A Journey to Participatory Human Development

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Contents

Executive Director’s Note

Introduction

Case Studies
1. A Matter Of Feeling
2. Holding The Partners Together
3. Spreading The Fragrance
4. Hope In Balochistan
5. Awakening Of Lasbela
6. Woman In A Man’s World
7. In The Line Of Fire
8. Lighting Lamp From Lamp
9. SESWA: Dreams Realized
10. In The Eye Of The Storm
11. Trying To Make It Work
12. Against The Odds
13. From Great Dream To Smaller Reality
14. Set off by Snake Bite
15. Breaking The Myth
16. The First Drop Of Rain
17. Standing Up Against Violence
18. Shahzad’s Story
19. The Tractor Ride To Success
20. Pirbhat: The Dawning
21. On The High Road To High Office
22. From 5 to 650
23. From Small Beginnings
24. From School Teacher To Development Executive
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BHU</td>
<td>Basic Health Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organization</td>
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<td>CCB</td>
<td>Citizens’ Community Board</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
<td>Community Physical Infrastructure</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner</td>
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<td>DCO</td>
<td>District Coordinating Officer</td>
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<td>DFG</td>
<td>District Focal Group</td>
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<td>DRCEP</td>
<td>Democratic Rights and Citizens Education Program</td>
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<td>EOBI</td>
<td>Employees Old Age Benefits Institution</td>
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<td>EVAW</td>
<td>Ending Violence Against Women</td>
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<td>IDRF</td>
<td>International Development and Refugee Foundation</td>
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<td>LHV</td>
<td>Lady Health Visitor</td>
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<td>MCH</td>
<td>Mother and Child Healthcare Centre</td>
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<td>PPAF</td>
<td>Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund</td>
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<td>PWG</td>
<td>Peasant Worker Group</td>
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<td>RDP</td>
<td>Resource Development Program</td>
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<td>SAP-PK</td>
<td>South Asia Partnership-Pakistan</td>
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<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
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<td>SDGP</td>
<td>Strengthening Democratic Governance in Pakistan</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children Fund</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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### Short Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hujra</td>
<td>An outhouse restricted for male gathering only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jirga</td>
<td>Council of elders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kachehri</td>
<td>An informal gathering of men in Sindh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>A Pakhtun elder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mohalla</td>
<td>Precinct of a village, town or city</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pashtun/Pakhtun</td>
<td>The former is the southern pronunciation, the latter northern. In the text, these words are not used indiscriminately, but match the area where they prevail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Svara</td>
<td>Forcible marriage of a girl from a murderer’s family to a relative of the victim. The brides are invariably under age and their grooms either aged or handicapped.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaseb</td>
<td>Punjabi word for village/culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zakat</td>
<td>Poor due as ordained by Islamic law</td>
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Are we here to teach people only political oratory? No, we must teach them something more substantial, something that can help them build a better world.

Haseeb ur Rahman
Executive Director’s Note

In 1989 when we at South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK) started out, military rule had just ended after eleven long years. It had been a terrible decade that killed political activism, increased religious prejudice, intolerance and militancy many fold and generally destroyed the social fabric of the country. This was a time when even the so-called progressive parties did not discuss women’s and minorities’ rights and fundamental rights were only mentioned in terms of people’s needs.

In that bleak intellectual landscape and with the recent re-establishment of civil liberties the imperative was people’s mobilization and political activism. As well as that, it was necessary that communities undertake their own development. Interestingly, there were other organizations working in the villages through what some called ‘work units.’ These units relied heavily on their mother organization for their working. SAP-PK was the pioneer in creating and working with entirely independent Village Organizations. It is no exaggeration to state that other leading institutions learned from us that local groups need to and can be empowered for political activism.

Now, this was time that there were few organizations working in the development sector. Spread across the country there was however, a plethora of groups committed to welfare activities. In the absence of anyone else to work with, we at SAP-PK made these our target groups for social development and the revival of political activism.

The major concern was not just to collect donors’ money, dump it in these village organizations and watch it being misspent. Though there was no denying the sincerity of most of those groups, the factor of concern was their lack of capacity and training. We resolved to train one woman and one man from these organizations and, though some urban-based groups did join our training, our focus was primarily on emerging rural organizations.

The modus operandi was consistency of instruction through our yearlong Resource Development Program (RDP). We began with a three-day session, followed a month later with one of five days. The subsequent sittings were all of seven days. All our sessions were residential with music and celebration in the evenings. This latter was to let the participants who came from across the country get to know each other. It went a long way in creating a profound camaraderie that lasts to this day. It is indeed remarkable that we had very religious participants who resisted the celebration on religious grounds in the beginning, but the general air of festivity soon drew them in.

As for the trainers, initially we experimented with the great names in economics and social sciences. But we learned that they possessed an idiom that our participants just could not understand. We quickly switched to those who were part of the movement and had hands-on experience that could be related to.
The content of our (RDP) training took a lot of discussion and thrashing out. Women’s rights were one topic and that was why we insisted on every participating organization sending both genders. Then we had our eye on turning out a younger generation of aware and motivated activists so we encouraged participating mothers to bring their young children. We now have examples of several youth who are now part of the development sector.

 Minorities’ rights was a subject close to our hearts again. We must remember that in the early 1990s religious prejudice ran high. Indeed, when one of the sessions opened at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Lahore, a great name in human activism today was appalled. How could Muslims eat in a Christian set-up? He asked. But in the years since 1991 when we initiated RDP until the last session in 2005, we have had persons of the major religious persuasions in Pakistan eating together.

 That was the spiritual side of the training. On the temporal front, we talked of the need to raise organizations, how they could help and what was the need for action by civil society. Our participants also needed to know organizational management – no empire building here, just the plain brass tacks were enough. Similarly, accounts and project management was also on the agenda. In the first year, we had no sectoral training. That is, if a participant mentioned a health or drinking water problem in his or her village, we were not equipped to impart that specific knowledge. Learning ourselves as we went along, we included sectoral training from the second year.

 In the first year our pet topics were data collection, analysis and reporting on their work, political analysis and history of development. Looking back, I can safely say that the most crucial subject that essentially changed the very outlook of all those myriad groups was the difference between development and welfare or charity. Until their interaction with us, none of them had ever questioned themselves about the wedding of the poor widow’s daughter they had paid for. They had done a good deed, but they had not prepared the girl to act if she was abused or divorced by her husband. At that point, in time no one knew how to address such situations.

 In the second year of RDP, we included technical and sectoral training in our program. The great minds of social sector development became our faculty. Our participants were taken to successful models, premium among which was Akhtar Hameed Khan’s Orangi Pilot Project. This was when we taught them how to do it themselves.

 As time went by, the RDP duration increased from one year to a year and a half. Our discussions now included topics such as the history of South Asia, the national question and politics in Pakistan. I can safely say that these discussions have much to do with the increased political and peace activism that we see in the country today.

 All that having been said, it needs be conceded that we did go wrong on a couple of counts. We envisaged that the organizations we were preparing with our training program would then be farther advanced by other Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). That did not happen. Our RDP graduates stand where they were immediately after the training. Secondly, we did not do very well with Coordinating Councils that emerged in the four provinces after RDP. We supported them only technically and although they did enjoy some little success, they failed to turn into one huge coordinated action across Pakistan. This was largely because we never taught them coordinated action.
Time was, in the early years, when people who had never heard of participatory development and who were appalled to be told that there were no free lunches in our line of work. Now we have moved on to an era of clear understanding of the difference between charity and development. It is indeed encouraging to run into women and men, all in senior social sector positions, who are our RDP graduates. It is doubly pleasing when they acknowledge that their status is largely because they attended our training.

Not all our partners and graduates may be as shining stars of the firmament of the Pakistani development sector. Admittedly, some have given a dismal account of themselves. But even the most ineffective activist or organization has something positive to show for itself: there is no RDP graduate who has not made some positive impact on his or her community.

Meanwhile, with Strengthening Democratic Governance in Pakistan (SDGP) and our Farmers’ Development Program (FDP) we have learned much and increased our outreach to some four thousand villages across Pakistan. We would like our presence to be in eighty thousand to begin work on movemental issues like peace and democracy.

The way ahead for SAP-PK vis a vis our RDP graduates was SAP-ART (Action, Research, Training). In a nutshell, where RDP had turned out graduates, SAP-ART would have been the post-graduate degree. However, internal and external factors kept us from initiating this program so essential to help our graduates move ahead.

The following pages contain the stories of SAP-PK’s RDP graduates. From each province, we have had selected cases of NGOs/Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that have impinged upon their world in different ways. Some have made profound, far-reaching impacts, others not so significantly, but even the least effective of our partners have left some mark on the communities they worked with. Each province also tells the story of one individual whose outlook was molded either by RDP or by their interaction with SAP-PK. These stories exemplify the success and the failure of SAP-PK.
Introduction

SAP-PK’s stated Value System

- SAP-PK is a secular organization;
- It believed in democracy;
- It believed in social justice and harmony;
- It believed in gender justice;
- It believed in affirmative treatment for women;
- And it believed that all human are equal in potential thus deserve equal opportunities.

Although the military dictator had died the year before and a political set up was in place, Pakistan had a bad case of hangover from the eleven year-long dictatorship binge. Political parties were under great pressure, Section 144 prohibiting the assembly of more than four persons was still in force, and there was virtually no free political activity. This was time when civil society activists saw the immense need of initiating political discourse among the people and rebuilt a progressive and democratic society. The task was gigantic and uphill but some organizations took the challenge.

That was one thing. However, as an organization focusing on participatory community and human development, SAP-PK was more concerned with introducing new approaches of human development and community uplift. There was no dearth of these anjumans (associations) or those working for the behbood (welfare) or Khairat (Charity) of, say, daily wage earners or women or orphans, destitute and those in the need. Their mode of operations was to collect funds from their own subscriptions and give out doles to needy persons or arrange for free food, medicines, books, uniforms, blood donations and other range of charity work. With no other model to follow, these groups were organized on the same lines as the country’s political parties. Each had its president, secretary, finance secretary etc. But without skills, proper systems of planning, monitoring, fund generation and organizational management. Above all the vision of development and change was missing for their agenda.

Despite their well-meaning endeavours, these associations, some of which had been in existence for four decades, had made any meaningful contribution to society besides dealing with some urgent needs for a few improvised. Nor had they brought about any sustainable change. The main reason was that these groups did not recognize the essential difference between charity and long-term sustainable development with optimum community involvement.

When SAP group began its exploration and consultation meetings in Pakistan with civil society activists, they found much common ground with their overall organizational mission. Issues such as rampant population growth, perpetual poverty and deprivations and marginalization due to unchecked defence expenditures, the imperative of Pakistan-India peace for development etc. came under discussion. In 1987, SAP-PK was launched with the motto: The Struggle to Empower People.

SAP-PK initiated its work with the following two-pronged understanding that development was:

- Efforts to build human capital at all levels;
- A process of enabling people and communities by engaging them in participatory initiatives and self-motivated development and change;
- Helping them realize their full human potential;
- Providing critical thinking for their self-realization and social change process;
- Connecting them at all levels from local to national and:

**Building Human Capital:** In SAP-PK’s vocabulary, the meaning of ‘full human potential’ is not restricted only to economic development. It has a more holistic significance of livelihood related well-being coupled with social and political betterment and self-realization of one’s own potentials. From this flows the struggle for rights-based concessions, especially for minorities, women and other under-privileged and marginalized sections of the society. This latter is the second most important component of the philosophy SAP-PK adopted and promoted through its actions since beginning.

**Developing Self-Reliant Communities:** SAP-PK thus began as a support organization for supporting rural community to embark on a journey go be self-reliant in terms of their planning, basic development and social integration. Small project grants were provided for viable and sustainable community development models with funding from CIDA and a number of other Canadian voluntary organizations. This was like beginning at step two without having taken the first step, that is, of preparing the beneficiary community or group for the task expected. Though some of SAP-PK’s partners had been working in their respective communities for several years (in some cases for decades), as noted above the concepts of participatory development and human resource development were yet alien to them. It was quite common in the beginning to hear of a community group receiving funds for a specific project but ending up employing them in non-developmental exercises. While sincerity of purpose and integrity were never questionable, understanding of the principles of participatory development was certainly missing and not practiced. The general belief was that development is the sole domain of governments and political representatives and communities should and will remain mere recipients. SAP-PK through its human resource development programs created new realization of human potentials and promoted the ideas of socially active citizens.

**Visionary Community Leaders:** It was therefore very clear that individuals running community-based organizations were not yet ready to start receiving financial aid. SAP-PK recognized that mere good intentions on the part of the managers in beneficiary communities were not going to suffice, that the greater imperative was the building of their capacity. This then was the origin of the Resource Development Program. Everything else that SAP-PK eventually achieved flowed from it. The program in later years successfully developed community leaders, activists and new agenda of development. Hundreds of semi-educated men and women from rural communities underwent the year-long process of training, education and debates that in several cases changes their perspective and vision of life and change.

**Promoting new Concepts of Development and Human Resources: RDP Begins 1991**

The first action by SAP-PK was that it halted doling out funds to its partners. Instead, the SAP-PK teams went into overdrive developing the curriculum for the RDP training. The first level of this training was conceptual to define the concepts of welfare and charity on the one side and distinguishing it from the concepts of participatory development and
human resource development on the other. Another essential part at this level of discourse was a notion hitherto not acknowledged in the rural setting: gender and development. The history of matriarchy and patriarchy were discussed together with taboos and associated problems these antiquated ideas imposed on communities.

Organizational formation, development management and planning featured prominently in the RDP training process. But if a group was to run efficiently and manage its funds well, an understanding of financial management was also imparted. Emphasis was given to the structures of existing welfare groups that copied political parties. It was underlined that the quality of work delivered was in no way related to the high-sounding designations of Community Groups. Sectoral and thematic training and skills were also made integral part of the program. Training did not follow a very hard and fast rule. With the passage to time, new discussions cropped up leading to the introduction of new topics and additional skills.

Each training event was followed by extensive field actions and learning steps well guided and facilitated by the SAP-PK teams. Trainees were encouraged to apply skills and knowledge in their actions and provide feedback. Through this training-actions-learning-feedback process new knowledge and skills were inculcated in these activists. There were in all six training sessions each year with a month between two sessions. One of the first exercises that trainee partners did in their respective villages was carrying out a baseline survey. This tool helped streamline their working in the future. In this one month, SAP-PK teams did follow up visits to monitor how the training was internalized and put to use in different milieus.

Thirty different organizations were selected from each province for the RDP training with at least two representatives from each with at least one should be woman. At a given time, organizations from two provinces would be undergoing training, that is, sixty organizations per year. At the culmination of the yearlong training, a joint inter-provincial session was held to promote inter-provincial linkages, interactions and sharing of experience. Time showed that this practice was extremely helpful in forging long-term, long-distances linkages that work to this day.

**Women in the Centre of Development Planning: 1995**

The basic condition for RDP training was that each organization must send one male and one female staff member. However, many groups were strictly all-men shows, particularly those in rural areas and thus unable to field a woman participant. With time, the situation changed, but the realization was not slow in coming that women were oppressed and marginalized. Women representatives were specially focused in these training sessions and post-training follow-ups enabling them to use their knowledge and skills for community planning and development purposes. Interestingly the performance from women participants was much better and effective in the entire RDP process proving the fact that the oppressed understand and act strongly when it comes to their leadership. RDP created a large cadre of rural and semi-educated development activists and advocacy workers that in later years proved useful in the growth of development sector in Pakistan.

**Electoral and Political Role for Rural Women:** With UNESCO support, SAP-PK started an experimental Democratization for Women (DFW) program in 1995. Initiated in village Rohras of Sialkot district, this program had three objectives:

- To increase women’s participation in the political process
To raise the number of women’s organizations
To empower women so that their voice is heard at a greater level

Today, Bedari, the Rohras women’s group, shines as proof that the three objectives were met. However, the going was not easy in the beginning. With names like Dr. Rubina Sehgal and Hina Jilani on the training roster, the girls who had signed up for the session had difficulties with their families. Indeed, even as the session began after some delay, a large crowd of local men gathered outside the training hall.

The village mullah was eventually sent in to present the objections the men had to this business: their young women with impressionable minds were being turned away from religion. The man was invited to sit in and listen before forming an opinion. He sat through to the end and as the first session began the following day, he brought his own daughter and daughter-in-law to join the training. The Rohras mosque may well have been the first in the country whose Friday sermon supported the work of an NGO and the women of the local community.

Strengthening Democracy through Organized Peasantry: 1998

By 1998, SAP-PK was no longer a funder or support organization. Instead, it took a different role and challenge in the society. It assumed the role of organizing peasants and rural workers, the largest poverty population of the country. Besides more than two third of the country’s population peasants in this country were not getting their due share. Ironically, this population was unorganized and without any voice in policies and plans of this country.

Meanwhile, because of its interaction with rural partners, SAP-PK discovered other areas that needed attention. A vast majority of the country’s population comprises of small farmers and peasants who yet continue to be voiceless. Farmers’ Development Program, launched in 2004 was designed to address farmers’ problems and organize them for collective voice. Together with some specialized trainings, the program also included a provision of agricultural inputs to small farmers at competitive rates. The real purpose of this exercise was to organize farmers in cooperative platforms, however. These function to this day as Kissan Baithakhs.

Democratizing Society: In 2001, the new military government introduced Local Government System encouraging participation of marginalized sections into the local governance. The LG plan opened new spaces and opportunities for the engagement of these marginalized groups in planning and development of the country. Several organizations initiated programs for effective and meaningful participation of women, non-Muslims, laborers, and peasants in the new system. SAP-Pakistan was one prominent among them that ensured the genuine representatives of peasants and workers, women and minorities must contest elections of their reserved seats.

In 2004, SAP-PK launched two new campaigns. The yearlong Democratic Human Rights Program (DHRP) to encourage and enhance the participation of common citizens in the electoral process. Its focus was on women, rural people, and minorities, most of who were not registered in the voters’ lists. The other program, Democratic Rights and Citizens’ Education Program (DRCEP) lasted for two years. Both campaigns were struggles for citizens’ rights and democratic participation. The translation of the people’s manifesto into
Urdu as well as the establishment of People’s Assemblies was two significant undertakings in these campaigns. Both these campaigns helped in popularizing debates and public understanding on democratic, electoral and fundamental rights. These campaigns reached out to more than 50 million citizens, mainly rural, all over the country. Through extensive public debates, public education material, interactive theatre, election watch and engagement with political parties and media these campaigns helped in mainstreaming peasants mainly women and minorities into local politics.

These two campaigns later converged into Strengthening Democratic Governance in Pakistan (SDGP) Program and is currently being implemented in more than 4000 villages of Pakistan. A journey that SAP-PK still continues to embark with new learning and actions.

**Supporting Girls Education and Health**: From year 2001-05 SAP-PK in a joint initiative with Agha Khan University and several other leading civil society organizations supported girls education and health objectives under ‘Tawana Pakistan’ project in more than 1500 villages of Punjab. Besides mid-day meal provided to 35000 girls primary schools, it developed women community leadership through mothers of the same girls. In all 1500 villages more than 35000 rural women were trained in child nutrition, family hygiene, girls’ education and other village development concerns. These dynamic rural women still playing active leadership role in community development processes.

**Connecting People in South Asia**: Meeting just before the SAARC summits, the People’s Assemblies presented people’s voices and agenda in the SAARC head of state summits. The voice of the common people, their aspirations and wishes were thus broadcast to this important South Asian platform. SAP-PK was thus able to take the voice of the people of Pakistan to the South Asian level. As for itself, the organization became known for speaking not just for Pakistan but also for the entire South Asian region. The parallel people’s SAARC process enabled social movements and other civil society groups to interact, share, learn and develop common grounds for actions and lobbying.

**Addressing Violence in Politics**: As part of South Asia regional efforts SAP-Pakistan also connected women leadership and political workers including parliamentarians to address the issues of violence in politics against women. A south Asian charter has been prepared that provides strong foundations for joint actions and regional lobbying for women friendly laws and practices enabling active participation of women in parliamentary politics.

**Setting Dialogue of Movements and Space for Interaction**: From year 2003-2007 SAP-Pakistan played a lead role in organizing Pakistan Social Forum as part of World Social Forum process. The process promoted people’s vision for ‘Another World is Possible’ and opened new spaces for dialogue among movements in Pakistan and South Asia. Leading the process in Pakistan SAP-PK organized two versions of Pakistan Social Forums, one poly-centric World Social Forum and also ensured participation of movements from Pakistan in two global events of World Social Forum.

**Organizing Peasantry in Pakistan**: SDGP Program was launched in 2005 and has successfully organized peasants’ groups (mainly women and non-Muslims) in more than 520 union councils (evenly divided in all four provinces). This mega-project is currently being implemented in forty districts of the country, ten each from the provinces. The aim of this initiative was to organize peasants’ groups, train them and create their interface with local government leaders and government line agencies so that local resources meant for
the village development should actually be utilized where they were meant. As well as that, in tandem with its partners, SAP-PK raised people’s units like District Focal Groups, District Resource Centres, Peasants and Workers, and Women’s groups.

Today, even as the local government system stands dysfunctional, there are innumerable cases of the effectiveness of these groups wherever they functioned in the entire country. A case that is the epitome of success as far as the working of PWGs is concerned comes from south Punjab.

**Strengthening Connections and Collective Actions:** In the last 20 years SAP-Pakistan initiated, supported and led several key NGOs networks, coalitions and alliances. Being the founder of Pakistan NGO Forum (PNF), Punjab NGO Coordination Council (PNCC), Joint Action Committee for Peace and Democracy (JAC), Coalition for Ending Violence against Women (COEVAW), Sustainable Agriculture Action Group (SAAG) and FATA Reform Movement (FRM) it has been at the forefront of peoples voices for human rights, peace and democracy. In case of 33% women reserved seats in Local government system a sustained advocacy campaign resulted in favorable laws and finally women were granted 33% reserved seats at levels of Local government and increased percentage at provincial and national Assemblies. Similar other concrete results are achieved recently on Women Protection Bills approved by Parliament through a sustained pressure and lobbying of SAP-PK through AASHA (Alliance against Sexual Harassment against Women), civil society voices in 18th constitutional amendments and other pro-poor legislations.

Since 2005 SAP-PK is an active voice for small farmers, landless peasants and rural workers mainly women and non-Muslims. Its efforts to make peasants a strong political force in Pakistan have already yielded good results and peasants’ voices can be heard on land rights, water rights and food rights. The journey is still continued.

**Wresting their Right**

South Punjab is cotton country where picking is traditionally done by women. During research in recent years SAP-PK learned that picking rate was pitifully low, sometimes being as little as two rupees per kilogram. Now, the average woman picks about twenty kilograms in a day and therefore earns no more than forty rupees for eight hours of back breaking work in intense heat.

The members of a women’s group formed by SAP-PK in a village outside Layyah in the cotton belt was not happy with this meager rate. Resolving that they were not going to settle for any less than seven rupees per kilogram, they made their decision known to the landlords when picking time arrived. After some resistance, the landowners had to settle for the demanded rate because either than or their cotton would have rotted on the stalk. Taking the cue from these women, cotton pickers in neighbouring districts are also demanding higher wages and hopefully they will get it in the coming season.

Yet another anti-women practice that prevails is of paying women half as much as men for the same amount of work. This is the norm for farm and industrial workers. Even as this document goes into print, SAP-PK is launching its campaign to bring payments for both genders at par. Beginning with forty districts countrywide, the program will eventually be expanded.
The Journey Continues: SAP-Pakistan believes that without attaining the objectives of democracy, peace and justice for all citizens no sustainable growth or development is possible and people play a vital role in the process. Providing equal opportunities and resources for people to realize and utilize their human capital is vital for sustainable development. These conditions can only achieve when all weaker sections of society and marginalized groups are made part of the development and change process. Pakistan is unfortunately left behind in the process thus paying heavy process of under-development and other multiple threats to its existence. Process of human development without discrimination, ensuring fundamental rights to all and fullest participation of citizens in development planning and benefits can lead the society to the pathways to development. The journey is arduous yet important thus a continued struggle must be committed.
1. A Matter Of Feeling

In July 2007, the town of Zhob in the extreme northeast corner of Balochistan came to a virtual halt because of eighteen hours of load shedding. With the summer at its worst and no electric power, business suffered, schools closed down and those farmers who relied entirely on electric tube wells to irrigate their fields saw the crops begin to wither away. Though the entire country was in the grip of a crippling power shortage, facing up to eight hours without electric power, Zhob had somehow been singled out for the greater punishment.

The District Focal Group, an essential accessory of SAP-PK’s SDGP partner in the district, organized a meeting of political workers, members of the civil society and traders groups in order to work out a strategy to resolve the problem. A press conference and statements in local and provincial papers were suggested to bring the situation to the notice of the authorities. Repeated press coverage made no difference, however.

In a second meeting, the DFG called for a complete shutter down strike in Zhob to coincide with Independence Day on 14 August. As well as that, a public meeting to condemn the discriminatory treatment was to be followed by a rally. Now, Zhob has a population of a hundred and seventy-five thousand souls and such protest rallies in the past had never mustered more than a few hundred participants. That Independence Day three thousand five hundred turned out to register their protest with a peaceful march through town. This had never happened before in Zhob.

The next day the provincial parliamentarian from Zhob invited the organizers of the rally for talks in Quetta. No sooner did the three men reach the minister’s chamber, they were ushered in for a hearing. Less than an hour later they were, together with the politician, in the office of the chief of the electric supply company. They walked out with the understanding of Zhob being put on a par with the rest of Balochistan in terms of load-shedding. Unlike official promises, this one was kept.

Watan Yar Khilji and two of his colleagues from the NGO Awareness on Human Rights Social Development and Action Society (AHSAS) who traveled to Quetta and back that day in August could not have dreamed of moving the machinery of the State when they first began some ten years earlier.

A reader of Iqbal’s poetry and the plays of Krishen Chandra and Chekov from his youth, Watan Yar why his native city of Zhob should be so backward and why no one moved to change things. But his youth and inexperience gave him no answer. Having spent eight years working in Karachi and studying part time to become a graduate he returned home in 1989. Mindful of Iqbal’s belief in man’s capacity...
to change his fate, Watan Yar set to work. But limited as his horizon was, he could only think in tribal terms and so in 1990 he established Anjuman Itehad-e-Khilji – Society for Khilji Unity – with the aim of providing health care and education to the Khiljis of Zhob.

Getting together a few friends Watan Yar set up three youth education centers and a facility to register blood donors for ready availability in case of emergency. The idea was to work for the ‘welfare’ of the community in order to foster a better society. Everything this group of friends did was voluntary and the services they rendered were free. Donations collected from ‘those who feared God’ catered for expenses such as supplies for the education centre and for and mustering of blood donors. The donations also paid for the purchase of sewing machines for poor widows or to wed a girl whose family could ill afford the expensive affair.

Over time however neither the donors nor the persons who benefited from someone’s fear of God were always strictly Khiljis. In keeping with its growth, Anjuman changed its parochial name to Development Association of Youth (DAY). Its focus was now on building a society where the voice of ordinary folks could be heard. In 1993 Watan Yar was visited in one of his DAY education centers by a team from SAP-PK. A year later he and a colleague were invited to attend the RDP training for 1995-96.

Understandably, the first session was informative, but the best part was that every subsequent session revealed another new truth upon Watan Yar and his colleague. He says RDP did not talk of rocket science, only very simple home truths. ‘We learned that our welfare business was turning people into beggars. This was so true, but we had never thought of it.’ He recalls being told that there were no free lunches. If he and his friends wished to bring about a long-lasting and significant change, DAY would need the participation of the target community.

Immediately DAY trimmed its business in line with the learning of RDP. The first target was the blood bank now operating out of the local hospital with proper storage facility funded by the federal health department. From late 1995, blood was given only in exchange for blood. That is, anyone calling in to receive a donation was asked to ‘pay’ for the facility with a donation of equal measure. They were also asked to provide a new empty blood bag to replenish the one being taken.

As the RDP training drew to its end, altogether new ideas were part of Watan Yar’s intellectual vocabulary. He recognized the imperative of sustainability and of the essential need of walking the development road not alone but shoulder by shoulder with the communities. As well as that, environmental degradation became an issue for the first time for him and his colleagues at DAY. Among other things, the wholesale and illegal trapping of migratory cranes took on special significance.

Every winter as the graceful grey and black birds landed in the wetlands of Zhob, trappers from NWFP were in place to take thousands of them to be sold in the bird markets of the country. For some peculiar reason, the people of Zhob who traditionally did not trap the birds themselves played host to the trappers. Having first won over the Malikis and the mullahs, DAY began a campaign to educate the locals about the dwindling population of the beautiful migratory birds. Sadly, neither the government nor the other NGOs involved in environment and species protection had done their work in Zhob for the trappers’ enablers were unaware of the protected status of the cranes.
Gradually the number of families willing to host the trappers fell and with that the illegal activity. The NGO may not have completely eradicated the unlawful activity, but they certainly have brought about a near seventy percent reduction in it. To this day, every year before the migration sets in about late November, AHSAS revisits the communities that were once host to birds and hunters to renew the pledge of no trapping.

Now, easy availability of heroin and hashish had ridden Zhob with widespread drug abuse, especially among the youth. Coupled with that the widespread ignorance of the connection between unsafe sexual practices and AIDS was cause of concern. There were and still are no statistics on unsafe sexual practices in Zhob, but drug demand has been significantly reduced. The only indicator favoring this claim is the rising hostility between AHSAS and the drug mafia.

It was now, in 2000, with its operations grown beyond its name, time for the NGO to register itself as Awareness on Human Rights Social Development and Action Society or AHSAS, the Arabic word for ‘feeling.’ That year with SAP-PK’s Democratic Rights and Citizens’ Education Program in full flow, a visitor from SAP-PK asked for a common meeting with women and men councilors. Members of AHSAS facilitating the meeting were aghast: this was not done in the strict Pashtun society of Zhob. A curtain between the two genders was suggested with the SAP staff member so seated as to be able to speak with both sides. The meeting went ahead to its end without incident.

For the outside world this was hardly remarkable. For AHSAS working in a strictly tribal society it was the crossing of a major bridge. Small wonder then that the first local government elections in the year 2000 filled seventy-five percent of women’s seats in the district. Four years later, the elections saw an increase of another ten percent in women’s representation. Admittedly, some of the women’s representatives of the first elections were mere seat fillers, but the second round brought a complete change in the substance of women councilors. This time around they were aware, motivated and vocal, capable of playing their due role as representatives of an electorate.

If RDP had set DAY on the way to becoming a tight and efficient little organization with a clear vision and line of action, SDGP prepared AHSAS to begin to fully realize the earliest objectives of its founders: the journey to a better society; a society where ordinary people had a voice. Watan Yar knows that the double-quick official reaction AHSAS received after its rally demanding a better load-shedding schedule would not have been possible without the clout of DFG. It was after the NGO’s efforts to restore electric supply in the district that a clear and massive shift in public perception in favor of civil society organizations was seen.

Meanwhile, AHSAS had already moved on to running WHO-funded mother and child health. With most of the forty government BHUs in the district either closed or working only one day a week because of non-availability of trained staff, healthcare, especially for children and expecting mothers, was sorely deficient. The maternity home in village Gardar Babur with a catchment of thirty-five thousand souls now offers 24/7 service while that in Zhob is preferred over the government hospital for its low fees and better facilities.

For women, who were scarcely better treated than chattel, this is a welcome change. Indeed, the emphasis laid by AHSAS on women’s rights and equality is sowing the seeds of that transformation that DAY had first dreamed of more than a decade ago. The tactic of securing the approval of religious leaders has won AHSAS support from the pulpit and
legitimized their work. Be it the 2000 SAP-PK initiative calling for curbing of public display of weapons or raising AIDS awareness and women’s rights, AHSAS has the approving voice of the clergy.

Of the two decades of AHSAS Watan Yar Khilji has this to say, ‘One of the things we learnt in the first RDP session was concerning the importance of getting the support of all stake-holders. Had we not done that from the very beginning, there is every likelihood DAY would have remained an association collecting donations to distribute alms. It would never have emerged as AHSAS that works with the federal Health Department, WHO and UNDP.’
2. Holding The Partners Together

After two decades of unhindered work across the province, the issue of Baloch nationalism has adversely affected SAP-PK’s outreach to remote areas. It was just as well that Balochistan Coordinating Council was in place since 1997. Today BCC very effectively plays SAP-PK’s operational and program roles in remote areas of the province. Starting as an organ to maintain linkages between the various RDP graduates, the not very long journey of BCC certainly has been a very interesting one.

At the certificate distribution ceremony marking the end of the 1996-97 RDP, participants from Balochistan decided in favor of a set-up to maintain contact. Earlier, after the first RDP ending in 1992, a Rabita Council had come into existence only to fall into dereliction shortly afterwards. And so BCC was formed with RDP graduate Yasmin Mughal as its provincial coordinator. Yasmin had attended RDP from her organization where she worked as an administrative officer. As it turned out, choosing Yasmin for the training had been an error of judgment on the part of her management. It was nonetheless all for the better for the cause of the development network.

Funded by donations, the organization was registered as a development NGO and ran a number of rather highbrow, fees-charging schools across the province. The schools as well as the NGO were owned by the man who was also the lifelong chair of the board of directors while the various principals and teacher made up the general body. What the chairperson said was law and the proceeds from the schools were the man’s personal profits. The while Yasmin had spent with the NGO before RDP, nothing had seemed out of order in this system. But now she made comparisons between what she was learning about the working of NGOs and what she saw at her place of work.

Now, during the training sessions the need to disseminate the new learning was impressed upon the participants. When Yasmin tried to do that at her place of work, the chairperson told her there was no need for these useless exercises. She was instructed to continue her training to the end so that the NGO could then forward a project proposal for a large sum of money to SAP-PK. Yasmin had meanwhile learned that SAP-PK was no conduit for funds, it was more of a capacity building institution and that her own employer was a bit of a scam.

But her job as the administrative officer gave her access to the telephone and fax, a facility she used to the full benefit of BCC. Moreover, operating without an office, BCC used the premises for holding their periodic meetings. Held after hours, the meetings were unknown to the chairman or the rest of the staff until the day the chairman happened to look in.

That was the end of the meeting, but the feeling that Yasmin harbored since the first RDP session now became stronger: that there was something to be done for the cause of community development but that her employer’s platform was not the one from where to accomplish it. She resigned and taking over a room in her home established the BCC office. With a monthly contribution of Rs 200 per member (at the time there were only eight members) and the full moral and technical backing of SAP-PK, the council was in
business with the express goal of acting as a node for communication and coordination between its members.

Communication enhancement was a simple enough objective to work for. It was meant to keep the entire network of RDP graduates in the know of each others work so that experiences could be shared and where possible replicated. For the first couple of years BCC worked only as a conduit passing information between its various members. Along came the case of Manjipur and it became recognizes as a strong platform for advocacy.

Situated in Nasirabad district on the border with Sindh, Manjipur was home to two remarkable young men. Divan Chand and Allah Waraya, both from poor backgrounds, were RDP graduates who ran a small CBO Itehad-e-Naujavanane-Manjipur. One of their early initiatives was community mobilization through group formation, an exercise that resulted in highly motivated and aware groups of men and women in several villages around Manjipur. Two successful projects added to their goodwill: the distribution of sewing machines among poor women and the institution of health care in an area forever deprived of it.

Itehad hits the headlines in the local press and by and by it came to such a pass that barely a day passed without press coverage of their work. The CBO was doing nothing wrong: it was using the resources of the Social Welfare and Health departments of the government for the benefit of the people of Pakistan. But this largesse was considered the prerogative of the local landlord and now here were two men from humble backgrounds playing his part. When the landlord’s threats were dismissed lightly, the man schemed with the local social welfare officer. The Itehad office, always an open house, was raided in the absence of the office bearers. The record and whatever meager assets there were were confiscated and the office sealed under the supervision of the social welfare officer.

Apprised in Quetta, BCC issued a press statement condemning this act as a violation of the charter of Social Welfare Department. This only resulted in the landlord’s goons roughing up the two activists in Manjipur. When the case filed in the session court was dismissed without a proper hearing, BCC decided to raise the high court in Quetta and ensured that the case received full press coverage. Before it came up for hearing, thousands of letters covering the details of the Manjipur case were sent out, not only in Quetta but to the three provincial capitals as well as to Islamabad.

The social welfare officer, who had mocked the Itehad activists and had refused to attend the session court in Nasirabad, presented himself at the high court. His superiors had apparently read the letter and judged the mood of the social activists in Quetta. In the course of the hearing, the honorable bench took a serious note of his disregard of judicial summons and for overstepping his authority and gave the man a thorough dressing down. The seized record was ordered to be returned to the CBO and it be permitted to pursue its lawful agenda.

Broadcast by BCC to its members in Balochistan and to civil society organizations nationwide, the Manjipur case became the banner for successful campaigning. This was a singular victory for the development sector in Pakistan. As for Itehad-e-Naujavanan-e-
Manjipur, it never paused to look back. Flaunting a membership of over five hundred persons spread across dozens of villages, Itehad works on strictly democratic principals with a governing body elected annually.

Its physical spread is now so vast that voting members have to be brought in by hired transport from outlying areas. Working through a network of CBOs and CCBs it helped raise, Itehad is linked with several donors and covers sectors like health, education, political awareness, micro-finance and infrastructure.

In 2003 Yasmin Mughal moved on and BCC leadership fell open. In other circumstances, this could well have spelled death for the group, but BCC had secure democratic moorings. The ensuing elections devolved its leadership upon RDP graduate Amir Mohammad Tareen of Gul Welfare Association in Loralai. In the following years BCC focused on advocacy and awareness raising courses for its member organizations. It also acted as an effective bridge between its members and donors.

The increasing political clout soon became evident when three women employees of an NGO were kidnapped in Mastung. The women being from the Hazara community of Quetta, it became known that their kidnapping was not political, but sectarian in nature and therefore of greater sensitivity with possible threat to their lives. There was of course the added peril of an outbreak of sectarian trouble. Calling together a meeting of one member from each political party, BCC collected on a single platform representative of opposing viewpoints and ideologies. The pressure that built up thereafter resulted in the release of the abducted women unharmed within four days.

Advocacy was now the keystone for BCC activities. Maintaining close liaison with every political party as well as the establishment in Quetta, BCC became a well-known group respected for its activism and support to the cause of human rights, justice and fair play. The acid test for its influence came with the arrest of Rashid Azam, a BCC member and human rights activist. Word was that he had been taken in by the intelligence agencies for publication of objectionable material. Using the same platform as before, BCC moved considerable public opinion through extensive media coverage. In consequence a stream of letters from national and international organizations flooded the establishment. Rashid Azam was released shortly afterwards.

This was BCC’s coming of age. It now emerged as a consortium of NGOs and CBOs. When the earthquake devastated Ziarat in October 2008, it was the consortium that moved in with its component organizations to launch a highly coordinated relief effort. It was BCC among all the agencies working in Ziarat that first brought attention to infants who had lost both parents and were in extreme peril. The aid of packaged milk that flowed into Ziarat to help save dozens of young lives was entirely due to the efforts of this consortium of NGOs.

What started in 1997 with a membership of eight individuals now has forty-five member organizations. That means upward of a thousand highly motivated adherents committed to the cause of development, human rights and democracy. This effectively takes the BCC spread to the remotest parts of Balochistan. With such assets, the way ahead for BCC is clearly charted.
3. Spreading The Fragrance

Nestling in the northeast corner of Balochistan, Loralai district, home to four major Pashtun tribes, is famous for producing the highest quality coal in Pakistan. But the district is also known for its intense tribal rivalries, lack of education, health facilities and infrastructure. Lying on the highroad through Loralai connecting the Balochistan highlands with Punjab, Duki is just another typical town of the district. But whereas the district headquarters had schools and colleges, Duki was additionally deprived of anything higher than middle school education. Medical facilities were non-existent and politics was the domain only of the rich. Worst of all, the people of Duki had not the faintest clue regarding their rights as citizens.

It was in this situation that Amir Mohammad Tareen grew up. In 1985 when he was but a boy, Amir assigned himself the unique task of assisting the illiterate people of Duki. After school he would hang around the offices either of the local administration or the National Database and Registration Authority filling in forms and guiding people about where they needed to go. All this he did gratis. In 1988 he took his middle school exam and moved away to Quetta to complete his college education.

Six years later when he returned home with a degree and a larger worldview, Amir got back to the work he thought he had left unfinished. But this time he roped in some of his childhood friends, all bursting with the spirit to serve less fortunate people. This team of good Samaritans picked up where Amir had left off some years ago; but now was one little difference. Each of the fifteen friends in the group gave a monthly fee of twenty rupees to meet the various expenses.

Amir had always chafed about the total lack of civic sense among his Duki compatriots. He and his team now launched a door-to-door campaign in the main bazaar of Duki and among residents against the dumping of rubbish in the streets. Simultaneously they approached the municipality to launch a concerted cleanliness drive and follow it up with daily clearing of rubbish from outside shops and houses. For the first time Amir became aware of the old adage about strength in numbers: as a lone crusader his pleas may have fallen on deaf ear. Now when this group of fifteen worked together, the speed of reaction both among the people and among the officials surprised him and his mates.

Next on the agenda of this young team was the water channel that had once supplied Duki with drinking water. Having fallen out of repair, the channel had become a victim of inter-tribal rivalries; it was always someone else’s fault that it was out of order and it was always for the other tribe to repair it. With the fresh water gone, the people of Duki were obligated to rely on a rain-fed pond where humans shared their water with animals. Yet the responsibility of cleaning out the system was always placed upon the other tribe.

Ten days of a dedicated campaign brought out men with shovels and pick axes and within days the spring was cleaned out and the channel flowing once again. Shortly thereafter the
vegetable patches of Duki had irrigation, once again after several years, from the repaired water channel.

A collapsed bridge in Duki town next caught the attention of these people. Amir and his team set up a collection stand by the detour around the bridge and took donations from passing traffic. Within no time at all, they had the funds to purchase the necessary materials and get a contractor rebuild the bridge. Only now it was better than before.

Impressed by the work of the group, well-wishers suggested they register themselves as a CBO – a term that, in 1996, was common knowledge. Gul Welfare Organization (GWO) thus rose on the Duki firmament that year. Gul being a rose, the name was meant to spread like fragrance through the rivalry-ridden community. As everyone appreciates a rose, the founders wanted their endeavors to be approved of by one and all.

The year 1997 was when the very term NGO was drawing considerable opprobrium from the pulpit. Naturally, GWO found itself at the receiving end of a good deal of flak. Regardless, it marched bravely on. Raising donations, GWO erected bamboo poles and got the electricity department to lay the line. A large part of Duki that had always been off the power grid was lit up for the first time. More importantly they linked up with Balochistan Rural and Urban Water and Sanitation to procure in-house latrines and twenty deep bore hand pumps at various point about the village.

By 1998 though the opposition continued, GWO nonetheless had also earned considerable goodwill, especially among the educated locals as well as officers of the district administration. Cashing in on this, the group acquired a dilapidated government building from the Deputy Commissioner. From the single room loaned by a well-wisher to be used as their office, GWO moved to this ramshackle place and launched a donations campaign to restore the ruin. Named Gul Plaza in its new incarnation, the building now houses the GWO office, their gym and weight-training facility and language classes.

In 1999 a SAP-PK team visiting the district met with the newly established office. Shortly thereafter the organization received intimation to attend the next RDP session. The three, two men and a woman, who attended returned with their ‘eyes opened wide.’ By Amir’s own admission, they now had knowledge that had thus far evaded them. Speaking for himself, he says understanding of the importance of awareness raising and advocacy was the essential tool with which the training equipped him.

It was about this time that his own father’s mind had been poisoned against Amir who, so the old man was told, had joined an NGO and gone against religion. Armed with his new advocacy skill, he enumerated all the work he and his colleagues had done and asked his father if it was good work or evil. Indeed, even the hand pump in the mosque had been installed by the efforts of the GWO team. When the old man agreed all that was for the good of the community, Amir asked his father to name the evil or irreligious activity his team had been reported for. There was nothing.
'It was as simple as that. That was advocacy. That was something missing from our repertoire of expertise.' Amir says even now, ten years on, feeling the triumph of that moment with his father.

By now the opposition from the pulpit was in full flood with the Friday sermons raging about *kufr* (infidelity) and the shameless act of women and men working together. What Amir had already tried with his father, GWO applied to the local mullah who was taken on a tour of the work done by the NGO. The tour began at the mosque hand pump and ended at the rehabilitated spring. Asked if the campaign for eradication of drugs and AIDS awareness that GWO had launched only that year was in any way opposed to Islam, the mullah was stymied. The following Friday, Duki streets rang with the mullah’s all-out declaration in favor of Gul Welfare Organization. The lessons of RDP paid the first substantive dividends.

Running the full gamut of the RDP training the GWO team emerged on the Duki horizon with ever more commitment and zeal. Back in 1985, a water supply scheme was approved for Duki town. Part of the work, including a large storage tank, was completed before internal rivalries forced the project to be abandoned. The original project envisaged a number of water taps interspersed across the town. The community however demanded a tap in every courtyard. That being beyond the cost of the project was denied. Hostile community members went up against the contractor, forcing him out and shutting down work on the project.

Late in 2001, GWO approached the provincial government for revival of the old scheme and secured a funding of Rs 2.8 million. The community laughed in the face of the GWO office bearers: the scheme had failed earlier, what magic did they possess to make it go this time? The magic, says Amir, was that of the lessons of RDP. That was not what he told the community, however; he simply applied the technique.

A week or so of campaigning made way for acceptance of the scheme and the original plan of water points, not in individual homes, but at selected spots across town. However, the contractor cut corners and when the water flowed for the first time, all along the length of the pipe from the water source to the tank, joints burst out like fountains. Undaunted, the GWO team procured the necessary tools and set to work on the faulty joints themselves. By and by, community members living along the pipeline joined them and the system was put in order.

The moment of trial came when GWO suggested a nominal monthly fee to keep the system running. The community would have nothing of that, it was declared. The NGO kept at it and even before the first month after installation was over, this seemingly recalcitrant community agreed to pay fifty rupees per household per month. The sum pays for upkeep of the system as well as the salary of an operator and continues to this day. As the community had worked together with GWO to get the scheme going, there is now a sense of ownership and all but the more technical repairs are done by the users themselves.

In 2001 SAP-PK funded a GWO health care project at a time when the ten thousand population of Old Duki had no medical facility within easy reach. Sustainability was ensured by instituting a visit fee of twenty rupees per visit that paid the salaries of the dispenser and the LHV as well as rent of the building. If there were objectors to the levy, their voice was soon lost because of the ready availability of medical care where none had
existed. Consequently, when fee was enhanced to fifty rupees, no dissenting voices were raised.

One aspect of Duki that no organization dealt with was the multitudes of coal miners in the area. As part of the largest coal-producing district, Duki town is visited by twenty thousand miners on their days off. Raising awareness concerning AIDS and Hepatitis among workers living away from home for long periods was one task GWO set itself. But more important was ensuring due compensation for the miners and their families in case of accident. Exploiting the miners’ ignorance of the law, owners had long denied them this right. An extended campaign with miners and owners may not have brought about a drastic change, but it has given the miners the knowledge armed with which they demand compensation.

As SAP-PK’s partner of choice for SDGP, GWO broke a barrier to bring actual women councilors to the district. Theoretically, the earlier elections did throw up women representatives. But in reality these were illiterate women backed by powerful families employing them as domestic servants. Their function was merely to fill the seats, not to represent women. The GWO campaign in the district under the SDGP banner prior to the 2005 elections has filled every single woman’s seat with genuine representatives.

Over twenty years ago when he started out helping illiterate people around the confusing maze of government offices, Amir Tareen had thought he would grow old doing just that. Today GWO works in the entire district of Loralai. Now it does not help them around; it shows them how to stand up for themselves.
4. Hope In Balochistan

For its short life of seven years, HOPE has come a long way. When it was established in 2002, its founders only wanted to ‘serve the less-privileged’ among them. And Besima, part of the newly created district of Washuk in the backwaters of Balochistan on the unpaved highroad from Kalat to Panjgur, is largely comprised of the under-privileged. These were people existing on a distant edge of Pakistan whose voice had never been heard.

Perched at 1700 meters above the sea with the arid Balochistan uplands to the east and the sandy Kharian Desert to the west, Besima sits in the catchment area of the Rakhshan River. Theoretically, that would make this a rich country of orchards and vineyards. But the extreme aridity takes everything away from Besima because the meager agriculture depends upon the rains. Also, as it lies off the national electricity grid, Besima cannot have electric tube wells and the high cost of transportation makes it impossible to run diesel-powered wells.

The government bequeathed a middle school to Besima some time in the 1970s. As with most government schools here too the standard of education was hardly anything to get excited about. It was from this institution that a boy named Karim Baloch did his early schooling to move on to Quetta for his degree. During his years in college, he heard of people helping others better their lives. The Urdu word that most fitted this activity was khidmat (Service), and that was what he got into his head to do for the people of Besima.

Having completed his high school (12th grade) education and back in Besima Karim spoke to his friends about his dream. Other than the notion of doing good, neither he nor his partners were clear what exactly needed to be done. With only hope uplifting their souls with visions of a better world, they established Human Organization for Peaceful Environment (HOPE) in the year 2002. With precious little to do, the team began going out to remote villages with visiting anti-polio teams. Their mission: to see that no child below the age of five missed the essential immunization.

However, polio vaccination was periodic with long gaps between that needed to be filled with useful work. The next best thing to do was to collect donations and help the poor in need. But in cash-starved Besima, what little collections they made could only pay for the HOPE team’s own running expenses.

Late in 2002, the HOPE office received a visitor from SAP-PK surveying for suitable organizations to join the forthcoming RDP training. Other than their single room with the palm-frond mat on the floor, the young dreamers of Besima had nothing to show him. There was no activity, save the periodic trips with the anti-polio teams, no record. The letter a couple of months later informing them that HOPE had been selected to attend the training came as a bit of surprise for Karim.

The critical demand by SAP-PK was that there should be a participant each from both genders. Now, Besima with its strict Baloch code of conduct did not take women’s activities outside the home lightly. No woman was therefore ready to travel with Karim to Quetta to be part of the training. Taking the boldest decision of his life, the young man asked his sister Sharaf Khatoon to join him.
It was an uncomfortable first day in Quetta for the siblings. Because of his greater exposure, Karim was able to stumble through the preliminaries but poor Sharaf, a total stranger to such activities, was at a complete loss. Karim recalls that he himself was surprised by the miraculous change he saw in his shy, village girl of a sister by the time the first workshop ended on the third day. Through 2003, a flurry of training sessions in various cities of Pakistan followed. And when they were home, Karim and Sharaf organized sessions respectively with men and women in Besima to pass on what they were learning.

Karim says the RDP training opened a new world for them. The big discovery was the difference between charity and development. The idea of doing good by giving alms from donations evaporated as dew in the sun from the minds of the siblings. Gaining a brand new vocabulary, they learned that people could be ‘empowered’ to build a better life for themselves. By the end of the year, they also knew how to run an office, manage finances and keep records. Advocacy, the art of winning others over to one’s side, was another important item now part of the sibling’s professional repertoire.

In the RDP, it had been said that charity or welfare activities were short-term schemes that rarely changed the recipient’s situation. Development, on the other hand, was sustained and paid dividends over the long term. Nothing, Karim recognized, could have a more enduring influence on society than quality education. And so, Besima saw the establishment of the HOPE school.

A large residential building owned by a retired government servant and abandoned since the owner’s move to Quetta was acquired. Donations from local well-wishers and friends paid for the necessary and very basic school equipment and the rolls were opened. With Karim and his colleagues working as volunteer teachers, the HOPE school started for a mere eighteen students. That was March 2006.

Even from the beginning, the school charged a monthly fee of a hundred and fifty rupees from students whose families could afford the expense. For poor children not only was that waived off, they were also provided free uniforms and books. If the act of taking his sister to the workshop in Quetta and then farther afield had been ‘against Islam,’ this was worse. Why, Baloch children were made to wear neckties with the uniform, a piece of attire of the unholy West. What is more, the school had co-education. The first attack against these perceived religious deviations came from the mosque.

Karim canvassed with the mullah and though the weekly attacks died off, the mullah yet remained repugnant to the way the school was run. Parents thought otherwise however and in the beginning of the second school year, the register had strength of thirty-four. Most of the new entrants had switched over from the government school. Compared with the nominal fee of the government school, HOPE was expensive yet its allure was the higher standard of education. As of late 2009, there are over a hundred and fifty students. Two of them are the mullah’s children who come duly attired with neckties.

Averse to letting the school building remain idle after hours, HOPE set up evening English language classes on the premises. Unmindful of what the country’s reactionary politicians say about learning of that infidel language, the young people of Besima flocked to the new facility and the first year the centre trained nearly a hundred young women and men in spoken English. From that early batch, one young woman is now following a masters program in English literature at the university in Quetta.
Encouraged by the success of the school in Besima, HOPE began to eye some outlying villages a couple of hours drive away that had never seen a school. Early in 2009, HOPE opened three more schools, one each in Zard, Rakhshan and Sajid. In the absence of roads and public transport it was impossible for a Besima teacher to go out every day, consequently local girls who had finished ten grades were trained to run the new establishments. Beginning humbly with a few students each, the three schools now have a collective strength of a hundred and forty-four students.

Three years is a very short time to assess the accomplishments of a school, but the case of little Waheed is a fine indicator of where the Besima school is heading. A new entrant in school and still in the first grade, the boy took part in a function during an exposure visit to Quetta in October 2009. Standing on a chair behind the rostrum so as to be visible to the audience the boy spoke in English. Waheed comes from a family amongst the poorest of Besima’s poor and is exempted school fees. In the audience, his mother broke out in tears to see her son who, in her estimation could not have been any better than an illiterate shepherd, hold forth in a language her family could not dream of ever speaking.

That day it was not just a mother moved by her son’s performance, however. Funded by SAP-PK and held in a posh Quetta hotel, the function was attended by senior government officers and politicians besides several NGO workers – all visibly impressed. The management of the hotel was the most overcome with the show: it waived off thirty percent of the agreed payment. That, it is reported, was the hotel’s contribution to the cause of education in Besima.

Meanwhile, Sharaf Khatoon had not been idle. Her time in the village between the RDP sessions was spent in training other women. In Besima, a place where women were not permitted to either work outside the home or go socializing, Sharaf organized Anjuman Khwateen-e-Rakhshan – Association of Rakhshan Women. The group daily gathered in a home ostensibly to sew and embroider, but in reality to socialize and discuss their problems.

The women of Besima gradually began to discover themselves as individuals and in 2005, the sewing group evolved into Women’s Development Organization. However, they had to tread very carefully in order not to upset the tribal notions of their families and it was only in 2008 that WDO was registered as a CBO. By this time, the women had agreed that their biggest problem was non-availability of potable water. The few sources being at various spots around the village, women had to spend as many as four hours daily to fulfill the household’s needs. Approaching TVO with a proposal, WDO procured eighteen hand pumps for installation around the Besima union council.

With more free time on their hands and bolstered by all-round appreciation for the hand pumps, WDO carried out an assessment to identify the next most important need. Funded by TVO and in progress in October 2009, the in-house, deep pit toilets will soon put Besima on the map as the first village in the region to have this facility. This was a mental turning point in the village. Whatever opposition there was to this increasing women’s mobility, now simply died away. Indeed, even the village mullah became appreciative of WDO’s work.

From this sound footing, WDO proposed a women’s rights awareness program for SAP-PK funding. Once through, this will enlarge WDO’s work to three other villages in the
union council of Besima. Consider: as little as three years before their first success, the women of Besima had no voice. For its short existence of just a year and as the only women’s organization in the district of Washuk, WDO has much to show and holds great promise for the future.

Back in 2002 when Karim and his friends laid the foundation of HOPE, they were frequently haunted by the fear of failure. The efforts to assist the polio immunization teams were commendable, but what would the healthy young people do with their lives in arid Besima? That was a question Karim had asked himself so many times. He says that the magic word he learned in his first RDP session and which led him to choose education as the major concern for HOPE was sustainability.

The children that HOPE teaches today will be better equipped to face their world as grown-ups than any pervious Besima generation. Surely many of these girls and boys will become the flag-bearers of WDO and HOPE to carry the good work begun in 2002 to the farther corners of the district. This will be the true essence of the khidmat that Karim Baloch and his friends had wanted to do.
5. Awakening Of Lasbela

In pre-partition days, the good people of village Moosani built themselves a school on self-help basis. Through the 1950s and 60s this school turned out a number of capable students some of whom went on to doctoral studies and made it to high positions in Pakistan and abroad. But while the nearby district headquarter of Lasbela saw a healthy growth of educational institutions, lying only a few kilometers from town, Moosani underwent an intellectual decline, especially among the poorer segment of the community.

Though the school was run by the government and charged but nominal fees, the poor simply neglected their children’s education. It was said that shepherds and small farmers could do without wasting money on school for their boys. As for the girls, what use was education when one only had to fetch water, cook and rear children? Asim Lasi, a native of Moosani was disturbed by this peculiar set of the mind. Why, if things continued this way, Moosani would be illiterate in a few years’ time.

To stop the village in its headlong rush to collective mental perdition Asim and a bunch of friends set up Rural Youth Social Welfare Association (RYSWA). The year was 1999 and the aim of this new organization was to educate out of schoolchildren and woo back into the fold those who had dropped out. But with little vision concerning how to go about their self-assigned task, the group thought the best means to this end was a tuition centre. Though there were no funds, there was nevertheless no dearth of spirit. Funded by donations and working as volunteers, members of RYSWA designated a room in one home as the centre and began to provide free education to out of schoolchildren.

A year after the group began work, the government sanctioned a girls’ middle school for Moosani. Now, in such cases, land for the building is provided by the community. However, the plot offered by a rich landlord lay right by the Narag stream that periodically flowed over its banks. Surveyors rejected the donation and with none other forthcoming, the school was scrapped. Six decades earlier, this same community had built a self-help school; and now indifference prevented it from taking advantage of a government offer.

Disappointed with the way the project had gone and frustrated with its own lack of voice, the youth group turned to the NGO sector. Having heard of the work being done in that sector, they shot off a number of letters to various organizations seeking assistance and guidance. Only one response came forth: from SAP-PK. Shortly after this letter, sometime in late 2000, RYSWA received a visitor from SAP-PK and was invited to join the NGO’s RDP training for the year 2001.

Because of the low literacy rate among the women of Moosani, the group was unable to find a woman participant to fulfill the one man, one woman condition. And so Asim was the only member to represent RYSWA. For him it was as if going to college for a degree in social uplift and community empowerment. As he returned home after each session to pass on his knowledge to his colleagues, Asim and the RYSWA team began to cast about for something meaningful to accomplish as their way of serving the community.
Now, the drought of the 1990s had adversely affected agriculture in Lasbela district. While rich farmers had installed tube wells and moved successfully from seasonal crops to vegetable farming, the scarcity of irrigation was forcing the poorer ones to abandon their ancestral lands. Instead, they took to daily wage labor in Lasbela town. In the union councils around Moosani, some affected farmers had sold their land to affluent growers from the southern districts of Sindh who sank wells and brought the land under banana plantation.

Organizing groups of those local farmers who had given up agriculture, RYSWA began its own RDP training with them. Within six months, these groups were sufficiently motivated to begin working their lands again. Bridging the gap, RYSWA invited officials of the Agriculture Department to visit the farmers, assess their situation and needs and suggest suitable crops. Since 2003, dozens of farmers in the union council of Moosani have reclaimed their lands and are growing crops like legumes and seasonal fruit that thrive on minimal irrigation.

If the drought had run farmers out of business, it had also taken its toll on livestock, the other major means of livelihood in the area. That same year, SAP-PK provided a small financial input for RYSWA to initiate a goat rearing project to offset the loss of livestock owing to the drought. Introducing prolific breeders from Sindh and Punjab, the association helped bring back numerous families from abject poverty.

Kuz Bano and her three children had a good life until her husband was alive. He worked his block of land and minded a reasonable herd of sheep and goats. There was food to eat and the family had no complaints. Then the drought killed the crops three seasons running and slowly wiped out the herd. The strain was apparently too much for the man for shortly after he passed away from this life leaving it to Kuz Bano to fend for her family.

Assuming the part of the man, Kuz Bano, became a farmer; tilling, irrigating, harvesting the land herself. But in the drought situation there was precious little she could eke out from the sere land. It was a hard life until she was discovered by RYSWA and loaned a goat. Before the end of 2004, she had returned her loan in the shape of a yearling kid and was the owner of three other goats as well. Kuz Bano now has a dozen goats and though she still keeps slogging away on her agricultural land, her sales of milk alone are enough to keep her family properly fed and clothed.

Meanwhile RYSWA had not lost sight of its earliest goal of getting as many children in school as possible. Back in the year 2000, the proposed girls’ middle school had come to grief because no one was willing to donate land for the purpose. This time around in 2004, RYSWA campaigned with one rich land owner after the other until a suitable block of land was pledged. Thereafter a fresh sanction for girls’ middle school from the Education Department was easy. Completed in 2006, the school now has a muster of two hundred and fifty students.

Interestingly, the Khaskhelis of the district had long been known for their indifference to education and were noted for their overall illiteracy. Consequent to the commissioning of the school, the RYSWA awareness raising exercise saw the enrollment of some eighty Khaskheli girls as well.

In 2006, Asim applied one essential lesson of RDP to the banner of the NGO. The word ‘welfare’ in the title of RYSWA had been rankling since 2001, now the organization was
registered as an NGO called Sujag (Awakening) Social Society (SSS) and its office was moved from Moosani to Lasbela town.

In Lasbela, the divisions on religious and political lines were deep and very old. Now, Lasbela was not Moosani where the SSS team could take a campaign from door to door. Here things would have to be tackled differently. Aware that nothing galvanizes Baloch men more than a soccer match, SSS resolved to use soccer matches as their assemblies. No strangers to donation collecting, the team raised funds and arranged regular weekly soccer matches. The stadium became an informal RDP training ground with the commentary box belting out harangues on the need for peaceful coexistence and brotherhood, on participatory development and what have you.

It was seen that the Hindus kept strictly to themselves – even a soccer match failed to get them out in the stadium. The first attempts by the SSS team to get Hindu young men to join them were met with a bit of suspicion. By and by, however things changed; Hindu youth raised their own informal club and began to attend the SSS functions and football matches.

That left the political divide to be bridged. The joke was that no elections can be held in Lasbela without outbreak of deep rancor at best and at worst fights that led to long-standing hostilities. The villages of Narag and Kallan in union council Moosani were the most infamous in this regard. With the ground prepared during the football matches and their door to door campaigns, SSS got their big chance to try their hand at peace keeping in the run up to the 2008 elections.

Ensuring mass attendance, the NGO invited the various candidates, one at a time, to address the electorate of Moosani. At the end of each address, the SSS team added its own little bit about the need to ensure peace even in the face of extreme political divergence. To the utter surprise of everyone, even of SSS office-bearers, the elections of 2008 were conspicuous for the decorum and amiability.

Becoming partners with SAP-PK in SDGP in 2007 gave SSS its first taste of success as a development NGO. The Narag stream flowing past Moosani had burst its banks in the summer floods of 2007 seriously threatening the village. The community was offered a protective wall project if it could raise twenty percent of the cost. Now, the cost was a whopping Rs 2.6 million and on the face of it beyond the means of the poor people of Moosani. For a time it seemed the project was on the same way as the school many years ago.

SSS intervened to convince the community that just about half a million rupees worth of manual labor would pay their share of the cost. Having never been in a participatory development initiative, the community was unaware of this angle. Today the stone and gabion embankment is in place and Moosani ready for the next flood without fear of a washout.

The roster of SSS successes may not be long, but it is remarkable that all the work the NGO has done thus far – save the livestock scheme – was funded by donations from local sources. Whether it was to ensure that tuberculosis patients saw their treatment through to the end or encouraging men to have their pregnant wives examined regularly by the gynecologist or getting children into school, SSS has worked on its own steam. That alone is their greatest potential.
6. Woman In A Man’s World

Generally speaking, the Bareach of Balochistan are very firmly moored in the ancient customs, good or bad, of the Pashtuns. The genders live segregated from each other, education for the girl child is frowned upon and rarely does a girl go up to the high school level. Women working side by side with men outside the home are virtually unheard of.

Jamila Gul Bareach was a bit peculiar to have shown some resentment when her father said she did not need to study beyond the stipulated high school. She was pulled out of school and it took a good deal of solicitation by a supportive mother and brothers for her to be permitted to continue to college. Having barely finished her graduation, she was offered a job in the Cooperative Societies Department. She proudly claims that in her position as Assistant Registrar, she became the first Bareach woman to work at this level in the government.

Jamila’s initial training was on the job in the various sections of the department that governs registration and functioning of cooperative societies and in some case of NGOs as well. Her teachers were mostly fossils who had wasted their lives virtually at the same desk and were now on their way to retirement. There were some younger men as well, but having been tutored by those same fossils, they were scarcely any better. All she learned was stultifying clerical procedures that only made the job dull and uninspiring. Any hankering that Jamila may have harbored for learning the intricacies of her new profession was smothered.

Within a month or two of Jamila’s entry to the department she met, Parveen Sikander, a well-known social worker of Quetta. With a view to selecting suitable candidates, she spoke about SAP-PK and the RDP training about to be launched. Jamila confesses that though her work meant their registration and functioning, she had only a vague notion about the work of NGOs. She says every new application for the registration of a development NGO was a source of wonder for her: what was the use and efficacy of these innumerable organizations her department listed? However, what she heard that day interested her and she got her department to nominate her for the training of 1991-92.

Neither school nor college nor indeed her few months of work with the Cooperative Societies Department had taught her what she now learned. For starters, she became aware of the level and range of work CBOs and NGOs were doing. This brought the realization that these development networks were functioning where the government had failed. From education to health to agriculture development to infrastructure and micro-credit, to name a few sectors, these organizations were doing the work that any efficient, people-friendly government should have done. Only a few years later when the anti-NGO campaign was launched by the government, within her office Jamila’s was the sole voice in defense.

The Cooperative Societies Department runs training sessions for organizations registered under it. Book and record keeping, office and financial management and report writing were handy subjects to be imparted, but these courses lacked some essentials that Jamila became aware of during her RDP training. Her departmental trainers had never touched upon community ownership of an initiative. Government agencies planned and executed projects that soon fell into dereliction because of a lack of community ownership. Consequently, the province was littered with dead schemes.
Now, part of the charter of the Cooperatives Societies Department is to train the institutions registered by it. As with the in-house training that Jamila had received, so too was this utterly wanting in substance. Equipped with her knew knowledge and against considerable opposition from the unimaginative official trainers, Jamila began to overhaul her department’s training program: the lessons of RDP were far too essential to be kept from the people working in the field and who most needed them. The training now included such abstract and unheard of notions as awareness raising, need assessment, community mobilization and participation and not least of all, sustainability.

The resentment upon revolutionizing the training had scarcely died within her department when Jamila raised her colleagues’ hackles again. The provincial Agriculture and Food Department initiated its Crop Maximization Project and assigned Cooperative Societies Department with the task of community mobilization. Recognizing that her department was ill suited to the calling; Jamila insisted the work be given to BRSP. Averse to seeing the extra income entailed in the project, her colleagues resisted outsourcing the work. Jamila held her ground and successfully pushed it through to have the satisfaction of seeing a job done well. If the development sector had an asset ensconced in a government department, it was Jamila Bareach.

Her NGO experience proved handy when the provincial Planning and Development Department in keeping with the times saw it fit to establish a Women in Development (WID) section. Jamila being the only woman in the entire province with both government as well as NGO experience was taken on board. Between 1997 and 1999, Jamila was the trainer for government officers. From this time the new heading of ‘Gender’ was added to the department’s planning documents.

Farther self-realization came in 2001 when International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) asked her to set up and lead its Advice and Legal Assistance Center (ALAC). On leave of absence from her department, Jamila worked on this assignment for eighteen months. That was a time when virtually thousands of Afghan refugees were rotting in jail with no recourse to legal help. In the course of her regular visits to the various jails in the province, she learned that it was not just Afghans: there were Iranian women, victims of the flesh trade en route to Indian pleasure houses, and Indians, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis caught while being smuggled to Europe via Iran.

Despite the large number of forgotten prisoners, there were only a handful of individuals struggling to help them. The ALAC initiative was the first institutional assistance for these hapless Hundreds of jailed foreigners were put in touch with their respective embassies and high commissions and dozens of women shifted from prison to Dar ul Aman in Quetta during Jamila’s brief stint with ICMC. In order to ensure durability of these efforts, the procedure for handling of such prisoners needed streamlining.

In 2002, approaching the Chief Justice of Balochistan, Jamila got a court injunction directing the police to refer all cases of arrested foreigners immediately to ICMC. Moreover, she coordinated with the provincial home department as well as the jails to inform concerned embassies as and when foreigners were arrested. The efficacy of this procedure is ensured by the ALAC offices in the districts on the international borders. If today police stations maintain close liaison with the various ALAC offices, it is because of the system put in place by Jamila.
As for the Afghan refugees, ALAC took the shape of a jirga – the only one presided over by a woman! As word of the work done by ALAC spread among the refugee camps, women began to resort to it in ever-increasing numbers. The petitioners were generally victims of domestic violence, forced marriage or divorce. Summoning the other side and mediating as the head, Jamila claims to have resolved dozens of cases of domestic injustice.

The Afghan woman Marjan, whose husband had contracted a second marriage for her failure to produce children, perhaps owes her very life to Jamila. When she first came to the ALAC office, she complained of beatings at the hands of her husband and his new wife and food deprivation to force her to leave home. Instead of supporting her, her family insisted she continue to live with the husband no matter what the situation. It turned out that Marjan’s family being much the poorer, was afraid of the better-off husband’s influence. The jirga was called and in view of the husband’s assurance of good behavior, Marjan was returned home.

Shortly afterwards she again appeared at the ALAC office, this time with a little bundle containing all her worldly possession. Under threat of death from her husband and his wife, she refused to return home. Moving court to send the woman to Dar ul Aman, Jamila received a visit from the husband who threatened her with dire consequences if his wife was not returned. Nothing doing, said Jamila. Seeing that bluster was not working, the man resorted to cajoling and pleading. A second jirga ensued in which the man was made to sign a document to refrain from violence against a surety bond of Rs 150,000. In the event of breach, the surety would stand forfeited and a case would be registered.

For the rest of her time with ICMC, Jamila kept track of Marjan. However, the poor woman suffered from the uncertainty of a refugee’s life. It is not known what became of this Uzbek woman after her repatriation to Afghanistan.

Back in her parent department since 2004, Jamila has ensured continuity of the training program she put in place after her RDP training. Caught in a mental inertia, many of her colleagues who had wished away the revamped course have come to accept it over the years. She says this may well be her most lasting contribution to the working of her department.

Jamila Gul Bareach says she was like a blank sheet of paper when she joined the department. She is aware that she could have well remained in that groove with a clerical set of the mind like all the men around her. But it all changed with the RDP training. Without it, she says, she would never have got the recognition from ICMC and the chance to alter the lives of so many foreigners and refugees.
7. In The Line Of Fire

In 1970, Talash village in Lower Dir was marked by a remarkable phenomenon: the formation of Idara Khidmat e Khalq (IKK) – Organization for the Service of Humanity. It was an all-male affair that did good by collecting donations. Their repertoire of good deeds included helping poor parents wed off a daughter, or providing a sewing machine to a widow with no means of livelihood. From donations alone, they even managed to establish and successfully run a Mother and Child Health Care Centre.

In 1990, IKK expanded its focus to bring the marginalized sections of society, women, children, minorities and the disabled, into their fold. In the strict Pakhtun society it was however impossible for the men of IKK to interact with women. And so, instead of seeking elsewhere, the men of IKK got young educated women from their own families to join them.

Shad Begum, a mere stripling barely into teenage thus came on board in 1994. By her own admission, she had very little understanding of the principles her father talked to her about. Not surprising then that she lost her tongue every time she was sent out, duly prepared, to address a group of women. Meanwhile, detractors found even this working together of men and women of the same family objectionable. To counter this unwarranted propaganda, the women of IKK registered Anjuman Behbood-e Khwateen – Association for Women’s Welfare.

When Shad’s father was invited from the IKK platform for SAP-PK’s RDP training of 1995-96, he took Shad along to participate from Anjuman. The fourteen year-old girl who hid behind her father when asked to introduce herself in the opening workshop gave a fine account of her transformation in the final session. With perfect poise, she faced an audience of about a hundred persons to present what she and her peers had learned in the training.

Back in Talash, Anjuman got its first impetus by a SAP-PK funded Mother and Child Healthcare Centre and health and hygiene promotion program in five union councils. The latter included monthly educational meetings between the trained staff of the MCH and women in the villages. For Shad, charged up with the concept of group formation, this proved a useful means of setting up women’s groups. This was the second half of 1996.

Before the year was out, Anjuman had seen its first big success with these groups. A women’s workshop in Talash culminated with an exhibition of their handicrafts that was attended, among others, by several NGO representatives. Among these latter was one from TVO. Impressed by the promise held out by Anjuman, the
donor provided them funding of Rs 500,000 for a credit program that had brought economic independence to numerous women and continues to do so to this day. Building on its mark-up and because of its zero-default rate, the fund today stands at Rs 1.7 million.

The case of Rehana Yasmin exemplifies how small inputs have changed lives. Her husband ran a successful electronics repair shop in Talash and the family of six (four daughters) was reasonably comfortable. Then the man was stricken by an undiagnosed disease and slowly began to waste away. The repair shop closed down and the family came in for very hard times. To keep body and soul together Rehana borrowed money from friends and neighbors until there came a time that she could no longer put up with their demands for the loans to be settled.

With no other way of escaping her predicament, she secured a loan of Rs 150,000 from a government bank and paid of her several creditors. It was about then she heard of Anjuman and their loan scheme. She applied for a loan of Rs 25,000 to purchase a cow. Her choice was based on sound logic: before her marriage, her family owned several milch animals and Rehana knew her way around cattle. She got her first cow in mid-1997.

With the diligence of the desperate, Rehana paid her monthly installment to Anjuman as well as to the bank. Half way through the loan repayment, she applied for and got a second loan for another cow. Not long after that, she was the owner of her third animal and an established dairywoman with servants to tend the cattle. In the twelve years since she got her first loan, Rehana Yasmin has paid off all her liabilities, wedded her two older daughters to well-off families in Rawalpindi and sent the two remaining ones to the best college in Chakdara. The monthly tuition fees for the finest available education runs to just over Rs 30,000. With things looking up for the family, the husband regained his health. Yet, another loan from Anjuman, re-established the man’s old electronics repair business.

Providence had other plans for Dir, however. In the late 1990s, local mullahs began to beat the populace with the stick of Islamic law. One of their oft-repeated promulgations was that women working for NGOs being engaged in the work of the devil were fair game to be abducted and married off to ‘good Muslims.’ A press conference in Peshawar condemning this inducement to villainy was covered by the national press with the accompanying photo showing Shad Begum flanked by her father and a politician.

In an attempt to undermine the work of Anjuman, thousands of photocopies of the clipping were flogged around the district by a religious party. The voices of the women who had benefited from the credit scheme, however, were louder than the propaganda unleashed against Anjuman. Though the storm died down, Shad Begum came into the reactionary parties’ crosshairs. She remains under threat to this day.

Meanwhile, the new local government elections rolled around in 2001. As a SAP-PK partner in their Democratic Rights and Citizens’ Education Program, Anjuman worked full tilt to bring women into politics. Now, Dir was a district where, since 1947, no woman had ever been permitted to vote, leave alone run for office. True to form, the candidates of the eight mainstream parties declared unanimously that this time around too women would not be permitted to either contest or vote.

Baton-wielding thugs of religious parties prevented genuine candidates from submitting their papers to the election commission while professional politicians fielded their servants, elderly relatives and other women who, once in office, could be manipulated. If reactionary
forces were permitted to succeed this time again, the new local bodies system would remain a non-starter in Dir. Resolved to turn the situation around; Shad Begum braved the baton-wielders and submitted her papers.

Her work over the past five years was her advocate and Shad scored a resounding win that surprised everyone. But in the district assembly, she and the other women elected representatives were seated in a separate room where they could not participate in the proceedings. When Shad protested, the men told her it was Pakhtun culture that did not permit them to seek a woman’s advice. Meanwhile, trained by UNDP as a trainer on women in politics, she was educating her peers on the local government ordinance. As time went by, even the illiterate representatives began to exhibit an opinion.

It took Shad Begum four years of assiduous campaigning with the rising crescendo of her colleagues’ voices joining in to force the first change. In 2005, a public address system was rigged up to broadcast the proceedings in the women’s room. Thereafter it was an easier journey to get women and men in one room separated by a curtain and the mike passing to the women when demanded.

When the local bodies elections of 2005 rolled around, the reactionaries rallied for a fresh attack on women’s representation. Letters from the election commission were circulated instructing women teachers not to present themselves for election duties on polling day. They were explicitly informed that their honoraria, even for absenting themselves, would be paid them at home. This practice had prevented women election officers from performing their duties the first time around. Shad Begum and her Anjuman colleagues visited every single teacher designated as the election officer, urging her to be at her station on election day.

From the Anjuman platform, Shad also sent a warning to the election commission: if the men prevented women from contesting or voting, she and her group would see that there were no elections at all. In the 2005 elections ninety-four women out of a total of a hundred and fifty thousand voters cast their votes. This was the first ever instance of women becoming part of the franchise in Dir. This was also the crossing of a major watershed.

If this was a direct win for the civil society, there was another indirect victory. In order to counter the vocal representation by Shad Begum and her group, the politicians gave off the practice of fielding their domestic servants as dummy representatives. This time around, their candidates who made it to the assembly were educated women. Even if they did not see eye to eye with their progressive peers, they were nevertheless an added voice. This was yet another dent in the anti-women mindset.

Half way through the term, a fund of Rs 2.1 million was allocated by Gender Reforms Action Plan for women councilors in Dir. Rather than utilize it for any other purpose, the women agreed to the building of a Women’s Resource Centre in the district headquarters of Timergarah. With a sum of Rs 3.0 million from the Ministry of Women’s Development, the building for the centre was competed in 2009. Once operational early in 2010, it will have a library, computer centre and training facility. A judicious use of the building funds has left a sufficient sum for operational costs for the first few months.

In 2005, victories came laced with a minor setback. A local parliamentarian held a jirga and declared that henceforth no honor killing shall be reported either to the police or in the
press. A digital scan of the press clipping about this *jirga* with a number of case studies of recent killing sin the name of honor was circulated to thousands of addresses around the globe. The email bore the signatures of Shad Begum. National and international media came into action to expose the politician for what he was, but the pressure on Shad was too much for her to continue in Talash. Her life under threat, she was forced to move her office to Peshawar from where she continues to function as a member of the Dir district assembly.

With the advent of 2008, the name Anjuman Behbood e Khwateen was, if anything, a misnomer, for it was no longer working only for women’s development. Anjuman re-registered as Association for Behavior and Knowledge Transformation (ABKT).

To seek such a transformation was a huge undertaking. One significant indication of the beginning of change came in July 2009. Invited to a seminar on IDPs in Islamabad, Shad Begum spoke of ABKT’s work with the Swat IDPs, on the culture and historical background of Dir and the imperative of bringing women into mainstream life. The participants comprised of, among others, about two dozen local bodies’ representatives, all men, from Dir. When it was over, all of them came up to her to congratulate her. It was music to her ears to hear many of them confess they would rather be social workers than politicians.

If ABKT had planned to expand its operations across the province, the current turmoil has temporarily put the plan on hold. But this too shall pass. Meanwhile, the work in Upper and Lower Dir and Swat and her own representation in the district assembly proceeds well enough despite the threats to her life. With eleven women’s groups registered as CCBs, the movement for women’s emancipation is well underway. Indeed, so well established are the groups that should the local government system be scrapped, they are all poised to be registered as CBOs.

Had her father not taken her to the RDP training in Peshawar back in 1995, Shad has no doubt where she would have been today. She would have ended up as a teacher – the only line of work socially acceptable in Dir. There would have been neither Anjuman nor ABKT. ‘I may have made some positive impact as a teacher, but certainly not of the same magnitude as I did as a social worker.’ Shad Begum is not far off the mark.
8. Lighting Lamp From Lamp

When Haseena Malik took early retirement from her schoolteacher’s post in 1998, she had been educating the children of rich families in Dera Ismail Khan for thirty years. Retirement turned out to be tedious however and soon she was working with Idara Khidmat-e-Khalq (IKK) – Organization for the Service of Humanity. Headed by a retired bureaucrat, the organization had been engaged in welfare activity for the past several years and had recently begun concentrating on education.

With funding from the Pakistan Education Program, IKK was in the process of reviving dead schools in the district of Dera Ismail Khan. Most of these schools were simply abandoned, others had children in attendance but no teachers and yet others had been closed because they had never been able to muster the requisite number, that is, thirty students in each class, for the government to sustain them.

Two years of tireless activity by IKK spearheaded by the energetic Haseena, saw the revival of four hundred government schools. Drawing upon her experience as teacher, Haseena did not simply get the dormant schools up and running, in order to ensure parental interest, she organized Parent Teacher Associations in every single one of them. If PTAs in her cantonment board school could help enhance performance among teachers and students, they were bound to work in rural schools as well. The idea was vindicated and today these schools have a collective strength of twelve thousand boys and girls.

That was 1999, the year IKK registered under the name of Sustainable Development, Education, Rural Infrastructure, Veterinary Care and Environment (SERVE). The title was explanatory of the vision and plans of bringing about a revolution. Indeed, a revolution was what the district of Dera Ismail Khan needed. With poor agriculture because of its large arid tracts and total absence of an industrial base, its rural population is amongst the most deprived in the province.

Children’s education has little importance in the lives of parents struggling to keep body and soul together. Healthcare is abysmal and, as in the rest of the country, government line agencies take advantage of the common people’s ignorance, denying them their rightful facilities. Such was the condition SERVE set about to change.

That year, 1999, SERVE came in touch with SAP-PK and Haseena joined the following year’s RDP. The skills she had acquired in her thirty years as teacher were honed to the utmost during the 2000-01 sessions with SAP-PK. Among the newly acquired tools, the most important was community mobilization.
Establishing schools and making them successful was, as she says, 'like lighting lamp from lamp to banish darkness.' But there was another problem she says she may not have been conscious of without her RDP training. The communities were not organized, cohesive groups with a common voice; they were rather like discordant rabble with too many centrifugal forces disuniting them. Recognizing that until the communities were organized, neither could their problems be identified nor input be given with good effect, Haseena oversaw the formation of six community groups.

Dearth of potable water is a common enough phenomenon in rural Dera Ismail Khan. The first few meetings with the group in Takwara, a village of two thousand souls in Kolachi sub-division, highlighted water scarcity as the most pressing problem. The age-old natural supply by a stream running down from the hills had badly silted up and its banks breached by floods. Consequently, water that once reached the village where it was stocked in a tank for domestic and agricultural use was now lost en route. With the supply gone, women trekked long ways from the village to collect water from rain-filled ponds. Here livestock and humans drank together. As a result, gastro-intestinal diseases were fairly common. This situation had prevailed since the late 1980s.

By the time the funding of Rs 300,000 came through from SAP-PK, SERVE had mobilized the community enough to be willing to contribute its twenty percent share in the form of manual labor. When the project was completed in the second half of 2001 and the storage tank filled, two thousand souls got a reliable and clean source of water after more than a decade.

Several farmers of small and medium holdings had been forced out of business by a paucity of irrigation back in the late 1980s. From being reasonably well off, these farmers were driven to poverty and obligated to work as day laborers in Kolachi and Dera Ismail Khan. With the resumption of the water supply, the affected farmers now returned home to the lifestyle followed by their ancestors.

Meanwhile, village Mandra Saidan, fifteen kilometers north of Dera Ismail Khan, caught Haseena’s eye. Noted for its citrus, mango and falsa orchards, Mandra was where Haseena had met Salma during the meetings to raise a women’s group. Widowed at a very young age, Salma’s life had been a struggle to bring up her three children. Unskilled and unable to work outside the home she had depended upon her brother-in-law for handouts to raise her children.

With the women’s group in place, SERVE went into partnership with SDC to launch a fruit processing initiative in Mandra. Twenty-five selected women were trained in basic food handling, hygiene, fruit selection, costing and marketing. This was capped with training in fruit processing for juices, jams and pickles and the women who had thus far spent useless lives were on their way to becoming entrepreneurs.

In the summer of 2001, twenty-five women of Mandra went about making bulk purchases of unripe mangos (for pickles) and falsa (for juice). Prior arrangements with dealers in Dera Ismail Khan had been made and when the first batch of bottled fruit products appeared on the shelf, it was quickly lapped up. If the women had even an iota of uncertainty about the quality of their products, that was removed in 2004. Invited to the fair arranged by the National Productivity Organization in Islamabad, the orange, mango and falsa products received all-round appreciation.
Indeed, this endeavor at women’s empowerment won Haseena a prime ministerial award. Salma and her group clinched a contract with the Utility Stores Corporation where they now supply a thousand bottles a month. These products can be purchased across the country at all utility stores outlets. From nothing, these women now earn as much as five thousand rupees a month.

Success is the best motivator and soon there were others in Mandra also wanting a bit of the action. With Salma doing as the master trainer, the initial group of twenty-five prepared another batch. Today the number of women entrepreneurs in Mandra Saidan stands at above fifty.

In the initial period when procuring fruit was hard work, the hours long and proceeds meager, Salma’s brother-in-law had advised her to give up the work. As long as he was there to provide for her and his brother’s children, she need have no worry, he had said. Salma, who was then enjoying the first income of her life, albeit rather small, turned around to tell him, she no longer wished to be a burden on him.

SERVE had meanwhile not abandoned its ‘lighting lamps with lamps’ idea. Five villages, namely, Mohabat, Kiri Malang, Hathala, Takwara and Kot Daulat were selected where the existing government schools were dead. The educational profiles of these villages were interesting. In one, the school functioned as the private property of the local landlord where his daughters took turns at teaching. But with no monitoring, they took days off whenever they fancied and were not always at hand to teach.

In another case, the only educated girls were the daughters of the village barber. Now, a barber is considered a menial therefore, it had never occurred to anyone to engage these local young women as teachers in the government school. With no outside teacher willing to work here, the village remained without a school. When SERVE invited them to teach in the non-formal school, the girls feared the Khan would run their family out of the village for what would be considered an act of reaching above their station.

Selecting suitable young women with middle school or higher education to work as teachers – the barber’s daughters included, SERVE opened a non-formal school in each of the selected villages. With teachers’ salaries (Rs 3000 per month) paid by Literacy for All (LFA), the schools did exceptionally well: within six months the students were all writing English and Urdu prose and rattling off multiplication tables.

If anything, it was a surprise that in Kiri Malang the barber’s daughters opened the first day of their school with twenty-five students and not a word of protest from either the Khan or anyone else. The very individuals, who were looked down upon for belonging to the so-called menial caste, soon drew the respect of the community for their sheer diligence and dedication to their new profession.

When these schools were opened in 2006, SERVE prevailed upon LFA to extend their support from six months to nine. That was time enough for parents to begin appreciating children who could read and write not only in Urdu but in English as well. These were the same students who had struggled in teacher-less government schools for up to three years and yet remained illiterate. Parents were now ready to pay a nominal monthly fee to make the schools sustainable. A bit of inducement was necessary, however. Haseena says she told the fathers in the villages to spend a few rupees less on their cigarettes and pay school fees instead. And it worked.
They say nothing succeeds like success. Inspired by the way village groups had exerted themselves to win facilities for their communities; SERVE further strengthened them through SAP-PK’s SDGP initiative. Peasant Worker Groups either registered as Citizens’ Community Boards or otherwise are independently networking with local Nazims and government line agencies to solve long-standing problems.

Earlier, the efforts of individuals seeking assistance from any government line agency were stonewalled by petty bureaucrats. Acting together, members of the PWGs and CCBs were pleasantly surprised at the ease with which the doors of bureaucracy opened for them. With six men’s and three women’s CCBs, that is, three hundred plus motivated and charged men and women in place, the sub-division of Kolachi has come considerably ahead in terms of community empowerment.

Consider: back in 2007 the government forcibly annexed one thousand two hundred and fifty acres of poor farmers’ land in Mandra Kalan for use by the army. There was some little noise from the affected community, but it was drowned in a sea of stolid official silence. In October 2009, the community, duly reinforced by the DFG, rallied with renewed strength. Even as this goes to print in December 2009, the case is being contested in the session court of Dera Ismail Khan.

That was the outcome of the first phase of SDGP when SERVE worked in one village of each union council. Entering SDGP Phase 2, SERVE has increased its outreach to ten villages per union council. If the performance of the present groups is anything to go by, a rise in their numbers can only bode well for the communities.

Back in 1998, IKK began by resuscitating dead schools. As SERVE today, the NGO has a broad-based integrated approach to development. The NGO has grown carrying its clients communities with it. That is what strengthening the people is all about.
9. SESWA: Dreams Realized

Lying north of the Mardan-Swabi highway, Sheva is today a village of swept streets, paved and partially covered drains and a general air of tidiness where droves of children, boys and girls alike, neatly attired in school uniforms can be seen morning and afternoon on their way to or from school. A bridge spanning the river flowing past connects the village to the link road. Outside the village, seasonal crops sway with the breeze. Every which way one looks at it Sheva, with its air of calm fulfilment, easily passes for a model village. And it might well be.

But back in the early 1980s, things were different. Divided along two distinct political lines the village, the village was held together not by design of man but merely good fortune. The jirga that once effectively governed village affairs had gone the way of anarchy because of its own internal differences and had created rifts within the community. Education was the worst sufferer in this situation. For one, it was commonly said that education other than in religion was one’s guarantee to hell. Secondly, taking their cue from the general attitude, teachers in the few existing government schools in Sheva remained mostly absent.

Its streets unpaved and sewage overflowing from the broken drains running through them, Sheva was like a rubbish dump. In place of the bridge across the stream, there was a causeway that went under in times of spate. Consequently, it was not unusual for people to be stranded on this or that side of the river – sometimes for a couple of days on end. The political arena was divided between two strong parties and infighting was so intense that development schemes were killed even before they could begin: if the party in power launched a project, the opposition ensured its failure and vice versa only so that the other side did not get any credit. In either case, the trickery continued regardless of the benefit the community could accrue without it.

Such was the situation that saw the birth of Sheva Educated Social Workers Association (SESWA) in September 1986. As its name suggested, the forces behind it were young college graduates who having despair of the situation prevailing in the village hoped to set things right. The issues that featured highly in the association’s agenda were internal friction and the overall lack of disregard for education. Good intentions alone are not enough, however. The association lacked a method of going about this business of putting things right.

Without a strategy and with no model to follow, the young men set to correcting all that was not right in their view. On the weekly holiday, they went about the village as a team armed with shovels and baskets to clear out the drains and clean up the streets. The rest of the village looked on in open-mouthed wonder at this unprecedented spectacle. Within weeks, however, other men began to join in to help. The big boost to their image came when these young do-gooders got the village electricity transformer repaired in double-quick time by the concerned department. Earlier, such a situation called for village-wide donation collection to be paid as bribe to the lineman. This time around, it happened free of cost by the simple method of relentless pressure on the department concerned.
With a little bit of goodwill behind them now, the association began daily evening rounds from *hujra* to *hujra* to lecture on the importance of education. Simultaneously, they also began to mediate to resolve the various minor and major quarrels in the village. Trust grew and a time came when people began to petition the association for conflict resolution. It was only natural for detractors now to crop up and condemn the association for being spawned by this or that political party. In a village long divided by conflict, distrust was the foremost emotion and even the *jirga* rose up against them.

In 1990, SESWA was invited to a meeting in Mardan with SAP-PK. Rooh ul Amin, one of the founder members, attended and came back excited: there were other people speaking the same language as them and they seemed to have a method to make the SESWA dream come true. Consequently, when the invitation to attend the RDP training came, Rooh ul Amin was ready to go. Though SESWA failed to meet the condition of equal gender representation, Rooh ul Amin came back with new light in his eyes. In a meeting after the first RDP session, Rooh ul Amin apprised the NGO’s general body of the difference between welfare and development. He told them that it was an explicit fault that the SESWA constitution declared it a welfare organisation. The constitution was duly amended to make SESWA a development organisation.

One of the tasks assigned to RDP participants was to carry out a survey of other organisations in the area. In the course of 1991, SESWA surveyed and recorded over one hundred village organisations. This exercise served as an asset and shortly thereafter Mardan-based GTZ took SESWA on as a partner to create organisations in six villages. In the three years the project lasted until 1995, SESWA oversaw the birth of sixty-seven men’s and twenty-seven women’s organisations. In the strictly segregated society of Swabi district, the latter were only possible through the newly raised SESWA Women’s Wing that worked out of a separate office.

If RDP had taught SESWA a few things about organising social groups, the importance of linkages was another lesson. The NGO therefore created the umbrella of the Regional Council for Development at the divisional level while in the district Samaji Behbood Rabita Council connected all CBOs with the wider network. This was just as well and in good time. By 1997, a vicious anti-NGO campaign was underway to curtail the work of the development network by an act of the parliament. The voice against this move coming out of Mardan was orchestrated by SESWA.

Meanwhile, between the years 1993 to 1999 the GTZ-SESWA partnership that had opened with a donation of Rs 25,000 to build a flood protection wall grew. It enabled SESWA to pave the streets and line the drains and change the very outlook of the village. It also raised SESWA considerably in the estimation of the people of Sheva village.

Ever mindful that education is the most effective catalyst for change, SESWA had not lost view of its commitment to raise its standard. In 1989, the village had a primary and a high school for boys and one primary school for girls. Education was generally disregarded and girls’ education positively frowned upon. Not surprisingly, enrolment in the girls’ school
had never risen above forty. The SESWA campaign for education was on two fronts. On the one, they canvassed with local politicians and the education department for new school buildings up gradation of the old. On the other, they got the jirga to allocate several plots for schools. And so when the government released funds for schools, the plots were in place for work to begin forthwith.

From three schools in 1989, Sheva has now moved on to nine boys’ schools and five for girls from primary to secondary school levels. As well as that, the village today flaunts a degree college going on to post-graduate studies as of 2010. Quantity was not the end-all of it, however. Years of daily meetings in the different hujiras has precipitated a marked attitude change about education. It is no empty boast when SESWA members claim that boys notorious for parading firearms in school have been weaned away to schoolbooks and sports instead. Likewise, the full classrooms of the girls’ schools owe it to the tireless efforts of the Women’s Wing with the mothers of Sheva. No longer is education the way to hell.

The jirga that had condemned the young workers of SESWA only a few years earlier for overstepping the boundary of good form was by the late 1990s supportive of the NGO. It is noteworthy that this council that traditionally comprises of two members from each mohalla now has two members from SESWA as well. The change in heart was due in a large part to the major improvement in the village infrastructure brought about by the GTZ-SESWA partnership.

The Farmers Development Program was the other reason for enhanced acceptability. Funded by a SAP-PK seed fund of half a million rupees, the program helped poor farmers obtain agricultural inputs at affordable rates. Its success in Sheva brought demands from nearby villages for it to be replicated there as well. But half a million rupees can only cater for so many and no more. With an infusion of Rs 2.2 million from Catholic Relief Service in 1999, the program was expanded. Now there was one innovation, however. SESWA gave out revolving funds to eleven CBOs to operate their own Farmers Development Programs. With SESWA keeping itself in a supervisory and monitoring role, the program continues to this day.

It was high time now to overhaul the jirga that had accepted SESWA as partner. Without being obtrusive, SESWA re-organised it with a proper governing body comprising of president, secretary, and treasurer, posts to be democratically contested for every year. Until then, its fund of close to Rs 7.0 million was distributed among the members for safekeeping. A bank account was now opened to be operated by two signatories from the board. The Sheva jirga thus became the first ever in the country to work with proper record keeping. Word spread and several nearby villages followed suit.

If development entails reclaiming lives, there is no better example than the case of the illiterate Fazle Khaliq. Built like a wrestler and with a stern set to his mouth, the man was to be feared. Strutting about Sheva with a Kalashnikov rifle as though a very appendage of his body, he was the local hoodlum. When the young men of SESWA first began to clean out the gutters and streets of the village, he came to watch. By and by, without being asked, he joined in to help. Over time, becoming better acquainted with the group, he was invited to their meetings. From there it was an easy step to become part of the mobilisation team for village development organisations.
His rifle was gone and so was his swagger, instead Fazle Khaliq excelled in his new incarnation as social worker. His outstanding performance in raising village development organizations won him a GTZ award. When he first came in contact with SESWA, never once was the man told to change his ways, never was he shamed for his ill deeds. He saw good being done and followed the example and today he is a steadfast supporter of the NGO. A life that may have been wasted in the line of thuggery and petty crime was redeemed.

Success is when others wish to emulate an example. Even as early as 1994, SESWA was approached by neighbouring communities for help in setting up ‘SESWA’ in their respective villages. Unaware of it being an acronym, the good people thought it was an English language word signifying progress and development. Today the few dozen copycat organisations that replicate SESWA’s work across Swabi district symbolise the NGO’s success.
10. In The Eye Of The Storm

Just a few kilometers from the municipal limits of Peshawar, Jamrud lies in tribal territory where the law of Pakistan does not hold. Here the Pakhtun code of conduct holds sway with its good face of hospitality and honor and evil one of revenge, mindless killing and gender discrimination. Display of weapons is a matter of pride and education takes a back seat for most people. Following the events of September 2001, Jamrud is virtually in the eye of the storm with miscreants holding sway around it.

Born in this tribal milieu, Zartee Afridi is peculiar for his pacifism and his commitment to the cause of education. Prevented in 1982 by maternal pressure from going to Soviet Russia for a degree in engineering, he turned to teaching instead. Beginning his career in 1983 he has risen to be the head master in a Jamrud school. When he started out as a teacher, the Afghan jihad, funded by the West, was in full flow and young men from all over the province made their way to the battlefield to either be killed or to become utterly criminalized. While that murderous business was in progress children under the tutelage of the idealistic Zartee were learning of the reality of the so-called jihad.

Looking back, he can proudly claim that not one of the youngsters who passed through his hands went to the fight. But there are many who have risen to higher education to become college professors and medical practitioners. Some have gone abroad while others have remained in their native land and in their own ways have been useful against the tide of obscurantism.

Disillusioned by the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan, Zartee found solace by joining Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. His commitment to the cause of human rights was bolstered by this association and he became a vocal advocate of equal rights from and treatment for minorities, women and children. It was, however, his single-handed campaign for the release of dozens of persons rotting in jail under the out-dated Frontier Crimes Regulations that won him the unmitigated respect of the people of Jamrud.

In the mid-1990s Zartee Afridi coupled his teaching in the morning with activism in the evening from the platform of Democratic Commission for Human Development. Every evening, when the day’s work was done, men gathered in the hujras to smoke the hookah, drink endless cups of green tea and talk. Our man went from hujra to hujra where men invariably discussed the Afghan situation. His take on the issue was divergent from the prevalent view that favored the Pakhtun factions and many of the elders took exception to Zartee’s views. There was some loss of the ground he had so painstakingly gained thus far.
Meanwhile, dissatisfied with the state of education, the draconian FCR and the lack of adult franchise in FATA, Zarteef founded FATA Education and Welfare Society (FATAEWS) in 1996. Struggling against minds caught in a century-old warp, FATAEWS took it upon itself to educate the community on the imperative of bringing FATA into the network of settled districts and the institution of adult franchise therein. Though this reality is some years in the future, but the first step has been taken. Sooner than later, this demand will become a movement and the out-dated status will crumble. Surely many will then recall the discussions first started in the hujras of Jamrud by Zarteef Afridi’s organization.

Now, with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, a corresponding backward slide began in much of the province. The idealistic schoolteacher in Jamrud read the far-reaching effects of this recidivism and came into action. From the FATAEWS platform he launched a campaign in Jamrud, Tirah and Landikotal to educate schoolteachers about the importance of secular education as opposed to a purely madrasa course. Our man was now treading on fairly dangerous ground.

The year 1996 was when FATAEWS came into contact with SAP-PK and joined the RDP training. Without realizing it, he had always been missing an important item of his activist’s repertoire: tact. He admits that teaching children is straightforward business with little use of tact and he, forthright by nature, had never developed it. The RDP training taught him just that – the art of saying even the most unacceptable truth in a manner that does not hurt the listener. ‘From RDP I learned the magic of effective communication,’ he says with a smile. From now on, advocacy was to be the keystone of his NGO’s philosophy.

Back in Jamrud FATAEWS was now a vocal advocate against the ancient Pakhtun custom of vulver – marriage against a bride price. Beginning the campaign, Zarteef ensured that no marriage took place under vulver, first for his own daughters, sisters and nieces, and then for the extended clan. Having set a personal example (he has since wedded off three of his four daughters without receiving a bride price), Zarteef’s efforts have made a huge dent in this out-dated custom.

All this was not without a price, however. The talk of secular education and now action against vulver were bound to raise some ire. Consequently his advocacy for women’s right to vote was met with all-round opposition. Why, as Pakhtuns, they were not willing to indulge in the brazen shamelessness of sending their women out to vote with men. With single-minded focus Zarteef pushed ahead with his agenda, however. The result was a jirga to declare him outside the pale of Islam. It was just as well that before anything untoward could happen, the political agent intervened on his behalf and had the promulgation overturned.

Zarteef’s efforts did not go waste, however. As the anti-vulver drive began from his own family, so too did the campaign to get women to the polling station. The trickle of women voters now seen on polling day in Jamrud, owe much to the fight Zarteef Afridi fought on their behalf.

If the attack on vulver and the effort for women’s franchise went so well, it was because Zarteef had started it from his own home. In 1998 the day after his brother’s wedding (contracted without vulver); it was declared that the bride had not been a virgin. Custom decreed that she be returned to her family where, more likely than not, she would be killed.
for hurting family honor. Learning that the girl had been abused when she was but ten years old, Zarteef retained her in the home and called a jirga to ensure her safety. Thereafter she was wedded elsewhere and has since moved out of Jamrud.

The means of community empowerment was group formation, so Zarteef had learned from RDP. In the years since 1997 he has been the midwife for fifteen registered NGOs and CBOs in and around Jamrud. In the current milieu of the tribal areas with obscurantist forces lurking in the shadows, this is a remarkable upshot. It signals that hope is not dead; it shows that men and women of vision and courage are still prepared to work for progress and development in the face of danger. With a USAID endowment of Rs 800,000 each for organizational strengthening the newly raised groups are on track and working as a cluster with SPO. There focus lies on child rights, democracy and good governance.

Meanwhile, even as it oversaw these new developments, FATAEWS re-registered in 2004. Although never a welfare group working with donations, it now dropped the word from its title and became Association for the Development of Skill, Health and Education (SHADE).

In an area where women’s education did not merit much importance, Zarteef had long been a vocal proponent for it. While he spoke for it in the hujras, he had a somewhat covert operation in progress within the homes as well. His training as an electrician and expertise in this field frequently took him into people’s homes. As he worked on their electrical appliances, he shamed the women of the household for their illiteracy. He says that over the years, this surreptitious campaign made for an increase in girls’ enrollment in schools, as well as that, it prepared older women for school.

When the ground was ready, SHADE got seven adult literacy centers from National Commission for Human Development (NCHD). Sprinkled in villages around Jamrud, these centers cater for women between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five who have never been to school. The years of surreptitious advocacy by Zarteef paid and though meant for about thirty students each, these schools now cater to more than three times as many. Today there are a total of seven hundred and fifty women in these centers with many showing the promise of going on to high school.

The earliest campaign of FATAEWS had been against FCR and for the expansion of the political parties order to the tribal areas. The presidential decree of 14 August 2009 against the old order vindicates this long-standing demand. In the tribal area of Jamrud the presidential ruling would have mostly unnoticed.

Led by SHADE, the cluster of fifteen organizations came into play and plastered the walls of Jamrud sub-division with chalking for support to the presidential declaration in favor amalgamation of the tribal areas with the rest of the country. Corner meetings and media coverage reinforced the campaign and today there is a strong realization that the major ills of the tribal areas rise from the peculiarity of never being governed by the laws of Pakistan.

The tribal areas of Pakistan may well be on the way to get the rights long denied them by vested interest. As Zarteef Afridi and his SHADE have so much to do with women’s education and franchise in Jamrud, it will have a hand in this great revolutionizing step when it comes to pass.
11. Trying To Make It Work

In 1979 a group of twenty young men, headed by Jehanzeb Jani got together to set up the Youth Welfare Blood Donor Organization in Kohat. Their concern was the large number of Thalassemia cases among the children of the city and the lack of a service that could make a donor of any given blood group available at short notice. Trained as an electrical engineer, a profession he never followed, Jehanzeb looked upon himself as a social worker and he found his calling in his position as the prime mover of the blood donors’ organization.

Within months, the group had registered eight hundred and twenty-seven donors and though, strangely, Thalassemia went out of focus, the group could produce a donor of any given blood group within a matter of minutes. As the only organization working for this purpose, this group was catering to most of the demands for blood in Kohat. That not being enough, they launched weekly free medical camps in and around Kohat. Collecting free promotional medicine samples from practitioners, Jehanzeb built up a stock of supplies and got a couple of volunteer doctors on board. Every Friday, the group tended to no fewer than a hundred and fifty patients in the premises of a local school.

In 1984, the group absorbed another Kohat-based blood donor organization and changed its name to Youth Welfare Young Blood Donor Association (YWYBDA). By now, their services had won acclaim and the organization was well known in the city. But five years of blood collection is a bit too much of the same thing and the general feeling of having worked themselves into a rut was now coming over the group. With only vague ideas about the welfare work they could do, YWYBDA was virtually directionless and venues for greater good deeds were sought.

In 1992, two residents of Kohat were kidnapped from a bus between Kohat and Peshawar. Jehanzeb and his friends gathered a mob and blocked the road as it descended from Kohat Pass. All trucks were stopped and the crew quizzed about their domicile. Anyone found to be from Darra Adam Khel, where the kidnappers were learned to have come from, was taken ‘into custody.’

Starting early in the morning on the day following the kidnapping, Jehanzeb and his team had twenty-five truck drivers and their assistants ‘under arrest’ in Jehanzeb’s home. The next morning, just as the call for the morning prayer was being sounded, the two kidnapped men returned home. Jehanzeb was booked for terrorism and got to spend five days in Kohat jail.

If he had first been moved by the cases of Thalassemia, this stint in jail brought him face to face with another harsh reality. Dozens of teenage boys sentenced for acting as drug carriers were used as sex objects by crime bosses in the jail. The prison was not a correctional institute. It was a place, Jehanzeb realized, where the youngsters were brutalized and farther criminalized. When he got out, he resolved to get a separate block...
for underage prisoners. With Rs 30,000 donated by the Society for the Protection of Rights of the Child and with a local donation of Rs 87,000, YWYBDA raised a boundary wall around the juvenile section of the jail.

Jehanzeb says his entire view of the work he had set out to do was changed when he attended the 1996-97 session of RDP training. It was as if his old mind was taken out and replaced with a new one, he admits. From being as like a frog in a well with only a circle of sky his only view, the horizon expanded. That having been said, the years between 1997 when the RDP training ended and 2000 were only a continuum of the past for YWYBDA.

With the new decentralized government system in the offing in 2000, YWYBDA went into partnership with Aurat Foundation on the initiative for women's representation at all tiers of the new system. The years past when YWYBDA had worked as gratis blood donors had earned the organization considerable respect. This proved extremely useful in getting access to otherwise segregated women and their work paid excellent dividends. In a district where women had hitherto never permitted to take public office, the elections of 2001 filled up ninety-four of the one hundred and seven women's seats in the district.

One of the great injustices against women is the disadvantage they are placed at by the simple act of filling in the Nikah (marriage) certificate. The clauses dealing with the woman's right to divorce are, as a matter of course, struck through at the time of the wedding. This happens without consultation with the bride, that is, she has no say in the matter of her marriage.

As part of the Actionaid campaign We Can to end violence against women, Jehanzeb first became aware of this breach of the law denying every married woman her basic right. A petition addressed to the district Nazim and the DCO resulted in the issuance of an official notification instructing all Nikah registrars to abstain from pre-empt striking out clauses 16 to 22 of the certificate. Any Nikah registrar found violating the notification was to be dealt with under the law. However, there was no enforcement of the new edict and even today the old practice continues.

In 2003 YWYBDA initiated its drug rehabilitation program on self-help basis. Refurbishing three unutilized rooms in the old building of Liaquat Memorial Hospital, the program got underway with ten patients. With three volunteer doctors in place, all other expenses, including food and medication, were made good by local donations. Jehanzeb himself contributed with the entire requirement of chapattis (unleavened flatbreads) for the rehab ward.
All went well until a visit by the Minister for Social Welfare. Impressed with the working of the centre, he pledged a sum of Rs 2.4 million annually for its running. However, the machinery of bureaucracy runs sluggishly and it took two years for the funds to materialize. Meanwhile, when the funds did finally arrive and with YWYBDA focus elsewhere, the venal minions of the state saw it fit to take over the centre. The volunteer doctors, all government employees, were prevented from attending their duties and the patients were shifted to a new premises allocated for the purpose. The work of YWYBDA over the past two years came to naught.

For YWYBDA 2005 was a year of setback after setback. The stitching and embroidery centre opened in a portion of Jehanzeb’s family home back in 2002 now came under fire. Started with a donation of eleven sewing machines from the Social Welfare Department and another seven from YWYBDA sources, the centre had worked well for three years. In this period it had trained a yearly average of sixty young women in sartorial skills. However, a change at the Social Welfare office resulted in a move to repossess the donated equipment.

Unable to handle the department’s move tactfully, YWYBDA resisted. Litigation ensued and in the face of the monolith of state machinery, the eventual capitulation by YWYBDA was perhaps a foregone conclusion. The centre was shut down and the equipment taken over by the department. Jehanzeb was fortunate to salvage the twenty sewing machines he had contributed to the centre from his own and local donations. This was a bit of saving grace because with this equipment he established four new skill centers in various localities.

This same year the CBO lost another asset. Funded by a yearly infusion of Rs 65,000 for three years from the Family Planning Association of Pakistan, a Mother and Child Healthcare Centre was opened in 2002. With staff comprising of one Lady Health Visitor and two vaccinators, this centre, like the skill-training centre was located in a room of Jehanzeb’s family home. It did well for three years, in which time no provision was made for the centre to become self-sustaining. Consequently when the funding dried up, it died in 2005. The only positive outcome from this three year-long exercise was that YWYBDA replaced the centre with a free weekly medical camp.

Despite all the setbacks, the apparently unfocussed activity of YWYBDA has nevertheless had a profound influence on some lives. Sakina on the one hand and the sisters Lailo-nahar and Rakshanda on the other are individuals whose lives were turned around by this NGO.

Back in 2002 working on the violence against women program, YWYBDA was contacted by teenaged Sakina. Her father totally wasted by drugs, Sakina’s mother wedded her to a local police officer for money. More than twice as old as her, the husband only used Sakina as a sex object. But when she was ready to deliver his child, the man refused to pay the expenses. The ensuing argument resulted in a brutal beating that caused Sakina to miscarry. In this state of physical and emotional trauma, she reached the office of YWYBDA.

Sakina, a skilled cutter and tailor, was the raison d’etre of the stitching centre that was eventually shut down in 2005. But when it was opened three years earlier, it did well and word of its success went around attracting Sharafat of nearby Khushalgarh. Also an experienced tailor and wife of a man given over to heroin, Sharafat requested a similar centre in her home. Thus, by the end of 2002 YWYBDA was running two skill centers.
Meanwhile, advised by Jehanzeb, Sakina completed her matriculation in 2003. Simultaneously Sharafat’s two daughters, Lailo-nahar and Rakhshanda, too were encouraged to finish high school. The three women were then sent for LHV training at the nursing college in Peshawar. Just as they graduated, the earthquake of October 2005 devastated a vast swathe of land in Kashmir and Hazara. With trained nurses in demand, the three women were hired by foreign relief agencies each at Rs 25,000 per month.

When they finished after their four-year stints, they were well off and their families transformed. While the sisters used their newly established contacts in foreign aid and relief agencies to secure jobs for their two brothers in Dubai, Sakina paid for the rehabilitation of her drug addict father. Today the three women works are in the process of setting up a medical centre in Kohat. However, the very devices, the skill centers in Khushalgarh and Kohat, that put these resourceful women on the course of new and empowered lives, were shut down in 2005.

With collapse plaguing its endeavors, YWYBDA attempted to salvage some lost ground by concentrating on its non-formal literacy centers. Funded by the Prime Minister’s Literacy Program in 2003, these twenty-eight centers were spread across rural Kohat district. These were areas where government schools either did not exist or were non-functional because of teacher’s absence resulting in large-scale illiteracy. The thirst to unravel the magic of the written word was so great that some centers catered for up to eighty girl students.

Though seven of these centers collapsed, the remaining twenty-one continue imparting not just basic literacy but primary school education (5th grade) to some eight hundred girls. Many of these young students having taken the primary exam are now working their way through mainstream high schools. In its sixth year, this program seems self-sustaining and may well be the one input of YWYBDA with the most enduring effect on Kohat.

Meanwhile a further boost to the CBO’s sagging fortune came as SAP-PK’s partner in SDGP in 2005. Given half a chance in a society where they are treated no better than chattel, women are quick to react to outside impetus. No surprise then that the second local bodies elections filled up the entire quota of women’s seats. Moreover, the district saw twenty-five women’s groups emerge as registered CCBs.

The journey for YWYBDA is still uphill. Plagued by a lack of focus and the haste to be part of as many new and diversified projects as possible, the CBO seems to run on a residue of goodwill earned from its earliest days. This may not last, however.
12. Against The Odds

Born in Mardan to Punjabi parents Nusrat Ara was brought up like a Pakhtun girl. Her father, a strict believer in segregation of the genders, maintained that the girl child needs no more than primary school education. That she had no right to sports or other extra-curricular interests in school and that her proper place is at the hearth and nowhere else. It was Nusrat inborn rebellion that got her into the girl guides in secrecy from her father. But remaining in school beyond the sixth grade could not be a secret and she had to fight a hard battle against her father to continue. It even took a hunger strike to be permitted to the graduate classes in a local college.

Nusrat’s escape from the stifling atmosphere at home were her clandestine activities first in school and later in college. She took part in debates, dramas and games and in college was elected the president of the dramatic club. For herself, she may have found an outlet in college, but she chafed to see her mother live a life of utter subservience to the man of the house. It was a non-existence, and this was something that Nusrat vowed never to get into herself. She understood early on that it was only education and economic independence that liberated the woman and made her an individual in her own right.

Marriage in 1980 brought her to Sialkot where her husband recently back from a job in Saudi Arabia, was without work. To tide things over, Nusrat took up teaching in a local school, her first job outside the home. Moving back in the mid-1980s, she set up a private school in rented premises in Mardan. Meanwhile, joining Light Home, a local organization as a volunteer Nusrat frequently found herself in the nearby village of Toru. Her work entailed liaising with women who embroidered the towels that Light Home marketed in Islamabad.

In Toru, Nusrat saw much the same situation as she had seen in her own home: women living lives of virtual non-entities; their existence molded by their men folk. Indeed, this was a village where the Khan held unchallenged sway. He discouraged education, maintained a private jail and the poor were his serfs. Now, in 1991 the only means of getting women together in a group was to institute a stitching and embroidery centre. The Khan was however repugnant to the idea of a skill centre in his village. Keeping one step ahead of him, Nusrat got his mother on her side and asked her to open the centre. A smart move, it brought legitimacy to the initiative.

Following close behind on the heels of the Toru centre, Nusrat opened another one in Rustum, a village as backward as Toru. Talking about the idea behind these skill centers, she says was that she knew rural Pakhtun women were socially disadvantaged and that she wanted to help them. But she did not know what help to render or how to go about it. She therefore thought that the mere act of talking with them and letting them get their problems off their shoulders would help.
That year a team from SAP-PK visiting Light Home invited Nusrat to attend the following year’s RDP. And so 1991 became a turning point in the life of a woman who had always wanted to break free from social fetters to do something for herself and for other women around her. By the time she was through with the training, Nusrat’s feminism was honed to the fullest. She recognized that the treatment most women took as a matter of course was in fact the most brutal kind of discrimination against them. To break the cycle, Nusrat began imparting her new learning to her protégés both in Toru and in Rustum.

A school for girls in Toru, Nusrat thought, would bring her ever closer to women. But when presented to the Khan, it was promptly shot down. Indeed, he was not alone in his prehistoric mindset, other men resisted just as vehemently. Why, the skill centre where women congregated to do God knows what mischief had been accepted with some difficulty and now this outsider was pressing for a school, the very nursery of evil and the surest path to hell. Nusrat spoke with the Khan’s wife, got her on her side and through her eventually reached the Khan. That was sound tactic and the man agreed to give a room in one of his properties for the school. In order that the leading family felt involved and for the villagers to know it, Nusrat got the Khan’s wife to inaugurate the school.

The school started functioning in 1994 with who but the Khan’s own daughters, the only educated women in the village, doing as teachers. Meanwhile, in Mardan Nusrat had already laid the foundation of her NGO, Women’s Development Organization (WDO) the year before. Under its wings she started her own RDP training sessions with local women. One year is a long enough time for awareness raising as the seminar for International Women’s Day of 1995 showed. A gathering of two hundred women – an unprecedented assembly in Mardan where women did not exist as individuals – took part in the proceedings.

In 1995 WDO was funded by Lahore-based Democratic Commission for Human Development to raise awareness on women’s rights. The skill centre and school in Toru, was the natural choice to begin this initiative and Nusrat chose the outlying village of Daftar Maira for the first workshop. The all-male audience came with a clear antagonistic set of the mind. Nusrat, duly wrapped in the traditional chador, asked the local mullah to open the proceedings with a Quranic recitation. The man who had been sitting outside the hall refused, saying it was sinful to share the podium with a woman.

Half way through the seminar, having heard the proceedings from his place of pardah, the mullah came into the hall. At the end of the day, he confessed he had been hostile for he expected to hear views repugnant to Islam. To his surprise everything said that day was in accordance with divine injunctions. With the mullah won over, the rest of the congregation became markedly more amenable.

Meanwhile, the glass of plain water served to Nusrat looked like lemonade. When she commented, the mullah burst out: their problem was not rights, but the non-availability of potable water. Finishing her seminar, Nusrat hurried back to the office of Public Health Engineering Department in Mardan. Aware that UNICEF had donated a number of hand pumps to the department, she demanded and got one for Maira. Not the one to leave a good thing off until the next day, Nusrat immediately returned to Maira to tell the community they would have to contribute twenty percent of the installation cost. The men there and then handed over two thousand rupees and the undertaking to provide free of charge labor.
Before the week was out, the people of Daftar Maira were drinking clear, untainted water from the hand pump. The community was won over and the following sessions with the women went well until something got the mullah to intervene again. All this talk of women’s rights was against the teachings of Islam, he declared. A subtle change had come over the community since the first workshop with the men, however. Nusrat did not have to plead her case this time. Village elders told the mullah that having attended the sessions, they found nothing wrong. That was the end of intervention from this quarter.

Nusrat’s commitment to women’s awareness raising received further impetus when WDO became partners with a Lahore-based theatre group in 1999. The story of the girl in her Toru school, keen on her studies but being forced into wedlock by her parents, became Nusrat’s theme for a play. Such is the power of interactive theatre that at the end of the performance, the girl’s would-be mother in law was moved to renounce the forced marriage. The girl eventually finished her post-graduate degree in English before getting married.

In 2000, Nusrat took up the challenge and submitted her papers for councillorship from Mardan and won hands down. But the district assembly was an altogether different ball game. To make his opinion about them absolutely clear, the convener of the assembly arranged his chair so as to present his back to women members. During the proceedings, as a matter of course women were not addressed. In those days of uncertain women’s participation, Nusrat was the only one to raise her hands on points of order. But she was ignored and the microphone never made it to her seat.

Enough was finally enough. Nusrat walked over to the Nazim as he spoke into the mike, snatched it from his hands and said, ‘It is now time to wrest the privilege not given to us willingly.’ A dumbfounded assembly heard her out as she submitted that women be recognized as duly elected members of the house. That was the turning point for the district assembly of Mardan. Taking the cue from her, Nusrat’s women colleagues became active participants, a fact amply borne out by the minutes book of the assembly.

Meanwhile, Toru was in for another overhaul. Working with limited resources until 2000, WDO was now able to expand work to six other villages around Daftar Maira with support from SAP-PK. Much water had flowed down the proverbial bridge since the first school in
Toru nearly a decade earlier. Then Nusrat had been hard put to find a woman willing to teach; now there was no dearth of teachers. With awareness raising becoming more assertive, the new skill centers in these villages bonded women into cohesive groups that could speak out against domestic violence and their right to education and exposure. These were the very same women who had until then existed like mere chattel.

It was still some ways off for Nusrat to be nominated for the Nobel Prize for women in peace. But she was well on the way. Two vicious practices were now in Nusrat’s gun sights: the one of svara – marriage of a girl, mostly a total mismatch, to settle a murder and the other of underage marriages in exchange for money. Always a family matter, svara came into public view when Nusrat got the district Nazim to issue a press statement about one particular case. On the basis of the newspaper item, she moved court and secured the child’s release from her mentally and physically challenged husband. Unprecedented in Mardan, this case was just a beginning.

Whether it was winning the reinstatement to school of a fifteen year-old girl expelled for getting married while on leave, or rights of women prisoners or using theatre to encourage parents to send their children to school, Nusrat has fought from the front with great perseverance and courage. In her first stint as councilor, she received threats concerning the safety of her children if she did not give up her activism. But she persisted and opposition gradually dwindled. It will be years before it is eradicated, but a start has been made.

Nearly two decades ago when Nusrat first began working for their rights, women were invisible in Mardan. Today, the women’s seats in the district and union council assemblies are all taken by educated women who can present and win their cases. Nusrat Ara fought a hard battle against considerable odds. And in Mardan and neighboring districts she has made the first dent in the defenses of obscurantist forces.
13. From Great Dream To Smaller Reality

Even before he completed his post-graduate degree in mathematics in 1993, Zia ur Rehman had grandiose notions of setting the world right. His world being Pakistan, he joined Anjuman Falah-e-Naujavanan-e-Pakistan – literally, Society for the Correction of Pakistani Youth. There he quickly assumed a central figure. By setting the youth of the entire country – not of a city or a province, but of the entire country – right, he could eventually hope to bring some sanity to the land.

However, other than stringing up tin receptacles on electricity poles for old pages of scripture in order to prevent desecration and establishing rubbish bins, there was little else Zia and his mates at the Anjuman knew about correcting the wayward youth of the world. Even this little endeavor soon came to grief: within days of the establishment of the rubbish bins, neighbors came knocking on Zia’s door to complain of the bins not being emptied. He realized that an initiative as insignificant as this could not function in standalone mode.

In 1995, a year into his assignment as a lecturer at the Bahauddin Zikria University, a friend of his who ran an NGO, invited Zia to join the group. It transpired that the NGO had received a large input of Rs 4.5 million for developmental work in Multan region and the ever keen to help Zia joined on part-time basis. There was plenty of good work in health and infrastructure to be done under the intuitive. Sadly, little was achieved. The NGO fell apart and the man heading it left the country leaving Zia a very disillusioned person.

Poverty was rampant in the district, the poor had no rights as citizens and the least said of women’s rights the better, disease was rife because of non-availability of basic sanitation facilities and potable water and virtually no health care services existed in rural areas. This was not the kind of work an Anjuman such as he had joined could accomplish. It was the kind of work that the defunct NGO could have done but, despite all its funds, had failed to deliver. Through this muck of disillusionment, Zia saw that this was what he should have been doing himself.

With an old friend from his days in college, Zia established Awaz in 1995 and proceeded to send out letters composed on an aging borrowed typewriter to several Lahore-based NGOs, among them SAP-PK. Invited to the SAP office in Lahore and asked what he wanted to do, Zia said he wished only to make Awaz work. Sent home with a few guidelines on financial and office management, he and his colleague got going as best as they could. With stationery donated by Aurat Foundation and their borrowed typewriter, Awaz set up office in a room of a private residence.

If anything, this development left Zia ever more confused. The organizations he had met within Multan and elsewhere were doing something definite, but here he was without...
direction and vision. Awaz may have had a nice letterhead to carry their name around, but it had no target, no goal. The thinking of Zia and his colleague was on a grand global scale but other than the vague notion of improving the standard of education in the entire country, there was no plan of action to realize this dream of global correction. For a time our man thought that with his experience as a teacher he could train others to think and act like him and so with an army of likeminded people make that distant dream come true.

The following year, 1996, Zia was invited by SAP-PK to join their RDP training. Zia says the turning point came after the first couple of sessions: he had to de-escalate his grandiloquent dreams. There was no way he could set the world or even Pakistan to rights and that he had to begin with a village. He recognized that there was something to be said for smaller, more achievable goals than dreaming dreams difficult to realize. And so with a vision made considerably clearer and with the yearlong training drawing to a close Awaz forwarded to SAP-PK a sanitation project for the village of Ahmadpur on the outskirts of Multan.

In a way, this project had its weaker side. While the underground sewers were properly laid, inexperience with such work led Awaz to mis-plan the disposal. The system did not work for several months until Cantonment Board Multan connected it to its own grid. But the one good thing to emerge from the exercise was the formation of the Vaseb Development Council (VDC). Part of the problem lay with Zia himself: when the project had just started in January 1998, he made off for a full year with a scholarship to learn leadership and management with Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Bangladesh.

While at home the sanitation project just pulled through and not without a helping hand from the local Cantonment Board, Zia took his lessons seriously in Bangladesh. Removed from the worries of the almost failed sanitation project, he was able to connect the learning in Bangladesh with that of RDP and realized that neither sanitation projects nor teacher training was his line of work. The work for Awaz was what RDP and now again BRAC showed him: community mobilization, strengthening people’s groups and linking such groups with donors. When he returned to Multan in the end of 1998, Zia had on his computer a five-year strategic plan for Awaz to work on integrated community development and empowerment.

With just one VDC in Ahmadpur to work with, Awaz homed in on Arif ul Hasan, a keen young member. Having given up education before his matriculation, Arif had little to do in his rural setting until he was discovered by Awaz. Naturally gifted with a fine handwriting,
the NGO employed him for record keeping and drawing of charts during their several workshops. Quick on the uptake, the young man had soon soaked up much of the training. By and by Arif took over from Awaz and began to conduct training sessions in Ahmadpur and elsewhere on his own. In 2004, Awaz hired him as a field social organizer. Today he can independently handle visitors, even foreigners, present his work in English in PowerPoint and is a role model for his peers.

Because empowerment stems from economic independence, Awaz launched their Integrated Program for Poverty Alleviation in 2002. This spun off from the in-house loan scheme started when the staff members of Awaz got their first salaries back in 1998. Creating a revolving fund from a compulsory contribution of three hundred rupees per month from each of the eleven members, the NGO was able to give out its first loan of a mere fifteen hundred rupees to help a man set up a vegetable pushcart.

Today Mushtaq subzi wala is well known in Gulgasht Colony, the upscale residential area of Multan, for his three thriving vegetable outlets. The man who was hard put to provide for his own family just a decade ago today supports the families of ten employees. Though the Awaz staff no longer makes the contribution, the revolving fund is still in place with a list of three hundred and seventy beneficiaries and growing.

The new Integrated Program of Poverty Alleviation (IPPA) with its considerable pool of funding came with a small but significant difference however. The NGO laid down eighteen indicators to be fulfilled before an applicant could qualify for the loan. Questions ranged from possession of computerized identity cards to registration as voters or getting their children immunized against polio and pregnant mothers against tetanus as well as children’s education. These may seem to be small factors, but they draw the line between community development or otherwise. With these indicators serving as qualifiers, it did not take long for Ahmadpur to turn into a model village.

Operations expanded and soon IPPA had beneficiaries in all its partner VDCs. While farmers constitute a good part of the beneficiaries, women are not ignored. A large number of village grocery stores are run by women and there are dozens of examples of home-based poultry rearing facilities managed entirely by women.

Rashda of Mohalla Tariqabad is a good example of women waiting to excel given the right opportunity. Having joined the Awaz loop in 2001, she was among the earliest women beneficiaries when she launched a stitching and embroidery school. By and by, she began to market her products in Multan. When the 2006 World Social Forum meet in Karachi rolled around, she set up her stall there. This was the first time she had left Multan. But it was not the last because in that brief time in the big city she established links with the handcrafts market and is now a steady supplier of quality embroidered apparel. Today she is an active and vocal member of the South Punjab Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Starting in 1998 by establishing four VDCs, by 2000 Awaz has overseen the formation of one hundred and twenty-eight to date. A hundred and seven of these are registered as CCBs of which twenty-four managed to launch their own projects with aid from the local government. Given the gross malfunctioning of the local government system, the success of some twenty percent of the CCBs indicates their effectiveness. Flaws exist however and of the hundred and twenty-eight VDCs, some thirty odd remain non-functional. There are others yet working independently with donor agencies and altering their villages with
infrastructure and micro-finance schemes. Success being terribly contagious, there is every
likelihood of the sleepers eventually coming into their own.

If empowerment stems from economic independence, it rises in equal measure from
education as well. Once again, with a tiny beginning in 2007, Awaz now oversees twenty-
seven home schools in villages where no government schools ever existed. It is interesting
that other than teachers’ training and books provided by Awaz these schools funded and
maintained by the communities are completely independent. Their collective strength
stands at six thousand students. In two years’ time, one-third of these youngsters will take
the grade five exams and join mainstream institutions in neighboring villages.

When Zia ur Rehman of Awaz first went to Islamabad to seek assistance from Oxfam-
Novib in 2001, he had only ninety rupees in his pocket. Of this amount, he paid half to a
doss house for overnight stay and walked five kilometers to the donor’s office. Today
Awaz has an annual turn over of Rs 40 million. It has been a long journey in a span of just
nine years.
14. Set off by Snake Bite

B

enighted in the Cholistan Desert while on a hunting
trip, the four friends fetched up in a village for the
night. Their welcome was barely over and the milling
crowd of local men had not even settled down when one of
the local men was bitten by a snake. The village
understandably had no medical facility, the nearest being the
Derawar Basic Health Unit about an hour’s drive away.
Putting the stricken man in their jeep, the friends sped off in
their attempt to save a life.

As is with most remote rural health facilities, the BHU at
Derawar was manned only by a peon. That was how it usually
was: the resident doctor rarely visiting left everything to the
nurse. But at that late hour even the
paramedic was nowhere to be found.
done and in front of the four friends
poor Cholistani gave up his ghost.

That was sometime in 1990. Farooq
four out in the desert that fateful
four years earlier finished his post-
Work, was deeply affected by this
people, he thought, marginalized and
connection, needed every sort of
being perhaps the most vital of all.
way to provide them the facility was
every now and again. The ranking

Deeming it necessary to have a banner to work under, Farooq and some friends set up
People’s Welfare Society in 1992 and began by conducting a survey to determine what was
most needed in remote desert villages. Living on the edge of the country and all but
forgotten by the state, these communities had much to wish for, but their foremost demand
was medicines and agro-chemicals. With a pool of funds from their own pockets, Farooq
and his friends made the first foray into the desert with their cache of supplies. Thereafter,
to keep the supply in step with the increasing demand, the group began to collect donations
from friends and acquaintances.

By 1994 it was realized that their title misled people into believing the organization was a
wing of a political party and the name was changed to Cholistan Welfare Council (CWC).
Ten years later, the name was changed yet again. Inspired by the learning of RDP, it finally
became Cholistan Development Council.

Going from door to friend and acquaintance’s door Farooq and his wife Razia became
expert donation collectors in cash and in kind. Food grain, money, clothing, agro-
chemicals what have you, were all kosher.

The frequent trips out to the desert to distribute the gifts brought the CWC members closer
to those remote communities. They discovered the soulful voices of singers never heard on
any radio; they became acquainted with dances unknown; and with crafts of rug-making and embroidery rarely seen outside the desert. But they also discovered another side of life in Cholistan: child marriages at age seven or eight and rampant *wutta-sutta* – the cross-wedding of brother and sister to brother and sister.

Even more sinister was the fact that Bheel and Meghwar Hindus were outcasts not only among Rajput Hindus, but also for Muslims. These poorest of the poor of Cholistan were virtually ostracized: no one socialized with them or sat on the same charpoy as them or next to them on public transport; shaking hands with them, it was believed, rendered others unclean. It was unthinkable for the so-called upper-caste Hindus and all Muslims to share food.

In their many outings to the desert the CWC team had noted that these forlorn souls were the last keepers of age-old musical instruments like the stringed *rahnti* believed to have originated some four or five thousand years ago and the large *naghara* (drum). These dying musical instruments as well as the embroidery and rug-making slowly going out of circulation were the vehicles to not just to preserve these dying arts, but also transport these people into the mainstream. The tragedy was that these arts were neglected because their keepers were Hindus of the scheduled castes.

Back in 1985 Farooq had introduced Fakira Bhagat, the *rahnti* player to Bahawalpur radio. In 1996 CWC using its capacity to raise donations staged a Cholistan Cultural Festival in Bahawalpur Arts Council. It was attended and greatly lauded by an audience of two thousand five hundred. For Farooq the introduction of those unknown artists to Bahawalpur was a first step to bringing them on to the national stage. He thought this was a major achievement and at that time it seemed the be-all and end-all of his effort.

In 1998 CWC was visited by representatives of SAP-PK – until then an unknown quantity for Farooq and his four colleagues. This led to CWC being selected for the 1999-2000 session of RDP training. And that opened up a new world for CWC. The periodic forays into the desert with supplies was not ‘sustainable’ – a word hitherto non-existent in Farooq’s vocabulary. It would forever make his beneficiaries dependent. Child marriages, *watta-satta* and discrimination based on religion and caste slowly began to look very sinister to him. These were practices that needed to be eradicated and this was what CWC would make part of its program. Most of all, the organization was to focus on Hindu-Muslim unity.

From now on the CWC team did not go into the desert with supplies; they went, instead, with new ideas. They now went with such abstract notions as participatory development and of human rights and equality. In the face of long-held customs of segregation based on caste and religion, the concept of human equality found little acceptance, particularly among the so-called upper castes. During a medical camp, the Muslims prevented the Hindus from coming for treatment. Their plea being that the doctors’ instruments would become unclean and therefore unsuitable for Muslims and upper caste Hindus.

This had to be seriously addressed and so the following year a Hindu doctor was invited from India to hold the camp. A day before it was scheduled to be held, the local political bigwig, a Mehr by caste, asked if the camp was on and was informed that since the doctor was non-Muslim only non-Muslims from the desert were to be examined and treated. Having already informed his electorate, the politician was mortified about losing face and agreed to make this a common Hindu-Muslim medical camp. That year for the first time
ever the same doctor, ironically a Hindu, treated alternately a Muslim and a Hindu or Christian.

Providence, so it seems, was waiting for such a breakthrough to begin her own scheme. Shortly after this event, a young woman of the Mehr family of Derawar needed a blood transfusion during childbirth. Her blood being the rarer O negative, the hospital was hard put to procure it. The patient’s own brother in law whose blood matched refused to help because he believed donating blood weakened the donor. Several others were tested until one person of the right group was found – and willing to donate. Ironically again this man was a Hindu and a Bheel to boot.

Now the Mehr Rajputs are reported to never forget a good turn and so days after the successful operation that saved the young mother and child, the man called CWC to ask the identity of the blood donor. He wanted to go to the man’s home and personally thank him. Once again, for the first time ever, the upper-caste Rajput sat on the same charpoy as the low-caste Bheel on a specially prepared ceremonial stage in full view of the people of Derawar. The Mehr ate from the utensils used by the ‘untouchables’ the same food prepared by the family. A stereotype and a mindset were shattered.

Until this time milk produced in Cholistan never left the desert. It was either consumed by cattle-owning families themselves or turned into ghee for keeping. Changing now from ‘welfare’ to a ‘development’ council CDC, campaigned and created a cooperative for cattle-owners to sell their produce to a corporate buyer from a common depot. Dissenters thought a common depot for all religious groups was an anomaly. Why, everyone knew milk from the cow of a Muslim was different to that from a Hindu’s animal and therefore could not be sold from a common bin.

But the choice was clear: they could either be part of the cooperative and sell their milk profitably or remain outside and continue to waste it. With good money to be had, upward of Rs 5000 a month for an owner of three milch cattle, this senseless objection quietly passed into its due demise.

A tiny exercise undertaken in 2006 brought the communities closer still. A large mixed batch from the three religious groups was brought together as a farmer’s cooperative. Until this time, without a means of transporting their harvest to the market, these same people were forced to surrender their crop to the middleman. Advancing seed and manure on loan to the farmers, this man, like all intermediaries, kept the purchase price of their produce so low that they were unable to get out of his debt. And so the farmers of Cholistan lived in an endless cycle of debt and hard work, forever in the middleman’s thrall.

With a loan of a hundred and twenty thousand rupees from CDC, the farmers’ group purchased a second hand tractor and trolley to take their crops to the market. The cooperative now sold their crop in the open market in one collective bulk, raking in a profit much larger than the middleman’s payment. That was the last year the CDC partners ever needed the middleman to purchase seed and fertilizer for them and before 2007 was over, they had also repaid the CDC loan. Today, a mere three years later, they are ready to purchase a second tractor and trailer.

Happily, this common business activity has led not just to removal of inter-religious acrimony; it has actually made new friendships across the three beliefs. The union council of Derawar that was once noted for its rabid discrimination and hatred, is now equally
well-known for the fellow feeling across the religious divide. Today Hindus, Muslims and Christians attend each other’s religious and social functions, eat and sit together. It would have pleased Jinnah to see this tiny piece of Pakistan where a few of his words have come true, ‘…Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.’

The next step to mainstream these marginalized minority groups was to encourage them to contest local elections. Now, Christians, some of them belonging to Rajput and Jat castes, being somewhat up on the social ladder, were already active in politics. But Bheel and Meghwar Hindus, supposed Untouchables, were utterly ostracized. The local bodies’ elections of 2002 saw Hindus running for office, and winning, the first time ever.

If social change is an index of success for an NGO such as CDC, their next substantive move came under the SAP-PK-Oxfam initiative of Ending Violence Against Women. Police stations, always known for their brutal treatment of citizens, particularly women, have a new image in Bahawalpur. Campaigning with the Regional and District Police Officers on one side and the Station House Officers on the other, it took CDC four years to bring about major behavioral changes in the region’s police force.

In Pakistan it was never easy for an aggrieved party to register a First Information Report with the police that forever resulted in the denial of justice to the poor who had neither influence nor useful connections. Today the city of Bahawalpur has three model police stations that make this once impossible task easy. Better than that, are the special cells created in the offices of the RPO and DPO for FIR registration, a first in the entire country. Another unique initiative is the mobile FIR facility that any citizen in the Bahawalpur police region can call upon by telephone.

Farooq admits that CDC may not have been able to eliminate corruption and inefficiency from the police, but the NGO’s close liaison with them has definitely substantially improved things, making it easier for citizens to take the first step, that of FIR registration, to justice.

It has been a long time since the snake bitten man died in Farooq’s arms in 1990; a long way also from collecting donations to make things go. The journey ahead is not done. But the way forward is now no longer unknown.
15. Breaking The Myth

Caught between the twin menaces of rigid religious fundamentalism and unyielding feudalism, Rajanpur district in the extreme southwest of Punjab is a blighted region.

In this extremely poor district, women’s mobility is strictly limited with all manners of rampant violence against them. Women’s education, if not frowned upon, is neglected; indeed, little merit is laid upon education even for boys. It is not uncommon to see villages without schools in the deprived western part of the district.

Peopled largely by Baloch tribes, the district has a predominantly feudal set up where tribal chiefs whose word is law rule supreme. For centuries, the few leading families divided between the traditional major parties have maintained an unyielding hold on political leadership. They get their vote through sheer intimidation and the abject slavishness of their electorate. Unchallenged and unquestioned, these powerful families have never permitted a plebian to contest the elections. Consequently, with power remaining with leaders of vested interest, development was unknown in Rajanpur.

Having got his post-graduate degree in Political Science in the closing year of the 20th century, Saifullah Mastoi of Fazilpur town (20 km north of Rajanpur) was casting about for ‘something meaningful to do for people’ when he joined Al Fatima Welfare Society. It was back in 1992 when the locally well-respected Mufti Khuda Buxh Naeemi established this organization to help a rape victim. He failed in his primary goal because ‘the feudal powers protecting the criminals were stronger than him,’ but in an attempt to mobilize women, the man set up a stitching and embroidery centre in a room of his house.

When Saifullah joined, the organization had about two hundred members, all noted citizens of Fazilpur, many of whom attended the regular fortnightly meetings. These meetings were sometimes addressed by visiting intellectuals, but, Saifullah noted, the discussions never headed anywhere with the participants merely ending up bemoaning all that was not right with society. Not one of the two hundred members had any idea about the mechanics of orchestrating change. Neither did anyone, Saifullah included, know that there were development NGOs working in Pakistan for just that same purpose.

In 2001 a team from SAP-PK seeking partners for their RDP training visiting Rajanpur fetched up in Fazilpur at the door of Al Fatima. Not long after Saifullah and a woman colleague (the latter having since moved on) found themselves in the opening session of the year-long training program.

‘The first light that shone upon both of us before the three-day workshop was over was that we were utterly wrong for struggling to provide welfare. We needed to change the mindset so that people could help themselves,’ says Saifullah.

As well as that, the unjust and biased treatment meted out to women that he was so painfully aware of in his native Rajanpur was a centre point in some of the discussions
during the training. Very early on Saifullah and his colleague agreed that once they got started, women’s emancipation and rights were going to be their principle focus.

The two new RDP graduates recognized that the name of their organization was incorrect. For one, it had a strong sectarian undertone especially because a large number of members were Shias. Secondly, the word ‘welfare’ stood out like a sore thumb because, as they were fast learning, not welfare but sustainable development was the key to effecting the change they so desired within the community. Now, the traditional name of the semi-desert region of Rajanpur is Rohi. It is the deprivation of this region that the great Sufi poet Khwaja Ghulam Farid so lamented in his time. And so Al Fatima gave way to Rohi Development Organization.

No sooner had the RDP training come to an end when early in 2002, RDO went on board with SAP-PK on the Oxfam-funded Eradication of Violence Against Women program. As they began work in the union council of Hajipur, one of the most backward areas of the district, RDO also applied for partnership with SAP-PK in the nutrition and education Tawana Pakistan Program. Though this government-sponsored program was short-lived, RDO got the chance to work with two hundred and fifty girls’ schools in the district. Their main activity besides overseeing the nutrition program was the organization of Mothers’ Committees in the schools. Both EVAW and the Mothers’ Committees proved to be powerful platforms to educate and mobilize women who had forever been denied the right of even being human.

Of these two hundred and fifty Mothers’ Committees, many evolved into Madadgar (Assistance) Committees under the EVAW initiative. Six developed into small CBOs that are today working as development NGOs with independent linkages with donor agencies.

The case of Tremat Sanjh (Women’s Collective) particularly highlights the new found women’s mobility in Rajanpur. Pachadh, the region in the extreme west of Rajanpur, is known within the district for its backwardness. That an NGO, run entirely by women, became one of the most vocal and active groups in such an area is no small success for EVAW and the school Mothers’ Committees.

No woman in village Bakhialpur in Pachadh was literate because the village never had a girls’ school. In 2003 when upon the request of members of Tremat Sanjh, RDO established a one-room non-formal school in the village the teacher had to be imported from neighboring Hajipur. Forever thirsting to discover the magic of the written word, the students, all girls, raced through two grades a year. Today, barely six years along, the Bakhialpur girl first on the school rolls has completed her matriculation and is employed as the teacher. Tremat Sanjh that had along the way taken over school management from RDO independently negotiated with the Education Department and got two additional government schools. In a region where less than decade ago there was not a single girls’ school, they now have three schools and ninety students – twenty-five of them in grade eight.

Saifullah says everything he and his colleagues learned from SAP-PK was faithfully passed on to their rural partners. Wanting in education they may have been, but the women were not stupid. Just eight years of seminars and workshops to disseminate the learning of RDP coupled with education have produced a crop of women now employed by Actionaid, National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), USAID and Save the Children Fund (SCF).
Along came the Devolution Plan of 2000 and SAP-PK’s Democratic Rights and Citizen’s Education Program. Until the first polls under this new governance model, Rajanpur women did not contest elections. However, in order to maintain the fig leaf of women’s representation, local politicians got their domestic servants ‘elected’ as councilors. The elections of 2001 the same procedure was repeated by the established political players.

However, this time there was the challenge of twelve women activists connected with RDO in the elections line up. All of them won to become councilors. It was a revolution from the meek servant women to feisty, vocal representatives it was an unexpected surprise in the local councils. A long-established myth in feudal Rajanpur was destroyed.

As of 2005, three of these women are part of the Rajanpur district assembly where they make a very vocal group. Two of these women were selected, one each by PPP and PML-N as their provincial assembly representatives on reserved seats. Though the parties could not muster the requisite votes and the women failed to make it, the mere fact that they were picked by two powerful parties is a recognition of the new role women are playing in Rajanpur.

Having completed her degree in law, Shazia Abid was reluctant to join the bar because the district had no precedence of a woman practitioner. As an RDO partner, her participation in SAP-PK’s DRCEP encouraged her to contest the 2001 elections which catapulted her to the district assembly. When the case of a rape victim came up in the assembly, Shazia stood up to point her finger and name the feudal lord who was protecting the criminal. If there was no precedence of a woman lawyer, neither was there of such behavior. This was the second resounding knock on the lofty gateway of feudalism.

Today there are seven women practicing law in Rajanpur and the district assembly rings with women’s voices. These are voices that the old order now finds hard to ignore.

Only a few years previously a rapist, protected as in this case by a powerful feudal politician, would have walked free. With Shazia weighing against the political-criminal nexus, the police were hard put to release the man who had to eventually raise the high court for bail. At the time of this writing, the man is under trial.

Rajanpur saw the first ever celebration of International Women’s Day in 2005 with a record gathering of two thousand women. The day ended with a rally by the participants to condemn violence against women. Two days later, Friday, the mullahs were up in arms demanding registration of blasphemy case against the NGO and Saifullah.
The blasphemy in this case was not against religion; it was the attempt to dismantle the old order and bring women out of the home and into public life. The noises soon died out when the DCO and the district Nazim who had both attended the show, quashed the reactionary demands.

From campaigning for women’s empowerment it is a short way to fighting for the rights of poor farmers affected by the building of the Kachhi Canal. With hundreds of acres forcibly annexed from farmers already starved for good arable land, the canal was leaving a wide swathe of increased poverty on its way to bringing greater prosperity to rich politicians and generals, the new owners of hitherto barren land in Kachhi (Balochistan). RDO and Saifullah are in the forefront today campaigning for compensation for the affectees of Kachhi Canal.

The canal had two major flaws. On the design side, the high embankments were practically like dams against the torrents flowing down from the hills in the west. It was more likely that in the event of any major outflow from the hills, the canal would be breached and, if full, cause widespread havoc. Secondly, the International Water Accord lays down that populations living along a canal cannot be deprived of its waters. The high embankments of the Kachhi Canal were designed expressly for the sole purpose of permitting the communities along its length any access to its flow. Intense campaigning by RDO was reinforced by Nature when it unleashed the floods of 2007 washing away large tracts of the earthworks.

‘We have succeeded in getting design modifications to permit hill torrents to cross the canal without damaging it and the surrounding villages,’ Saifullah points out. ‘That had taken immense efforts. We are now working on getting compensation for those uprooted from their homes and farms.’

Having joined Al Fatima Welfare Society only ten years earlier, Saifullah Mastoi was worried about the future of his organization and with it his own future. His major concern then was having a paying job. He had never thought of being in a leadership position. That he finds himself now in such a position, he says, would never have been possible without his RDP training.
16. The First Drop Of Rain

Lying 15 km west of Sialkot city, in the heart of rural farming country, the village of Rohras could hardly ever be expected to become a paragon of liberated young women that it is today. That it did, is because of a faltering, fitful journey begun in the 1930s.

In those pre-partition days, Rohras was dominated by the richer Hindu and Sikh population while the Muslims, save for the odd landowner, were a somewhat poorer minority. In order to better their lot, Muslim elders got together and in 1934 established Anjuman Islah-e-Muashra. Though the name suggested an association aiming to correct society as a whole, its actual goal was to better the lot of the Muslims of Rohras.

With the word ‘development’, still way off in the future, Anjuman’s charter of welfare activities consisting of collecting donations, purchasing sewing machines and dishing them out free or aiding the poor wed off their daughters. Other activities also included improving sanitation and other infrastructure in the Muslim part of the village. For twenty years, the association continued to function thus, in which time it even acquired a building of its own.

Following the turbulent 1940s and with the founding of Pakistan, the Hindus and Sikhs migrated away and Rohras became an all Muslim village. The incentive for Anjuman to continue with the same zeal ebbed and by the early 1950s, it was a moribund organization. The Muslim refugees that had replaced Hindu and Sikh families had reduced the community into groups on the bases of caste and clan, political affiliations and affluence or indigence.

Quite naturally, conflicts arose and in the absence of a conciliatory mechanism sometimes got completely out of hand. It may not be without foundation when old residents of the village aver that hostilities were sometimes so blatant that residents from one precinct of the village were afraid to visit another. By the mid-1960s, Rohras was cleanly divided along clan lines. It was virtually every man for himself in this once thriving and happy village.

While some individuals rose to petty leadership positions, the village suffered because of this lack of consensus and harmony. There was no infrastructure, no electricity or paved lanes in the village. Indeed, access from outside was all but impossible after every fall of rain when the dirt track leading to the village was submerged.

The year was 1966 when young Ashiq Mirza, used to daily cycle to the city and back for his job with the government. That summer when the rains came, he carried a kai (digging implement) on his bicycle to prepare the way as he went. Bit by bit a two meter-wide unpaved track began to take shape. Watching Mirza’s solo performance other joined in. Those who could afford helped with money, others chipped in with physical labor and before the monsoon was over, a proper track raised above the stagnant water connected Rohras with the nearby highway.
Word got around and in 1969 the deputy commissioner of Sialkot came visiting. Pleased with the self-help effort, he sanctioned Rs 40,000 for the new track to be brick-paved. Those who had only heard tales of the work done by Anjuman Islah-e- Muashra now knew the power of collectivism.

Had it not been for the dacoit Mohammad Hussain Kholra, things may just have stood that way. Most Rohras natives worked in the sports and surgical goods factories of Sialkot and on paydays Kholra sometimes waylaid them on the way home to relieve them of their earnings. Many tried individually for police intervention. But the police being what it is, nothing happened. With the robber’s depredations becoming more frequent and blatant, the aggrieved of Rohras gathered and descended upon the office of the DC. Their clamor shook the walls of officialdom and Kholra presently came to his deserved end.

A divided community moves to cohesion very slowly even when experience shows the power of collective harmony. And so it was not until 1972, three years since they had moved the DC against the robber, that a group of young men teamed up to establish Rifahi Committee Rohras (RCR). Translated into English the name meant Welfare Committee and that was exactly what it set out to accomplish.

Uppermost on their agenda was the abominable sanitary conditions of the village. Recalling the example of Ashiq Mirza and his road-building, the men of RCR, armed with brooms and rubbish bins, soon had the streets clear of litter. Next came the clearing of the open drains that overflowed into unpaved streets. Within no time at all, Rohras wore a different look altogether.

Raising funds by collecting from door to door, RCR was next able to hire a couple of janitors to keep the village clean. Over the next thirteen years, besides other things, they contrived to secure electricity and a tarmac access road for the village, a girls’ middle school and a bank as well. Having gained the trust of the community, their greatest achievement came when it was time to up-grade the school. Mobilizing the people, they raised sufficient funds from within the community to buy the properties adjacent to the existing school building in order to expand the facility. This institution was eventually raised to the level of a high school.

Little did the men of RCR know how this school would one day change the very mindset of the whole village.
'With this string of gains behind us, we became entrenched in our pattern and had begun to believe that we could change our world by collecting donations and using them for community work. For us development was bricks and mortar. Paved streets and lined drains was the ultimate limit of our welfare ideas.' Arshad Mirza of RCR admits. Though they began to have grandiose notions of changing the whole province by extending their outreach, their goals were yet vague and there was no strategy to achieve them.

They may have remained in that groove had it not been for the invitation in 1991 from SAP-PK for RCR to attend the RDP training. Arshad Mirza says that the first session gave him the spark. The great dawning was the understanding that the concept of development really entailed development of the human mind. 'From a smoldering heap we were suddenly a fiery blaze,' says Mirza who had exhibited great courage by taking his wife to the training in Lahore. Courage it was indeed because he had defied the wrath of his extended family that did not permit its women the liberty of meeting strange men. Even after the first session, paving streets and building drains seemed of little consequence. The greater need and imperative was to change people’s thinking.

Following the training exchanges with SAP-PK and with a mere Rs 146,000 in aid from them, RCR set up Rifahi Literacy and Skill Training Centre for women. The move was roundly censured by the community: this was a village of honorable folk who kept their women locked up and these upstarts were challenging the old order and exposing the women to all manners of Western behavior. Regardless of what the men said, the centre became functional and was soon drawing woman of all ages in an ever-growing stream.

With their learning still raw, the RCR team however found it difficult to translate its principle’s into practical terms in their rural setting. Late in 1992, a SAP-PK monitoring team was surprised to find that the skill training centre was simply that: a tailoring and cutting class that took some time off to impart basic literacy to women who had no formal schooling. If the monitors had imagined that the establishment of the centre would mean discussion groups where the learning of the RDP training was disseminated to lead to heightened awareness among women and their eventual empowerment, that was not happening. In the rigid, male-dominated setting of rural Punjab, the women who did venture to the centre came only to learn the sartorial arts.

SAP-PK’s way into the mind of Rohras women was through their Democratization for Women (DFW) program. Early in 1993, the sewing and literacy classes were interspersed with discussions on women’s rights, Family Laws Ordinance, Hadood Ordinance and the Law of Evidence. Things began to change slowly. Girls who were earlier only seen, never heard in their own homes, began to advise in domestic, particularly matrimonial, crises. A barrier was now crossed. Word got around, and more and more girls from Rohras and surrounding villages joined the centre – many of them in the face of severe family pressure. Now they did not join to learn to be seamstresses or to become literate. This time round, most of them had high school or even college education and they came to learn of their rights under the law of the land.
It is hard to keep a good woman down, and more so a bunch of them. Before its second year was out, the girls running Rifahi Literacy and Skill Training Centre had decided they wanted an umbrella organization for its centre. And so the year 1993 saw the birth of Bedari – Awakening. Thereafter, it was full tilt for these brave young women. Their centre met with such success in Rohras and a number of nearby villages, that the older RCR began to dissolve into Bedari, rather than the other way around.

When Hina Naureen joined the skill training centre as a student in 1995, one thing caught her attention: the self-assured poise of the teachers only a few years older than herself. These were women who were continuously engaging with trainers and monitors from SAP-PK. Hina promised herself that she would one day be like her instructor. The shy young woman who had just finished her twelfth grade in time completed her graduation and moved forward to become a long standing President of Bedari.

With visible pride Hina and her sister Zille Huma (also a member of Bedari) recount how they saved the marriage of a cousin. The routine practice at weddings was that the column in the nikah (marriage) certificate granting the bride the right to divorce was unthinkingly struck through. Women were thus deprived of a right given them by law.

At the cousin’s wedding, Huma prevailed upon the bride’s parents to let her retain the right to divorce. That was just as well. Within months of the wedding, the couple had serious trouble over the issue of dowry, prompted, as in most cases, by the husband’s family. When the young man threatened his bride with divorce, she, under Huma’s instructions, retorted with a counter-threat. The man backed down asking his family to let him and his wife work out their differences themselves.

Left to their own devices, the couple resolved the conflict and today remain happily wedded. ‘We saved two families from everlasting grief,’ Huma says.

Four years of hard work in over-crowded literacy classrooms, gave the young teachers their first taste of success when they mainstreamed a batch of students. The crowning glory of this work came years later when many of those girls, having graduated from college, are employed as teachers themselves. Some also work in the sports goods industry of Sialkot. These girls had stood against the pressure of brothers and fathers who maintained that in their pure-blooded families women must forever remain dumb fixtures within the home.

When Hina Naureen wanted to continue her education after the matriculation, an older uncle told her mother that as respectable people in the village, they did not educate their daughters. Both sisters had by then attended several training sessions at the Centre and had a mind of their own; they had learned to break down the doors restricting them. Today, just over a decade later, girls’ education as well as young women working outside the home are acceptable in Rohras.

‘We were the first drop of rain,’ says Zille Huma. ‘We took the heat and paved the way for others to follow.’
17. Standing Up Against Violence

Afia Batool and her husband Shafiq, having married because they loved each other and not because their respective families so desired, were under threat. Having fled their native Budla ki Sund, a village outside Multan, they lived in hiding for a year and a half. One day walking along a city street, Shafiq passed a large group of women demonstrating against honor killings and domestic violence. It was as if they were protesting against his own misfortune. He took down a telephone number from one of the banners the demonstrators were carrying.

Shafiq and Afia thus came in touch with Women’s Rights Association (WRA). WRA went into action and their case hit the headlines: here were two young people in love whose families opposed their union for the antiquated and inhuman reasons of ‘honor.’ Both were threatened with death. Indeed, it was said that even the couple’s infant daughter was not to be permitted to live were the families to lay their hands on her. With free legal aid provided by lawyers on the WRA team, the court took six months to absolve the husband and wife of the crime their families perceived they had committed.

Shafiq today works in a factory in Multan while Afia stays home to look after their daughter, now a bubbly child of four. Ask them and the couple will assure you that as little as ten years ago they would have stood no chance of survival. That they live is because WRA was one day demonstrating against domestic violence and in passing Shafiq happened to notice the banner and called them for help.

It is from a humble beginning that Shaista Bukhari has raised WRA to be a powerful advocate for an end to violence against women in and around Multan. Politically savvy from a very young age because of an elder brother active in left-wing politics, Shaista was pained by the discrimination she saw against women in the under-privileged section of society. By and by she realized that it was not only the poor and illiterate who so criminally treated their womenfolk; even upper-class, highly educated families suffered from the same disease.

As a young woman in the late 1980s, Shaista took it upon herself to assist women who had no recourse to the law. Her modus operandi was simple: she would call well-placed friends of her brother to intervene. While such small interventions in the lives of ordinary women were very gratifying, Shaista yet felt that her work was not making a significant dent on her little world. Something more needed to be done. But that something was the unknown factor.

In 1999 Shaista, then teaching in a private school, and three friends launched WRA. The focus was very clear: this was to be a rights-based agent working strictly for women’s rights and emancipation. There being no money to run the organization the group worked half a day in their respective salaried jobs and volunteered the rest of their time in the WRA office. Even after registering as an NGO in 2000, Shaista and her colleagues were conscious that there was no direction or method in the daily affairs of their organization. With little else to do, the group began collecting data of crimes against women in Multan division. At the same time they also began inviting women to attend their meetings.
Now, this was time when women in Multan division were not very mobile and most of them needed excuses to get out of the home. Consequently, WRA made it known that they intended to help women enhance whatever skills they had to help them build up their own income. Dozens of women turned up for the meetings. By Shaista’s own admission, though these sessions did bring women out of their homes, the net outcome was nothing more than that: there was little WRA did in the direction of its professed goals of empowerment and emancipation.

In 2001 WRA made a favorable impression on a visitor from SAP-PK. Shortly thereafter in 2002, Shaista was nominated by them for training with Priya in Delhi. When she returned, she had very clear concepts on Good Governance and Poverty Eradication – that being the theme of the Priya exercise. That same year a new world of social mapping, advocacy, financial and office management opened up when she and another colleague underwent SAP-PK’s RDP training.

In 2003 WRA received funding from SAP-PK for their Women’s Development Through Education and Skill, a program meant to enhance awareness and literacy. This input of Rs 400,000 came just in time. With three years of work behind them, and a full year after the RDP training, Shaista and her colleagues were getting an inferiority complex about their work not being capable of notice by a donor. That was one thing, but this input brought a far greater change in Basti Shorkot where a skill and literacy centre was established. Two sisters of the village with high school education and skilled in cutting sewing were hired as teachers and set up with the necessary materials. Only she who is denied education knows its allure and the illiterate women of the village thronged to the centre.

Two years later when WRA pulled out of Basti Shorkot to set up the same school in the Multan slum of Samejabad, the Shorkot school did not collapse. Instead, WRA linked the teacher sisters with UNDP and the centre continued with short-term funding from that donor. Today, the two sisters run an efficient institution supported by fee-paying members and have expanded its curriculum to include basic business management. Some of its members are busily engaged in the apparel trade with buyers in Multan. In just six years of operations, it also flaunts once-illiterate young women sitting for their matriculation exams.

When SAP-PK and OXFAM launched the Ending Violence Against Women program in October 2004, WRA was a natural choice for partner in view of its past work. Then working in two union councils near Multan, the NGO was called upon to expand the number to ten. The new curriculum included, besides skill and literacy, discussions on domestic violence and means to stop it.

The strength of these women’s groups lies in linkages with each other as well as with WRA and the District Focal Group, a pressure group comprising of lawyers, media persons and civil society activists. The DFG serves well as a platform to orchestrate joint action as well as police and legal assistance in the event of violence. Now, two years since the project has ended, WRA knows that violence is far from ended. But it has markedly declined if we are to go by the case of young Fatima, a regular at the skill and literacy centre in Basti Shorkot.

Forever in terror of her father who regularly thrashed her mother, Fatima one day watched the man smash his wife’s face with a metal platter. It could have been just another day of
domestic violence, but the spurt of blood from her mother’s nose snapped something inside Fatima. Grabbing his arm as the man raised it to strike again and screaming at him to desist; she held it so firmly that the man was dumbstruck. That was reportedly the last day the man hit his wife.

“We have to begin with little successes if we want to go on to a major change in society,” says Shaista. Of this one little triumph WRA can rightly be proud.

The EVAW program entailed training of twenty women as anti-violence activists from each union council. Of these, one was trained as a para-legal worker and another as a social organizer with the remainder being EVAW foot soldiers. There were occasional pitfalls when men objected to the evil being taught their women, but the skill of advocacy came into play. Garnering the local mullah’s support before paid good dividends and dissenting voices died when support rang out in the Friday sermon.

By the time the project ended in 2007, WRA had a field force of two hundred trained and motivated women in the ten union councils. That was not the end, however. Word spread and women in nearby villages demanded similar training. Taking over from WRA, the trained teams have since prepared additional activists in another forty union councils. The number of women activists against domestic violence now stands at over four hundred and counting. Interestingly, the trainers as well as the trainees are so charged up and committed that expansion of the project is self-sustaining by donations from trainee groups.

Once helpless women who, like Fatima’s mother, quietly put up with maltreatment now resort to their respective para-legal worker who can either deal with the case independently or forward it to WRA. Though all is still not entirely well, today it is comparatively easier to register a case of domestic violence with the police. This change became possible when the EVAW program included all tiers of police officers in the training. In a country where citizens have never looked upon the police as saviors but as villains, this was a major shift. Indeed, in Multan, this was the first ever interaction between a civil society organization and the police, giving the latter a long-denied chance to make their side of the story known.

Even before she had launched WRA, Shaista had been conscious that the woman most susceptible to violence in the home was the one financially most dependent. This was shown to be true by a 2004 research by the NGO. With funding from The Pluralism Fund to end domestic violence and some from Shaista’s Asoka International award, WRA has an on-going extension similar to the EVAW program of training and group formation.

WRA has encouraged four groups to set up small cooperatives with contributions of as little as five hundred rupees from the members. Loans advanced from this common pool have enabled women to set up small businesses and over time repay their loan. The revolving fund thus created continues to expand and benefit an ever increasing number. There are cases of women beneficiaries running village grocery shops or selling bangles or going into the embroidery business with market linkages provided by WRA.

This is just the beginning say Shaista and her colleagues at WRA. With no grandiose plans of diverting from their avowed goal of remaining just a rights-based organization, they are keeping clear of expanding their operations. Their aim is to change their world with the smallest of beginnings: with women’s groups that can look after themselves. If in a few years’ time the women of Multan district are freer, financially better off and less prone to violence in their homes, the work of WRA will have been worthwhile.
On the last day of August in 1987 when Shahzad Ahmad returned home from school, he found his father’s body being prepared for burial. He was only fifteen years old. The youngest of three siblings, Shahzad was a pampered child in a home where he had not seen want. With a successful restaurant near Lahore’s most frequented Sufi shrine near Bhati Gate outside the old city, his father earned enough not just to keep his own family in comfort but also to share some with his less well-off relatives. If truth be told, the generous man even spent money on his neighbors’ entertainment organizing weekly outings, complete with food and transport, to the city’s various picnic spots.

Within days of this unfortunate death, the owner of the property housing the restaurant told Shahzad’s family to vacate. With their only source of income in jeopardy the family realized that there was next to no saving to tide over the sudden setback. In order to keep the household going and also to maintain Shahzad in school at least until his matriculation the following year, his elder brother Ejaz abandoned college to set up a tea stall near the home.

Having duly cleared his matriculation and joined a local college, Shahzad was not aware that Ejaz was talking to friends of his about the difficulties the family was facing. Nor too did he know that he was also looking for a suitable opening where Shahzad could be adjusted. One of the friends that Ejaz spoke with knew Mohammad Tahseen of the newly-established SAP-PK. The NGO needed an office boy and so on the last day of August, exactly two years since the death of his father, Shahzad joined SAP-PK.

The one-room office in an apartment block in Gulberg Main Market was shared by Shahzad and Tahseen with two other colleagues. The first day went well with introductions all around and moving a few papers and files between the three desks. That was all very well, but about the end of the day, Shahzad was also asked to wash the tea and lunch things in the tiny cubby hole of a kitchen. This was a shock for the pampered boy who had never moved a finger at home.

At home when he told his mother of his day’s work, he wept making her and his sister weep with him. He absented himself from work the next day. And the next day. That evening Tahseen visited his home to cajole the boy into not giving up and to canvass with his mother for her support. If doing dishes had upset the young man, the next shock was being asked if
he could prepare tea for the staff and visitors. Of course he did not and had to be shown how to do the needful, which he did with a twinge of resentment. Now twenty years on, he looks back and can see the casual, easy-going manner in which the spoiled child in him was broken and prepared for the life ahead.

At the end of the month Shahzad received his first salary: six hundred rupees. When he took stock, he had spent about an equal sum on his upkeep and daily transport from Bhati Gate to Gulberg by bus. Other than not being a drain on his brother’s income, he had not made any contribution to the household budget. However, in this one month he had settled into a sort of routine. The first few days expanded from preparing tea to handling incoming and outgoing mail and dispatching telexes from the machine in the nearby post office. By and by the accountant took Shahzad under his wing teaching him how to fill in the cash books and ledgers. Naturally gifted with neat handwriting, his work was appreciated.

Encouraged by his colleagues at work, the boy joined a typing school not far from his home. For three months the end of his workday was marked by an hour in the school where he pounded away on a typewriter thirty years older than himself. As his proficiency increased, colleagues at work began to give him handwritten sheets to key into the single computer. In time he built up speed on the keyboard that was to pay him good dividends years later when computers became common equipment in every office.

In 1991, however, computers were still not everyday tools and accountancy was largely manual. A new part-time accountant showed Shahzad how to tally cash memos and enter vouchers in the ledgers. Diligent by nature, the boy would have the ledgers ready with the entries made in neat script before the accountant arrived in the afternoon to counter-check and validate them.

About this time, upon Tahseen’s suggestion, Shahzad began to prepare for his intermediate (grade 12) exams. Cramming his text books was hard work after a full workday and English always a weak spot, was the hardest yet. The good Professor Abbas, Government College University Lahore, who had tutored Shahzad’s brother, was always at hand for free-of-charge coaching.

The following year, 1992, Shahzad had earned his intermediate certificate. This was remarkable, given that the year before had seen hectic office activity with SAP-PK in the thick of its inter-provincial RDP training program. Though the staff had now grown to seven members, Shahzad was the dab hand during the sessions in Lahore. He had something to do with everything ranging from logistics to food to accommodation as well as seeing no one had a complaint about the arrangements. His exams coincided with the culminating RDP session in full flow in Lahore and he made through by sheer application to purpose.

With his intermediate certificate under his belt, Shahzad was put to work as an unofficial assistant to the chief accountant. Before the year had passed, the two were in Bangladesh to attend a SAP financial management workshop with participants from the five South Asian countries as well as from Canada. As it turned out, Shahzad was the youngest and least experienced in the group. But this exposure was the greatest yet the man had ever had. By his own account, the new learning in Bangladesh equaled in quantum the learning of his past four years with SAP-PK. Upon his return, Shahzad became the official assistant accounts officer for his organization.
With encouragement from Tahseen, Shahzad began preparing for his graduation. With the full load of an assistant accounts officer in a steadily growing organization, it took four years before he was ready to appear in the exams and pass in 1996. While he may have been pretty pleased with himself, his chief had little faith in him. He did not have what it takes to get ahead as an accountant, he was told. A degree with political science was all right, it was said, but Shahzad had not read accounting and commerce in college and therefore lacked the clarity to excel in his chosen field.

Piqued, the young man enrolled in 1998 in a private college for a bachelor’s degree in commerce. One year through the course, it dawned on him that he was making a foolish mistake. Instead of working for a masters degree, he had demoted himself for another bachelor's degree. By the end of the final decade of the last century SAP-PK had grown into a large national NGO staffed by thirty members and programs in the farthest corners of the country. The assistant accounts officer’s work was a good deal more than that of seven years earlier when Shahzad was first put in that position. Resolving to yet become an MBA, Shahzad burnt huge quantities of the proverbial midnight oil.

At this point in time, a new chief accountant took charge. A different working style gave Shahzad free reign and for him it was like attending accounting school. He was encouraged to perform tasks that he had hitherto believed to belong beyond his capacity. All he was required to do was to show his postings to his chief. Unbeknownst to him, Shahzad was being prepared for his MBA.

In 2004, eight years after the challenge was thrown at him about not having any grounding in accountancy, he earned his post-graduate degree in Business Administration. The year before had been a grind of a full day of work followed by evening classes at a private college. But the slog was worth it. Shahzad was now prepared for accountancy at the managerial level.

When he joined SAP-PK back in August 1989 and settled into his routine of making tea for the staff and running to the photocopy shop at the corner or dispatching telexes, Shahzad the matriculate thought he had found his vocation. Then they gave him the ledgers to fill and handwritten pages to key in and he looked upon himself as a typist and clerk. Still later he thought his role as an accountant’s helper was the zenith of his abilities. Along came the first RDP training and finding himself in an administrative role, he thought that was the work he was cut for.

By his own account not once along the way did he understand how his colleagues were pushing him on to realize his own abilities and capacity. He did not ever realize that he was being helped only to recognize what was within him; that he was not being done a favor, he was only being shown the way. Today with all his degrees, an MA in Political Science thrown in for good measure, he mans the chair of the Accounts Manager. ‘Once everything seemed to be the end of the road. Now this seems to be the beginning. I hope to lead one day.’ Shahzad Ahmad, the frightened teenage boy of 1989 who spoke with a marked lisp, has come a very long way.
19. The Tractor Ride To Success

Village Ghazi Mashori lies a few miles from the ruins of the prehistoric city of Mohenjo Daro. Noted for the green-domed shrine of Mashori elder revered as a saint, the village is like hallowed ground for its inhabitants. Therefore nothing even remotely ‘irreligious’ could these simple folk think of enacting on this sacred land. Since the Mashoris (actually Mussori, a clan of the Bugti tribe of Balochistan), have very strict rules about gender segregation, girls’ education and mobility were foremost on their list of taboos.

It was not strange then that Ghazi Mashori only had a boys’ primary school and none for girls. However, in very rare cases it was acceptable that girls went to the same school as the boys. This too was permitted only until the fifth grade after which girl students were pulled out and confined to the home. While the better off families sent their sons to continue their education in nearby Larkana girls never got the same benefit.

Maqbool Mashori’s father was somewhat of an oddity for, despite being a religious teacher, he educated his daughters and sons alike. Beyond the fifth grade, when the daughters could no longer share the school with the boys, the man arranged for them to daily commute to Larkana and back in order for them to continue their schooling. As a youngster Maqbool found this remarkable and used to think that if it were within his power he would see that all girls got the same deal as the boys.

Having finished his matriculation in 1986, Maqbool began thinking of doing something for the betterment of the village. The phenomenon of development NGOs was yet in its infancy in Pakistan and few outside a select circle knew anything about them or their work. Nevertheless, there was plenty of ‘welfare organizations’ in other villages and so together with nine other friends Maqbool established Ghazi Social Welfare Association (GSWA) and got it registered with the Social Welfare Department in 1987.

The group of ten met regularly and soon had identified most of the problems their village faced: the boys’ school needed upgrading, a girls’ school was wanting, the streets in the village were unpaved. The list went on, but the most pressing and recurrent problem was the drain that passed by the village. Every monsoon it overflowed inundating the village and destroying large tracts of agriculture. With funds raised from door to door collection, the group hired a tractor and dozer blade for the earthworks while doing the manual work themselves. The next monsoon the floodwaters drained harmlessly away into the Indus River winning the young do-gooders gratitude all around.

Now, since the 1950s Maqbool’s father had run a religious school in a two-room building that had lain unused after the elder Mashori’s death. The GSWA team cleaned out the rooms and with sewing machines donated by the Social Welfare Department opened a cutting and sewing training centre for women. There being no precedence, such a move to get women out of their homes naturally caused a bit of furor. Maqbool deftly parried it by appointing his sister Hamida, well versed in the sartorial art, to head the centre. If the men
were opposed to such business, the women were thinking otherwise and on the first day the centre opened its doors, fifteen women joined up.

One pre-condition for admission to the centre was now laid down: the three-hour session would be divided into two hours for skill training and one hour for basic literacy. There was some noise about the defiance of the established order by these young men and ‘shameless behavior’ they were encouraging. But it soon died down because of Hamida’s presence.

By 1990 with a large number of women becoming literate, GSWA gained some respect in and around the village. What was more, men who opposed the centre in the beginning were not fools unable to count the rupees: a skilled woman capable of meeting the family’s tailoring needs meant considerable saving of precious cash.

Maqbool was rankled by a thought, however. Was this the way to ‘develop’ village Ghazi Mashori? Meaning well, Maqbool and his friends were all over the place so as to be able to make as wide an impact as possible. They procured zakat funds for widows to wed their daughters or purchased sewing machines to be given out. They helped people with problems in the revenue department, they mediated in disputes. In short, they did everything they considered right for the community. Only they lacked vision and direction.

Early in 1991 a man called Suleman Abro visited the Social Welfare Department in Larkana and asked for a list of organizations working in the district. This man was listing NGOs for the RDP of SAP-PK. Maqbool admits that for the life of him he had no clue what that meant. Why, the problem with GSWA was not training or a lack thereof, it was a lack of funds to execute its welfare schemes. Nevertheless, he signed up and in order to fulfill the one-man one-woman precondition, took Hamida with him.

The sound of the word *shrakti taraqi* (participatory development) he heard for the first time still sends a thrill of excitement through him. This was a concept so utterly sensible yet unknown to him and his colleagues. The following session brought Maqbool up to date with the realities of the rest of the country. Suddenly the work of the years from 1987 until 1991 seemed like a joke to him.

Upon his return home after each session of training, Maqbool went into overdrive disseminating his newly learnt lessons to the communities GSWA worked with. When he led the Friday congregations, which he did being from the saint’s family, he spoke of participatory development and of women’s role in development. Gaping mouths and
surprised eyes looked up at him from the congregation. A number of repeat performances slowly made this alien concept and the skill training centre somewhat more unacceptable.

In response to a project proposal, SAP-PK provided a tractor to GSWA. The farmers groups that Maqbool’s RDP sessions created were holders of small packets of land who worked with hired tractors. As it is with such things, their turn came last of all after the tractor owner and tilled his own land and that of his rich friends. The luckier ones of the GSWA partners got the tractor at the tail end of the sowing season, others after the season ended. The resultant effect on yield was therefore considerable.

Forming two committees of five persons each, one to work out a roster for use of the tractor and the other to collect the dues from the users, GSWA withdrew to be only a distant supervisor. At the end of the year, net income from tractor rental ran into a neat six figures setting GSWA on its way to financial viability.

As the community believed, the new purpose-built premises of the skill training centre that now replaced the two-room shack was a sign of advancement. But the GSWA team was more satisfied with the gradual change in the mindset. No longer was girls’ education or their attending the skill training classes taken as ‘obscene.’ Maqbool asserts that the frequent visits by SAP women staff members did much to affect this change. But the greater change was yet in the future.

In 1995 SAP launched its Political Education Program. Maqbool attended with his sister and his nephew’s wife as well as four other girls from the village. It dawned upon them that whatever GSWA and countless other development NGOs were striving to do was actually the work of the elected representatives. When they returned to the village, this team of trained young persons set to training the community.

The impact assessment of this activity came a few months later when the NGO invited the local representative in the provincial assembly. In a hugely attended gathering the community virtually forced the man to promise a blacktop surface for the two kilometer-long village link road.

That was a watershed. The community now knew of the power of the ballot, their own collective strength and that they had the right to demand service from the person who rode their votes to the assembly. Expression of political views, long suppressed out of fear, now became common.

Until the middle years of the 1990s, the vote bank was traditionally carried by a very rich land-owning family. This was not in recognition of services rendered by them, but by sheer intimidation of the electorate. Traditionally the Sindhis, politically more savvy than other Pakistanis, fly the flags of their party on their rooftops. But in Ghazi Mashori so complete was the thrall of the powerful family that even those who did not agree with their politicking and their affiliation flew their flags when elections drew near. Indeed, no politicians from other parties so much as dared to canvass in this village.

For the 1997 elections, for the first time in three decades, the houses of village Ghazi Mashori hoisted the flags of the parties that the people favored. Accusing Maqbool of jeopardizing their campaign, the concerned politician threatened him with death by stabbing. A year earlier he may have been awed, but now Maqbool retaliated with his own rally informing him that he was not to get a single vote from the sub-division of Dokri (of
which Ghazi Mashori is a part). At the same time he invited the other party to campaign in the village.

Another bridge was now crossed and it was time correct one more wrong. For long, the powerful political party did not permit any polling agents but their own in the voting stations. In the elections of 1997 the past order was completely overturned, however. Agents of all candidates were present and even the lowliest, most powerless person in the electorate voted for whomever they favored. This order has since prevailed.

With the community now squarely behind GSWA, the NGO joined SDGP to pen yet another door. Since farmers and their problems were the major concern of GSWA, it was of special interest to the organization that departments like agriculture and livestock had field officers mandated to ascertain and solve farmers’ problems. But these were desk-bound field officers. Primed with this new knowledge, farmers associated with GSWA began to descend upon the offices of the agriculture and livestock departments. If once they had gone as individuals, they had not been heard. Now their strength lay in numbers and the field officers were forced from their desks into the field.

Maqbool says there has been an overall attitude change in government functionaries in the past few years. From the rude and dismissive masters of the past they have become attentive and helpful. This, he believes, has come about because of the increased pressure from service recipients who know their due.

Knowledge is power and this new power has positively touched the lives of the families of Mohammad Saleh and Mohammad Hussain, both workers of a rice shelling mill who died a few years ago. One of the lessons Maqbool learned with SDGP was that mill owners are required by law to contribute a monthly subscription against each employee to Employees’ Old-Age Benefits Institution. In the event of a worker’s death, EOBI pays to the family a sum commensurate with the dead man’s years of service. However, in order to cut what they consider ‘undue expenses’, mill owners did not register their full complement of employees.

Even when they did register, employees’ ignorance of the law did not necessarily translate death into compensation to the affected family. Informing EOBI of the death, shrewd mill owners received the payment back into their coffers either in full or shared it out with corrupt functionaries of the department. Armed with the knowledge acquired from the SDGP training, GSWA saw to it that the families of Saleh Mohammad and Mohammad Hussain were duly compensated. Subsequently, the NGO also ensured that employers registered every single worker with EOBI.

It is not just past successes that GSWA gloats over. Maqbool now has visions of a school for quality education to poor farmers’ children – a school that has the potential of eventually becoming a university.

If he looks back to the struggles of the 1980s, Maqbool thinks they would not have gone very far without linking with SAP-PK. ‘Collecting donations to do this or that for the village we would have burnt ourselves out and GSWA would have turned into another moribund rural organization, not one that works in three districts. We got the vision and the drive to succeed from our long association with SAP-PK,’ says Maqbool Mashori.
20. Pirbhat: The Dawning

When the summer floods swept down the Khirthar hill torrents in 1996 and inundated Shahdad Kot, then part of Larkana now Kambar-Shahdad Kot district, Naujavan Samaji Forum of Shahdad Kot town sent out dozens of volunteers to help the agencies involved in flood relief. Very quickly it was noticed that the absence of women volunteers in the team denied them access to women and their work remained limited to the men folk.

In order to overcome this disadvantage and with no access to any women other than their nearest relatives, Forum members got their sisters and cousins on board as volunteers. So it was that Parveen Magi found herself wading through knee-deep water around flood-stricken villages with her elder brother and his team. She was not alone however. There were at least a dozen other young women, all of them related to someone or the other from the Forum.

With Shahdad Kot virtually treading on the toes of Balochistan, the tribal mindset of neighboring Baloch and Brohi peoples had over the centuries seeped into the Sindhi culture of the district. Though the young women volunteers of Forum well knew the general male behavior towards women, it yet came as a shock to be condemned as women of easy virtue – simply because they worked shoulder to shoulder with men. It was doubly unkind because these young volunteers had left the comfort of their own homes to help these people in their hour of plight.

Talking among themselves the girls resolved that this situation somehow needed to be changed. There had to be some parity in the status of woman and man for the former to be treated somewhat better than beasts. The flood waters had barely receded when Pirbhat Women’s Development Society (PWDS) emerged on the Shahdad Kot horizon. Pirbhat being the Sindhi word for that pre-dawn moment when the light of day first becomes discernible, this was as appropriate a name as ever. And that moment of first light did PWDS indeed turn out to be.

In her late teens, Parveen Magsi headed the new organization that was staffed entirely by women. All of them were students and every single one of them worked voluntarily. The mandate this group set itself was women’s awareness and emancipation – both social and fiscal. Now, in the tribal setting of Shahdad Kot it was impossible for single women to go about freely, leave alone travel to villages outside. Consequently, PWDS presently acquired a complement of men volunteers as well, usually brothers and cousins, to act as escorts.
That was step one. Step two comprising of regular motivation meetings with their target audience, rural women, was somewhat the more difficult. As an all-women gathering is looked upon with suspicion, women were not permitted by the families to attend. Consequently, the participants lied to their parents about going to a milad (religious) gathering instead.

This was also time when society did not accept working women. The only profession not actually frowned upon was that of teaching while some few upper class Shahdadkot women were educated as doctors. Even so, a woman venturing out of home was required to be draped in the all-enveloping black burka (veil) and escorted by a close male relative. If an educated Shahdadkot woman wished to work outside of the two acceptable professions, she had to leave home to work in Karachi or Hyderabad. Not strange then that the young PWDS volunteers’ visits to the villages ran into stout opposition from men who believed these visitors were urging their women to rebellion and, despite the cover of milad meetings, religiosity.

With no money to run the organization, Parveen and her colleagues persisted in the mission using their pocket money as running expenses. When that ran out, they walked from village to village sometimes averaging upward of sixteen kilometers on a typical field trip. Sometimes they resorted to collecting donations from around town. They were obsessed with creating a ‘peaceful and just society in which people enjoy their rights without discrimination.’ The program of community meetings was their means of achieving this ideal.

One thing rankled, however: their discussions in the villages had little focus and direction. All they could tell the women was that they ought to stand up against familial tyranny and abuse; that they ought to work to improve their and their children’s lot. How that was to be effected, of that there was no clue. While the volunteers thus struggled for their goal, threatening and defamatory letters began to reach their homes. Yet these brave women persisted.

Nearly two years went by before they were noticed by Oxfam for a small funding of Rs 60,000 to run a savings and credit program for rural women. With a maximum loan of Rs 3000, the program took off in 1998, the first ever in the Shahdadkot area, and within months things began to change. The simple no-fringe, no-strings facility that uplifted poor women economically, was not lost on the men who opposed and threatened. Suddenly PWDS gained respectability in male eyes long clouded by gender prejudice. The mechanism of this particular change, kept secret at the time, eventually became known: many an applicant had drawn the loan not for herself but to assist her husband in his enterprise.

Though she and her colleagues received some training to manage their credit program, but by Parveen’s account, the focus was narrow and confined only to the program they ran. Consequently their vision of changing their world was confined to their micro-finance scheme. This little scheme they thought was their ticket to the new world they dreamed of.

Early in 1999, PWDS became part of SAP-PK’s RDP training which lasted through 2000. For Parveen this was not simply professional training. This was ‘a lesson to support [her] through life.’ The new vision helped her shed her own bias and back in the village she invited men to her meetings with a curtain segregating the genders so as to respect local sensibilities.
Simultaneously, discussions moved on to the more meaningful notions of the rights of people under the constitution of the country; the roles, rights and responsibilities of elected members of the parliament and the electorate. There were discussions also on the role of the State. Special attention was given to domestic violence, rape and honor killing and the protection offered to the victim under law – something that was only vaguely known among rural communities.

This was something new, something never discussed in rural gatherings before and the audience began to grow. The tiny trickle of men attending these sessions expanded. By and by younger girls also appeared among the audience. Some of these late entrants having completed their education now work either for PWDS or other local NGOs. This trend among educated rural women to work in the development sector was unknown in the district until this time. It was the year 2004.

PWDS now set down its objectives:
- Struggle to eliminate all discrimination against women, especially in education and health
- Campaign for women’s participation in politics
- Empower women in socio-economic terms
- Raise awareness regarding women’s rights

If awareness raising was the agenda, the case of Yusuf Brohi is very illustrative of change. A native of Dheeng village just outside Shahdadkot this man in his early twenties seethed with rage every time he saw the PWDS team in his village. His greatest grief was that his own sister attended their meetings and came home to speak with the parents on what she heard there. Naturally, hot-blooded Yusuf considered all this ‘un-Islamic.’

After several face-offs with his sister, he resolved to attend the next meeting to see for himself what was becoming so important in the lives of the women of his village. Then he attended another meeting and another until he too became a regular. Much later he disclosed how he wished in the beginning for an automatic rifle to lay low the whole lot of the PWDS team. Today he is an ardent and vocal supporter of the NGO’s work.

As of early 2009, a legal aid centre operates out of the PWDS office in Shahdadkot. It has recorded dozens of cases of domestic violence duly reported to the police and brought to court. Within weeks of its outset, the center became widely known in Shahdadkot and the districts around. Time was when an abused wife, a raped woman or a harassed teenager knew only one thing: to conceal her plight for she had no recourse to relief. No one therefore reported maltreatment. But that was the past.

Campaigning by the NGO has yielded to positive results. On the one hand, victims of violence know where to seek redress, on the other; the NGO’s sensitization drive with the police has paid significant dividends. In the event of a woman ending up in a police station seeking help against violence, the police as a matter of course now inform PWDS. This is a major shift from the earlier practice of suppression of such cases by the police.

Shahdadkot where PWDS operates is still far from the Utopia the NGO seeks to attain. There is a marked fall in the activities of writers of defamatory and threatening letters. The few who persist do so by email or text messages and their threats are less virulent. It is however the decline in cases of domestic violence and the corresponding population of
more vocal and visible women that marks the success of PWDS. That is what Pirbhat is all about: the beginning of a new day.

Looking back Parveen Magsi has this to say: ‘Had we not run into SAP-PK and become part of RDP, we would have taken the credit and saving program as the limit of our existence. It is possible we would have worked ourselves into a groove and remained there without realizing that though financial betterment is essential, real development is something more. It is changing the medieval mindset that plagues our society.’
Allah Dad Marri, a kind and benevolent man, was a major landholder of union council Chanesar in Nawabshah district. If Arshad Khaskhel’s family knew easy times, it was only because of this good man for whom Arshad’s father and maternal grandfather worked. Arshad was about ten when the landlord passed away and his sons, having divided up the property, had no more to do with the two Khaskhel employees. With no other means of livelihood, little education and no particular skill, Arshad’s father turned to sharecropping and the family fell upon difficult times.

It was through these hard times that young Arshad maintained himself at the top of his class in school. When he finished his matriculation, he joined the government college in Nawabshah. Preferred by upper class boys, the college had an atmosphere far different from what the village boy was used to and he began to feel inferior to his peers. This sense of inadequacy led to a constant fever of psychosomatic nature that kept the boy out of college for about three months.

When he recovered and resumed college, he found that the world had undergone a revolution: his two mates from school now sharing college with him were no longer what they had always been. They were now friends with the rich and stylish city boys and they wanted Arshad to join them. Arshad however felt there were better things to do with life than wasting it with persons who cared little about education. He had heard of welfare organizations that held seminars, debates and other functions to highlight social issues and he felt he and his friends ought to have a similar organization.

His friends thought the idea foolish. Regardless, our man founded Shah Sachal Sami Social Welfare Association (SSSWA). Even at that young age, the choice of name for the organization was a sign of Arshad’s secular mind: Sachal Sarmast (real name Mian Abdul Wahab) was the celebrated Sufi poet of Sindh, while his contemporary Sami was a Hindu mystic. Both were notable for challenging the clergy of their respective religions. The sole purpose of the association was to help village boys so that, in Arshad’s words, they did not end up having and inferiority complex like him.

Donations paid for weekly functions with speeches, debates and quiz programs. Local politicians and government functionaries were invited to distribute items of school stationery and uniforms as prizes to those who did well. It was early in 1991 during one such function that Arshad, acting as the master of ceremonies, was noticed by a man from SAFWCO, the Shahdadpur-based NGO. And so the young man ended up as a participant in the RDP training session of 1993-94.
Although he did not take it seriously and was more interested in wrestling a leadership role in the provincial coordination council, the yearlong training did take its toll on Arshad. Two changes came over him. For one, the callow, tongue-tied village boy of the first session quickly lost his shyness. On the philosophical side, he realized that adversity and well-being were not conditions divinely inflicted upon man and therefore unchangeable, but that they are the result of an inequitable distribution of resources.

The term ‘inequitable distribution of resources’ made lucid sense for Arshad for he recalled how his own father labored throughout the year as a sharecropper and yet never had enough food to last the family until the next harvest. On the other hand, the owner of the farm who never moved a finger grew fat by the sweat of his laborers. The injustice of lack of opportunities for the poor, especially landless and small farmers, needed to be addressed.

Arshad returned to the village to hold his own RDP sessions with his colleagues at SSSWA as well as in the communities. The debates and speeches of the past gave way to the philosophy of participatory development and human rights. Until 1994, the year SSSWA was registered as an NGO, the modus operandi was to collect donations from the rich and to pass them on to deserving poor. There now started a five-year-long period of awareness raising and advocacy to wean people away from the welfare mentality that SSSWA had unwittingly sowed.

In 2000 SSSWA got a micro-credit project of a quarter million rupees from SAP-PK and moved out of the realm of donations. This revolving fund, subsequently enlarged by an input from Orangi Pilot Project (OPP), continues to change the lives of the poor of union council Chanesar. The pace was set by Sharif Sanio, a farmer from union council Chanesar. With a small land holding and limited means, the man struggled every year for seeds and other farm inputs. There never was enough money to satisfy his needs so he ended up borrowing to perpetuate his debt to be paid off on the next harvest.

In the winter of 2000 he sowed his first wheat crop with a loan of Rs 25,000 from SSSWA, applied the right manures and pesticides and reaped a harvest that he had only dreamed of all his life. Out of his cycle of debt, Sharif has expanded the area under his plough and is now counted among the better off farmers of his union council. Sharif Sanio’s has done so well that his enterprise was billed as a model, winning the man a prize of Rs 50,000 from Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF).

The six villages that the SSSWA worked in during that period saw the formation of six very strong farmers groups. All registered as CBOs, they are a strong and vocal presence around Chanesar. It was perhaps with their strengthening that Arshad Khaskheli first got the idea of his own role in the political leadership of the district. Aligned with the most powerful party in Sindh, he is now clearly headed for a parliamentary role in the future.

This dramatic move ahead may have been good for the person, but it shifted his focus from the development initiatives of SSSWA. The TVO-funded Mother and Child Healthcare Centre was the first casualty of this shifting focus. With no attention to its sustainability, the center was permitted to run only for the two years the funding lasted. Thereafter it was downgraded to a dispensary kept alive by the district council.

That having been said, the community mobilization initiatives of SSSWA need also be conceded. Under the SDGP initiative the NGO has hundred PWGs in the pipeline, thirty of
which are already in place. Besides, the past nearly decade-long work on community awareness and mobilization has rendered some five thousand irregular affiliates that SSSWA can muster with a single call. These will be the numbers whose shoulders Arshad Khaskheli will ride to his parliamentary seat.

While the effects of the community mobilization efforts of SSSWA are abstract, the NGO has recently made some physical impact as well. With the introduction of the high paying irrigation-intensive banana crop to Nawabshah district, small farmers and sharecroppers faced two-fold problems. To begin with, higher irrigation led to waterlogging and salinity destroying large tracts of agricultural land. Secondly, because of its requirement of considerably less labor than, say, cotton or wheat, a large number of farm laborers became redundant.

Now, the Tenancy Act very clearly lays down that a landlord may utilize only ten percent, and no more, of his agricultural holding for fruit. The rest has to be under seasonal crops. With plenty of contractors at hand to lease agricultural land for conversion to banana plantation, landowners are succumbing to the lure of large earnings without any work. While farm laborers are being laid off, the contractor and the landlord make huge profits and the Tenancy Act is openly flouted.

As they thrashed out a strategy for the limiting of banana plantations, SSSWA and its associates prepared a feasibility of a channel from the area to the Left Bank Outfall Drain. Simultaneously a media campaign was launched to highlight the plight of the afflicted union councils. Armed with the feasibility for the drainage canal and press cuttings, Arshad approached the Department of Agriculture and got the project sanctioned.

Completed in early 2009, the channel carries the brine tainting the subsoil water of two union councils. Thirty thousand souls who were on the verge of turning into internally displaced persons have a new lease on life. The next step now in the offing is to reclaim for regular agriculture the land lost to banana crops.

However, Arshad Khaskheli and SSSWA now seem to be in a cul de sac. While Arshad has his eyes on the political office he hopes to win, the NGO needs new leadership and greater commitment if it has to abide by the ideals it had set for itself back in 1991.
22. From 5 to 650

In 1991 Sindh Agriculture and Forestry Workers Cooperative Organization (SAFWCO) was housed in Suleman Abro’s family home in Shahdadpur, Sanghar district. Then its staff comprised of five persons. Today the organization, since having developed from cooperative to a ‘coordinating’ organization, has thirty-five offices province-wide with six hundred and fifty employees. Back then a visitor from NOVIB favored SAFWCO with a grant of Rs 700,000 for furniture and office equipment. Today the organization has a turnover of Rs 50 million annually – of which six million is just its credit program.

It has been a very long journey – a journey of dogged commitment and devotion to a cause. It is a journey to serve as a beacon for individuals and organizations.

When he was promoted to the sixth grade, Suleman Abro did not go to school for a full two weeks. His family did not have money enough to purchase the new text books. It was just as well that they somehow arranged the money and with it the books or the development sector in Sindh may have been very different today: SAP-PK would not have had a partner called Suleman Abro of SAFWCO; there would have been instead a sharecropper of this name.

By the time his next promotion drew near the following year, Suleman had a plan. He collected all the used text books from the students in his school and with the help of a group of friends distributed these to students who needed them but could not purchase the books themselves. This effort won him not just the needy students’ gratitude, but also appreciation from teachers and parents as well. Thereafter this became an annual exercise for Suleman and his friends.

Times were hard and from the sixth grade on Suleman worked after school. He did as the punkha-puller in the patvari’s office where he sat outside the door alternately pulling and releasing a cord to swing the large cane and fabric fan hanging from the ceiling of the room. Later in the evening he was the ironing boy in a laundry where he worked until midnight. Yet he was up at five the following morning to be an apprentice with a bricklayer. All this meant a much needed boost to the family’s income.

Despite this tough regimen, he yet found time to read Shah Latif, Chekhov and Voltaire, Manto, Faiz and Mubarak Ali. At the same time, by 1985 Suleman had also completed his master’s degree in Sindhi literature, another in Sociology and a bachelor’s in law. Meanwhile, the old germ that had him collecting used text books for needy students had also put him in touch with a group of young people who called themselves Sindhi Graduates Associations. With the development NGO phenomenon still to take off, this
group went about from village to village setting up free medical camps and donating medicines.

Being with them got Suleman thinking: this work was all right, but what would a sick villager do when the camp was not on? Clearly this well-meaning effort had no long-lasting effect – the word ‘sustainable’ not yet having become fashionable. His own village, Ismail Abro, being deprived of modern amenities, he was not unaware of the difficulties of rural life, but his travels with Sindh Graduates Association (SGA) made him ever more conscious of the lack of everything that made life worth living. He had to do something. But how it was to be done was something he did not know.

For ordinary deprived people, their condition was God’s will with little anyone could do about it. His reading of literature had sufficiently opened his mind that he knew when man proposed, God disposed. However, with no other way to educate them, Suleman began to travel between villages taking a VCR and copies of Indian art movies that dealt with issues of social injustice, especially concerning the farmer. After the show he would initiate discussions on how the problem had been tackled in the film and what they could with similar situations in real life. But movies and real life are poles apart and no solutions for real problems came forth.

In 1989 he was contacted by SPO for a survey of NGOs and CBOs in Sindh. This he did with his characteristic single-minded thoroughness. Word of his assiduity got around and in the summer of 1990 SAP-PK invited Suleman to be part of its RDP training beginning the following year. He was also asked to help organize the sessions in Hyderabad and Mithi. A year later, a new person emerged from the training, a person who knew the essential key to changing the wretched world of his was sustainability of effort coupled with unified, aware and motivated communities.

According to Suleman that one year of RDP training laid the foundation of his future. While it taught him everything from finance to conflict management to the fine art of
awareness raising and motivation, it gave him also the confidence to interact as an equal with donor agencies. More than anything else, Suleman recognized that every effort had to be ‘sustainable’ – a word missing from his vocabulary earlier. From now on the village meetings were no longer called kachehri, the word traditionally used for such gatherings in Sindh. These were now Participatory Community Development Dialogues with a qualitative change in the discourse. The Indian art movies were replaced with the lessons of RDP.

‘One essential change in my thinking was the enhanced focus. Suleman recalls. ‘Time was when I wanted to do everything for the whole world. Now I knew I had to begin in a small way within Shahdadpur.’

This was also the beginning of a very meaningful partnership with SAP-PK. The following year, 1992, with Rs 289,000 from SAP-PK, SAFWCO initiated a poultry rearing program in villages around Shahdadpur. That year summer floods destroyed several villages and hundreds of acres of farmland under crop forcing SAFWCO to waive off the mark-up on loan repayment. Barely recovering the principle sum, the NGO now set its eyes on rebuilding the flood-ravaged villages with funding from International Development and Refugee Foundation (IDRF) with SAP-PK remaining a very close advisor.

Fazal Talhani, today a model village with paved streets, permanent housing with toilet facilities and its own hospital is a galvanized and very cohesive community of farmers with small holdings. When the village was being rebuilt after the floods, word reached the office of the Deputy Commissioner who came visiting. Impressed by the single-minded dedication of the women, men and children the DC sanctioned a blacktop two kilometer-long link road for the village.

Not used to having anything happen without his prior sanction in what he considered his domain, a neighboring landlord raised the court against the road-building project. But proverbially blind justice seemed, in this case at least, not to be so blind after all. With judicial approval empowering them, the community resumed work on their road. Not one to give up, the landlord came against them with armed henchmen and ordered them to abandon their project. On the call of Hussain Talhani, the village mauvi (Muslim priest) and close associate of SAFWCO’s, every single person turned out with their own weapons: axes, clubs, bamboo poles, digging implements, kitchen knives, whatever they could lay their hands on.

The landlord ordered them to disperse failing which, he threatened to open fire. Not one of the one thousand inhabitants of Fazal Talhani moved. He ordered a volley fired above their heads. Not a person flinched. Knowing that he could not massacre an entire village, the man quietly withdrew. That was the last time he ever meddled in the affairs of this community. If there was ever a true bloodless coup, it was staged in Fazal Talhani in the early days of 1993. That was just the beginning.

Awareness-raising was the key to bringing about social change. This was the primary lesson Suleman learned from the RDP sessions. In the beginning however, the two women social organizers from SAFWCO thought they were wasting their time going from village to village talking to illiterate rural women about issues such as emancipation, gender equality, reproductive health and evils of child marriage. Before the year 1993 was over, there were thirty women’s Village Organizations, the precursors of the innumerable more now sprinkled across the province bearing the SAFWCO brand.
In the beginning, SAP-PK was the bridge between SAFWCO and IDRF, but that was nowhere linkage building ended. The way ahead was now known and with expansion in the area of SAFWCO operations and scope of activities, other donors came into play. By the end of the millennium the NGO had successful micro-credit, education, CPI and health programs. A full decade has not passed since reconstruction of flood-hit villages had begun and SAFWCO can highlight hundreds of cases where the lives of marginalized people have been altered. This is no longer restricted to Sanghar district; today the NGO works in thirteen districts of the province.

The man who had only thirty years earlier started his ‘welfare’ activities by collecting old textbooks for poor students recounts the time when he first came to present a case to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Islamabad. He had traveled by lower class train and put up in a cheap doss house near the intercity bus depot. With his work known around the world, this same person now frequently travels within and outside Pakistan. He has presented his case and that of development activity in Pakistan to forums around the world and it is indicative of his growth that he sits on the SAP-PK Board of Directors.
23. From Small Beginnings

Saddar Itehad Tanzeem of Old Hala was a small beginning in 1997 with the sole function of working for the four hundred Saddar families of town. A not very well-off group, few Saddars had more than high school education and fewer still good jobs. Most worked as farmers. As for Old as well as the neighboring New Hala, both were largely deprived of amenities. Health facilities, sanitation and water supply were non-existent and poverty rampant.

The first meeting of the Itehad resolved to work fundamentally for health, education and poverty eradication within the Saddar community. Fresh from the university with a post-graduate degree in Sociology, Khalid Shafi Saddar was elected the first finance secretary of the nascent organization. Since there were not much finances to begin with, he thought it a neat idea to institute a monthly membership fee as well as voluntary donations from those who could afford. These collections were to be used for ‘welfare’ work.

There being no better welfare service than free medical camps and free school uniforms for poor students, Itehad went into business. Soon their work expanded to a small micro-credit scheme similarly funded by local donations. By and by their outreach grew to several villages. Unable to help all the deserving cases because of limited funds, the Tanzeem team spent more time discussing people’s problems than solving them. Khalid admits that though they wanted to change their world completely around, they had neither the means nor the understanding of how it was to be done.

By the year 2000, Itehad had one major accomplishment under its hat: the repair and brick lining of some streets in Old Hala funded by two hundred rupees from each household. It was now time to register itself as an NGO. The Social Welfare Department however said they could only be registered if they shed their parochial caste-based name. And so Saddar Itehad Tanzeem became Sindh Health and Education Development Society (SHEDS). Though the name was all encompassing on the provincial level, the NGO was very clear that its operations would be restricted to the union council of Old Hala.

Aware of the nationwide network of development NGOs, SHEDS sent out letters to several leading NGOs. In reply they were visited by a two-member team from SAP-PK who, having heard them out informed them that they lacked the ‘capacity’ to expand their work, as they desired. This was a new word in the SHEDS vocabulary, and when the organization was selected to join RDP in 2004, Khalid Saddar was nominated to attend the training.
It was a breathless one year as he shuttled between the shifting training venues and Hala. At home he passed on everything he learned to his colleagues and partners in the villages. The discourse included one new concept: that nothing was free; there was no welfare and that people must participate in some way or the other. Yet another concept that did not exist in their vocabulary earlier was empowerment. Every development concept, if executed in the true spirit would lead to empowerment of the under-privileged. The directionless journey that SHEDS had begun a few years before was now on a true course.

About the time Khalid graduated from RDP, Mai Nazaan died on her way to Hala from Matival Khosa, an outlying village. Nurturing a full term pregnancy, she was mishandled by an untrained traditional birth attendant in the village. Just when it was too late, she was put on a donkey cart, there being no other transport available at night, for the long trundle into town. The bumpy ride proved too much for the poor woman and on the way she gave up her ghost.

Shortly after this tragedy, a SHEDS team visited Matival Khosa for a meeting. Among the several problems facing the village, the case of Nazaan also came up for discussion. Lots were drawn to pick the most serious need of the village and it turned out that an affordable ambulance service and a Mother and Child Healthcare Centre were what Matival needed most of all.

After a few hiccups, funding from TVO provided both the MCH and the ambulance. Poor as it is, the community was averse to paying for the facility, but sustainability was a concept SHEDS had learnt well from RDP. The users were confronted with the question whether they wanted the service to last only as long as the funding sustained or for the rest of time. The choice was simple and the community agreed to pay ten rupees a turn for patients and five rupees per kilometer for use of the ambulance.

Staffed by a trained LHV and a qualified doctor, the centre has catered to the needs of an average of thirty cases a day. That tallies to an estimated one hundred thousand women patients in its nearly decade-long life. The fee, meager as it is, keeps not only the MCH but also the ambulance running.

Now, in the absence of a disposal system in villages, there are no in-house latrines and everyone goes to the fields for relief – men going in the morning and women mostly at night. For some peculiar reason the cruel event of murder for honor generally took place
when a young woman was returning from her nightly visit to the fields. The murdering brother invariably maintained that he had seen his sister with another man in the fields.

However, a casual survey by SHEDS revealed that nearly all such cases of murder were not instigated by any feelings of honor. These heinous crimes were prompt by brothers’ greed: in order to get a sister, a potential sharer of property, out of the way, the murders were planned to look like honor killings that go unpunished in Pakistan. The communities where these dastardly killings took place pretended they did not happen and were unwilling to speak on the subject. As far as SHEDS saw it, the way out was to provide in-house toilet facilities.

When they applied to UNICEF with a project for hand pumps, in-house toilets and hygiene education in schools, SHEDS had least expected expansion in its outreach. That is what they got with UNICEF sanctioning a hundred hand pumps and hygiene education for neighboring Matiarri district and toilet facilities for union council Old Hala.

The three-pronged outcome was as exciting as it could get for the upcoming NGO. The hand pumps saved several thousand women a trek of up to three kilometers at least thrice a day for tainted water from the river or stagnant ponds. Now they had clear, clean water for the first time and practically right outside their doors. Children, impressionable as they are, adopted with gusto the simple principle of hand washing as frequently as ever, especially after each visit to the toilet. Feedback reaching SHEDS from both parents and teachers amply highlights the success of this small initiative. It was however the drastic reduction of nighttime murders in union council Hala that was the biggest dividend yet – murders that anyone not acquainted with the society could scarcely connect with the non-availability of in-house toilets.

Though expansion was thrust upon them, SHEDS now returned to concentrate on poverty reduction in Old Hala, one of their two earliest goals. Initiated with OPP assistance in 2005, a micro-credit program turned lives around. It has brought prosperity to families that had always known only hunger and adversity and smiles to tired faces that had forgotten the meaning of happiness. The program has thus far benefited one thousand five hundred individuals and Kuz Bano was one of them.

A native of village Khanot just outside Hala she was among the earliest partners of SHEDS who regularly attended all their capacity building and awareness raising meetings back in 2004. The wife of a small farmer, the ambitious and energetic Kuz Bano was stumped by poverty from realizing her full potential. An expert seamstress, she could not afford her own sewing machine and in order to do her family’s stitching borrowed one from her neighbor. To compensate, Kuz Bano had to teach her skill to the owner of the machine.

When SHEDS announced the micro-credit scheme, Kuz Bano applied for a loan of Rs 8000. Purchasing two sewing machines, she set up her cutting and sewing training centre in a one room of her small home. For a nominal monthly fee, she got more students than she had bargained for. Today nearly all her students are established as tailors in their own homes. Many have themselves taken loans to set up their businesses and regularly take their stitched and embroidered products to NGO festivals in Hyderabad.

As for Kuz Bano, she is now the focal person for the SHEDS loan scheme: outgoing loans and incoming installments between SHEDS and its beneficiaries pass through Kuz Bano.
As of October 2009 a total amount of Rs 350,000 has gone through her hands without a single glitch.

That is not all this remarkable woman does. With only five grades of education in 2004, she was encouraged by SHEDS to complete her matriculation. Armed with her certificate she applied for and won a teacher’s place in a local school. That being a day job leaves the afternoon free for her own tailoring classes. She says if she had not joined SHEDS, she would have still been tailoring on a borrowed sewing machine. There are not many people in the world who can say without sounding hollow, ‘I am very happy with life.’ Kuz Bano happens to be one of them.

If economic well-being is one step to empowerment, political participation is another. As SAP-PK’s partner in SDGP, SHEDS made one remarkable breakthrough to ensure somewhat fairer polling. A gross and prevalent malpractice that needed curbing was the way professional politicians used their connections to prevent polling agents of weaker candidates from keeping their station on polling day. Organizing a seminar, SHEDS invited one representative from each major party and through astute discussions cornered them into pledging that no polling agents will be ousted. Consequently, with polling agents in place, the local bodies’ elections of 2005 were remarkable for the low occurrence of voting fraud. SHEDS may have earned the ire of the powerful, but it now has more friends on the other side of the spectrum.

The pick of the several initiatives by SHEDS remains their work on HIV/AIDS awareness. Of the four provinces, Sindh has the highest number of known HIV positive cases and within the province, Hyderabad tops with twenty-three known cases. Most of these are out-of-school youngsters with little or no education belonging to poor families. When SHEDS initiated work in 2004 with awareness raising and the offer of free testing for HIV, there were no takers. Likewise, the first interaction between the SHEDS team and street boys, expectedly, yielded nothing. It only led to being recognized and over the next few visits, the boys would take to their heels when they saw the team approaching.

Today these same boys, some of whom have tested positive, are as friends of SHEDS. They regularly visit the centers where bathing facilities and refreshments are provided free of charge and they attend AIDS awareness sessions with the project staff. Since it is not HIV that kills, but its complications that do, infected persons are shown how best they can hold infections at bay. If there are now people in Hyderabad taking voluntary tests for HIV infection, or if there are discussions on the subject and possible ways of preventing its spread, SHEDS has played a major role in it.

The small step taken in 1997 by Saddar Itehad Tanzeem has flowered into a long and meaningful journey. Today SHEDS works in four districts besides its home in Old Hala. Now they no longer provide free uniforms to poor students; instead they teach the parents to provide for their children.
24. From School Teacher To Development Executive

Born in village Malehar near Diplo in the Thar Desert of Sindh, Noor Mohammad Bajeer had only finished twelve grades of education when circumstances forced him to join a government school as a teacher. His family was never rich and even when his father, a government vaccinator, was alive things were not easy on the meager salary. Consequently, the passing of the senior Bajeer forced Noor Mohammad to give up his education and instead teach primary school children in order to augment the income of his elder brother. That was in 1986 and he was not yet eighteen years old.

A strange fire burnt in his breast, however. Noor Mohammad wanted to change his little world. But he did not know how he was to bring about such a great upheaval. Those were days when his district had a number of ‘welfare associations’, built around clans or villages. His teaching assignment left him with the second half of the day free that he devoted to the Bajeer Welfare Association, of which he had long been a member, organizing all sorts of ‘welfare’ activities. His world revolved around arranging free medical camps or raising of funds to wed a poor daughter here or provide medical treatment to someone there.

While teaching in Mithi town, he became acquainted with SGA and because of his commitment to the ‘welfare’ cause soon rose to become SGA’s convener for Tharparker. In order to fit into the same slot as his college graduate peers, he took the examination in 1989 and won the coveted degree.

The connection with SGA took him traveling around Sindh and he got a clearer notion of the sort of activities other development NGOs were engaged in. He also heard that there were organizations training interested persons to do this work better. However, it was not until 1992 that he attended a training session in Mithi organized by the Aga Khan Foundation.

‘There I learned that whatever we were doing was way off what was actually required to be done,’ says Noor Mohammad. ‘But one thing was obvious: I needed further training and a clearer vision if I was to make my work meaningful.’

Though he came away with this feeling of not knowing enough, yet he did not know how to fill this nagging gap. Late in 1992 SGA introduced Noor Mohammad to SAP-PK’s RDP training and our man was on the session for 1993-94. He says that as he progressed through the training, he became as a man possessed. He was learning what he had missed all along. The nagging gap was narrowing. His trainers from SAP recall a striping of a man,
extremely shy and unsure of himself who rarely smiled and never spoke in the presence of others. That was the beginning.

Within no time, Noor Mohammad came out with his colors flying high. His trainers now saw a man politically charged quick on the uptake and with the capacity to grow at an amazing speed. When SAP needed to run an RDP training session in Mithi, they called upon this very man to organize its logistics. In a town that had only a few years earlier turned into a district headquarters and which had no hotels or rest houses, Noor Mohammad provided board and lodge in the local college for forty participants with nary a complaint about his arrangements.

He recalls that two items from this session that most importantly helped him on his way ahead in the social sector were, one, that training could, and should, not only be conducted in conference or training halls. That if one had a board, markers and a few sheets of paper, one could set up shop even under a tree in the desert and come away leaving a bunch of village folks thinking and hankering for more. The second was the method of interviewing to prepare a village profile.

More importantly, as the session drew to an end he realized it had become easier for him to speak in the company of others. The school teacher who harangued only young children was now a bit of a public speaker. Later that same year (1994), he found himself in Lahore attending yet another RDP session. The group dynamics and camaraderie of that session, the late night informal sittings and the singing and dancing told him more about his colleagues from the other provinces than he had ever known.

‘I did not realize it then, but this stood me in good stead later when I was working with SPO in Punjab and the Northern Areas.’ Noor Mohammad recalls.

In 1994 he still held his school teacher’s job when he applied for a position with Save the Children Fund. Only months earlier, he may have found it easier to speak among his RDP peers, but when he appeared at the venue for the interview, he was awed by the other applicants. He told himself he, a school teacher, stood no chance against the other dozen or so aspirants all versed in development NGO work with lengthy and impressive CVs vying for the single opening. Noor Mohammad went home to take a nap.

It was entirely his good fortune that a friend at SCF seeing him missing sent someone to get him. He appeared and was completely floored that the interview was ‘as if a script from the RDP training of SAP-PK.’ Later that evening he attended a SGA meeting as convener. The SCF director also participated in this session and what transpired thereafter had a hint of drama.

Following the meeting, the SCF man asked the SGA participants to dinner at the end of which he handed an envelop to Noor Mohammad. Taking it as a regret letter, the man did not check it until several hours later. When he did, he was surprised to see an offer of a program officer’s slot with a salary twice as high as his school teacher’s wages. The happiness was not so much over the likely increase in his income, however. It was that his abilities had been recognized.

Taking five years leave of absence from the government, Noor Mohammad joined SCF. Part of his job here was social mobilization and the tool he used were the lessons from the RDP training. He recalls that he had saved all the training materials from his sessions with SAP-PK and these he now put to good use as he traveled from village to village on his
social mobilization missions. Over the next two years his dozens of two-day training sessions in over forty villages around Islamkot led to the emergence of several motivated and active individuals and groups in the area.

In 1999 when he was a Program Manager at SCF, he knew it was time to move on. SPO advertised a trainer’s vacancy to run their Development Planning and Management courses. At the interview Noor Mohammad learned that the program was very similar to SAP-PK’s RDP. No surprise then that he clinched the offer. But even before he could join, the slot for training and technical support specialist also fell vacant at SPO. He was called to Islamabad for a second interview.

With the two offers from SPO to choose from, he took the latter. It was the greater challenge of the tech specialist’s assignment and the chance to work all over Pakistan building the capacity of rural organizations that attracted the man. For Noor Mohammad it was a gratifying job where he was acknowledged as an expert master trainer.

Noor Mohammad left SPO in 2007 at a time when he was heading the Hyderabad office for six years. After a brief stint with UNDP he was offered a position with the Italian oil company ENI. This was not a switch as drastic as it may seem for this was time when most multi-national companies had begun to lay stress on the Corporate Social Responsibility component. Noor Mohammad was hired as the Community Development Advisor. There he has remained (as of September 2009) revealing the intricate secrets of community development to his corporate managers.

Early on in this assignment word came from the ENI head office in Italy that the managers needed to be taught the use of logical framework analysis. It was something entirely new to his management but it was what he had learned in the first RDP training in 1993. When Noor Mohammad and his manager flew to Italy for the requisite training, our man had in his brief case a log frame analysis of his assignment as well as that of his firm’s work in Pakistan. ‘The trainers were surprised that we knew all about it and we were sent back for we did not need the training,’ he says.

His corporate assignment has not detached Noor Mohammad from his real work however. Employed in Karachi five days a week, he spends every weekend in Hyderabad where he divides his time between a Civil Society Club and his NGO, Civic Society Support Program. As a training institute, the latter prepares youngsters not only for absorption in civil society organizations but also to be better citizens.

He recounts that years ago his frequent traveling around on his meager teacher’s salary had put him under debt to the tune of ten thousand rupees and he was forever hiding from his creditors. The salary that he draws today is twenty times his first debt. The sum of his association with SAP-PK in his own words is: ‘I would have remained a school teacher who worked only half a day with nothing else to do the remaining half.’