If you accelerate women’s education ahead of men’s education you create an imbalance in the local community.

Traditional social relations are so strong that the educated girl opposite the uneducated boy is an equation for disaster. There are societies ... where the educated woman will not find a husband because she’s educated. So you need to be very, very careful in handling these things, because they can be a real boomerang if you get them wrong.... So there are a lot of criteria there and it’s a difficult problem. But it’s one that needs to be handled with immense care.

In each of these areas where we feel the greatest need for capacity building, we have been extremely conscious of the fact that opportunities must be created for women. This is why we are targeting women as major beneficiaries with regard to the income generation activities related to agriculture, the training of nurses, the professional education of teachers and for receipt of micro-credit.

The respect that is due to women is a very important factor in the Islamic world and in the history of Islam and in the faith itself. And my interpretation is the better educated the woman is the more respect she is going to get in modern civil society. I find it very difficult to validate the concept, for example, that Islam says a woman cannot be educated. Or that Islam says that a woman cannot work.... there will be an acceptance [in the Islamic world] that women must function and try to function in civil society in a proper, overt manner.... I certainly see a change occurring, I think it’ll take time.

When this university was conceived, Nursing was one of the founding concerns that we had. It was a profession that needed support, recognition, enhancement. But it was part of a more significant issue which was the education of women in Pakistan.... For the Aga Khan University, education of women and that they should participate in the development of this institution and in the development of the country, is a fundamentally important principle.