



## Case Studies (A report)

**South Asia Partnership-Pakistan**

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## Preface



**T**his little booklet contains ten stories of the ordinary people of Punjab and, by extension, of Pakistan; ordinary, but the real, bona fide, actual people of the country. These are the people who make up the vast majority of Punjab province and live in its rural heartland. Unlike the tiny majority of large land holders, these real people possess small holdings where they literally put their shoulders to the yoke together with their animals and toil long hours to eke out a meager living.

They are the ones who, six decades since independence, have been neglected by successive administrations. For them the provision of a primary school for their children is a major leap forward. For them electrification of their village, or the soling of a connecting road, or the building of a tiny culvert brings a sea change in life style. These people live on one side of the spectrum of Pakistani life. On the other are those who strut about in their starched white dresses, drive around in 4x4 vehicles that they do not actually need and whose daily expenses are more than what most real Pakistanis make do in a calendar month.

The lives of these real Pakistanis have remained in limbo for want of such insignificant infrastructure as tiny culverts across irrigation ditches, soling of pathways and brick-lining of irrigation channels. It is remarkable that while the rich of this country ride about in cars that cost upward of five million rupees, the lives of the real Pakistanis can be altogether changed by the soling of a path merely a few hundred meters in length at the measly cost of less than half a million rupees. From the depth of abject poverty these real people can rise to build comfortable lives if only their irrigation ditch is brick-lined to prevent water loss at an expense that would match the monthly budget of any upper-class urban family.

These are no mere hypotheses or tall claims. These are hard, measurable facts that have been seen on ground. It is remarkable in a sad way that though the needs of these real Pakistanis are so trivial and low-cost, they have been disregarded over the past half century. South Asia Partnership-Pakistan in partnership with Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) has attempted to address basic needs of the people, educate them about their rights and mobilize them to organize themselves. The stories in the following pages will illustrate how tiny inputs have altered people's lives. SAP-PK is especially thankful to Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) for contributing in the struggle to address poverty.

These ten case studies showcase recent interventions, yet the effect of poverty reduction is very clear. Even more useful is the way societies change with such interventions. Villagers, who would not sit together to sort out shared problems, now meet regularly to discuss even their most trivial issues. They exhibit a growing confidence in their ability to address their problems rather than resorting to the local landlord. But the greatest victory of these tiny, tiny interventions is the demolition of the curse of long-established patriarchy.

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No ordinary voters in  
Dallu Khelanwala

**A**bdul Rauf Khan, thirty-ish and lean is very much a live wire who, with his matriculation is by local standards a pretty reasonably educated man. It is his kind of folks that take communities forward. But in his village Dallu Khelanwala he does not appear to be a rarity. He is one among many who are struggling to change their world that had stood still for the past sixty years.

He had been a farmer for some ten years when back in 2003 he first came in contact with SAP-PK. The NGO recognized the fire in him and after a few brief sessions the young man was set to begin as vice president of the Gharib Kissan Tehrik. That started his exposure to the work of development NGOs. Shortly after that he entered an NRSP program where he trained as a para-veterinary worker. This was the training of choice for Rauf because not only Dallu Khelanwala, but neighboring villages are home to a fairly large population of cattle.

He remembers the time the prize buffalo of his family needed treatment. Rauf Khan had to ride the local bus to Wan Bhachran, pay the vet's fare to bring him to the village, buy the medicine and then pay for the man's return to town. Above that there was also the vet's fee. All of that had set him back by a good six hundred rupees. And this was the story of all cattle owners in his area. So when Rauf asked to be trained as a veterinary worker, he knew where he was headed.

As for his own Dallu Khelanwala, although it is a rather prosperous little village of sixty households and some five hundred souls, its only connection to the Shadia-Wan Bhachran road that passes nearby was either through the fields or by a half-kilometer unpaved path winding around the fields. Even in the best of times when there was no rain, the path, running at the level of the fields, was flooded in various places. This being because the low earth walls separating the path and the fields would sometimes break because of the odd animal straying across. The result was irrigation water flooding the road. The detriment was two fold: precious irrigation was wasted and the road became impassable.

The soil of the village being a rich sandy loam, the path became a sucking morass during the rains making entry or exit for Dallu Khelanwala a near impossibility without completely soiling one's clothing. Even the slightest shower would keep children from school because not even the humble donkey cart could get through without bogging

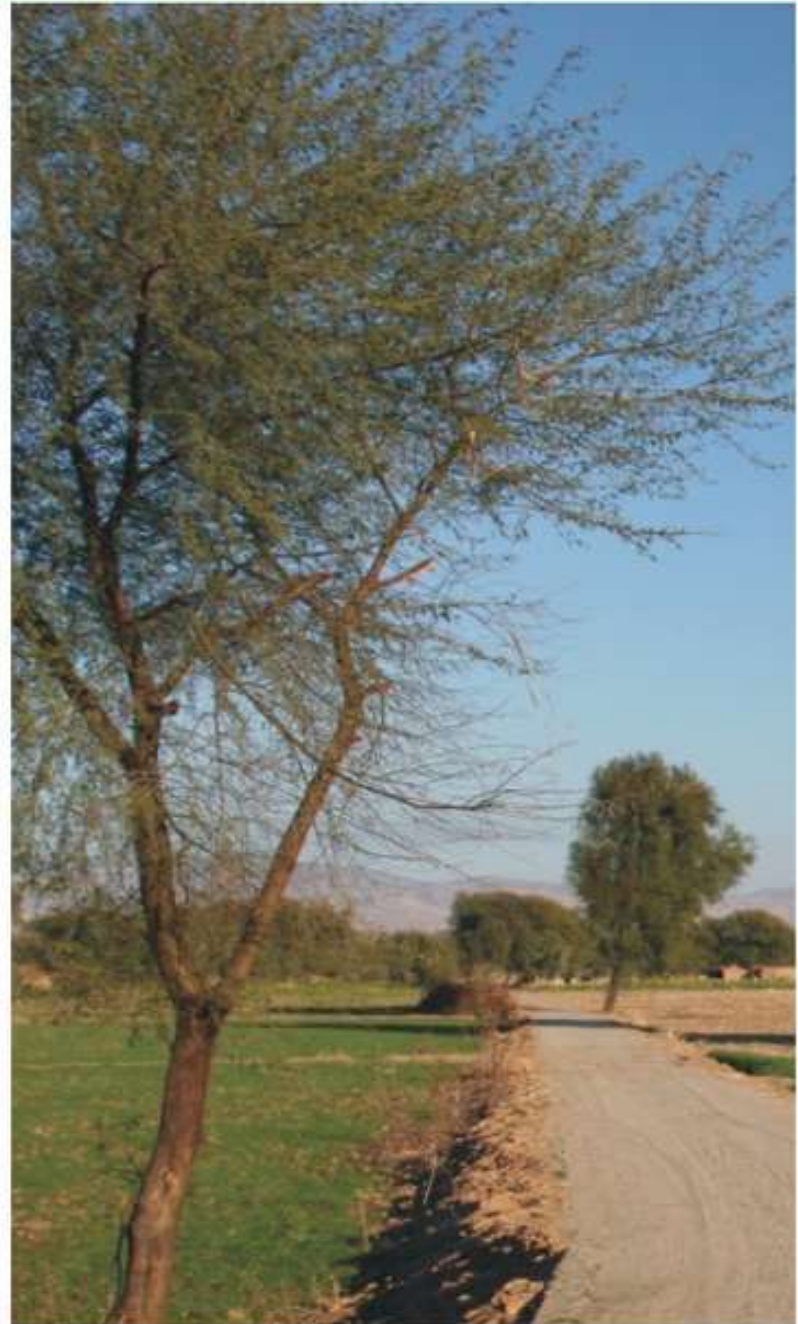
## No ordinary voters in Dallu Khelanwala



down. There was many an occasion since Rauf Khan had learned his trade that he was unable to answer a call because of the condition of their only access to the main road.

Others remember how they took their elderly and ailing family members in case a doctor was needed: with four young men at each corner of the *charpai* bearing the sick one. But these, says Rauf speaking for his village, were their unforeseen and infrequent difficulties. The biggest problem which they faced every harvest, be it sugar cane, wheat or cotton was sale and removal of the produce. There being no access to their fields, no buyer was willing to get his shoes dirty. Whereas buyers usually lift the crop from the fields, in the case of Dallu Khelanwala, the farmers had to carry it to the roadhead.

Wheat and cotton were easy. All the farmers had to



do was bag them and either man haul or use donkey carts and tractor trolleys for the short haul to the road. But owing to its bulk, sugar cane was always tricky. Donkey carts being able to take only so much, could spend days removing the harvest running up a high transportation bill. Tractor trolleys could have been the answer, but with the harvest in full swing it was another thing: tractor drivers sought long hauls from farm to sugar mill because that meant more money. The haul of a few hundred meters from Dallu Khelanwala to the road was just a hassle and scarcely feasible as it burned more fuel and paid a lower return. Consequently, tractor drivers used the ploy of being 'too busy' for Rauf and others of the village. Those who agreed asked for very high rates per trip. With all these difficulties, there were times when the harvested cane waited so long to be transported that it spoiled right where it lay.

In December 2006 the farmers of Dallu Khelanwala put their heads together and resolved to sort out their problem with SAP-PK input. That was when the NGO was working on Strengthening Democratic Governance Program with peasants, workers, women and religious minorities in focus. In February 2007, SAP-PK facilitated the formation of Ittefaq Kissan Committee, provided the members initial trainings and then guided them to how to demand for a brick-pitched road from their village to the road head and undertake the task with participation of the community members. The grant had to come through Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund.

Survey was carried out and the road length came to 2300 feet (700 meters). SAP-PK helped the PWG in generating resources. The farmers from Dallu Khelanwala took time off from the cotton harvest to work four hard months on their road. There was the incentive of not only directly overseeing the quality of construction, but it also meant daily wages which reimbursed the contribution they had made from their meager savings. December was not yet over when the road was opened to all kinds of traffic. 'For the first time ever, I saw a real car in my village!' says Rauf Khan.

The cotton harvest was already in. But December was time for the sugar cane to be taken out. Suddenly, there were no overly busy tractor drivers. They came, loaded up and drove straight off to the sugar mills. Sooner than they knew, the entire crop had safely been removed. When Dallu Khelanwala farmers sat down to tally their accounts, they were pleased to note that they had made Rs 10,000 per acre of sugar cane more than past years! Already they envisage that in future transportation of wheat and cotton crops will be no





less than fifteen rupees cheaper for each 50 kg bag.

That is an indicator of collective economic uplift whose real effects will be measured in the coming years. As for Abdul Rauf Khan, the road has helped his veterinary service considerably. Earlier he could not imagine getting out in case of rain or an outbreak of irrigation water. Now, by his own admission, he is servicing no fewer than eight to ten animal patients every afternoon. With a great sense of satisfaction he says that in the first



month after the soling was completed, his daily income shot up to Rs 1500, that is threefold.

Not to be left out of the tally, the women of Dallu Khelanwala are quick to point out that their laundry bill has fallen drastically in the month since the project was completed. School uniforms that were soiled in one day now last two, and for the more careful youngsters, even three days even when it rains.

The new-found ability to solve their problems through means other than the local politician or a government agency, has given the people of Dallu Khelanwala a confidence they had never known. With their road complete and electioneering in full swing, they were no longer prepared to listen to the useless harangues of their candidates. The women being more vocal than the men are reported to have told the candidates, 'We now are capable of addressing our problems. We want you to tell us what legislation and laws you will enact for our collective good!'

Many a worthy politician has had to beat a sorry retreat because legislating is one thing so few of them are prepared for. The importance of the economic benefit can hardly be denied, but in the long term the people of Dallu Khelanwala will thank the 2300-foot soling for the socio-political uplift it precipitated. That will be its farthest reaching consequence.



**"Turning Human"**



Wan Bhachran Well of the Bhachars (a local clan), could have become a prosperous village when the Mohajir Canal and its off-shoot the Bhoki Branch were laid out over fifty years ago. But for the Bhoki Branch, whose name means 'hungry', there was never any maintenance and over time it became completely unserviceable. Local farmers have a tale to tell as to why this was permitted to occur: the land reforms of 1972 allowed only 150 acres of irrigated and 300 acres of unirrigated land. Therefore, in order to hang on to as much of their holdings as possible, the rich landlords let the Bhoki go to seed.

Whatever the landlords may or may not have achieved by the alleged tactic, the truth is that the 1972 land reforms did bequeath five acres to each landless farmer of Wan Bhachran. Because the Bhoki Branch was nothing but a sandy ditch, their holdings did precious little for them. They worked hard, plowed and planted and then waited for the rain to irrigate their fields. Sometimes it came, sometimes not. And so the poor farmers remained poor. Soon they fell into the pattern of plowing, sowing and leaving the rest to their women to tend while the men went off either to work as share-croppers or as daily wage earning laborers in nearby towns.

The year 2005 brought them some joy when the Irrigation Department undertook rehabilitation of the Bhoki Branch. When the farmers of Wan Bhachran saw water in what had always been a dusty ditch for them, they thought their lives were on the verge of change. They quickly rehabilitated the ditch taking water off the canal to their fields. But again, that did precious little for them. Water losses in the unlined channel running through the sandy soil were colossal: up to seventy percent of it was lost to seepage. And then, because of the dunes, outreach of the channel was very limited.

As it is for other areas, here too the Irrigation Department has allocated twelve minutes to irrigate one acre. But under the circumstances, the given time permitted irrigation of little more than half an acre. Consequently, though they held as many as five acres, the small farmers could cultivate scarcely more than half an acre and that with great difficulty. The only change was that earlier, if the rains failed, they sometimes lost their entire crop. Now, they knew they could give their full attention to an acre or less and strive to get the maximum from it with whatever little irrigation their channel delivered.

Mohammad Qasim, one of the small farmers of Wan Bhachran and a member of Natal



Kissan Committee, recalls his meeting with Khan Mohammad of Anjuman Islahe Mu'ashra, the local SAP-PK partner. He had gone to plead for some financial assistance because he saw politically connected people reaping all sorts of benefits (which he thought came from NGOs) while he and the other Natsals, the poorest of the poor of Wan Bhachran, continued to wallow in poverty. That was in January 2007; it was the first step to the establishment of Natal Kissan Committee.

The Natsals were a closed, suspicious society, so riven by severe internal frictions that it took several meetings to break the vicious mold and turn them into a cohesive group. According to Qasim, this was the first time ever in his forty-six years of life that he saw all the elders gathered and the meeting not breaking up amid ill will and bickering. If the men were suspicious, Natal women were all but impervious to outside contact: they even refused to meet with the NGO's woman social organizer who intended to help them form a group and assist them to receive trainings for organizational management, democratic process of decision making, record keeping, project planning and monitoring, etc. But gradually things changed and by July the common consensus was that the community could do with a brick-lined irrigation channel to start with. Following the collection of funds, work was undertaken in August 2007. The sand dunes made the going harder than it had been imagined and even though the projected duration was eight weeks, the work dragged on into the beginning of 2008.

The Natsals were quick however in leveling out their sand dunes in step with the progress of the channel slowly inching forward. In February with about a hundred meters of it still to be lined, the channel was already irrigating an estimated three hundred and fifty acres of cultivation. That was five times as much as had ever been brought under the plow in the Natsals' holdings. With completion of the project in March, the total will be just over four hundred acres.

The channel was progressing just in time for the farmers to sow wheat, fodder and lentils and at the time of writing the harvest was still a few months away, but the Natal land owners were already counting their profits. For land that had long been valued at no more than Rs 35,000 per acre, the price jumped over ten times to Rs 400,000. With an expansive wave around the crowded room, Qasim says with great satisfaction that these people were all *lakh patis*.





In Wan Bhachran, women were the first to start tallying their profits. With the increasing amount of land becoming arable, they quickly planted fodder as part of livelihood schemes. As the crop grew, they added to their number of goats with an eye on the soon-to-explode market of Eidul Azha (Feast of the Sacrifice). In August when the bricklining work took off, Mansoorah, for instance, had five goats and one buffalo. And these she could barely maintain in good fettle because of a scarcity of fodder. This good woman may not have ever been to school, but she can spot what's good for her and she did not miss the first of the recurrent annual boom.

Her net profit from the sale for the Feast stood at Rs 20,000, the largest amount of money her purse had ever held. The first thing this good woman did was to withdraw her children from the free-of-cost government school and enroll them in the local English medium institution. At two hundred rupees per child per month she can well afford to

keep the five of them there because her daily income from the sale of buffalo milk is fifty rupees and that is after she retains enough for the family's use. She points out that without the fodder that is now available, such a supply of milk from her two buffaloes would not have been possible.

Mansoorah now has twenty goats, but she is not alone in her spirit of entrepreneurship. All other Natal women have increased their livestock. Time was when a household would, on the average, have only one or two goats. Today there is no family with less than half a dozen animals in their yard. An index of the growing dairy business that they are now engaged in is that the expensive English medium school is attracting students away from the free government school.

This is that quantifiable benefit of a brick-lined water channel that has been in partial use for less than four months. There are other advantages that cannot be quantified, only observed. With the great load of work to level out the sand dunes keeping the men busy from daybreak until nightfall, the community has decided that one man should go with the donkey cart to collect fodder for the entire village. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier practice of every man for himself. Men take turns at being the fodder-collector for the week and no one has a gripe.

Qasim says that the even greater sign of being with the times is that they no longer revert to the local bigwig if they need a problem sorted out with a government department. 'You went to the landlord for help, and instead of assisting you he put you to work in his fields or his home. And you could not refuse,' says Qasim. In the one year since Natal Kissan Committee came into being, committee members go to government offices as a team. More often than not they come back successful.

Growing prosperity has ended the long-established dependence on the landlord. The February 2008 elections found the Natsal unwilling to submit to the landlord's will regarding who to vote for. Their ballot went to the candidate they deemed the most suitable for themselves.

An elderly member of the committee summed up the whole thing most aptly: 'We were like animals for the landlords. They would drive us the way they pleased. Over the past one year we have turned human.'



Postscript: In December 2006 when the SAP-PK social organizer visited Mohalla Miana, where the Nats live, she was looked upon with utter distrust and dislike. So far as the men were concerned, she had come to 'teach their women new tricks.' When she reached out to the women, she was rejected for working in an office with men and therefore being of dubious character. This was interesting because the women who doubted her themselves worked shoulder to shoulder with men in the fields. A year later, these same women sat in one room with their men folk to talk to a strange man from Lahore.





No Longer Angry



**T**he men folk of village Qaziwala in Lodhran district were a suspicious lot, forever casting wary sideways glances. And they had a good enough reason to be that way.

With an agrarian economy based almost entirely on the cultivation of wheat and cotton, their lifeline was the water channel that fed their farmland from the nearby canal. But this lifeline was also a regular headache. Like most other irrigation ditches, this one too was unlined. Burrowing rats and crossing cattle weakened its banks of sandy loam and when it was the turn of Qaziwala farmers to receive water from the canal the danger of breaches was always imminent.

No surprise then that on their water days they posted three men along the 2000-foot (610 meters) length of channel cutting across their properties. Armed with the *kai* each of these men patrolled equal lengths of the channel to check for and repair breaches when they occurred. Sometimes this had to be in the freezing cold of mid-winter nights.

Yet breaches occurred. And when they did, there were two kinds of sufferers: those who had already watered their fields and had no need to swamp them and those who were waiting to irrigate but had to go without because someone else's property had already been waterlogged. Angry arguments ensued; tempers and suspicion rode high and each party blamed the other for being driven by malice and willfully causing the damage.

Losing up to seventy percent of their share of water to the breaches, the farmers approached concerned officials. Their attempts, though repeated, were haphazard and perhaps half-hearted for they received no response from any quarter. And so with every breach, bickering rang out across the fields of Qaziwala.

That was the social aspect. There was an economic side as well. For one, even though there was never enough water to meet the demands of Qaziwala farmers, the government did not relent in collecting the levy of a hundred rupees per acre per annum. A communal tube well was considered, but its installation cost being as high as Rs 300,000 was not deemed feasible, particularly because of the general air of distrust. Even if that could somehow have been achieved, the running cost was exorbitant: Rs 300 per hour with a tractor or half as much by electric motor. Moreover this was also not a preferred solution because water losses in the unlined channels would have rendered the tube well



economically ineffective. The farmers of Qaziwala were caught between a rock and a hardplace.

Early in the year 2007 SAP-PK field staff came in contact with Qaziwala. Meetings followed in which the modus operandi of the NGO was explained and Sunrise Kissan Committee came into being on the sixth day of February. The farmers had had meetings in the past, but it was after a very long time that they met with the NGO's social organizers



in a general air of congeniality. The emerging common demand was brick-lining of their irrigation channel to minimize water losses. It took several weeks for SAP-PK to discuss possibilities of joint struggle with the folks and to finally form a group of the farmers. Subsequent to having received the required trainings, SAP-PK assisted the farmers' group in materializing their demand of construction of the channel.

Work began in July and by September 2007 two thousand feet of channel was lined and equipped with distribution points. The cotton crop was almost harvested, but in the short interim before the sowing of wheat in December, fodder was planted. With a good supply of water, it did well and the women of Qaziwala recognizing a new opportunity invested in goats. Earlier most families had at most two goats, now there were up to half a dozen; and in some cases, even more.

The first noticeable change with the lining of the channel was that time taken in irrigating one acre fell from four hours to just two and a half hours. Moreover, instead of the three men necessary to monitor breaches, there was just one to open or close the required distribution point.

At the time of this writing (February 2007) the lined channel has been in use for a mere four months, but the way the young wheat is shaping up, the farmers of Qaziwala are very pleased. Even though profits have not started coming in, they can already see the change over the past. But surely the greatest blessing brought by this project is the growing amicability.

Aftab Hussain, the secretary of Sunrise Kissan Committee has this to say, 'Since the day in September when water first flowed in our new channel, we have not heard a raised voice in Qaziwala.' That also is an index of success.



Way to the Future



**S**nuggling under the shadow of the western-most edge of the Sakesar massif, Biruli is a picturesque and idyllic little village lying some twenty kilometers due east of Mianwali. But its idyll has long been marred by grinding poverty and lawlessness. But the poverty first.

Sitting in the lee of the hills and virtually at the fag end of the reach of monsoon winds, this part of Mianwali district is as poor as it can be in terms of agriculture. The few stretches of flat arable land are dependent entirely upon rains. And as we know in our part





of the world, rains are uncertain especially winter rains. Consequently, while the Biruli farmers do cultivate small blocks of summer millets and sorghum, they have, for a very long time, never tried wheat. There was however a small number of farmers who enjoyed canal irrigation, but these holding were no more than forty-one percent of the village's arable land. Thirty percent was rain-irrigated while the remainder simply lay barren.

As the men struggled with their summer crops hoping for good rain to make them come through, so the women took their few scrawny cattle and goats to pasture in the ravines where they hoped the meager run off of the rare fall of rain would nurture some grasses. The few who had managed to scrape through three or four grades of schooling traditionally enlisted in the army or the police. And since there was little money, few ever went beyond the first few grades of school.

Honorable men went to work on the several quarries along the western slopes of the Sakesar hill. Those who did not join the military, turned to the lucrative but rather risky business of smuggling. Over the years, Biruli became an important staging post for heroin and hashish transiting from west of the Indus River to the Punjab heartland.

Caught fast in the vice of abject poverty and with no education, the men of Biruli had little at stake. Mohammad Khan sitting under the banyan tree by the village pond said, 'We had no money and because every able-bodied family member was expected to work and contribute to the family's kitty our children did not go to school but helped at home. We drank this stinking water that our cattle shared with us and we had so little agricultural work that our minds were always free. We were not even fully human.'

The idle mind, it has not been wrongly said, is the devil's workshop. Tempers ran short and insignificant arguments led to fisticuffs. Quarrels festered and sometimes ended in cold-blooded murder. The lucky ones among the law-breakers were those who were prosecuted and went to jail. Those who escaped the arm of the law took refuge in the harsh ravines of the Sakesar massif to spend a miserable, sub-human life of fugitives. But there was little to look forward to and these criminally inclined men missed nothing. That then was the pattern of life in this strip of land a mere twenty kilometers east of Mianwali city.

It was while the SDGP was in its offing when some good men of Biruli met with Anjum an Islahe Mu'ashra, the SAP-PK partner in neighboring Wan Bhachran. Over time, with several meetings behind them, they established Biruli Kissan Committee. Surprisingly, even for this backward area where women are chattel, the committee started out with twenty men and half as many women. Today while the number of men remains static, the committee has fifteen women members.

The common consensus emerging from the ensuing meetings was the need of a pipe irrigation system to the rain-fed lands east of the village. These properties lay nearer the hills and at a higher elevation than the rest of village. The difference between the source and the area where delivery was required was about two and a half meters (7 feet). The only way for it therefore was to use electric power. Fortunately for the farmers of Biruli, one of their committee members had a deep well fitted with a large turbine.





It was a remarkable turn of events for a community forever feuding internally to get together for some serious decision-making. Since they could not afford to hike up the price of cost of the project, they resolved to utilize the existing turbine by contributing to the cost of its running and maintenance. That left the cost of 1080 feet (330 meters) of PVC pipe of 8" diameter to be laid underground from the turbine to the highest point in the route of the delivery. Thence onward the water flows in an open channel to the north and westward into a region that had never before been irrigated. Work began in September and despite the difficult task of digging through hard and sometimes rocky ground was yet completed in just less than three months.

In February with good clear water bubbling along the channel, the farmers had brought a new block of one hundred acres under wheat for the first time ever. Eagerly they talked of the possibility of leveling out the mesquite-covered land through which their channel sweeps in an arc to their new wheat fields. But that spells and long hours with a dozer that costs big money which is a commodity the community so far does not have. But with an additional one hundred acres of wheat where only millets once grew, would mean



enhanced income. And surely, one day, not years, but months after the scheme has been in operation, the farmers of Biruli will be stripping this virgin land of the useless mesquite and leveling it out to grow food.

But how can they be sure they will actually do it? 'We know because of the three years of interaction with SAP-PK. Before that we had no direction, nor any cohesion as a community. Now we do. But best of all, we have direction. We know which way the future lies,' says Mohammad Sher, the president of Biruli Kissan Committee.



In Top Gear!



**Y**oung Abdul Majeed is a useful man to know if you live in or around village Chak Number 19 MPR in the district of Lodhran in southern Punjab. He is the local tube-well borer and therefore an important person in the heart of agricultural Punjab. He is now headquartered at Behishti Adda, the crossing where the link road bypassing his village takes off from the Multan-Bahalwapur highway. His store is well-stocked with the wares of his trade and spare parts and from all appearances, he is more prosperous than he was before August 2006.

That was when the three thousand-foot (915 meters) long brick-pitched (commonly known as soling) path was built to connect the link road to his village. Until then he would haul his boring equipment, including the twenty-foot long pipes on his bicycle. With a total weight of upward of twenty-five kilograms over his shoulder and one hand on the handlebar, pedaling about the badly rutted dirt road was hard work. After even a meager shower of rain, it became all but impossible. Then he would have to hire the local ox-cart to get his pipes around to his work site at the cost of a hundred and fifty rupees per trip. Being a rather methodical young man, Majeed knows has worked out that even if he now has to do two trips on his motorcycle, the cost is never more than thirty rupees.

It was in this year and a half since completion of the soling that Majeed was able to save enough from transportation costs to be able to set himself up in a rented shop at Behishti Adda and to upgrade from bicycle to a new motorcycle. He proudly points out that no longer does he procure the spare parts on as-required basis but he now has his own stock that he purchases from the wholesale market in Lodhran or Multan. This means that the difference between the wholesale and retail rates also goes to his profit.

And all because of a brick-pitched road a mere 915 meters long a project that would not even feature in the district development program, let alone in the national scheme. But Majeed is not the sole beneficiary of this project. He is merely one among fifty householders in Chak Number 19 MPR that benefit directly from the soling. There are another one hundred households of nearby villages whose lives it affects positively in an indirect way.

It was during the unfolding times of SDGP when Mohammad Bashir, the 15 MPR headman, heard of the SAP-PK or the word "NGO" for that matter. With a vague idea about the work of these organizations, he and a few of his colleagues met with the local



SAP partner and talked of the many problems they faced because of the absence of a direct paved link to their village. By no means was this the only lack of infrastructure problem of the village, but in their view this was their major difficulty. And so in keeping with Step Number 1 of SAP philosophy Chak Number 15 MPR became the home of Allah Hoo Kissan Committee and started receiving trainings on various skills and issues concerning them.

Survey showed that the soling project was direly needed in the community. The project began in April 2006 with the assistance from SAP-PK. The road followed a minor irrigation channel throughout its length and it became imperative therefore to raise its level so that a breach would not turn it into another irrigation ditch. This required filling of a hundred thousand cubic feet of earth and its compaction.



Residents came to work on the project partly for the wages, but also because this was *their* road and they wanted to be sure it was made as good as possible. When the Supervisory Committee, set up to oversee the work, did not approve of a trolley load of bricks, they were rejected because the committee was just not willing to compromise on quality. Before August ended, and when it was still raining, Majeed was able to cycle along the brand new soling to a work site with his twenty foot-long boring pipes balanced on a shoulder. And never once did he have to dismount and manhandle his gear across any ditches; nor too did he have to make two trips which would be usual in case of rain, he reports with a grin. For the first time since he began this work, he was independent of the need of the ox-cart.

While Majeed may have been immensely pleased with the situation, the farmers of Chak Number 15 MPR were still under the pall of a fear they dared not name. Their joy for the new road was subdued. The cotton crop was all but ready to be picked in three weeks' time, but they fretted over the disaster that happened with precision every monsoon for the past many years. Swollen by rain, with its embankments weakened by the crossing of cattle and by rainwater in the sunken dirt road, their canal breached regularly at least once during the monsoon.

Only the year before (August 2005), the breach was so bad that it flooded the village and brought down several mud-brick houses. Vegetable patches were swamped, but the greatest setback was the total destruction of the cotton crop. That was time when the plants were in bud and required next to no watering. The breach left the entire cotton crop of 15 MPR under water for several days killing it off. Khurshid Ahmed was doubly unfortunate because while he lost his cotton like everyone else, his tube well was a total write-off. Only shortly before, he had spent close to Rs 300,000 on its boring and installation. For a farmer with a meager holding this was nearly three years' income.

Misfortune, they say, never comes alone. And neither did the breach of 2005. With everything lost, the farmers of 15 MPR applied to the Irrigation Department for a waiver of the water tax (*abiana*). But strange are the ways of the government: the village was fined for deliberately breaching the canal!

In August 2006 they labored under the dread of the canal breaking its banks again. This time they knew it would not only take the cotton crop, but their new road as well. Though





there was a repair fund, Mohammad Bashir and his colleagues were afraid the damage would be greater than the fund could afford to fix. But nothing happened. Only then did the realization dawn: the compacted earth-fill had strengthened the canal at least on their side.

Real dividends from the soling were first counted by 15 MPR PWG when their cotton crop was lifted in the autumn of 2006. For the first time ever, it was collected right where it stood because now the trucks and tractor trolleys had access. The farmers were no longer required to load it up on the ox-cart for the short journey to the road. The count was twenty rupees more for the farmer for each 50 kg bale. That is what the tally came to again at the time of the wheat harvest the following April.

The soling set off a number of first-time events. The ox-cart driver may have been unhappy for the first time in his life, but it was also the first time that the farmers of 15 MPR planted sugar cane. Earlier, they had never considered it because of the difficulty of moving this bulky crop from the fields to the road. In 2007 a large chunk of farmland

came under cane besides wheat and cotton. And sugar cane being a well-paying crop, this spelled increased income.

Shortly after the road came into use, the women of 15 MPR had nearly twenty percent more household budgets and that was not because their husbands were being more generous. The local grocery and general merchandise store-keeper, who procured his stocks from Lodhran, always marked up prices to cover cartage costs. Now he simply phoned the wholesalers who dispatched his quota in the ubiquitous Suzuki vans that rolled right up to the store front.

Shahzada Bibi who runs a one-person stitching and embroidery set-up out of her home says her business has almost doubled. Earlier, her customers were only her closest neighbors; now they come from surrounding villages riding with their men on their motorcycles. Mohammad Bashir's elderly mother can think of no monetary benefit she has garnered from the road, however. She only remembers the time when she fell ill several years earlier during a spell of winter rain. Their village was cut off and her younger son had to carry her piggy-back through ankle-deep mud to the road.

One benefit of the road that the residents of 15 MPR had not envisaged in the beginning was children's education. For one, increased income has enabled most parents to send their children to English medium schools outside the village. One father proudly recounts how pleased he is when his children read from their English text books something he himself has never been able to accomplish. Most of all, gone are the days when rain meant a day off from school.

'Now we just get on the motorbike and come or go in top gear,' says Mohammad Bashir the headman speaking for everyone else. And all this from just through the formation of our group and 3000 feet, a mere 915 meters, of soling to start with.







## South Asia Partnership-Pakistan

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