

Dialogue instead of Physical Violence, Gender Equality instead of Forced Marriage

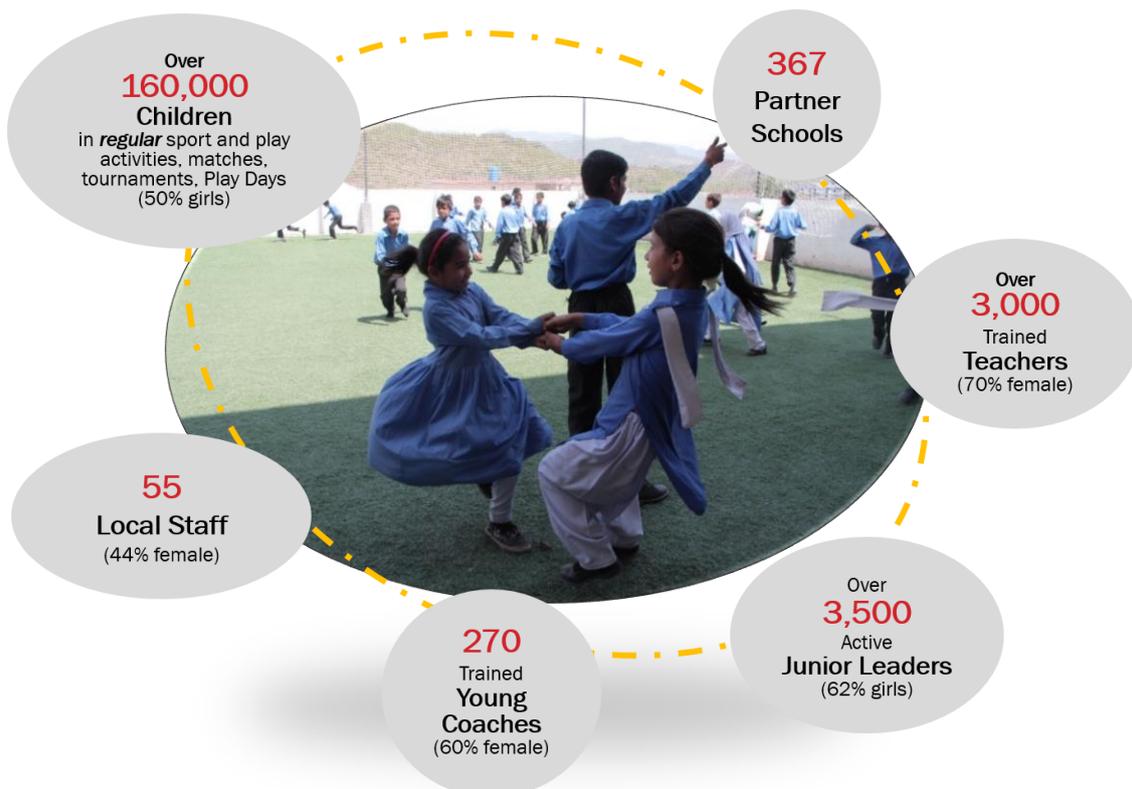
June 28, 2017

Recently Iqbal Jatui, Country Director of Right To Play in Pakistan, visited Right To Play Switzerland and we seized the opportunity, to give invited Swiss donors an exclusive insight into our work in Pakistan. The audience experienced a first-hand account of the challenges Pakistan is currently facing and learned that the empowerment of young generations – and especially of girls – is crucial for a positive development of Pakistan.



Political and social tensions, natural disasters, poverty – In Europe, Pakistan is often times linked to sorrowful and negative images. Iqbal Jatui, Country Director of Right To Play's programme in Pakistan for almost ten years, did not spare to make issues in his country a subject of discussion with the 30 invited guests. Illiteracy, discrimination of women, earthquakes, droughts and floods, chronic power shortages and one third of the population living on less than one dollar a day, sadly demonstrate how terrorism can take root in the South Asian nation.

The Pakistani Country Director, who has been focusing on education in his professional career, reported that 24 million children in Pakistan have never attended school, government expenditures on education and health are shockingly low, and that 55 per cent of the inhabitants can neither read nor write. Particularly girls and young women are still being treated unequally and suffer from barriers to exercising their rights. This results in limited faith in themselves and in their skills which creates huge restrictions on child development. «All these circumstances cause children and youth to become extremely receptive to violence and militancy», explained Iqbal. In order to counteract this state and create social change, Right To Play has been implementing sports and play programmes for children and youth in and outside school for almost ten years. «Creating future perspectives for young generation is of tremendous importance. Thereby, I am personally keen to especially promote gender equality», emphasized Iqbal several times.



With regular sports and play activities, which are executed by trained local coaches and teachers, Right To Play's projects in 19 districts of Pakistan focus on following areas: **Education and Promotion of Foundational Social Skills, Leadership Programmes for Youth, Gender Equality** as well as **Peaceful Communities and Social Cohesion**. The activities take place twice a week and reach more than 160,000 children.

The projects particularly focus on quality education and an improved and more attractive learning environment at schools: Teachers learn to transmit the curriculum in a way children are centred and can actively experience. Through games, children are more likely to absorb new information over the long term. At the same time, they can work together and have fun. «The relationship between teachers and students is positively changing and corporal punishment is disappearing. Like this, children start to love to go to school and are actively taking part in lessons», described Iqbal the improved school attendance and quality of education.

Moreover, Pakistan's programmes have already more than 3,500 active Junior Leaders. «Junior Leaders – more than half of whom are girls – are a crucial part for the sustainability of our projects which I am enormously proud of. We definitely want to support them with additional projects», explained the graduate social anthropologist. In part, Junior Leaders independently execute Right To Play's activities to their peers and consequently, act as role models. They especially empower girls in their self-confidence and in standing up for their rights. These are all important preconditions for a positive development of Pakistan.

Particularly one encounter very much touched Iqbal which he happily shared with the audience: «Benazir, a young woman in our programmes in Karachi, told me that – despite her great graduation results – she was always staring to the ground and feeling completely naked and intimidated when walking in public. Over time and through her commitment and experience as Junior Leader she slowly strengthened her self-esteem. She found new self-confidence, courage and optimism to exercise her rights and today she encourages other girls to do the same.»



From the beginning, there has been a strong cooperation between Right To Play Pakistan and Right To Play Switzerland and especially with Swiss donors. To a considerable extent the projects in Pakistan could only be realized thanks to the loyal and substantial Swiss support. Therefore, Iqbal emphasized many times: «Our appreciation towards Swiss supporters is incredibly high and it is a huge honour to thank you personally for all your great and important support over the years.»

Special thanks go to Lombard Odier & Co AG, host of the evening and long-time partner of Right To Play.