

## **Pakistan: Feb/Mar '10**

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Open Minds journalism students put their newly acquired skills into practice.

Students from three Pakistani girls' schools, who participated in IWPR's Open Minds programme, have begun producing their own school newspapers.

The students, who have undergone almost a year of IWPR media training, are putting the publications together under the guidance of IWPR-trained professional journalism trainers and peer educators.

Students at the government girls high school in Sherpao, in the Charsada region of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, were the first to set up a newspaper. Pupils in two other schools in Chitral, also in the north, and the southern city of Karachi followed in their wake.

The schools have each produced one issue so far, and are working on further ones.

Student Mehak Rehan, 18, from the Sherpao school, said she was given the freedom to write about whatever she wanted, but chose to focus on the problems facing her fellow students.

Ufra Kanwal, 14, from the Chitral government school, said working on the newsletter had been "an interesting, informative and rewarding experience. We have learnt how to articulate and express our views in an effective way".

Aitezaz Ahsan, 16, also from Chitral, said, "The first issue of school newsletter is a wonderful product - for students, by students."

Journalism trainer Ayeesha Taskeen said the students picked up newspaper production skills very quickly.

The trainees at all three schools covered local news stories, including the rising cost of living, the problem of under-qualified teachers and women's issues, as well as national politics.

They also reported on lighter subjects, such as sports, entertainment and poetry. Pakistan is a highly literary culture and poetry is very popular among young people. Interestingly, Ayeesha says, the showbiz pages students wrote tended to cover Indian film stars.

Peer educators - older students trained by IWPR to mentor the trainees - were vital in helping students to produce their newspapers. The project has so far trained 84 peer educators across its 42 featured schools.

The students from the three schools exchanged copies of their newspapers.

The newspapers were handwritten in both Urdu and English. Schools generally do not have access to printing facilities.

Although students have been placing articles in their local newspapers as part of the Open Minds project, IWPR has encouraged trainers and students to start school newspapers to put into practice all the skills that they've learnt.

The project will also help to develop the most talented student journalists by offering them internships in Pakistani media organisations.

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