Annual Status of Education Report
Citizens on the March
Stories from the FIELD
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PUNJAB
DISTRICT BAHAWALPUR

STORY#1

Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan entails the right to education, one that makes education a right and demand for all children, regardless of gender, caste or any other discriminatory factor. The village of Moza Kora Ronjha saw this lapse of education especially regarding girls, where according to the ASER survey the enrollment and literacy rates here were frighteningly low. The purpose of this Baithak was hence to highlight the issues people had in the area that were prohibiting the development of education, one that could seriously hamper the future of the children.

One mother got up and said that she did not send her daughter to school, where it was in fact it was only an old room which had no boundary wall nor was it cemented. Moreover, it lacked all the basic facilities such as adequate tables, chair and even clean water. How could a parent send their child to a place like this, she questioned the whole meeting.

The basic task for us was to provide a platform for the community to try to find out plausible solutions as to what should be done to improve conditions in the school, making children more eager to come to school and making parents more willing to send them. Many ideas were put forward which included the men working together to build a wall for the school, one that would be high enough to provide protection for the children. Moreover it was decided that a council would be made that would act as officials of the school to ask the government to fund the construction of the school and provide funds for the continuous improvement of the school. This proved momentous for the school where it was not only getting the help it needed, but a mother of three girls decided to enroll her children right there on the spot. This shows that a change can only come if the whole community works together, a change that will make the future of these children.
STORY#2

Being a coordinator for the ASER Baithaks, success I feel is when we go into a community to mobilize them and after listening to their issues not only help them come up with solutions but also do something ourselves. Here, silence is the greatest enemy, where if one doesn’t speak out about what is wrong, a change for the better can never be enforced. As a community, if we do not stand up for each other, especially for the future generations, a stagnant Pakistan will remain, one that will never be a beacon of hope for the children.

Even with this deteriorating situation, aided by the lack of funds and resources, there is still a light at the end of the tunnel. A light, that shines brightly because of the collaboration of the community where the civil society, parents and teachers all work together to improve conditions. ASER through this mobilization was able to get 115 uniforms for girls, the dearth of which was preventing them from attending school. Ultimately, we were able to educate 115 families, proving to be a milestone for the community and a start to implement a change, one that would improve the quality of education for the children, a demand and right for all.
DISTRICT CHINIOT

STORY#1

Chak No 126, a village in Chiniot has fallen into the same problems that many other villages have: one of having extremely low enrollment rates in both girls and boys primary schools. The main question that arose was of why this was the case when the area had one elementary school for boys and two for girls.

The 36% of the children that were out of school, according to one SMC member were because of the lack of awareness and interest in the community regarding education. However many parents stood up and said that poverty was also one of the pertinent issues that deprived their children of a chance to go to school, where they could not afford to buy basic books or uniforms for them. An announcement by Allah Ditta, a local influential person spread joyous atmosphere amongst the participants where he promised that he would from now on pay for the uniforms of the children that could not afford them. This wave of inspiration caused the community to raise their voices together and claim that they would from now on make an effort to make sure all the children in the area were going to school. Moreover, it was decided that through the collaboration of teachers and parents, a door to door campaign would be started to preach awareness amongst the people as to how important education truly is for their children.
DISTRICT DERA GHAZI KHAN

STORY#1

It seems that the problem of low learning levels is seen across the districts of Pakistan, where ASER by conducting Baithaks tries to come up with concrete solutions that can improve the standard of education for them. I was interning for the summer, assisting the ASER team through the villages they visited where what I saw made me extremely anxious about the future of Pakistan, one that was destined for failure if something was not done to improve the standard of education, especially in the rural areas.

ASER Team visited Sakhi Sarwar B village in D G Khan to share the findings of the survey where it was revealed that 74% girls were still not enrolled in schools. Looking at the learning levels of the village, students were doing poorly where only 60% could solve basic math problems, while 80% could read basic words in English. Learning about these results, the participants, especially the parents became very depressed, where they did not know what they could do to improve this standard. The ASER moderator then raised the question as to what they thought were the main reasons why the learning and enrolment rates were so low. One parent stood up and said that there was only one teacher in the boy’s primary school which was not enough to complete the teaching & learning process. Moreover the girls school did not even have the basic facilities such as adequate tables, chairs or clean drinking water. The distances of these schools were also at a length where even in a population of 5000, there was no girls school present.
During the Baithak, the representative of the education department was also present where the community demanded from them more teachers for both schools. Coming to a consensus, different stakeholders of the community including parents, teachers and patwari would prepare applications for the executive district education officer to hire more teachers. Moreover they would also request for the provision of basic facilities such as toilets in the girls schools to immediately be made. The signatures of the community were then placed on the applications that were formulated during the baithak, symbolizing a move towards change. During today ASER baithk both applications were prepared with the signatures of community. It was also decided that after 15 days, a representative from the community will follow up with the department making sure that a continuous improvement would take place in the area. The Baitak also made the community aware about the importance of girls education where it was decided that a group of community members would start an enrolment drive to ensure a 100% enrolment rate at the Girls school.

The Baithak today made it clear that even with the limited resources that the community had, they were still determined to try to improve conditions for their children. Education can hence be a basic right for all, only when the government, civil society and community members together try to advocate change.
DISTRICT FAISALABAD

STORY#1

Imagine that you are about 11 to 12 years old, walking into the treacherous heat towards the fields that you work at. Your father walks in front of you, and you behind with your head held down, not trying to look at the children walking on the road besides you. They are wearing freshly ironed clothes with backpacks swinging from their shoulders. You used to be one of them. Now the role you have is providing for your family. Shahbaz Nagar in Faisalabad with 350 houses and a population of 3300 people is home to many stories like this, a plethora of which exist in Pakistan. The question that arises is one of who is to blame. Every citizen being the responsibility of the state, is the government to blame for the inadequacies being faced by the children, where education is a basic right for them? Or is the development sector to blame, the advocates of improving conditions for this population? The ASER team conducts its Baithaks for the very aim of trying to pinpoint the prevailing issues in the community and coming up with plausible solutions to counter them.

The government even though is making an effort to provide them with basic facilities such as cemented houses and a water and electricity supply, the education sector is still neglected where there is not even one primary school constructed in the area. This creates a problem of having almost 400 girls and boys out of school, where some of the parents had to shift to other areas so that their children could have a decent education. With this dearth of institutions, girls suffered the most where even with the parents sending their children to school elsewhere; only boys were allowed to go.

ITA’s Intervention

ITA realizing the importance of the role of the civil society highlighted the need of a Literacy Center, one which will work on the enrollment rates and skill enhancement of the children.
After holding some meetings regarding the issue, the district government agreed to allocate a house for this where the iTA team started their campaign to mobilize the community to enroll their children.

After the determination and sincere efforts of the community and ITA, one literacy center was established in Shahbaz Nagar. With 4 female teachers to teach 200 students, this center became a positive light for the community, one that finally provided the children with a beacon of hope that they too could get the education that other children were getting.

**STORY#2**

Belonging to economically poor families in Pakistan, many children leave their education in between because they cannot afford to buy uniforms, school bags and other basic necessities required for going to school. Having very little support from their parents, being more helpful as another pair of earning hands, these children lose all motivation to remain in school, ultimately dropping out and joining their families as laborers. Looking at these dire situations, how does one even try to curb the poverty prevailing at such a rapid scale in Pakistan? These children, having the same potential as their urban counterparts, are forced to stay out of school, a violation of the right that they have a demand over a free and compulsory education, regardless of their socio-economic background. The ASER team while conducting their surveys and Baithaks, sees a plethora of these cases, something that brings a hovering anxiety and doubt that the standard of education might remain stagnant, something that would destroy the future of these children.

A teacher stood up in front of the crowd and narrated the story of a student, one that brought tears to many parents there. A little girl, one of the pupils, was standing outside the school and weeping. This teacher being surprised went up to her to ask her the reason, where she replied that she and her brother did not have any breakfast in the morning, so they had to
come hungry to school. When she called their mother, she came to know that the father of these children had gone to another city to work and the mother also remained outside the house, working in the fields. Since the only thing present was ‘roti’ to eat, they had to come without food to school. Listening to such stories highlights the grim background for these children, where they have nothing, yet many of them still try to come to school for as long as they can, knowing that an education would be the only way out for them. Because of this, the teacher urged the community members and especially the ASER team and government officials to do something in this area to alleviate poverty, the root cause of the deteriorating conditions prevailing.

Even with this cloud of darkness, the teachers of the school are becoming a ray of light where they had started a Students Welfare Committee, where members would gather donations and funds for uniforms, notebooks and other essentials for students who could not afford them. Moreover money for an adequate breakfast for these children will also be collected. According to the teachers, this is the only way that progress can start in the area where poverty and dearth of economic means, are the most crucial problems in the area.

**STORY#3**

Out of school children has become one of the biggest issues that need to be tackled regarding education in Pakistan, where despite that fact that efforts have been made to improve conditions, there seems to be a huge gap between the number of schools and the children actually enrolled in them. One question that comes into mind is that where is Pakistan going wrong? Looking at the rural areas, there seems to be a dearth of children actually sitting in classrooms and learning even with the promises of a change and reinforcement of policies that cater to the right of education for all.
Background:

Achkera Larra situated 17km from Faisalabad city, is where I along with the ASER Team arrived to conduct a Baithak, an area interspersed with semi-urban to rural patches. The majority of people living here belonging to a low socio-economic background with a primary occupation of being laborers, this area was one of the most neglected in Faisalabad. This meant that education here was also not given heed, making the schools have one of the highest out of school children ratios in the district. The Government has provided two schools one GES for boys and one GGPS for girls; however looking at the state of the existing infrastructure, the parents refused to send their children. This lack of quality of education being provided is one of the reasons the ASER team arrived in this area, negating the idea that just by providing a classroom is enough to provide education.

Problem: Education does not only end with books.

The ASER Baithak saw the disgruntled faces of the parents, those that refused to send their children to school only because the school infrastructure was in a state that was not fit for them. Without a solid boundary, there was no protection being provided to the children where one mother said ‘Hum apni baiti ko kaisay idhar bhajain?’ to a place where she will always live in fear. There was no clean water for children to drink from and no clean desks or floor for children to sit on. And what other choice did these people have where due to the low income resources that they had, it was impossible for them to enroll their children in private schools. The education being provided by government schools was the only hope that had, one that was slowly dwindling away.

One major qualm that parents had regarding this dropout rate was that because of their children no longer going to school, they were indulging in detrimental activities such as street fights and smoking. Some cases of drug abuse had also been noted by the police, where
without a proper institution of learning, these children were drifting away from a bright future, one that their parents so desperately wanted for them.

The teachers of the schools took a stand by saying that the situation cannot change with only the school, rather all community members should work together for the future of the children. School council members, parents and teachers decided to build the boundary wall of GES 217 RB with the help of funds that were to be collected from the community. From this money, a water tank was also to be constructed so that both the girls and the boys’ school would have drinking water. A committee was also formed under the leadership of the headmaster of the school, in order to ensure that all tasks were completed in time.

These positive efforts provide a sense of hope that even with the limited resources that these people had, an initiative towards making a change was one that would actually start a progress of improving education in the area. It was also made clear that having a proper quality of education in Pakistan, was a long way from being wholesome. The rural areas lacked the basic facilities needed for children to stay motivated, engrossed and enlightened towards learning. This would unfortunately mean that children of the rural population, making the majority of people in Pakistan, would not get the education they need to stand up for them and ultimately become the person they had once dreamed they would. This slippery slope is one that would indeed extinguish the light of hope for them.
DISTRICT KHUSHAB

STORY#1

Literacy & NFBE Department, Khushab, since its establishment has played a pivotal role in bridging the gender gap by improving girl’s schooling through informal primary schools at their door steps.

A NFBE school teacher Kalsoom Khatoon working since 1999 in a remote village Shimar of Gunjial UC, said that her school got affiliation with Literacy & NFBE Department, Khushab in 2002 as it was already established under Federally funded informal schools. This school provided free access to education for 632 girls and 428 boys since its establishment, up till primary level, where government schools at a distance of 1-2km near the village had no elementary sections. Unfortunately in March 2010, this school was closed down by the department which widened the gender gap that was trying to be bridged by them to a certain extent. However, with the help of a local NGO, the community decided to open a private school in this area with Rs 100 as a monthly fee. Due to lack of access to these facilities, poor parents in the area enrolled their sons in this school rather than sending their daughters leading 60 boys and 35 girls now studying in this school. Hence the dropout rates that occurred and the gender gap were due to the fact that parents could afford the fees of basic essentials such as books, stationary and uniforms.

STORY#2

Mithatiwana GHSS

One of the most successful schools, having a long history of success, which has been leading from a century ago. This school also educated the current Secretary of School Education; Abdul Jabbar Shaheen up till class 10. Moreover, it has seen a general trend of being an institution for Army officers and Education officers who belong to Khushab. Always shown more than 88% result of the secondary classes, here the quality of education is intermixed with extracurricular activities regularly where one student is a
The school is well-equipped with the latest IT, Science and teacher’s training labs. More than 750 students are enrolled here where it was also declared an examination centre of intermediate classes in 2014, to facilitate accessibility to the students of the area.

STORY#3

Utra GGES

Utra, an agrarian based community and a culturally male dominated area, has seen to take the education of girls for granted.

Principal Naheed Hashmi, a devoted educationist has made great practical efforts for the past 12 years for upgradation and promotion of women’s education in this village, where it has seen a visible increase in enrollment. However, even after 70 years of its development, the school is not upgraded to a secondary level so parents have no other alternative to stop their daughters education after class 8th. There is a constant concern from mothers for education of their daughters at secondary level, where most of them are motivated to study further. The mother of Beenish Iqbal, a student said that her husband stopped her daughter’s education after class 8th due to lack of accessibility and financial constraints. Kauser Perveen, another mother of 6 daughters, was so motivated that she is paying all expenses to make them study in class 9 in a far flung area. All the mothers pray for a secondary section to be built for their girls in the Utra village.

STORY#4

Adhikot GGHSS

Miss Kauser Perveen, PST, a granddaughter of Ghulam Muhammad who had inaugurated this school in 1938, was present and said that the teachers in Adhikot were mostly her grandfather’s students. Her mother Wilait Bibi, infact remained a principal of this school. Three generations of this family worked for the promotion of education, especially for women where now in this remote rural area, almost 75% of the community is well aware of female education.
DISTRICT MULTAN

STORY#1

I was volunteering for the ASER Baithak in the village of Chah Gehnay Wala where the occupation of people was mostly teachers, laborers and farmers. Working on fields primarily being the source of income for people, education had seemed to take a backseat where the parents rather preferred having helping hands at home rather than sending their children off to school.

The ASER 2013 survey revealed that 80% of the girls in the village were out of school. When the ASER team asked the participants that included stakeholders, teachers and School Health & Nutrition Supervisor participated all of them primarily accused the quality of education in the area. Over here, the community was then asked to share their opinion as to how to increase the literacy rates. Most of the community narrated that these could not be improved unless the teachers took a greater interest in teaching their children. The teachers however complained about the parents, claiming that even with them giving their full attention to the children, the poor result of the school was because the parents were not doing anything at home to motivate or help the children out.

The discussions that took place during this Baithak, not only highlighted the main issues regarding why there was a deteriorating state of affairs regarding education, but also tried to come up with a few solutions as to what could be done. Taking an initiative, one of the only ways that a change can come, a few people volunteered to teach different classes for free. In this way they would try to curb the problem of lack of teachers. One influential person in the village said that he would go door to door himself to spread awareness amongst the people of educating their children where without it, there was no chance of them ever getting out of this village.

Looking at the events that went on today, I felt that the only way the quality of education would increase in the area was through such determination of change. The community getting together is the only way a concrete structure can be developed, one that will be sustainable and ultimately lead to rapid improvement in both learning levels and enrollment rates. Only through this can education be called a right for everyone.
STORY#2

The Baithak conducted at Girls Government Public School, Qasba Sani, brought out a story of the headmistress, who left a comfortable life in an urban locality to cater to the education of the children in an area that needed it the most. Her story is one that shows how one person can be an inspiration for many, one that truly becomes an advocate of change.

Nuzhat Yasmeen, along with another teacher was the only staff of the GGPS in Multan, making it a tedious and almost impossible task to run it all by themselves. The head mistress living at a distance from the school could not come in daily to school, making this a serious threat to the enrollment rate and quality of education of the students. The parents discussed this matter of concern with her, one that would ultimately threaten the future of their children. Nuzhat, hearing them out, ultimately took the difficult situation of shifting to the same locality along with her family, leaving behind all the luxuries and facilities of an urban life.

Observing this dedication of the headmistress, community elders and other influential people decided to help her out, hiring more staff for the school and paying their salary from their own pockets. These new reforms regarding teacher punctuality mirrored with the students where following their mentors, they also started coming to school on time. Hence the change in environment not only improved the structure of the school, rather also motivated the students to do better.

The Baithak became a platform for inspiration, one that motivated more families and teachers to take interest in the education of the children in the locality. Many parents stood up in front of the meeting and claimed their support for the head mistress. ‘Hum aapkay saath hain’, showing that a change is not possible unless all stakeholders collaborate with each other.

STORY#3

Being an intern, the story of Mukhtiar Mai was truly inspiring, one that gave hope that education could be a right that everyone could get. When the ASER Team went to conduct the Baithak at the Government Girls Primary School, we saw her, an elderly woman sitting and reading along children of class three. Her dedication towards achieving
education, even if she had to start from the beginning is one that should be a muse for all.

Mukhtiar Mai belonging to an extremely poor family had 4 children, where her husband used to sell different products by visiting door to door in different localities. Her family was also very firm on the fact that education for girls was not necessary; rather they should only stay at home and manage the household chores.

When her daughter became old enough to go to school, Mukhtiar Mai’s husband refused to enroll her, despite her urging. Moreover her husband said that they did not have enough resources to waste them on her education, rather they should only send their sons to school. Even with the discouragement that she faced from her whole family, Mukhtiar Mai still did not give up hope where she directly went to the headmistress of the girl’s school and requested her to visit her home in order to convince her family of the importance of education for their daughter. The headmistress conducted a session of awareness with the husband of Mukhtiar Mai and consequently the husband has been agreed to enroll the daughter into the school.

Since Mukhtiar Mai stayed in school until her daughter got off, she was hired as a peon with a salary from the SMC fund of the school. Upon her frequent interaction with the headmistress, she told her that her desire for getting an education was still there but could not fulfill it due to her family constraints. Upon hearing this, the headmistress asked her why she did not get an education now

“Is this possible now at the age of 38” she asked.

The headmistress replied with a yes where she immediately went home to ask her husband. Taking the ridiculing of her husband, she was finally able to convince him, after which she was enrolled as a student of class three, the same class as her daughter.

Looking at this story one can see that even though people in the rural areas have very little, the passion and the ability to work hard surpasses many in Pakistan. It is now the time to help these people pursue their dreams where no matter what age, gender or socio-economic background, one should never be denied the right to an education.
DISTRICT MUZZAFARGARH

STORY#1

“Get Education from the lap of mother to grave” Holy Prophet (pbuh)

The story of Muhammad Younas is one that shows the passion that children have towards getting an education, especially in the rural areas despite the hardships they face in order to get it. Enrolled in school in grade 5, Younas had to leave his studies because his family could no longer support him financially and expected him to start working as well. Getting a job as a peon, he worked for 5 years at a meager salary to support his family but always observing the children carrying books and bags on their shoulders, wondering why he could not study as well. Finally having the courage to pursue this dream, he requested the principle of the local school to let him study where he would purchase his books himself. With the acceptance of his enrollment Younas worked day and night, where he passed his 6th grade examinations with flying colors because of which he got double promoted to class 8. Currently pursuing higher education at Allama Iqbal University, through ASER, he wanted others to know that if he had not taken a step towards pursuing his dreams, despite having very little, he would have never be the confident and respectable person he felt he was today.

Even with success stories like these, we still have to climb mountains in order to get to a level where each child gets education, a basic right and demand for them. Muhammad Younis was able to fight a destiny of working his whole life as a peon, his story being an inspiration, but also a rare one.

STORY#2

With all this talk about ‘Naya Pakistan’ and a brighter Pakistan, education somehow took a backseat for the policy makers of the country. However for every story of that one hears about education being a ‘lost cause’, there is one that will instill hope that a change will come. ASER Baithaks are conducted with the aim of making a community aware of the standard of education prevailing amongst their children. Moreover, the idea of ‘what you can do to improve the learning outcomes’, is reinforced into
them where the teachers, parents and stake holders present are urged to take a stand themselves.

Being an intern and assisting these Baithaks was eye opening for me where facilities like adequate classrooms, clean bathrooms and good teachers are usually taken for granted in an urban locality. The story of a school in the village was narrated in front of the gathering, one that proved to be an inspiration for teachers, ITA officials and parents present there.

The GGPS Bair Wala Mouza Qalandar Wala Union Council is located on D G Khan Road, Muzaffargarh with 3 teachers and 154 students enrolled. The head teacher, an elderly woman working for this school since 1981 was present at the Baithak to talk to the participants present, urging them to visit the school and see for themselves the determination and persistency that they have shown regarding the education provided to the children. In order to see for ourselves, the ITA team accompanied the parents and officials that were following the head teacher towards the school. The school was clean, while all the classrooms were fully decorated with either artwork or motivational posters. The teachers along with the students had decorated the class rooms where according to the head teacher; this helped build an environment for the children, one that was necessary for them. By teaching them finger printing and the use of a brush, the children work together, ultimately respecting each other in the end. Moreover, this confidence helped build up their motivation and fervor to learn resulting in a direct increase in learning levels as well.

The Baithak conducted and the visit to the school made the parents and teachers aware of the importance of having a healthy environment for the children. The school must be a ‘chaar ‘diwari’ to keep the children safe and the parents at ease for sending them to get an education. To keep on increasing learning levels in the village it was decided by the teachers and parents that they would collaborate with each other and act as role models, the only way quality of education would be maintained for the children.
STORY#3

A teacher has a pivotal role in a student’s life where they not only serve as mentors of learning; they are also leaders of a community where their views, ideas and thoughts have an influential impact. The Baithak conducted in Muzaffargarh, with a purpose of making the local community aware of the state of education in the area, highlighted this role. Working as a volunteer for this Baithak, the fervor of some of the members of the community showed me how there was still hope that the dream of providing education for all, even though a distant one, was on its way of becoming a reality.

The Baithak was introduced with Mukhtiar Hussain, the principle of the DL school system in the locality. A teacher by profession, he started a school with the primary objective of providing education to children who were unable to go to school because of binding financial or personal constraints. Having no motive of getting any monetary gain from this, he went door to door in the village trying to get children enrolled into his school, those that were not going to school due to any reason. Hearing this dedication in Mukhtiar’s voice, truly made the gathering an inspiring one where for me, there were innumerable other stories like this that were trying to improve the levels of education in Pakistan, even with the limited resources they had. With the help of some influential and comparatively wealthy community members, the school fees of many students was paid off while some parents were only paying half or less than half. With the enrollment of 70 students in the school, 40 were actually studying without paying. When asked why he refused to take money from people of the community, he replied “I am serving this locality and this institute is not source of income for me, but a hope for the poor people”.

The stories of people like Mukhtiar Hussain, a visionary for advocating education are amongst the many that exist in small villages. The Baithak conducted today reinforced the passion that might have been lost in people. The work of the school and dedication shown by teachers made the parents realize how important it was for their children to go to school. The ASER survey also showed that learning levels were increasing in the community, where the parents took an oath that from now on they would be more involved regarding the work that was being done for the children, the only way this progress could be maintained.
STORY#4

A Ray of Hope for the Bright Future:

(A Single Person Can Bring Change)

Educational institutions are major factors that aids to the learning of children where if these provide sound quality of education, the children will benefit from what they learn here towards the building of their futures. Government institutions are available in almost every village but private schools are very rare in these areas, which increases the importance and value of the latter in the locality. These institutions helped out government schools in order to increase their standards and cater to the students who cannot afford to go to private schools so that they are not left behind.

The ASER Baithak held in Khar Gharbi brought forward a similar story of success by a private school where the owner became a beacon of hope at the meeting. Ghulam Shabir, founded a private school in the village in 2006 where in the start he only had 30 students enrolled. Deciding to increase the learning levels of the village, he took up on himself to first increase the enrollment of children n schools. When ASER came two years after Ghulam started, the enrollment rate of his school increased to 150. Soon this school became affiliated with the Punjab Education Foundation and both male and female children started to get free education in school. After 7 years, the ASER survey was conducted in this village where the out of school ratio of boys was now only 4%. However the girls' rate was a little higher, being 17%. This school hence played a integral role in decreasing the OOSC rate in the village, becoming an example to follow for other institutions. Now enrollment of this school is more than 500, with about more than 35 teachers both male & female teaching.

The Baithak saw how even the efforts of one man could result in being a benefit for the whole village. With the increase in learning levels of the students, the students that were graduating from this school were also serving the community by teaching in other schools. Ghulam Shabir, became an inspiration for the parents and teachers present, where the meeting ended with a momentous action when the parents of the out of school students that were present, enrolled their children immediately after.
In the village of Kurnali, even with low learning levels and high dropout rates, a grandmother who has never attended school in her life, still knows the importance of getting an education. The ASER team coming across her during a Baithak heard her story, one laced with hope and determination that going to a private or well rounded school is not the only means of one realizing the impact of learning. Being from a poor family, her parents could not afford to send her to school. After getting married, she could not send her children off to school as well, being that her husband could not afford to. However today, she was extremely happy where her grandchildren were going to school, finally living her dream, one she was not lucky enough to pursue.

Always wanting to work in a school, the grandmother’s lack of education did not stop her where she fully participated in following up on the children’s progress. Since she did not know how to check the daily class work, she gauged it by looking at the number of ticks or red marks in the notebook. If there were more red crosses than ticks, she would call upon the child to counsel him or her and ask them about the problems they were facing regarding their school work.

Even with the dearth of educational institutions and quality of education, many rural communities in Pakistan still have the motivation of achieving good learning opportunities. Even with the parents and teachers not that well aware of the standard of education, they still try their best to do whatever they can to build the future of the children. The grandmother addressed the villagers by saying that,” banda khud khyal rakhe to bache theek parhty hen or school say jan nai churaty” meaning that if enough attention was given to the child’s education, they will be an automatic drop in the dropout rate of schools. Even though the parents and grandparents could not follow their own dreams of getting an education, they wanted nothing more than seeing their children on the path of learning where they were a helping hand at every step.
STORY#2

The ASER team while traveling towards the Girls Elementary School Thoha Khalsa, for the Baithak found one child, that looked about 9 years old was holding a book in his hand and walking away with a look of worry. Being 2km away from the village, the boy to us looked like he had skipped school and was waiting to pass the time until he could go home again. When we reached the school, the headmistress called upon the peon to make two announcements, one for Baithak participation, and other for a missing child. The mother of the child was also present who was angrily arguing with the mother as to why no one was looking after her son. She further said that since no one cared in the school, which is why children ran away where there was no motivation in them to study or learn anything. That’s why my children often ran away from the school, he avoid studies due to the easy and relax environment of the school.

The teachers rebutted this argument made by the parents by saying that they had actually informed the parents many times about the lack of focus of their children, yet they did nothing about it. One teacher said that she had informed their parents many times, but they did do not bother to follow up, nor do they ensure the presence of children on daily basis. It was indeed carelessness on the parent’s part as well. This should that immediate action had to be taken against these matters where the AEO advised to form an action committee to bring back the missing children. Moreover this will also have school counselors that will follow up on the progress of students and teachers, by submitting monthly reports about this.

The Baithak today made it very clear of the callousness that was prevailing regarding the education system, especially in the rural areas. There is an immediate need to change things where the teachers and parents have to collaborate to make sure the child remains motivated at school and at home, towards learning. The children will not remain in school unless they are focused enough to know that education will indeed provide them with a brighter future, one that is only possible if they themselves believe in it.

STORY#3

Article 25-A in the constitution of Pakistan entails a right to education, where it is free and compulsory for every citizen regardless of any discriminatory factors. As an intern, when I assisted in conducting the Baithak at Panyali, a family with three disabled children broke my heart, where they were denied this right only because they were deemed ‘insane’ by the community. One female and two males, these children had listening and speaking problems
due to which they were refused entry into schools. The father, desperate to find a way to educate his children was present at the Baithak to appeal in front of the community for help. He argued that one another special child in the village was going to school, but only because his parents could afford the cost of travelling from their village to special children centre in Kahutta. He on the other hand was the sole bread owner of the family working as a woodcutter, and living in single room house near the main village of Panyali. He hence did not have the resources to send his children off to another village and nobody was eager to help him.

The old man after sharing his story started weeping after which there was pin drop silence at the meeting. One man finally rose up and asked everyone the question as to how many people donated their money to Masjids and Darbars? The majority raised their hands. Then he questioned as to why no one had the courage to help this family out and that were they not all Muslims and assistants of God?

Rana Javed Iqbal, DEO stood, and thanked the Baithak today for highlighting a saddening aspectof society, one that did not help the people who were in most need. He pledged that he would do anything for the education of these children, and would provide financial help by his own if needed. Motivated by Javed Iqbal’s pledge, one van driver decided to contribute as well, where he volunteered that he would drive the old man’s children and others from the village to Kahutta. Moreover the DEO requested ASER to keep on conducting these Baithaks in order to mobilize and motivate the community.
DISTRICT RAHIM YAR KHAN

STORY#1

The ASER Team visited Chak No 102/ P village in the district of Rahim Yar Khan to conduct a Baithak that had a purpose of inviting the community to sit with other stakeholders of the area in order to get a sense of the learning levels and the general pattern of education that their children were getting. Listening to the narration of the ASER statistics and looking at the disgruntled faces of the crowd, expounded on my limited knowledge regarding the condition of rural education, one that was a long way from its urban counterpart.

The learning levels showed that only 35% of the children could pass Math while only 38% of the children could read whole sentences in English. This was an eye opener for the parents sitting in the vicinity who were not aware of these disappointing conditions that surrounded their children.

One mother stood up and complained about the conditions of the girl’s schools claiming that lack of teachers in the science department was a hurdle for their daughters’ education.

“Humari baaitiyan aur kahan jayain?” she said claiming that if education was not improved in their own village, she did not have the resources to send her children any other place. Without this basic education her daughters would have no skills and no future of ever standing on their own feet. Being a girl myself, where I have never had struggle to obtain education, the dearth of resources in their possession was heartbreaking to see.

The voices of both men and women could be heard in this Baithak, where collectively they demanded for conditions to improve. The first demand was the increasing of teachers for both boys and girls school, especially science teachers, where without this the children had no chance of moving forward. For its implementation an application was drafted for the executive district education officer for the demand of more science teachers and labs.
STORY#2

The image of a mother quarreling with a local teacher is how one can describe the disgruntlement parents feel towards the quality of education being provided to their children. The ASER Baithak conducted at Wahid Bux Laar, in order to involve the community regarding the education of their children, was an eye opener for me, a volunteer, where it highlighted the dire need for improvement in the schools, something that is taken for granted in an urban locality. The particular mother that was fighting with the teacher had just found out about the results of the ASER survey that showed the deteriorating state of the quality of education in their village. Her children had been regularly attending school; however the results startled her where she had no idea of the discrepancies that were prevailing. Blaming the teachers of the school, she pin pointed to two teachers and said that ‘they had no right to ruin the lives of our children’. This incident for me highlighted the heightened emotions of the parents regarding the future of their children, one that seemed bleak for them.

Parents were the main audience of this Baithak where standing at the sidelines I could feel the risen tensions that they were experiencing towards the teachers of the schools. One mother narrated the financial conditions of her family, associating them with the loss of hope she felt regarding the education of her children.

“Hum khaiton mein pura din kaam kertay hain takay 20 rupay deh sakay har mahinay”.

Despite this condition laced with poverty, she claimed that they worked hard to provide everything they could for their children and in fact the teachers now had to give a justification for the poor learning levels. From where I was standing, the teachers and parents looked like they were confronting each other in court. One mother stood up and said that teaching was a great profession, but these teachers did not do justice to it, rather were
only here to make money. Holding the teachers full responsible for the low literacy levels of the children, she emphasized on the rigorous checking of schools by the local community members in order to make sure that their children do not suffer.

The ASER findings for me and the parents reflected the grave nature of the quality and progression of education in the area. The distressed voices of mothers and the anger that fathers were showing, made one sitting in the audience realize the extent of the lack of communication between parents and the school. The quality of education can only be improved if all the stakeholders work together with rigorous determination to fulfill their duties, a necessity for the children in the area.

STORY#3

The ASER Baithaks are conducted with an aim to bring the community together and motivate them to collaborate with all the stakeholders influencing their village, in order to try to increase the quality of education for the children and their enrollment levels. As a local teacher of the school, the events of this day showed me the dedication that parents and students had regarding a change to occur in the area, despite the limited resources they had.

ASER Team reached Bhong for the Baithak, where an enrolment walk was to be conducted, and one which would be a driving force to ensure an increase in education for the children of the area. Both men and women took part in the walk which showed me that the locals were determined to get equal opportunities regarding education, an equal chance for both their daughters and sons. The walk started from the Government Boys high School and ended with the participants, that included the ASER team, school head teachers, teaching staff
members, local NGO representatives, local media, parents and school children, reaching the Government Girls Elementary School.

What made this enrollment walk a memorable one was the fact that students, sixteen boys and five girls that were never enrolled in schools were collected from door to door to take part in changing their future themselves. Most of them wanted to be educated but could not go to school due to financial constraints and lack of interest by their parents in enrolling them.

‘Humari majboori hai’ one of the girls said regarding why she was not in school like the rest of the children her age.

The zealous motivation that the participants had at the walk, proved a prominent success for the Baithak where all these children were enrolled into school, making their dreams of becoming doctors or engineers, those that for them were impossible to achieve had become a little believable now.

Parents of the local children were the backbone of the Baithak where they were not shy to raise their concerns regarding the quality of education that was being given in the area. The anxiety of the parents was also mirrored by me where all of us longed for a change, one that was taking a long time to implement in this poverty stricken area. One parent stood in front of the crowd and claimed that they were all alone in trying to improve education for their children, where the teachers and local committee members took the least amount of interest in fulfilling their duties. She urged the meeting that it was essential for all of them to work together in order to fulfill their obligations towards the children, the future of Pakistan. From the missing facilities in schools to the grave reality of the conditions in the girl’s school, the quality of education can only change if all the stakeholders invested in the area are fully devoted and sincere regarding the dire need for a change.

The enrollment walk and Baithak for me was one that reinforced the vigor that something must be immediately done to increase the quality of education, where if a continuous effort is not made, the children of this area would be far left behind.
DISTRICT MIANWALI

STORY#1

A Baithak was arranged in Tarag Sharqi a village in Mianwali, by the ASER team, where I was residing as a coordinator. The ASER data that was revealed was with the purpose of making the community aware of where their children stood regarding learning levels and enrollment in the local schools. The results were astonishing of the parents where a hefty 51% of the children in the village did not attend school. Those that did attend, their learning levels suggested that only 34% of class 5 children could read a story in Urdu. Moreover they also showed that only 30% of the class 5 children were able to do two digit divisions.

The general disgruntlement that was prevailing in the audience was due to the lack of quality of education being provided to the children where the parents ultimately blamed this on the teachers. One mother said that the teachers were not sincere in performing their duties where she had four children enrolled in the local school; however they were not learning anything.

The Baithak with the aim of allowing all participants to raise their concerns in a healthy environment prompted them to try to come up with some practical solutions. I along with my team wanted them to talk to the school heads, as well as other influential people present in order for all of them to be in charge of the education of their children. After mobilizing them, the participants came to a compromise of not only blaming the teachers rather also taking an initiative themselves where without the collaboration of all stakeholders, education would remain at a standstill or worse, deteriorate from the existing levels.

STORY#2

Khola, a village of Tehsil Piplaan in Mianwali was where along with my ASER team, conducted a Baithak. This poverty stricken area, with extremely low levels of enrollment for both boys and girls desperately needed a change where the meeting we called of the local community was a means of interaction between parents, teachers and all other subsequent people that had influence in the area. The ASER data found that 31% of the girls in the village were not going to school. Bringing this matter in front of the Baithak, the main reasons that kept girls away from getting an education was the extreme poverty prevailing in the community, where the parents working at a minimum wage could not afford to send their daughters off to school. Moreover regarding the lack of enrollment of girls in higher classes,
in other reason that came into light was the fact that girls in the area were generally not allowed to get jobs because of which the community found it fruitless to invest in them.

A father stood infront of the meeting and narrated that the average number of people in a household were 5 to 6, due to which spending 20 rupees on every child was impossible. All of them were mere laborers, where sparing such an amount was a burden for them against providing their families with basic necessities such as food and shelter. When the ASER team asked him what the best solution for this would be, he said ‘Humari liye yeh maaf ker dain’; meaning that waving off the school fees would ease their troubles. Expenses like giving 60 to 70 rupees to teachers and buying other necessities such as notebooks, uniforms and stationary was something that parents here could not afford.

The Baithak aimed at trying to ease the troubles of the community in any way it could, called upon the headmistress of the Government Elementary School to answer to the community. She offered that the amount of 20 rupees would be paid from the local School Management Committee’s fund, by identifying the families who were unable to pay the fees. Furthermore she appealed to the philanthropists of the community to try to help the parents in any way they could.

Looking at the events that took place during this Baithak, the distrust that the parents were feeling regarding the future of their children, a change can only come if something is done to alleviate the poverty in the community, where because of the economic constraints posed on almost all families there was no way out for them or their children.
BALOCHISTAN
STORY#1

Being a student and sitting during the ASER Baithak listening to the coordinator narrate the low levels of learning in my village, shocked me. How was it possible that even with us working so hard, we were still not up to the par? How was it possible that only less than half of us were only attending school where the enrollment rate was not even half of the children of the village? Moreover the girls were worse off where hardly any of them were getting the same education I was. Thinking of all my cousins that were not getting educated only because they were girls, I felt sadness creep through me. We were the future of this country, where if all of us were not getting educated, how will we make Pakistan a better country, one that would make our Quaid proud again?

The teachers and parents that were present during the Baithak were also worried after listening to the survey results. They all decided that regular tests would be taken from all the students, to make sure that their learning levels would improve. A students welfare committee would also be formed that would actually go door to door to spread awareness amongst the parents of the importance of education, especially those that were not sending their children to school.

We will only succeed in the future if we improve the standard of education in our village. This can only happen if all of us work together. I also urge the government and NGO’s to help us in whatever way they can, for even though we do not have many resources, we have a dream of becoming something big in future and serve our country.

STORY#2

My name is Haji Muhammad Omar and when the ASER team came to our village to conduct the Baithak, I felt inspired to help out the children, those whose future was on the line if the education standard is not improved. The team came to the local school to tell us how they conducted the survey and by highlighting the results, urged as to speak up about what we thought should be done to improve them.

Many suggestions were made, where both parents and teachers stood up to raise concerns and try to find plausible solutions regarding the low learning and enrollment rates of the children. It was decided that every week, the teachers along with the parents would take rounds of the school to make sure everything was up to the standard such as classrooms, tables, water
tankers and others. This would be done to make sure that the environment would not be a hurdle for the children, where with a healthy and clean place to study, the children will also remain motivated to learn. If something was not up to the par, we would go to the ECO to draft an application for its immediate repair. Moreover the parents made a pact that they would pay more attention to what was going on in the school, where every day they would check their child’s work to make sure he was revising it at home.

**STORY#3**

Being a teacher of the local school at Kili Gul Muhammad, sitting through the ASER Baithak gave me a perspective about the prevailing conditions of education, ones I never thought existed inside the walls of my school. Teaching the 5th and 6th grade classes, the children I come across are motivated and determined to learn, despite the limited resources they have. However the ASER survey told me a totally different story, one where these children were falling behind, while many others in the village were not even enrolled in schools. Indeed a grave picture was painted right in front of me, one that demanded an immediate action.

The most important point that was raised during the Baithak was the question that even if we were teaching the students whole heartedly, were they retaining it and what they were doing to revise this work? At the end of every academic year the students take their final examinations, however the parents never come and ask about the progress of their children. The children just go into the next grade, without any follow up by the parent. This lack of interest is one of the reasons that there is a disparity between what is being taught and what is actually being retained by the children. When children go home, they get no encouragement or assistance regarding their school work, due to which they lose their motivation to revise their work again. One parent however stood up and said that how could they as they worked hard all day trying to provide the basic necessities for their family. They simply had no time. One teacher in response said that if the parents did not follow up at home, even a minimal amount, the students will never remain motivated till the end. Many teachers rose up and narrated similar encounters, where I agreed with them: a child will only fully learn if his education is backed by home. The parents are the biggest part of a student’s life, where encouragement from them goes a long way regarding the success of the child.
The Baitak providing a platform for healthy discussion opened up many issues that were stopping the progress of children. It was decided that the parents would form a committee, one that would make sure that there is a follow up of what is going on in school, like monthly reports, checking of copies and revising the work learnt at school. Moreover, the teachers would also collaborate with the parents to make sure that they know how their child is performing in school.

I am ready to do voluntary work for ASER where I truly do believe that they are helping increase the standard of education of the village, any way they can. Being advocates of change, I as a teacher want to help my students in every possible way, for I want to be a change maker too, the need of which is desperately felt in this village.
KHYBER
PAKHTUNKHWÁ
STORY#1

Village Alamganj

During the era of militancy, 402 schools received damages due to which they were closed in which some were rebuild while many are still in demolished condition. GPS Alamganj is one in them which is currently operated as Maktab School in the Bhaitak of School Teacher Adnan Gul. Most of the people in the village were absent knowledge from Maktab School and as a result the total enrollment was less than 20 students. This issue was highlighted by Mrs. Adnan Gul (who is also a school teacher) in female ASER Bhaitak which was organized by ITA in Alamganj on 27th May 2014. According to her, “School is functioning since 2010 but the enrollment is from the nearest ten or twelve houses only.” The same issue reached to X.Nazim Mr. Sohrab Khan who took prompt action and has visited the Maktab School and asked teacher regarding the prevailing problems faced in school. The nazim also visited Education Deptt and put up the issues of the Maktab School like the provision of Govt Text Books etc. Within one week of the conduction of ASER Bhaitak, the School Teacher and Nazim along with other local people did a house to house awareness campaign regarding Maktab School and enrollment. Also Education Deptt has provided text books to school on the hand of Nazim and currently Maktab School is operating with a strength of 52 students whose credit not only goes to Nazim and local people but also to ASER Bhaitak.

STORY#2

Village Tootanubanday

An ASER Bhaitak was organized in village Tootanubanday in order to aware community regarding the issues prevailing in education. In this Bhaitak open discussion was made with community in which community point out two major responsible factors of all the prevailing issues and that were extreme poverty and insufficient infrastructure of Education especially of Govt Schools.

After the Bhaitak, Parents, PTCs members and Teachers has decided to form a pressure group who will visit Education Deptt and DC/AC for solving problems. For the same purpose, a school committee was formed for GHS Tootanubanday who visited DEO (M) Office on the very next day and put their issue of closing of admissions in GHS Tootanubanday due to lack of space of school in front of DEO (M). They asked DEO (M) to address the issue on
immediate bases but the DEO (M) didn’t take any notice as demanded. The group visited DEO (M) Office again and has given him reminder regarding the issues. They also visited Assistant Commissioner Office for taking time from AC for visiting locality schools. On the next day DEO (M) Mr. Abdullah arrived in GHT Tootanubanday and sought the problems. The DEO (M) looked the entire situation and at that time he ordered his office to provide two tents on emergency bases to school in order to divide strength of class 9th and also assured community and Principal for building two additional rooms in the coming summer vacations.

The Assistant Commissioner Kabal also visited school after two days of DEO (M) visit along with parent and community members. He assured the Principal for the provision of water pump and construction back side boundary wall for the school.

**STORY#3**

**Muhammad Ismail Primary Teacher**

Muhammad Ismail is a primary teacher in GPS Mahaq who worked very passionately and hard in enrollment drive launched in April 2014 and enrolled 35 new students in school. But after a few days of enrollment, 30-students were dropped out while only 5-students were in school. After attending ASER Bhaitak in Village Tall, he became very much optimistic regarding the high figure of out of school children and decided to launch another enrollment drive in his school locality with the help of other local members. On the same day he went to a very influential person Mr. Jalat Khan (contested candidate of Provincial Assembly) and discussed the issue with him and sought for help. Mr. Jalat Khan gathered all the locality members in his Hujra tell evening and addressed the community regarding the importance of Education and put the issue of out of school children in front of them. The school teacher also sensitized the community regarding the same issue and asked the community to send their children to school. On the very next day, the 30 dropped out children along with other 8-students who remained were carried by their parent to school and were enrolled again and assured the teachers that they will be regular students from now onward. They thanked the school teacher for making parent aware regarding the importance of education for their children future. According Mr. Muhammad Ismail, “I was very pensive on the drop out of these children because I was feeling that all my efforts were wasted but now I am a happy because my current efforts has given me fruits in the form of bringing children back into school.”
Muhammad Ismail Primary Teacher

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