

SANA SHAMSHER SATTI

AGE 21, RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN

Ever since I was very young, I dreamed of becoming a doctor and supporting my siblings so they could get a good education. But I faced many challenges. I was born near the town of Muree, an hour's drive northeast of Islamabad, Pakistan.

My father, who was a teacher, struggled to find the money to educate me, my brother and three sisters. We all wanted to do well and make our parents proud, but our education was poor. If my father had not been a teacher, I would most certainly have dropped out of school by fifth grade.

Schools in villages like mine simply don't have what they need, which helps explain why more than half the people living in Pakistan's rural areas are illiterate. Our schools have no career guidance programs or knowledge about computers. There are no debates, competitions or class trips where students learn about the larger world. I discovered too late that I had chosen the wrong subjects to get my medical degree. I was so disappointed that for a while I gave up my dreams.

Though I knew my job prospects were poor, I decided to continue my studies. After much hard work, I moved to Islamabad to attend the university, where I graduated in March 2006 with a B.A. in statistics

and economics. After a long search, I finally got a job interview. It did not go well, and I was turned down.

Even young people in Pakistan with a good education have a difficult time getting jobs. The foremost reason is the lack of educational relevance—including technical education. Our options simply do not satisfy the requirements of the current market. So a large number of youth are educated but not employed. Of course, the ongoing political instability and violence in Pakistan also creates doubt about our country's economic and social development—and job prospects.

Last year, my father told me about a new job training program. When I was accepted, I hoped I would learn how to better conduct interviews and enhance my communications skills. But I learned more. The program offered us training in customer service, selling and corporate ethics, as well as practical advice—like appropriate dress codes in the workplace. Before, I was not able to speak well in public. Thanks to the confidence-building exercises, all of that has changed. On the first day of classes, almost no one had any goals. By the end, everyone was talking excitedly about how they wanted to get a job or continue their studies. All of a sudden, everyone was motivated. It's like we realized this is not the end—there is much more to do.

The training I received in this program is the reason I am now employed in a customer relations job with U-fone, a mobile telephone company in



Above: Sana's job training program is implemented by ASK Development and managed in partnership with Rural Support Programmes Network, two Pakistani organizations working with IYF.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF EEA

Rawalpindi. It has really changed my economic prospects. Growing up, the greatest mission that I set for myself was to get a job and save enough money to help educate my younger siblings. I am 21 now and so happy to have realized those distant dreams.

As young people, we can be catalysts for change in Pakistan, directing our country toward a better future. But we need to prepare ourselves. There is so much more out there for us to accomplish. **Y**

Sana Shamsheer Satti participated in a job skills training program supported by the Education & Employment Alliance (EEA). An initiative of the International Youth Foundation with funding from a US\$13 million cooperative agreement from USAID, EEA works in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan and the Philippines to help young people enhance their job prospects.