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEP/Non-GEP</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 10</th>
<th>Number of students in grade 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEP</td>
<td>Rumi School 1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumi School 3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-GEP</td>
<td>Rumi School 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistics presented in Table 43 regarding female students’ progression from grade 10 to 11 in the Uzbek stream appears to confirm the notion that female students of Uzbek ethnicity face fewer barriers to secondary school completion that their Tajik peers. In all cases, at GEP and non-GEP schools, all but one female student in the Uzbek stream moved on from grade 10 to 11.

Thus, qualitative findings from GEP schools appear to indicate that there was an increase in female student enrolment in grades 10 and 11 when the project was being implemented. Quantitative evidence supports the findings that girls of Uzbek ethnicity if allowed to go to grade 10 will also likely be allowed to go on to grade 11, regardless of whether they were at a GEP or non-GEP school. In contrast, it appear that just because a female student within the Tajik stream was allowed to continue to grade 10 she may not be allowed to continue into grade 11, even if she were attending a school that had implemented the GEP when she was in grade 8 and 9.

**Benefits from using the GEP model of house-to-house visits**

As noted earlier, although the practice of house-to-house visits existed prior to the GEP, the number of people involved in the visits was expanded during the project to include other teachers, administrators, CEC members, female students and, periodically, NGO staff. During data collection, no female students at GEP schools spoke about having been kept from coming
to school by their parents or other family members and/or having returned as a result of house-to-house visits. Therefore it was very difficult to get a sense of how effective the house-to-house visits were during the GEP from the students’ perspective. However, there were three occasions when a School Director pointed out that a particular student was “brought back to school” during the project. One such occasion happened during an interview with a Grade 11 Uzbek student at Rumi School 3. During her interview the student attributed her strong desire to stay in school, along with her good academic performance, as the reasons why she was able to convince her parents to allow her to finish school even though they had been against her completing secondary school. She noted how

when I finished grade 8, my father didn’t want me to continue my study. He said that I should not go to school anymore but I insisted because I wanted to study so I kept coming to school. Then he told me, “okay, if you want, just go to school.” (P94)

At this point in the interview, the Director came into the room to collect a book and noted how “we brought her back by force. For three months she was absent from school.” The student went on to explain

I had an interest to continue my study. I was very much happy to be back to school….My mother and my father were against my going to school. They wanted me to work and not to continue my studies. Now it has changed. They are telling me “go to school, study” and I will see if my brother will agree, if I can convince my brother, I can continue to higher education. (P94)

When asked what changed, she replied “I started coming to school. My knowledge was good. They saw that I was studying well and now they are happy and they agree with my study” (P94).

While female students were very reluctant to speak about being brought back to school as the result of house-to-house visits during the GEP, many students spoke very positively of their experiences of being involved in house-to-house visits. Not only did several students express a proud sense of accomplishment at helping a classmate return to school, but many also spoke of how an increase in the number of girls in their class benefited them personally. For
example, a female student in grade 10 at Rumi School 1 described how having more girls in school helped her and her female classmates when she stated:

we brought back those girls to school and that helped us as well. If they didn’t come to school, it would be difficult for us to come to school and to study among the boys. If they didn’t come we would not study also….We are more [in school]. It’s better because we can come together, we can study together and get advice from each other…outside the school when people said that there are very few [girls] at school and you go to school, this make me sad….When there are a lot of girls in a class I feel myself more open, I can easily do my blackboard exercises, answer the questions but when the majority is boys I am not that much free and comfortable. (P32)

When speaking of how she felt about being part of some house-to-house visits that resulted in female classmates returning to school, a Tajik Grade 10 student at Rumi School 1 described how it improved her classroom experiences. She described how:

previously we were just two in the class, me and my neighbour, two girls in the class among all the boys and we were not feeling comfortable sitting in the class, just two of us, and when we brought those girls back, the number of girls increased. For us it was good, we felt much more comfortable….In total we had 36 students, out of this 14 girls were registered. Only two of us were coming. One girl she was coming once in a while and the rest were boys…Sometimes at home we used to say that we don’t want to go to school because there are just two of us but at home they were all the time scolding me that you’re supposed to go, don’t pay attention to them. They’re by their own, you are by your own. You should study. You just have to go. (P40)

Similarly, a grade 11 Tajik student at Rumi School 3 stressed the importance of each student’s presence at school. She noted how:

when we are losing even one classmate, for us it’s bad. Because 11 years we started in one school, we wanted all of us to finish the school. We don’t want that any of our classmates to be kept away from the school. That’s why we try to pay a lot of visits, several visits, in order to get them back. By this exercise we tried to bring a lot of girls back to school. Now we are 10 or 8 girls in the class. (P95)

Several female students in this study spoke very positively of their experiences when participating in the house-to-house visits even if some visits did not result in the female student returning to school. For example, a female student in Grade 11 at Rumi School 1 commented that, “from this exercise, house-to-house visits, I learned a lot, how to go, how to ask, [and] how
to talk to these girls” (P43). A Grade 10 student from Rumi School 3 said, “I liked the house-to-house visit most of all because we talked to girls. We understood what is going on, what are the reasons she is not coming to school, what is going on in the family” (P90).

The Director of the Rasht School 1 described the benefits of including the female students in the house-to-house visits, especially within the context of the norms and practices of the community. He described how

when the project started, they opened the groups of active girls and they worked with the girls’ issues to attract the girls to school, to go on these house-to-house visits. For example, the girls from grade 10 would pay a visit to their classmates’ houses and have a talk to the girls with their parents, with their families, to collect information. It was very useful for our school because we had a lot of talks with the girls. After the civil war, the thing was that even if the girls would get married, their husbands were in Russia for a long time. They girls did not have an education. They were not able to work anywhere. Their husband is in Russia. The situation was very bad. But it was very good, because here, the women, the girls they talked with the girls. They have a mutual understanding, rather than if I, as a man, will go and talk to them. There are some things that girls can only share with a girl. It was a good activity. (P116)

Despite the project having ended before this study was conducted, several female students at all three schools talked about participating in recent house-to-house visits, indicating that the practice of including female students in the visits is continuing. For example, a Grade 11 female student in Rumi School 3 described how

just now, I’m in grade 11, we paid a visit to one of my classmate’s house. Her father didn’t want the girl to be in school for grade 11. Then the teachers asked us to pay a visit and to check, and we called on the girl, and we talked to her and she told us that my father is saying, “if other girls go to school, then I will let you go, but alone you will not go to school.” Then we told her, “let’s go, because we are also going to school, you can join us.” And the father said “ok, if the girls are coming to school.” Then the Director during Eid she paid a visit to the same house and talked to the father. And after Eid, after two days of it, the girl joined the school. When we started grade 11, most of the girls were dropping out because their parents say that they are grown up and they don’t allow them to come to school. Our classmates, some of them were brought back to school. This is because many teachers, many people from school paid a visit to their houses, talked to them and brought them back to school. (P95)
Thus, the enhanced form of house-to-house implemented at GEP schools gave female students an opportunity to be actively involved in supporting their female peers to stay in school. Several of the female students at GEP schools spoke of how much they enjoyed being part of the visits, how proud they felt when they were able to help a female classmate return to school (especially since most of these students have been together since grade 1), and how having more female classmates improved their schooling experiences. These house-to-house visits appear to allow female students to further develop a critical sense of their reality as well as the opportunity to make a difference in a classmate’s life, thus potentially having a positive effect on their sense of agency. As already noted, house-to-house visits to absent students’ homes also take place at non-GEP schools. However, female students are not involved in these visits.

**Sewing classes enhance schooling for female students**

The GEP activity of providing sewing machines enabling sewing classes to take place was often mentioned by teachers and students as an important activity as it enticed female students in non-compulsory grades to return to school and it improved female students’ attendance. Many parents of female students as well as the female students themselves greatly value the practical skills taught in sewing classes offered at the school since sewing is a socially acceptable way for girls and women to earn money. Without sewing classes at school, girls and young women who want to learn to sew must pay for lessons in the village if they do not have a female family member who can teach them.

Teachers at Rumi School 1 and 3 spoke explicitly of the importance of the provision of sewing machines through the GEP. The teacher and school club leader at Rumi School 1 spoke of how parents were more willing to send their daughter to school if she could learn sewing skills. She noted that
one of the things that helped [parents] a lot is to receive these sewing machines and to open the sewing class. Because usually after grade nine people used to get involved in some vocational training. They used to take their daughters to some tailors so that she will teach her stitching and sewing. But now it was comfortable and convenient for them because their daughters in school will get their education and will get some skills. So it helped them a lot. (P22)

Similarly, a teacher in Rumi School 3 who teaches students from grade 5 to 11 noted how girls’ interest in coming to school increased once the school obtained the sewing machines. She stated

the project has given the sewing machine, and I would like to tell that the sewing machine helped us a lot to attract and to bring girls back, especially for grade 10 and 11. Girls were very much interested to come to school because of having such kind of activities like sewing, and during all my working experience, I know that we had problems with the girls starting from grade 9. And in grade 10 and 11, we had a lot of problems. We were not having girls in schools. It was difficult. ...[now] we don’t have much attendance problems with the girls. Before, it was the case, but after the project, the attendance rate of the girls has been improved. Bringing sewing machine, opening the baking class, this helped to attract girls, to keep them in school. (P88)

While the schools now had sewing machines, at the time of this study, there were no sewing teachers at two of the three GEP schools so no sewing classes were taking place. The baking class was a summer camp activity, and although the schools who requested baking classes now had ovens, no baking classes were happening when I was collecting data at the schools.

Additional activities that were offered at schools implementing the Girls’ Education Project served to provide an incentive for some female students to return to school. For example, a female Grade 11 student at Rumi School 1 noted that she would have left school earlier if not for the GEP club at her school. She described how

there was a time when I was in grade 9 I wanted to leave the school. I wanted to drop out because I was very much interested to become a tailor. I was taking some sewing classes out of the school, going to someone and she was teaching me so I got an idea, I will just stop going to school and I will [learn to sew]. Then my father said “what happened to you? You were very much interested in school and now you want to leave”. When they opened this club, it made me want to come back to school. (P43)
This student came back to school when the project was being implemented and stayed on in school even after the project ended.

Thus having sewing machines and classes at GEP schools appear to have increased both the willingness of parents to send their daughter(s) to upper secondary school (because she will learn valuable, socially acceptable skills that she can use to earn money) as well as increase the motivation of some female students to want to stay in school. However, despite GEP schools having sewing machines, sewing classes were not occurring at all the schools due to a lack of sewing teachers (perhaps caused by a lack of funds to cover their salary). Of the three non-GEP schools, one school, Rumi School 4, had received sewing machines as part of the PEAKS project (funded by UNICEF and implemented by Save the Children) but also did not have sewing classes taking place due to a lack of a sewing teacher.

**School clubs and their effects on female student participation in school**

It was evident from student interviews that the school clubs for girls and boys that had been established during the project were active at the three GEP schools in this study but it was not possible to accurately determine to what degree they were functioning as intended. Since this study was conducted at the beginning of the school year, many students were new members of the club and as such could not speak about the club activities. However, one group of students in the school club in Rasht performed two short plays they had created the previous year on the issue of why some girls are not allowed to continue in school, an activity which demonstrated how the club seemed to function as intended.

As for previous years’ activities, several female students spoke of their involvement in the school club. The following response given by a student in Grade 11 in Rumi School 1 reflects what many other students said about their participation in the school club. She noted how “we learn much from the club. We learn many new things, like we take some drawing
class, and we do some debates. It was interesting and this way we improve ourselves” (P32). A
grade 10 Tajik student at the same school described how “the best I liked was, in front of all
students, to read poems, to talk about hygiene and sanitation because later on these students
would take this information home to help their mothers” (P38).

Female students who had participated in the school club for several years mentioned
attending seminars held at the school on topics such as hygiene but they could not recall specific
details of what they had learned. In contrast, female students spoke with much greater detail and
excitement when describing activities such as visiting other schools, participating in
competitions and attending camp than when talking of the seminars. For example, when
speaking of the school club activities, a grade 11 Uzbek student from Rumi School 1 noted that
“the best activity was when we went to other schools and got introduced with others and that
way increased the number of our friends” (P33). Students seemed to enjoy and benefit from
GEP activities that allowed them to develop their skills interactively and to benefit greatly from
activities that exposed them to life outside their familiar surroundings. Students really enjoyed
visiting other schools for competitions such as debating.

A grade 10 Tajik student spoke of how some parents were uncertain about the school
club and its activities in the first year of the GEP and didn’t want their children to participate.
However, many parents became supportive, especially in the second year of the project, once
they knew what the school club members were doing. She noted how

most of them they were not supporting the idea of the club because they didn’t
like their children to perform in front of everybody, to show off in front of
people and to show their activeness. They didn’t like this, for a girl
especially…After one year, then things changed. Most parents changed their idea
about the club and more number of students were coming by their own decision
and choice. (P38)

Two challenges regarding the functioning of the school clubs after the GEP had ended
were mentioned by a Save the Children staff member. First, while the teacher who leads the club
is supposed to receive some additional salary from the school, the staff member noted that “teachers are overworked, underpaid and don’t want to take on another responsibility and there is no money” for that additional salary (P52). Second, during the implementation of the GEP, NGO staff visited the schools regularly to monitor and support the school club activities. After the GEP ended, monitoring and support of the school clubs is one of the many responsibilities of the District Education Departments staff who are not able to provide the same level of attention as did the NGO staff during the project.

As noted earlier, all schools in Tajikistan were supposed to have a school club. However, during data collection it was clear that no extracurricular activities were taking place at non-GEP schools. While it was difficult to precisely determine the extent to which activities were occurring at the GEP schools after the project ended, students told me about activities they participated in while the project was being implemented. Several students at GEP schools recalled how the various activities increased their interest in and motivation to stay to school. Of all the activities they mentioned, student participants spoke most vividly and passionately about experiential activities, such as public speaking, preforming plays, and visiting other schools.

*The “best” GEP activity: Camp*

Of all the activities that took place at the school, the “camp” activity was most commonly mentioned by female students who participated as well as teachers and NGO staff as the “best activity” of the Girls’ Education Project. Experiential learning activities such as the camp, the visits to other schools as well as the house-to-house visits had the greatest impact on the female students who participated in these activities.

For example, a grade 10 Tajik student spoke about how her camp experiences when she was in grade 7 have affected her. She first described how she participated in the camp with girls from other districts such as Rudaki (just outside the capital) and Rasht. She then went on to say
I have become more open-minded, my eyes opened. For example, before I was hesitating in my talking in conversation because they were dividing us into groups with girls from different places. There were a lot of talk, a lot of speeches and we had one teacher for seven days, not a teacher from the school, an outsider. For seven days he came and he was talking about the hygiene and sanitation with us. He explained a lot. It helped me to improve my talking and communication skills. (P40)

A female student in Grade 10 at Rumi School 3 described how much she was “changed” by her camp experiences. She stated that

there was a camp going on this summer in this school and I participated in this camp. We had some activities that were taking place in the district, in other villages. We go there. We see those places. It will change the vision, the thinking of a person. For example, when I saw their study, their behavior, in the district, in the city, they are two steps further than the village people so when I am seeing that it is changing my thinking, my vision. When I am seeing them, I want to be like them but in my family they don’t want me to continue [to study]. (P90)

It appears from this quote that the students’ motivation and interest to stay in school was greatly increased through her camp experience. This student also participated in house-to-house visits as part of the GEP. She summarized her experiences participating in GEP activities as follows:

From these exercises [the camp and house-to-house visit] I am changed. For example, I can talk to people now when I am going to other districts or villages. I can interact with the girls. I have become more active, participating in the conferences and interacting with the girls. They are asking [questions] and I can answer their questions. They say it is good that they let you to participate but we don’t have an opportunity to participate in some activities like you….If the project wasn’t here I wouldn’t be the same as I am now. (P90)

Several adult participants in this study also spoke about the importance and significance of the camp activities for the female students who participated. When a teacher at Rumi School 3, who was also a camp leader, was describing camp activities, she also noted how the girls developed important interpersonal skills. She stated that

some talks were going on, the subject was about the period time for the girls, about behavioral issues, and about the “teenage” time. The talks were around this subject, and also about their rights. There were some group exercises. They would make some group exercise and present to each other, and also there was some topics about hygiene…we saw changes in girls…For example, the girls learned how to have conversations with the teacher. They also learned how to talk to each other. And also, during this group exercise, one of the group
members, she was supposed to make a presentation, also they learned the skill of how to present. (P98).

This teacher went on to note that in the village these female students “don’t feel much free to talk to others…Most of the time they spend with their own family. They don’t interact much with others” (P98).

An NGO staff member in Rumi described how some female camp participants reacted to the end of the camp session. She noted how “when the camp ended, especially the girls from Gharmi families, they were almost crying and saying that the camp is now finished and again we will be closed up in our houses” (P52).

A teacher of grades 5 to 11 in a Rumi GEP school described the benefits of the project in regards to the development of the female students who participated in the experiential activities. When speaking of “the impact of the project”, she noted how the girls visited several schools. They visited the district. Before [the project] they were not going anywhere. They were just closed up here and their thinking was different. But once they started seeing other places, other girls, other schools, their vision, their thinking has been changed. I think this is how it works and also, before our school was not participating in any activities and competition in the district. But now, whatever is happening in the district, the students at our school, they go, they participate. It made them change their vision and they become more open-minded and active. (P88)

While most adult and female participants who had participated in GEP activities described the experiential activities such as camp and house-to-house visits as the “best activity”, there were some other responses.

In Rasht, several teachers as well as school administrators believed talking to the community members was the “best activity” of the project. These comments suggest a greater need for public engagement since the barriers to girls’ secondary schooling appear to be greater in Rasht than Rumi. For example, the former Director of Rasht School 1 noted that the best activity was when the teachers in the public places, we used to give a speech, and all the time to keep repeating that it is already time to overcome this problem with girls’ education…We were telling also, that if the girl gets
educated and finishes school, in her life, even if she will come into some difficult period, she won’t be lost. She will find a way to overcome the problems and difficulties during her life. We used to give also examples, for example, the daughter of someone…she studied and now she is working. She’s earning money and independently, she is having her own money. (P116)

This former Director went on to explain how allowing a girl to stay in school may have a significant benefit to her family in the future if she was to be divorced.

And also, we were trying to explain, for example, a girl will get married. She will have two or three children, suddenly she is divorced. It will be very difficult for a woman to be in such a situation. And according to the Tajik saying, she will be lost. She will be left without anything. No house, nothing. She doesn’t have an education. She doesn’t have any skills. No way to earn any money. Two or three children, no husband, she’s lost. She will go back to her parents’ house. It will be again on the shoulders of the parents. And if she has some education, she will not rely on parents. She will not be a headache for the parents. She can just earn money, and she can have her own life. (P116)

Thus, camp was another form of extracurricular activity offered during the GEP that was experiential in nature. (Such an activity was not offered at non-GEP schools.) Time and time again both adult and student participants at the three GEP schools believed the experiential activities of camp and house-to-house visits to be the “best” of all the GEP activities. Camp activities, in particular, were understood by many participants to have had the greatest effect on changing a female students’ view of herself and her need to attain as much education as she can.

As mentioned in the section on house-to-house visits, experiential activities appear to have the potential to positively affect female students’ sense of themselves in the world (even though they may have little opportunity to make decisions about their schooling and other aspects of their lives).

Summary and reflections on findings related to the GEP

In this chapter I presented findings to answer the following research question: How did the Girls’ Education Project (GEP) attempt to overcome factors hindering or limiting rural girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived
to be most effective? When answering this question I also compared findings from GEP and non-GEP schools.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the status quo regarding schooling in all six rural communities in this study is that the majority of girls leave school after grade 9. The Ministry of Education, with funding from UNICEF, chose to implement the GEP from 2006 to 2008 in a set of rural schools to challenge the status quo through a variety of community and school-based activities to reduce and/or eliminate barriers to girls’ non-compulsory secondary school. Save the Children worked with local NGO partners to implement the project.

The GEP consisted of four components: 1) School club activities (some which allowed both female and male students to participate and other activities, such as camps, sewing classes, and house-to-house visits, that were restricted to female student participants); 2) Community Education Committee activities (involving school administrators and teachers as well as male and female community members); 3) information dissemination in the form of policy and best practices guidelines; and 4) activities with the Ministry of Education in the form of coordination mechanisms.

Findings from this study related to community/society and family show how GEP activities sought to bring together community members, school staff, and students to identify and address factors serving as barriers to girls’ non-compulsory secondary schooling through the Community Education Committee. In the section regarding findings related to school and self from GEP schools, I discuss evidence of increased enrolment of female students in grades 10 and 11, the benefits of using the GEP model of house-to-house visits, how sewing classes appeared to have enhanced female students’ schooling, and the effects of school club activities on girls’ participation in school.

Of all the school activities that were implemented during the GEP, experiential activities that enabled female student participants to learn by doing were consistently mentioned by
female students, teachers, and NGO staff as the “best activity”. Many female students also mentioned how much they enjoyed and benefited from other experiential activities such as debates, competitions, and visiting other schools. These activities enabled female students to see other ways of being, make friends, have fun, and develop their leadership skills and interpersonal skills by interacting with others.

While it appears that gains were made in terms of improving girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities at each of the GEP schools in this study, I find the short length of the project (two years) to be highly problematic given that the project aimed to challenge dominant norms and practices regarding girls’ secondary schooling. The length and nature of any development project is largely determined by funding availability. The GEP were intended to improve girls’ secondary schooling experiences and opportunities in rural communities with deeply embedded discriminatory social-cultural norms and practices related to girls’ upper secondary schooling. I argue that the length of the project (two years) was far too short to have a lasting effect on these norms and practices. It is clear that challenging the status quo that exists in these communities (namely, that girls leave school at 15 because they are “grown-up”) requires persistent sustained efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education, school administrators, teachers, community members and parents. Two years is simply not long enough for activities such as those implemented in the GEP project to have any major and/or lasting effect.

However, if one judges the project on its outcome alone, there is evidence in this study that some reluctant parents did allow their daughter(s) to stay in school past grade 9. I believe that the GEP did “get the ball rolling” by increasing the number of girls in grades 10 and 11 as well as enhancing their schooling experiences through the various extracurricular activities. However, two years is a woefully short period of time to expect any real and lasting change to the status quo regarding girls’ schooling in these communities.
As for the nature of the project, I questioned why the project did not have a component aimed at improving the quality of education through some form of teacher development and/or support. When I discussed this issue with Save the Children staff I was told that they had hoped to include a teacher development component but not enough funding was available to do so. In addition to taking steps to increase the number of female students in school, there is also a need to improve female students’ experiences and achievements inside the classroom. Findings from this study show that some parents do not believe that there is much difference in the skills and knowledge of a grade 9 student compared to that of a grade 11 student (though this concern appears to only apply to female students). If teacher were provided with opportunities to become more effective and students’ academic achievement improved, more parents may perceive a complete secondary school education to be of value of and benefit to their daughter(s).

When considering the sustainability of project activities or aspects of project activities at the GEP schools, it appears that activities relating to the newly established CEC were far less likely to be sustained after the end of the project when compared to activities which enhanced already existing practices, such as having female students participate in the house-to-house visits. During data collection, only one of the CECs established at the three GEP schools appeared to be still functioning after the end of the project. The parents who were part of the functioning CEC appeared to be closely connected to the school and highly committed to build upon their achievements resulting from the implementation of the project. While it is not clear why the other two CECs did not appear to be functioning, I suspect that the end of the project likely also signal the end of the CEC. This is perhaps the case in Rasht School 1 where several teachers spoke of the problem of girls’ schooling as having been “solved”.

In contrast, the practice of including female students in upper grades in the house-to-house visits continues at the GEP schools. As mentioned earlier, house-to-house visits were an established practice before the project but were only conducted by the teacher and class
coordinator. Enhancing this established practice by including a peer-to-peer component (by having female students visit and speak to their female classmates who were absent from school) appears to have been quite effective in helping to bring girls back to school, requires no funding, and, as a result, continues to be carried out. Despite the project having ended before this research was conducted, several girls at all three schools talked about participating in during house-to-house visits more than one year after the project had ended. Besides resulting in an increase in the number of female students in grades 10 and 11, female students were provided with an opportunity to take an active role in helping their classmates. Several students who participated in house-to-house spoke of how they personally benefited from this experience.

Another important element of the project was the improvement in school infrastructure, especially given the very poor conditions of many schools in rural Tajikistan. Except for Rumi School 3 that had a newly built school, the other GEP schools were able to refurbish school blocks that were either unusable or in extremely poor condition. The refurbishment of school blocks was conducted through a collaborative process in which the community was responsible to provide the labour as well as to match money provided through the project. I believe it is important to mention the rehabilitation of school blocks as one of the beneficial activities of the project even though it was not discussed a lot by participants.

It is impossible to accurately assess the effects of interventions such as the GEP and it remains to be seen whether the gains made in GEP schools in the study in terms of increasing female enrolment and participation in school will be sustained. However, all participants at each GEP school spoke very positively about the activities that had taken place during project implementation. Many female students spoke with enthusiasm about participating in activities such as the school club and the camp that enhanced their schooling experiences. A few girls even described having their “vision” of life change by traveling to places outside their village and meeting and interacting with female students from other schools in other districts and
regions. Teachers and administrators spoke of how these activities helped to increase female student attendance as well as how GEP activities helped to involve the parents and community in addressing issues of educational exclusion of female students.

Teachers, community members and students at all three GEP schools mentioned various achievements of the project ranging from bringing girls back to school, improving relationships between and among parents, the community and the school as well as the personal development attributed by female students to their participation in school club activities (house-to-house visits, camps, debates, school competitions). While some of these activities were open only to girls, such as the camps, others involved both boys and girls, reflecting the understanding that challenges to girls’ schooling need to be address holistically and involve boys as well as girls.

When considering how to increase the likelihood of girls continuing in school in rural Tajikistan, it is important to provide activities that are deemed to be of value to the parents as well as being of interest to the female students. The provision of sewing classes seemed to address some parents’ concerns about what additional valuable skills their daughter might develop by being in school past the compulsory grade of 9. Being able to learn sewing skills was also of interest to female students.

One important outcome of having the GEP at a school is that members of the school community had to openly acknowledge problems related to girls’ schooling. This is a significant and important outcome since, according to several adult participants, many people in these communities are reluctant to openly acknowledge and discuss existing problems. (As mentioned earlier, some participants attributed this reluctance to acknowledge and discuss problems to be part of the Soviet legacy.) Thus, issues regarding girls’ leaving school after grade 9 and attending school irregularly were brought to the forefront in schools and communities that implemented the GEP. Even the name of the project itself boldly and clearly framed the focus of the project’s work. This clarity is very important in a cultural context where the tendency is to
hide problems. (However, those who support the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling would not interpret a lack of female students in grades 10 and 11 to be a problem.)

Most importantly, findings related to the GEP show that enabling even just a few girls to return to upper secondary school has a significant impact upon the likelihood of other girls being allowed to attend. Several students also described how having more girls in class improved their schooling experiences both inside and outside the classroom. When comparing responses of female students at GEP schools to those at non-GEP schools, it is clear that the additional activities students at GEP schools participated in greatly enhanced their schooling experiences. Although implementing GEP activities for two years likely did little to change the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling in these communities, it appears that the activities did significantly enhance the schooling experiences and opportunities of some of the female students who participated and were also part of this study.

I conclude this study with the following chapter in which I analysis and summarize the key findings related to factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling followed by those related to the Girls’ Education Project. In so doing, I draw out what can be learned from these findings in relation to theories of social reproduction and empowerment.
Chapter 10: Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

Introduction

Since Tajikistan’s independence in 1991 the number of rural girls leaving school after grade 9 has increased at an alarming rate, especially in certain regions. Very little research has been conducted to explain why this well-documented trend is occurring. Efforts to help girls in these regions stay in school longer have been undertaken by the Ministry of Education through an NGO intervention known as the Girls’ Education Project. This two-year UNICEF-funded project implemented community- and school-based activities to identify and address barriers to girls’ non-compulsory secondary school, thus seeking to improve their experiences and opportunities. While many girls’ education projects have been implemented by NGOs in various low-income countries in the last few decades, there is a dearth of research on the effects of such interventions, especially from the perspectives of the girls the interventions aim to help.

As stated in Chapter 1, I sought to help fill these two research gaps by answering the following research questions: 1) What factors serve as obstacles or enablers to girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities in rural Tajikistan? and 2) How did the Girls’ Education Project attempt to overcome factors hindering or limiting rural girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities and which aspects of the project were perceived to be most effective? To answer these questions I conducted a complementary mixed methods study with a case study of the Girls’ Education Project. This study was conducted at six rural schools (three GEP and three non-GEP schools) located in the two districts with the lowest levels of female participation in non-compulsory secondary school in Tajikistan one year after the project had ended.

I collected quantitative data (in the form of school statistics) to complement the qualitative data (in the form of semi-structured interviews) that dominate this study. I used concepts drawn from Bourdieu’s social reproduction and from empowerment theories to frame
this study and to interpret the findings. At each school I interviewed female students in grades 9, 10 and 11, school administrators, teachers, and community members. I also interviewed national and regional Ministry of Education officials as well as staff from UNICEF, Save the Children, and two local NGOs. I used a multi-level data analysis process to compare findings between schools within each district as well as across the two districts where this study was conducted.

In this chapter I analyse and summarize the study’s two sets of key research findings from which I draw my conclusions. One set relates to factors affecting girls’ schooling (serving as an enabler or obstacle, depending on the circumstances), which answers research question 1. The other set of key findings relates to the Girls’ Education Project and aspects that were perceived to have improved girls’ educational experiences and opportunities, thus answering research question 2. I then discuss the significance of the study, its limitations, and its implications for theory and practise related to improving girls’ educational experiences and opportunities in low-income countries. In the final section I discuss possible directions for future research.

Factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling in rural Tajikistan

Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction posits that an individual’s “habitus” or worldview of themselves (and how they should be and act) is influenced, shaped, and affected by their interactions within various social setting that he refers to as “social fields”. Bourdieu refers to an individual as an “agent” and their actions as “practice”. By interacting with various social fields, individuals are socialized into what Bourdieu (1972/1977) refers to as “the world of realized ought-to-be, in which things are what they are only because they are what they ought to be” (p.166). Bourdieu (1998/2001) also argues that divisions between the sexes, historically based on implicit assumptions of male superiority and female inferiority, is ever-present and is “normal, natural, to the point of being invisible” (p.8). In this analysis, I focus on “the world of
realized ought-to-be” in terms of factors that, depending on the circumstances, can serve to maintain and reproduce or challenge the status quo within these six rural school communities regarding girls’ secondary schooling.

Findings from this study show how female student participants’ worldview of themselves is influenced, shaped, and affected by their interactions within the fields of community/society, family, and school. Their worldview affects their actions as some female students conform to various elements of the status quo while other ignore, reject, resist, and/or challenge them.

The dominant norms and practices within the social field of the community/society shape, influence, and inform a shared understanding of appropriate (and inappropriate) attitudes and behaviours. From a young age, girls (and everyone else) in the rural communities in this study learn about the status quo regarding girls’ schooling through dominant norms and practices which reflect deeply embedded social constructions of power relations reflecting a gender hierarchy. Individuals who want to maintain and reproduce the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling seek conformity in all others. However, others do not adhere to the status quo in thought and/or in action. This discussion now leads me to Bourdieu’s key concepts of cultural and social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) posits that there are several forms of capital in addition to economic capital. Cultural and social capital are abstract or “symbolic” forms of capital that are of value, are accumulated, and, in some cases, converted into a type of gain. Individuals accumulate cultural capital unconsciously, Bourdieu (1986) argues, when interacting within different social fields. According to Bourdieu (1986), the social field of family plays the most significant role in transmitting cultural capital to the individual with cultural capital being embodied within the family. Bourdieu (1986) also argues that educational attainment is an institutional form of cultural capital. Higher levels of educational attainment, as cultural capital, become more
valuable as fewer individuals acquire it. For Bourdieu (1977/1990), “the school system contributes to reproducing the structure of the distribution of cultural capital and, through it, the social structure” (p. vii-viii). For Bourdieu, social capital is a type of capital one gains through one’s relationships within various social networks (i.e. being a member of a group).

Cultural and social capital can be interpreted in this study in the following ways. Adult participants appear to classify families into one of two groups. The smaller of the two groups consists of a parent or parents who allow their daughter(s) to complete non-compulsory secondary schooling. Members of this group include parents of Uzbek ethnicity as well as “educated” and/or “open-minded” parents of Tajik ethnicity. These parents understand secondary school completion to be of value and benefit for their daughter and support her as she defies the status quo regarding schooling. Some of these parents consider the value and benefit of their daughters’ secondary school completion in terms of potential future economic gains (i.e. earned income) while others consider the gains to be more abstract (i.e. as a type of insurance to help her manage her life if she faces difficulties such as divorce).

The other, much larger, group consists of parents who do not allow their daughter(s) to continue in school past grade 9, thus reproducing the status quo regarding schooling. This group includes parents from very poor families and those described by participants as “narrow-minded” or “religious”. Parents from very poor families simply cannot afford the costs associated with sending their daughter to school. Others in this group perceive their daughters’ secondary school completion to be of little or no value and/or benefit and therefore do not permit her to continue past grade 9.

Using Bourdieu’s concept of social capital, I argue that these two groups of parents represent two social networks from which the members accumulate social capital by adhering and/or conforming to the norms and practices understood to be appropriate (and inappropriate) by that group. Findings from this study show that factors related to economic class, ethnicity,
religious affiliations, region of family origin, and/or the educational backgrounds of parents affect the make-up of the two groups, substantiating Bourdieu’s classification of factors that differentiate social networks. These factors play out in different ways for each female student in this study, depending on the circumstances. (See Figure 16 in Chapter 8 which illustrates characteristics of parents most and least likely to allow their daughter(s) to complete secondary school.)

Findings from this study also support Bourdieu’s argument that the family, as a social field, plays the greatest role in shaping an individual’s habitus, including one’s understandings of the dominant gender norms and practices. In this study, as elsewhere, parents (and in some cases, other influential family members) are the key decision-makers regarding their daughters’ education. These decisions are based on the parents’ economic circumstances, parental and familial attitudes towards girls’ non-compulsory secondary schooling, and parental and familial aspirations for female family members. In this way, the decision-maker in the family has the power to determine whether or not the female family member is permitted to interact within the social field of the school (at the non-compulsory level). In many cases in this study, it appears that the key decision maker is male (usually the father and in some cases the older brother(s)).

The decision to allow or prevent a daughter or sister from continuing in school past grade 9 influences and shapes the daughters’ or sisters’ habitus. The following statement made by a grade 11 student at Rumi School 4 provides a vivid example of how this influence is borne out in the data. She stated that, “those [brothers] who don’t want their sisters to go to school do not believe in their sisters” (P181).

The extent to which a female student has any degree of control or influence over her schooling past grade 9 varies depends on the key decision-maker(s) in her family. Findings from this study indicate that some students’ high level of interest and motivation to stay in school can influence key decision-maker(s) to allow them to continue in school past grade 9. Other female
students needed their teachers (and in some cases classmates) to advocate on their behalf through house-to-house visits. Still others described having no control or influence over schooling decisions. For example, several grade 9 students were certain that their key decision-maker(s) would not allow them to continue on in school regardless of their strong desire, interest, and motivation to do so.

By allowing a female family member to attend non-compulsory secondary schooling, the key decision maker is allowing the female family member to interact with individuals who are outside the family (although a girl may have siblings and/or relatives who are students and/or teachers at the school). These interactions occur on the way to and from school as well as while in school. When allowing a daughter or sister to go to school, the key decision-maker(s) in the family have less (or even no) control over whom the daughter or sister interacts with and how she interacts with them (and no control over how the individual interacts with the daughter or sister).

The key decision-maker(s) also has no control over how the female family members’ worldview of herself is influenced, shaped, and affected by these interactions with the social field of school. By limiting her schooling to grade 9, parents and family members are ensuring that she will not experience these interactions, precisely when at her stage of development, as a teenager, her social network of friends and acquaintances become increasingly more influential and important to her.

While the parents or other influential family members have little or no control over the female family member while at school (and on her way to and from school), findings from this study show how gossip is used as a powerful means of social control and behaviour monitoring of female students (and others) when outside their home. Student participants in this study described in detail how female students, particularly those in their mid to late teens, are often the subject of gossip, utilized to maintain and reproduce the status quo. These participants described
how people gossip about why girls go to school, how they dress (especially if the student wears the black and white school uniform), and how they behave.

The gossip is even more critical when the subject is a girl pursuing higher education. It seems that community members punish girls (and, by extension, their families) for not conforming to the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling by making these girls the subject of gossip. The threat of being the subject of gossip is powerful enough to ensure many, if not most, of the girls in the community/society (and their families) adhere to the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling by leaving school after grade 9 and not wearing the black and white school uniform. These girls are rewarded for their conformity as they know they will not become the subject of gossip regarding their schooling.

Other factors in this study serving to maintain and/or reproduce the status quo are evident in the structure of the school system. Since the government determines what level of schooling is compulsory, the choice to make schooling compulsory until grade 9 seemingly supports the notion that schooling beyond grade 9 is not necessary for boys and girls. It is then up to the key decision-maker(s) in the family to decide whether or not the family member continues in school. (Most boys in the six rural communities in this study, except those from the poorest families, complete secondary school whereas most girls in these communities do not.)

It appears that the structure of the school system of Uzbekistan in terms of the level of compulsory schooling may well contribute significantly to reproducing the status quo regarding secondary schooling for girls of Uzbek ethnicity in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Uzbekistan has the highest level of compulsory schooling of all the Central Asian former Soviet Republics. Schooling has been compulsory until grade 11 since 1999 and until grade 12 since 2002. I argue that this may be one reason why girls of Uzbek ethnicity who are citizens of Tajikistan face far fewer barriers to secondary school completion than their peers of Tajik ethnicity.
While policies of the Republic of Tajikistan regarding compulsory levels of schooling appear to contribute to the reproduction of the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling, some appear to be designed to challenge the status quo. For example, national education policies, such as presidential orders and the Presidential Quota mentioned by participants in this study, seem to aim to challenge the status quo regarding girls’ secondary schooling. Several participants spoke of the presidential order declaring that girls should complete secondary school and that the government intended to extend the level of compulsory schooling in the near future. Participants also spoke of the Presidential Quota, a scholarship system intended to increase opportunities (and options) for some rural girls to attend higher education institutions by covering some of the costs of higher education. Both these national level government education policies, as well as the governments’ agreement to implement the GEP, can be interpreted as indicators that the government is trying to use its power over its citizens to increase and improve girls’ participation at the secondary and tertiary levels, and thus challenge the status quo that exists in certain rural communities.

These policies may affect girls’ secondary schooling in various ways. They may influence a girl’s habitus by possibly increasing her (real and/or perceived) options and opportunities regarding the level of education she may want and be able to attain, depending on the circumstances. Through these policies, the government is also providing school authorities and leaders, such as some of the Directors, Deputy Directors and teachers in this study, with official declarations and policies they may use to influence the “perceptions, appreciations and actions” (which are elements of one’s habitus) of individuals who oppose girls’ non-compulsory secondary and higher education.

While a girl’s access to and participation in secondary school is affected by the level of economic capital of her family has (or does not have), it is also affected by other forms of symbolic capital (cultural and social capital). Parental and familial perceptions regarding the
purpose, value, and benefit of secondary schooling commonly differs for sons and daughters, as the majority of parents perceive boys’ secondary schooling to be of value and benefit in contrast to girls’ secondary schooling which is not. Parental and familial notions of value and benefit of girls’ secondary school are primarily, if not solely, related to cultural capital (i.e. how knowledge and skills a girl acquires though schooling will be of value within the social market, namely who she will marry and what kind of life she will lead) rather than economic capital (i.e. how the knowledge and skills a girl acquires through schooling will be of value within the economic market in terms of future income). Since norms and practices regarding women working outside the home in the rural Rasht communities in this study are quite restricted, very few parents appear to consider upper secondary schooling for their daughter(s) as a means to access paid employment or higher education. It appears that only poor or widowed women work outside the home. Within the dominant social network, women who pursue higher education are criticized (and become the subject of gossip, which appears to be highly feared by most girls, women, and their families.)

According to Bourdieu, individuals from privileged backgrounds accumulate more cultural capital, especially through interactions with the social field of family, than individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The degree of cultural capital one has affects how one does in school and in life after school. Findings in this study show that girls in the non-compulsory secondary school grades (10 and 11) are described by adult participants as those with “intelligent” or “educated” parents. Findings also reveal that the few female students who defy the status quo by pursing higher education come from the families of teachers and school administrators. In both these cases, the students appear to have benefited from the cultural capital they received particularly through interactions within their families as their schooling was encouraged and understood to be of value not only to themselves but also to the family.
I use Bourdieu’s concept of social fields to summarize my findings related to factors affecting girls’ schooling by categorizing them into one of three social fields: community/society, the family, and the school. I also identify factors related to self as a fourth category. Each factor serves to enable or limit girls’ secondary schooling, depending on the circumstances.

The main factors affecting girls’ schooling categorized as those related to the community/society are as follows: a) The dominant belief that a girl is “grown-up” at 15 and should therefore no longer go to school, b) The presence and influence of gossip supporting and reinforcing the above mentioned belief and, c) How people’s actions and attitudes regarding girls’ schooling are affected by what the majority of people in the community do (e.g. I will do what my neighbours do). These three factors are interconnected.

In these school communities (as elsewhere), the dominant societal norms and practices, based on deeply embedded social constructions of power relations that reflects a gender hierarchy, result in a status quo regarding schooling that answers the following questions: Who should go to school?; For how long?; and for what purpose(s)? This study provides evidence of the dominance of the belief that a girl is “grown-up” at 15 and should therefore no longer go to school which greatly affects the status quo regarding girls’ schooling within the school communities. The dominance of this belief, in and of itself, serves as a factor hindering and/or limiting girls’ schooling.

Negative gossip related to girls’ schooling is used by individuals within the community/society for social control and behaviour monitoring to maintain and reproduce the status quo. This gossip serves as a means of monitoring and thus influencing who goes to school, what they wear, and the number of years of schooling they attain, based on norms and practices that make up the status quo. Girls who attend non-compulsory secondary schooling
and higher education often become the subject of gossip. (Gossip will be discussed further in the section regarding self that follows.)

Findings from this study reveal the extent to which peoples’ actions and attitudes regarding girls’ schooling are affected by what the majority of people in the community do (e.g. I will do what my neighbours do). If the majority of the families within the school community do not allow their female family members to complete secondary school, few other families do as well. However, as always, there are individuals who do not hold the same views as the majority of the community. As seen in this study, there are people in all six communities who reject the dominant belief and support girls’ secondary school competition. Besides some female students, some key-decision makers within the family (such as parents and older brother) reject and/or ignore the apparently ubiquitous gossip that aims to keep girls from completing grades 10 and 11 in these school communities. Findings from this study show that when some girls are allowed to attend grades 10 and 11, others are also allowed to do so.

While factors related to the community/society have a strong effect on norms and practices regarding girls’ schooling, factors related to the family have the greatest effect on whether or not a girl can complete secondary school. There appear to be four main factors affecting girls’ schooling related to family. The four factors are as follows: a) the family’s ethnicity and region of origin, b) the key decision-maker(s) perceptions of the value and benefit of grade 10 and/or 11 for the female family member as well as aspirations for her, c) how key decision-maker(s) within the family are affected by and react to negative gossip related to girls’ schooling, and d) the family’s economic circumstances. As with factors related to community/society, factors related to family are also interconnected. Each of these four factors can serve as enablers or obstacles to girls’ secondary school completion depending on the circumstances. (For a summary of the characteristics of families most and least likely to allow their daughter(s) to complete secondary school, see Figure 16 in Chapter 8.)
Findings from this study reveal four factors affecting girls’ schooling categorized as those related to school: a) Government policies and presidential orders, b) the quality of education a student receives, c) efforts made (or not made) by Directors, Deputy Directors, and teachers to identify and address issues regarding girls’ secondary schooling, and d) the degree of support a female student receives from her classmates.

Government policies (such as those pertaining to compulsory education, school uniforms, and financial support of students) and presidential orders affect whether or not female students complete secondary schooling in rural Tajikistan. Government policy which limits compulsory education to grade 9 gives parents the right to determine whether or not their daughter(s) and/or son(s) complete secondary school. When this factor is combined with other factors mentioned earlier in this chapter, particularly the dominant belief that girls should stop school after grade 9, this factor serves to limit and hinder girls’ schooling. In contrast, findings from this study show how presidential orders stating that girls should complete secondary school enable some school staff and other key stakeholders such as NGO staff to advocate for female students more effectively. Government policies such as the Presidential Quota, although somewhat problematic, provide financial support for a few female students in these school communities to attend university, thus serving to enable their secondary school completion.

The quality of education a student receives affects how people perceive the value and benefit of the non-compulsory grades of 10 and 11. The quality of education at any school is affected by the number of teachers, their qualifications, the school leadership, the condition of the school facilities, amongst many other elements. Given familial concerns regarding girls’ personal safety as well as their reputation, the quality of education at a school has different repercussions for female and male upper secondary school students. For example, a school with few teachers means that students may be unsupervised for longer periods of time than a school
with many teachers. Parents of female students are less likely to find this situation acceptable than parents of male students, due to concern over their daughter’s reputation.

Findings from this study show a difference in the extent to which some school staff recognize and take efforts to address issues causing low female student participation. Some Directors, Deputy Directors and teachers at the schools in this study recognize barriers to girls’ schooling in their communities and take actions to enable their female students to attend and stay in school. In contrast, some described there having been problems with girls’ attendance and retention in the past but they considered these problems to be “solved” (although others at the school and in the District Education Department of the MoE recognized that problems with girls’ schooling still existed). Those who refuse to recognize issues that limit and/or restrict girls’ schooling are, in fact, compounding the problems.

Finally, a female student’s interactions with classmates affect her schooling experiences and opportunities. Some interactions enable and/or enhance girls’ secondary schooling while others serve as obstacles. The following are two examples of supportive interactions. Many student participants in grades 10 and 11 described how they rely on their female classmates to help them catch up if they missed classes. Adult participants noted that older female students were more likely to be allowed to walk to and from school if accompanied by other female students. In contrast, harassment of female students by male classmates was mentioned by some participants as the reason why some girls do not want to continue in school and why some families do not want to send their female members to grades 10 and 11.

Findings from this study that have been classified as factors affecting girls’ schooling related to self are as follows: a) Students’ interest in and motivation to go to school, b) Students’ perceptions of the value and benefit of schooling and their aspirations, and c) How students are affected by and react to negative gossip regarding girls’ schooling. As with other factors, these are interconnected.
Factors related to students’ interest in and motivation to go to school appears to be the most significant of these three factors. Female students in grades 10 and 11 all expressed their enjoyment of schooling and/or learning. Some also mentioned school as a place they could come together with their friends who they would not see otherwise. (Findings related to a typical day in the life of a grade 9, 10, or 11 female student show how time at school accounts for a significant portion of time a student spends outside her home.) Several students in grade 9 expressed a strong interest in and motivation to continue to grade 10 but they knew that their parents or other key-decision maker would not allow them to do so.

Female students’ interest in and motivation to go to school past grade 9 must be considered within the broader context of their daily lives. When considering participants’ descriptions of their daily life, presented in Chapter 7, alongside reasons given for wanting to stay in school it is evident that school is a very important social space for these girls and young women. It is a social space that differs significantly from other spaces in their life such as home or the cotton fields. When at school, female students have time to learn and socialize together alongside their male peers. Thus, while some aspects of the schooling these girls experience reproduce the status quo, other aspects of schooling can provide female students with a space for enhanced autonomy.

Students’ interest in and motivation to go to school was also linked to their perceptions of the value and benefit of schooling and their aspirations. Many students in grade 10 and 11 expressed a hope to continue on to further education. Several of these students also mentioned how their hope would not be fulfilled (Some student spoke of economic constraints while others spoke of social norms preventing any possibility of higher education.)

As mentioned earlier in the section on community/society, gossip about girls’ schooling appears to affect girls in the following ways. Many girls appear to greatly fear becoming the subject of gossip while others ignore it. Gossip appears to serve as a punishment for girls who
transgress dominant norms and practices regarding girls’ schooling in these communities. Girls who conform to the norms and practices by leaving school after grade 9 are, in a sense, rewarded because they will not be the subject of gossip.

What can we learn from these findings and analysis? Some of the findings in this study related to factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling reflect what has been well-documented and discussed in literature on girls’ education in low-income countries over the last three decades. Multiple factors affect the secondary schooling of the girls living in the rural communities included in this study in a complex and multifaceted manner. There are a wide variety of factors affecting girls’ schooling including but not limited to economic, social, cultural, geographical, religious, and political factors. These factors can serve to enable or limit girls’ secondary schooling, depending on the circumstances.

Parents play the greatest role in determining how long their daughters and sons will go to school and the extent to which their schooling is encouraged and supported. (In this way, parents have the greatest degree of power over these decisions.) Various costs are associated with schooling and parents make choices regarding their children’s schooling based on their ability and willingness to cover these costs. Direct costs include fees for school, books, and uniforms while indirect costs include time spent in school that could be spent otherwise, such as doing household chores or picking cotton. This study provides evidence that all boys except those from the poorest families attend non-compulsory secondary school (regardless of the quality of education they receive).

While poverty appears to be the single most important factor serving as a barrier to boys’ non-compulsory secondary schooling, several other additional factors come into play when parents make decisions regarding their daughters’ schooling. Dominant norms and practices regarding girls’ and women’s roles in society (reflecting the status quo regarding girls’ schooling) affect how parents’ perceive the value and benefit of different levels of education for
their daughter as well as their aspirations for her. Parents who are “educated” and/or “open-minded” are far more likely to educate their daughters than those who are not educated and/or are “narrow-minded”. In this study, “educated” parents were teachers and others who went to university.

While factors related to the family play the greatest role, those related to community/society are also significant as they largely serve to maintain and reproduce status quo. Gossip serves as a strong form of social control and behaviour monitoring. Girls who defy the status quo regarding schooling, especially at non-compulsory secondary and higher education levels, often become the subject of gossip. Many girls fear being the subject of gossip while a few are encouraged by influential family members to ignore the gossip and go to school anyway.

While some community/society factors reproduce the status quo, others can serve to change it. For example, social changes resulting from an increase in the number of divorces and the civil war have led to some parents to consider non-compulsory secondary school education (grades 10 and 11) as a type of insurance to help their daughter cope with any unforeseen difficulties she may face in the future. Rather than view secondary school completion solely as a path to post-secondary education, some parents value the skills and knowledge their daughter(s) will acquire by completing secondary school, thus broadening their understanding of secondary schooling as an arena of achievement.

In terms of factors related to self, a girl’s interest and motivation to stay in school past grade 9 only seems to really matter if her parents (or other key decision-makers) consider her non-compulsory schooling to be of some sort of value and/or benefit (which is interconnected to parental aspirations for their daughter). Several students in grade 9 and some in grade 10 had a strong desire to stay in school but knew that they would not be allowed to do so.
My findings regarding the factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling in rural Rumi and Rasht confirm those from the qualitative survey on girls’ education conducted almost a decade ago and discussed in Chapter 2. The similarities in findings are striking given geographic and time difference. Harris’ (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006) ethnographic work on gender relations in Tajikistan, especially her studies in Khatlon when many participants were from families originating from Gharm, Rasht, provide rich insights into power relations within the family, community, and state that substantiate many of my findings. Findings related to factors affecting girls’ secondary schooling at GEP and non-GEP schools provide a broad contextual understanding that serves as a foundation on which to better understand factors related to the GEP.

**Findings related to the Girls’ Education Project**

The GEP sought to reduce or eliminate barriers to girls’ schooling through activities designed to enable Ministry of Education officials, community members, school staff, and students to work together to identify which school-age children within each household in the school community were not enrolled in school and/or not attending regularly as well as the reasons why this is so. Based on this household information, the members of this group, guided by the national and regional NGO project implementers, participated in various activities to address barriers to girls’ schooling they identified. The GEP consisted of four components/aims: to establish and support school clubs, to establish and support Community Education Committees (CECs), to develop and disseminate policy and best practices guidelines, and to implement a coordination mechanism with the Ministry of Education.

As a government-sanctioned project, the GEP was challenging the status quo regarding girls’ non-compulsory secondary schooling in these school communities specifically selected because very few girls were allowed to continue in school past grade 9 and many who were
enrolled were not attending secondary school regularly. At the heart of this issue is the widely-held understanding that girls’ secondary schooling is not of importance or value to the girl (and by extension to her family). Non-compulsory secondary schooling (grades 10 and 11) is considered by the majority of the community, including many students, to be a valuable, beneficial, and necessary arena of achievement for boys but not for girls. (It appears that all boys in the communities in this study complete secondary school except those from the poorest families who leave school to work.) To increase girls’ chances of being allowed to stay in school longer, this widely-held perception needed to be challenged and/or changed. The GEP activities needed to be perceived by the community as increasing the value and benefit of the two years of non-compulsory schooling. While improving the community/society’s perception of the value and benefit of grade 10 and 11 for girls was very important, it was critical to change parental perceptions because parents make the schooling decisions regarding their children. GEP activities also needed to appeal to girls to increase their desire to stay in school and not conform to the status quo by leaving school after grade 9.

I argue that the most effective way to increase the real value and benefit of more schooling for girls in these communities would be through activities that enhance the teaching and learning process in classrooms. However, the GEP was not given the mandate or funding required to implement teacher development activities which could improve the quality of education students receive.

Activities were conducted within various social fields reflecting an understanding that because factors restricting and/or limiting girls’ schooling exist within the community/society, family, and school as well as within the individual, actions should also be taken within at each of these levels. These actions are intended to influence social constructions related to girls and their schooling which are the foundations for the power relations that exist within family and the wider community.
The project’s community-based activities, such as CEC activities, reflect an understanding of the various roles and degrees of power certain individuals within the social field of community/society have and their influence in regards to reproducing the status quo regarding girls’ non-compulsory schooling. Ensuring that local religious leaders, who are male and the most powerful and influential individuals within the community/society, became members of the project’s Community Education Committee served to leverage their authority by signalling their support and approval of girls’ defiance of the status quo by completing upper secondary school. With the inclusion of active local women as CEC members became a forum in which these women could take a leadership role alongside important male religious leaders. In this way it appears that the project designers and implementers sought to elevate the social status of women who are traditionally largely excluded from the school/community management process. For example, PTA members at non-GEP schools were almost, if not exclusively, male because the mandate of the association appears to be primarily concerned with maintaining the school infrastructure.

At the center of Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction as well as theories of empowerment is the individual or “agent”. While girls in these school communities, as elsewhere in the world, may be restricted in their actions by the power relations that exist particularly within the family, when in school they are away from the confines of familial norms and practices where they can develop their skills and abilities as well as to think about themselves, who they are, and how they are in the world in different ways, which is precisely why school is considered by many to be a suitable environment for “empowerment”.

Various GEP activities for female students could be interpreted to have affected their understanding of their reality in a critical way. Student participants spoke of importance of GEP activities such as debates, school visits, and camp which gave them an opportunity to visit places outside their village and meet female students from schools located in other districts.
Some student participants even mentioned having their “vision” of life changed by these experiences.

Including female students in the house-to-house visits provided an opportunity for these students to advocate for their female classmates who are kept away from school by their parents (or in some cases, older brothers). Student participants expressed a sense of pride and happiness that they were able to help their peers return to school. Given that I perceived a sense of solidarity when student participants spoke of how they and their female classmates had been in school together since grade 1, this achievement may have further fostered a sense of solidarity amongst the small group of female students who were able to attend grades 10 and 11 in the communities included in this study.

GEP activities involving female students appeared to have also increased some girls’ interest and motivation to stay in school past grade 9. GEP activities for female students, such as camps, school visits, debates, etc., provided girls with opportunities for personal development that could be considered enhancing various elements of empowerment noted in my conceptual framework. For example, female students at camp had opportunities to develop their leadership and speaking skills which could enhance their sense of agency and/or self-esteem.

Providing sewing machines and ensuring sewing classes took place was an activity that not only increased some girls’ interest to go to school but also increased some key-decision makers’ perceptions of the value of girls’ non-compulsory secondary schooling because sewing is a socially acceptable form of employment for girls and women. This factor was likely especially important in Rasht where few women work outside the home. Enabling female students to develop their sewing skills could be interpreted as increasing their “capacity to generate independent income”, noted by Stromquist (2002) to be an element of empowerment. Sewing is also a skill that is valued for homemakers. Although the schooling students receive may be thought to be of little value due to its poor quality, the addition of being able to learn
sewing skills appears to enhance people’s perceptions of its value. (As mentioned in the previous section, boys’ non-compulsory secondary schooling is perceived by the majority of the population to be of value and benefit regardless of the quality of the education students receive.) Thus, GEP activities involving female students enhanced their schooling experiences by providing extra-curricular activities not offered at non-GEP schools and enabled them to develop their skills, advocate for their peers, meet girls from other schools, expose them to life outside their village, and have fun.

When asked which of the GEP activities they felt was “best”, the vast majority of the adult and student participants mentioned the camp activities (day camps conducted at schools and overnight camps conducted at urban centers bringing together girls from different schools and regions.) Again this reflects the importance of the individual girls’ experiences as the ultimately most important avenue for “empowerment”.

As for the effectiveness of the implementation of GEP activities, leadership at the school level appears to have a significant effect on the extent to which Directors, Deputy Directors and teachers are willing and able to identify and address issues that cause girls to attend school irregularly and/or leave school after grade 9. Since problems are commonly not discussed publicly (which is part of the Soviet legacy), having the GEP implemented at a school significantly raised the profile of the issue within the school and community. As was seen at one non-GEP school, issues regarding girls’ schooling, though well-documented as on-going, were considered by the Director and some teachers to have been “solved”. The clearly named project spoke not only to the community but also to the girls that their schooling is important and that people were willing to advocate on their behalf to increase their chances to complete secondary school, to fight for their rights to continue in school if they want to.

When considering the effectiveness of the GEP, two perspectives can be used. If considering the project’s sustainability, it appears that when already existing structures and
practices (such as house-to-house visits or the PTA) were adapted as they were in during the GEP they were far more likely to be continued once the project ended. In contrast, structures and practices (such as the CEC) that were established through the GEP seemed to stop functioning once the project ended. It could be argued that this was partially due to the very short duration of the GEP (two years) which is simply not long enough for these structures and practices to be established and get up and running in order to judge whether they are truly effective and worthwhile. However, if one considers the effectiveness of the project in term of enhancing girls’ secondary school experiences and opportunities while the project was on-going, findings from this study provide evidence that this was so. The increase of just one or two girls in school can mean that other parents will send their daughters to school while enhanced activities in-school can increase students’ desire to stay in school.

This study helps to fills two gaps in the literature. It complements Harris’ (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006) ethnographic work of gender relations in Tajikistan by provides insights into the broad context of girls’ secondary schooling in some of the same rural areas where Harris conducted her studies. This study also complements the pioneering study conducted by UNICEF (D’Hellencourt, 2004) almost a decade ago and confirms the many shared barriers and factors that restrict or limit girls’ schooling regardless of where a girl might live. When comparing findings of the UNICEF study with findings from this study, it is clear that little is likely to change without specific actions being taken to address the problem. Given that the GEP existed because of UNICEF funding, it is also clear that UNICEF has played a significant role in bringing the issue of girls’ schooling in Tajikistan to light and seeking means to tackle the many challenges inherently involved in changing the status quo regarding girls’ schooling by using evidence from the 2003 study to inform the shape and mandate of the GEP.

Without UNICEF’s efforts, it is likely that the government would continue to report the widening gaps in schooling without any actions to address this very challenging problem despite
government national education policy statements recognizing the need to do so. Quantitative data alone does little to inform us about girls’ education, especially in contexts such as Tajikistan where the availability and reliability of statistics is highly problematic. With the severity of the underfunding of the education system in Tajikistan it is no surprise that the government would not allocate funds from its budget to support this issue over issues such as teacher shortages, teachers’ low pay and textbook shortages.

When considering this study in relation to literature on NGO projects implementation in Tajikistan, very few, if any studies, have been conducted. Within the field of education and development, there is a recognized need to learn from experience by documenting and disseminating “good practices” or “lessons learned” to the wider community by the project implementers. As a result, this study helps to fill this very large gap in the literature. Steiner-Khamsi and Silova (2008) offer valuable insights into NGO activities in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Mongolia, particularly in relation to what they call “education reform package” (although they focus on the work of the NGO known as the Soros Foundation Network). The often-cited publication *What works in girls’ education: Evidence and policies from the developing world*, Herz and Sperling (2004) suggest a package of policies and programs with an emphasis how an improvement in educational quality would likely cause reluctant parents to send their daughters to school. Both the “education reform package” discussed by Steiner-Khamsi and Silova (2008) and the “package of policies and programs” discussed by Herz and Sperling (2004) provides evidence of belief that there is some type of “cure” that can be applied to different contexts to reduce or eliminate discriminatory norms and practices that favour boys’ schooling over girls’, as noted in the quote by Connell et al. (1982) that opens this study.

While the components of the GEP provide structure to the implementation of the project, community members, school administrators, teachers, and students identify local barriers and decide on appropriate actions to address issues. I question whether an improvement in the
quality of education alone would provide enough incentive to convince many parents to allow
their daughters to complete secondary school in the school communities included in this study
but I do think it would influence some to do so. Extending compulsory schooling to the end of
the secondary cycle would significantly improve enrolment statistics and affect the status quo
regarding girls’ secondary schooling but, with the under-resourced and poor quality of the
current education system, the system would be stretched even further. Currently even though the
official status quo for girls’ schooling (as articulated in education policy regarding compulsory
schooling) is that they receive 9 years of schooling, many, although registered, are unable to
attend school regularly resulting in a type of unofficial status quo for girls’ schooling differing
greatly from the official version. (While the Uzbekistan compulsory education policy of having
all children complete secondary school appears to affect the attitudes of parents of Uzbek
ethnicity, completion of secondary school has been the standard since Uzbekistan became

While there are limitations to this study related to various issues of funding, timing,
access to participants and statistics, being an “outsider,” language, power, and cultural norms,
the greatest limitation is related to what can be known in a study such as this. While factors have
been identified based on participants’ response, it is not possible to know how the various
factors play out, the cause and effect, why some parents allow their daughters to go to school
regularly and complete secondary school while others do not. Even adult participants often
mentioned that they don’t know the “real reasons” why their neighbour limited their daughters’
schooling. Therefore it is very difficult to anticipate what would cause these parents to alter their
behaviour and allow their daughters to stay in school. Similarly it is very difficult if not
impossible to know how various project activities affected individuals’ attitudes and actions
regarding girls’ schooling.
However, there are things I can say. Most of the female students in grade 9 spoke of their desire to continue on into grade 10. Some of the students even mentioned their hope to continue on to higher education but they recognized that this was not possible. A grade 9 student started to cry as she talked about what she wanted for her life as she wanted to be a doctor but knew it could never be. A grade 11 student described her schooling as her “only happiness”. At Rumi School 4 all the female students knew, as did everyone else, that no girls have gone on to higher education therefore no girls will. In some families a girl’s older brother decides how long his sister will go to school. In some schools the school administration and some teachers were genuinely concerned about trying to support and encourage their female students to be allowed to stay in school. In other schools the school administration and some teachers deny the current existence of gender inequalities by stating that previous issues regarding girls’ schooling have been “solved”.

**Possible directions for future research**

While there are many avenues for future research, I will focus on two possible directions. The first direction I will discuss relates to development projects and/or interventions aimed at improving the educational experiences and opportunities of girls and women in low-income countries. The second direction relates more broadly to girls’ and women’s education in Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries.

As noted in Chapter 1, despite the existence of many development projects attempting to improve the educational experiences and opportunities of marginalized girls’ in poor countries, little research has been undertaken to determine what elements of these initiatives improve (or do not improve) girls’ experiences. While this study was conducted one year after the GEP had ended, a study conducted during the project could also contribute to the better understanding of issues relating to implementing interventions aimed at improving girls’ education. Impact
evaluations that compare base-line data prior to the interventions to post-intervention data could provide fruitful, valuable insights.

The paucity of literature and/or research regarding girls’ education in Tajikistan or other Central Asia countries creates a plethora of possibilities for future research. Given the limitations of this study detailed in Chapter 4, longitudinal studies and/or ethnographic studies conducted at schools were few girls complete secondary school could unmask further insights. There is a need to better understand the role that some older brothers play within the family regarding the life of their younger sisters, including her schooling.

Given time constraints (among other limitations), I was only able to interview girls who were registered and attending school. Learning more about girls who left school after grade 9 (or earlier) would also be a possible area of future research, as would investigating the experiences of the few female students mentioned in this study who went on to attain post-secondary education. Future research could explore the experiences of female students undertaking TVET studies as well as those who, having received the Presidential Quota scholarship, are undertaking university studies.

Epilogue

As I reflect back on my time in the six villages discussed in this study I vividly recall several experiences and conversations that have had a lasting impression on me. In Rasht School 1 a teacher sat in on all the interviews I conducted with female students. During the interviews, students would often glance over at the teacher either as they answered or after they answered a question. I did not ask probing follow-up questions in the same manner as when I conducted interviews with just me, the translator and the female student because I wanted to avoid putting one of the students in the position of saying something that might get them into trouble. I really
felt that we were being monitored and policed. Therefore I chose my words and actions carefully.

At the other end of the spectrum was the freedom I experienced when interviewing female students at Rumi School 4 where the Director and a female teacher appeared to genuinely and sincerely improve the very restricted educational situation for many girls within the school community. The teacher, whom the female students trusted, encouraged the students to “speak from their heart”. It was in one of these interviews when a Tajik grade 11 student said “my only happiness is to go to school. I want to go to school and I want to learn.” While she was allowed to finish secondary school, she knew that she would not be allowed to continue her education because in the last two decades no girl has gone on to continue their education except for an Uzbek girl whose father was a teacher at the school. She and many other students at Rumi School 4 lamented this reality.

Many of the students I spoke with at each school also expressed their strong desire to stay in school. However, many of the students in grade 9 knew that they would not be allowed to stay in school. A grade 9 student began to cry as she described how she wanted to be a doctor but she knew that she would not be allowed to stay in school past grade 9. Her sadness was heartbreaking.

I was also amazed at the striking similarities in the descriptions given by 109 female students at six different schools of a typical day in their life. Girls in Rumi described spending their days at home, in school, and in the cotton fields (only a couple girls said they did not work in the cotton fields) whereas girls in Rasht spent time at home and at school. Only 2 of the 109 mentioned “sometimes” visiting friends or a female cousin nearby. Schooling clearly provides these girls an opportunity they would not get otherwise to be outside the authority of their parents, other family members, and/or their employer. Without schooling, these girls would
definitely be far more socially isolated at precisely the time in their lives when, as teenagers, they are transitioning from childhood into adulthood.

Clearly, without some form of advocacy little would likely change in the lives of these girls and the next generation of girls. UNICEF, by funding the first study on girls’ education in 2003, began to make support to girls’ schooling a priority. One year later UNICEF-funded activities were implemented by a local NGO in 13 rural schools in the northern region of Sughd. These activities became components within the Girls’ Education Project which was implemented in 2006 in 50 rural schools situated in three regions. Three of these schools were included in this study. While all contemporary education projects implemented by NGOs contain elements related to addressing gender inequities and inequalities, it appears that the Girls’ Education Project is one of the few, if any, are specifically designed with the improvement of girls’ schooling experiences and opportunities as the central mandate.

As the quote that opens this study points out, what is most important when seeking to address injustices related to schooling, such as those highlighted in this study, is to consider “the potentials that a given situation has for the people in it, and the constraints on what they can do with it.” Despite the short duration of the GEP (two years), and the fact that I conducted the research a little more than one year after the project had ended, there is evidence that the project activities did enable girls to return to school who would otherwise not have had this opportunity and it enhanced their experiences while in school. From a statistical perspective the number of girls who returned to school was not numerically significant (for example, where they previously were only one or two girls in grades 10 or 11 maybe there were 8 or 10 during the GEP). However, from a humanistic perspective and considering the experiences of each girl to be of importance, these results are significant.

Most importantly, female students who participated in various GEP activities described many experiences that they otherwise would never have. Some who participated in house-to-
house visits described how they advocated for their fellow classmates to come back to school. Although they were not always successfully, many spoke with pride as they described how some girls they visited were back at school with them. Not only did they help their classmates return to school, these students also described how having a few more female students in class also improved their in-school experiences. Of all the GEP activities overnight camps noted by the majority of adult and student participants to be the “best” as they exposed students to life outside their village. While at the camp they met female students from other schools in other districts. Some participants even mentioned how these experiences changed their “vision” as they aspired to be more like other active girls they met. One can only imagine what these kinds of experiences might mean for teenage girls living in the social contexts of the villages described in this study.
References


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Appendix A

SUPER Research Fellow scope of work for Tajikistan

SUPER RESEARCH FELLOW SCOPE OF WORK TAJIKISTAN

TOPIC/TITLE: Assessing the effectiveness and sustainability of Save the Children’s work to increase girl’s attendance and retention at schools

LOCATION: Rumi and Jomi in Khatlon Region

DATES OF STAY: March 08- May 08

Project Background:
This research will assess the effectiveness and sustainability of approaches used in a Save the Children (SC) project that aimed to bring 1,200 girls who were irregularly or not attending school back into the classroom. The results of the research will inform the design of future save the Children in Central Asia projects.

During this project, Clubs were established to strengthen the girl’s capacity to claim their rights for quality education; to find out the educational needs and how to address them; to develop an action plan to combat discrimination and make the environment girls of school, home and community more child (girl) friendly and bring girls back to school. Community Education Committees were formed and trained to involve the girls and women in raising awareness about gender in education, problems and solutions and develop action plans to improve the attitude and support of parents, teachers and all others involved in the education and upbringing of girls in school, home and community. A coordination mechanism was established with the MoE to ensure maximum learning, experience sharing, joint planning and decision-making on the project. Finally, policy and best practice guidelines, with training tools, were developed to with the goal of ensuring participation and non-discrimination in regard to girls.

For the baseline and endline measures the project used various tools to collect data on girl’s enrolment and attendance and motivation, as well as comparative data on ALL children, and monitor changes over time by the community, parents, children, teachers and education authorities.

Primary research questions:
1. To what degree did Save the Children’s project successfully bring back targeted girls back to school by a) reducing their drop-out rate, and for those not dropping out, b) increase retention (attendance rates)?

2. What are some of the major factors contributing to a) girls who dropped-out again or had poor attendance rates and b) those girls that who attended school regularly?

3. What were the academic, as wells as personal and social, outcomes for those girls who regularly attended school? Clubs?

4. What were the institutional relationships (SC, school committees, MoE, etc.) that formed and were crucial to getting the girls to regularly attend school?
5. What were the institutional outcomes (e.g., cooperation, capacity-building) from any institutional relationships?

6. Which, in any, of the institutional outcomes are sustainable?

7. To what degree were the policy and best practices guidelines and tools successful toward broader policy development?

QUALIFICATIONS:
- Educational background in inclusive education and gender analysis.
- Strong research and education background, analytical skills, excellent report writing and communication skills.
- Preferred fluency in the Russian language, Tajik a plus, but not essential.
- Skills and experience with both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

DELIVERABLE(S):
- Initial research design and approach proposal.
- Final research design and approach, with tasks and timelines.
- Draft report of findings to be reviewed.
- A final, comprehensive report outlining the findings, outcome of the research and key recommendations.
- Summary presentation of the report (for presentation to the SC SMT, program advisors and managers)
Appendix B

Letter of authorization from Minister of Education

ВАЗИР
А.РАХМОНОВ

Ташкилоти байналмилалии
«Начоти кўдакон» дар
Чумхурии Тоҷикистон

Вазорати маорифи Чумхурии Тоҷикистон мактуби Шуморо мавриди барраси қарор дода, иттилоъ медиҳад, қи Вазорат чиҳати дар доиран Лоиҳани «Тахсилоти духтарон» барои гузаронидани таджикоти илмий доиҳани мазкур дар водин Рашт ва вилояти Хатлон фаъолият намудани ходими илмии Донишгоҳи шаҳри Торонто (Канада) - Кара Джаниган, зид нест.
## Appendix C
Comparing factors and issues affecting girls’ education by school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District and School</th>
<th>Factors and issues mentioned by Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers and community members that affect girls’ educational opportunities and experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Rumi School 1 (GEP) | - 50% of Tajik families are estimated originate from Rasht  
- High demand for female labour in cotton fields  
- Girls’ irregular attendance and drop out is reported to start in grade 7, 8 or 9  
- Many female students want to complete secondary school but parents, particularly those of Tajik ethnicity, believe they are “grown-up” by grade 9 and should no longer go to school  
- If female students from villages far from school walk with other girls then parents’ safety concerns are diminished  
- Female students of Uzbek ethnicity are far more likely to complete secondary school than female students of Tajik ethnicity  
- Whether or not a girl is allowed by her parents to finish secondary school depends on her parents “open-mindedness” and level of education  
- Director does not enforce attendance policy with female students as he fears they will stop coming to school (the policy is strictly followed for male students) |
| Rumi School 2 | - 30-35% of Tajik families are estimated to originate from Rasht  
- High demand for female labour in cotton fields  
- Denial by many staff of any current problems regarding girls’ schooling (the problems have been “solved”) despite school having been identified by DED as having serious girls’ education issues  
- Girls’ irregular attendance and drop out is reported by two PTA members and a teacher to start in grade 6, 7 or 8  
- Many parents, particularly those of Tajik ethnicity, believe girls are “grown-up” by grade 9 and should no longer go to school  
- Many Tajiks from Rasht are “religious people” and don’t want their daughters completing secondary school  
- Female students of Uzbek ethnicity are far more likely to complete secondary school than female students of Tajik ethnicity  
- Female and male students of Uzbek ethnicity change into Tajik stream in upper secondary grades to be better prepared for post-secondary education (which is only offered in Tajik language)  
- School uniform can be problematic for female students  
- Increased absenteeism of students, especially those from a poor family, in winter due to a lack of warm clothes |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District and School</th>
<th>Factors and issues mentioned by Directors, Deputy Directors, teachers and community members that affect girls’ educational opportunities and experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Rumi School 3 (GEP) | - High demand for female labour in cotton fields  
  - Girls’ irregular attendance and drop out is reported to start in grade 8 or 9  
  - Many parents, particularly those of Tajik ethnicity, believe girls are “grown-up” by grade 9 and should no longer go to school  
  - Female students of Uzbek ethnicity are far more likely to attend school regularly and complete secondary school than their female peers of Tajik ethnicity  
  - Poverty and religion are identified as main factors causing barriers to girls’ schooling  
  - Some absenteeism of students in winter due to a lack of warm boots and clothes (The Director says students are usually absent only for a day or two) |
| Rumi School 4 | - “Many” families originate from Rasht (according to the Director)  
  - High demand for female labour in cotton fields  
  - School uniform can be problematic for female students  
  - While a few female students of Uzbek ethnicity have gone on to post-secondary education, no female students of Tajik ethnicity have done so in the past two decades  
  - Increased absenteeism of female students in winter due to a lack of warm clothes (though the Director believes this is used as an excuse by some parents to keep girls home) |
| Rasht School 1 (GEP) | - September and October are when many marriages occur, greatly increasing some female students’ household responsibilities which can interfere with their schooling  
  - Many parents uphold traditions that require older girls to stay at home  
  - Few women within the community work outside the home  
  - Many girls want to complete school but their parents do not allow them to so  
  - Some parents, described as “very religious,” are fearful their daughters will wear less traditional clothes such as a traditional dress with short sleeves and no headscarf  
  - Some teachers and PTA members deny there are any problems regarding girls’ education  
  - Many parents don’t believe their daughters will benefit from grades 10 and 11  
  - Some female students wear traditional dresses made of more expensive material, causing poorer girls to want to wear the same type of dress  
  - Direct costs of schooling |
| Rasht School 2 | - Many parents believe girls are “grown-up” by grade 9 and should no longer go to school  
  - Parents fear their daughter(s) will be the subject of gossip regarding inappropriate behaviour if they attend grade 10 and 11  
  - Some female students wear traditional dresses made of more expensive material, causing poorer girls to want to wear the same type of dress  
  - Few women within the community work outside the home  
  - Many girls marry after completing grade 9  
  - Some parents no don’t see the benefit of their daughters completing grades 10 and 11 (marriage is of greater importance than secondary school completion)  
  - Many female students have an increase in household responsibilities as they get older (starting when they are in grade 5)  
  - Some female students want to complete grades 10 and 11 but their parents will not allow them to do so |
Appendix D

Informed consent letter for student participants

My name is Kara Janigan. I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University in Toronto in Canada. I am also a teacher who has taught primary and junior secondary school in Canada and Africa. I am very interested in the education of girls. I have a research fellowship from Save the Children US to study the experiences of girls and schooling in Tajikistan.

There are two parts to this study. For one part, I will be interviewing girls and their parents to learn about the experiences of schooling for girls. For the other part, I will be interviewing teachers, school administrators, community members, officials from the Ministry of Education and staff from educational organizations (Save the Children and UNICEF) to learn about efforts to improve the educational opportunities and experiences for girls in Tajikistan.

For my study, I would like to ask girls, like you, questions to find out about your life and your experiences in school. I would like to know your personal stories and education history. I would also like to know what has helped you in your studies as well as what has been difficult. Lastly, I am interested to hear about your personal thoughts and feelings about your education and your hopes for the future.

If you participate in this study, I will ask you some questions for approximately one hour, which will be done at a time and place of your convenience. A translator will be present during the interview to translate our conversations. The interviews will be tape-recorded and kept in my possession. After I return to Canada only myself and my supervisor will have access to the interviews. At any time during the interview you are free to request changes or ask me to remove any piece of information. You are also free to withdraw your consent and the information you provided me with would be removed from the study. Your name, or the name of anyone you may refer to during your interview, will not be used. I will use a code name for each participant and related people that only I will recognize. Your participation in this study will be of benefit to those interested in understanding the experiences of girls and schooling in Tajikistan. You may also benefit by gaining personal insights while reflecting on your experiences during the interview process.

You are free to contact me after I return to Canada at any time, to ask questions or to request a change or removal of the information you gave me. My phone number is 1(416)856-8440. My email address is kjanigan@oise.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Karen Mundy at kmundy@oise.utoronto.ca. You may contact the Office of Research Ethics if I have questions about your rights as a participant. The email address for the Office of Research Ethics is ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please have your parents or guardian sign the attached consent form and return it to me, at which time we can set-up an appropriate time to interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kara Janigan