

Multi Nation Program



Dr. Erfa Iqbal | Islamabad, PAKISTAN
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Dr. Erfa Iqbal manages and coordinates the Prime Minister of Pakistan's development program for Southern Punjab, with the aim of addressing religious extremism by improving the social and economic conditions in the poorest regions of the Punjab province. The Southern Punjab Development Package, announced in 2008, includes a focus on women's empowerment projects via the establishment of industrial units. It also includes the promotion of medium-sized enterprises in rural areas, utilizing private sector involvement to foster skills development and employment generation among this rural population. On her fellowship, Dr. Iqbal explored issues relating to economic development including entrepreneurship, public-private partnerships, and women's empowerment.

During her fellowship travels, Dr. Iqbal met with former ambassadors, international aid organizations, major corporations, and members of academia. She spoke with individuals who were interested in learning more about her work, as well as discussing ways that their organizations could potentially collaborate to further support Pakistan's economic development. Not only did Dr. Iqbal's meetings fulfill her expectations, she was also pleasantly surprised by some appointments that seemed initially tangential to her fellowship. A meeting at the Queens Economic Development Corporation demonstrated that some areas with which they are struggling are similar to those she is working on in Pakistan; communities across both countries are trying to attract investments and encourage entrepreneurship in order to bolster economic development. Additionally, she became increasingly interested in discussing venture capital over the course of her fellowship, as conversations in meetings revealed that this could be an important area for Pakistan to develop on its road toward further economic development.

In addition to her meetings, Dr. Iqbal gave a series of talks sponsored by Pakistani-focused organizations to familiarize those in attendance with her work and its impact, and discuss the relationship between Pakistan and the United States. Dr. Iqbal's talks were well-attended and well-received, and were important in helping her achieve one of her program objectives, namely to understand the level of knowledge the "average" American has about Pakistan. The answer she found was "very little," and the opinions were overwhelmingly formed by the American media.

Dr. Iqbal hoped that making connections with the Pakistani diaspora in the United States would lead to opportunities for that community to reestablish links and business connections with Pakistan. It appears that, to a large extent, she will be able to accomplish this as a result of her fellowship. Dr. Iqbal found that most people she met wanted to aid in Pakistan's economic development, but did not know how to go about making connections. She plans to keep the connections she made over her fellowship alive, and to pursue opportunities to meet the objectives of organizations in the U.S., while helping to strengthen Pakistan's economic future and facilitating increased understanding between Pakistan and the United States through relationship-building.

Leaders bettering the world around them.