When there is a will there is a way...

No-one can ever imagine the pleasure of enlightening a person who was in darkness without experiencing it. This is how I felt when I succeeded in bringing the women of my village to the literacy centre. It was like spreading the light”.

These are the words of Naseema Bibi, a 47 year old woman residing in the far flung Sarvala village of District Muzaffarabad. She is a married woman and the mother of five children, three daughters and two sons. Her husband runs a small grocery shop in the local bazaar and is the sole breadwinner of the family.

Naseema has never seen the face of school in her whole life. She has always been keen on reading and writing, but unfortunately her parents could neither afford the expenses of her education nor was there any facility for female education in their area. She felt more helpless each time she had to budget her expenses or when her children asked anything regarding their studies.

One morning in March as she sat with her neighbour after finishing their household chores, her neighbour’s husband entered and told them about the establishment of
adult literacy centres in their areas being formed by some non-governmental organisation. Naseema decided to use that as an opportunity to fulfill her dreams. She returned to her house and, keen to know more about the literacy centre, she visited it the next day.

When she asked her husband to join the centre, he refused and her mother-in-law was in agreement with him. Her children made fun of her but when her literacy teacher saw her enthusiasm, she mobilized the family to support her and her children eventually offered their support.

Although her husband was unsupportive, her elder son took her to the centre to enroll and this motivated her to move forward.

According to Naseema, there are many in her village who would like the opportunity to read and write but cannot. She feels lucky that she had the support of her children and literacy teacher. Now she is better able to manage the budget, she can read the newspaper and knows the retail prices and expiry dates on foods. Above all, she credits education for having given her confidence in herself. She is now trying to pass on the light to others by mobilizing other families to send their female family members to the centre to take part in literacy courses. This way, she feels she is giving back to the community for what she received.
“It might be a minor thing for others but it’s pleasing to me that I, who had never thought I would hold a pencil in my hand, signed my marriage certificate”

Sobia Gillani was very excited when she shared this. At 21, she is newly-wed and lives in Bandi Bakalan Village in District Muzaffarabad. Her family is poor. Her parents could barely support their children with basic demands of food, clothing and shelter and only a piece of land served as the source of income for their family of ten. Although Sobia would have liked to go to school, she did not get to because of the lack of finance to pay for education. There was also lack of support in her village for female education.

Fortunately an NGO came to start a literacy center in her village. Before they could start though, they had to fight the cultural taboos in the area and find a way for female education to become acceptable, particularly for adult females. They started with awareness sessions with different groups of community. With the involvement of the communities, it became easier to set up the literacy centre. Some of the families showed willingness and sent their daughters to the centre and Sobia was one of the daughters sent.

Sobia says, ‘the happiest day of my life was when I signed my marriage certificate. It was difficult for me to believe that my name was on it.’
She further said that women of their society were paying a heavy price of ignorance. They were totally unaware of their rights and have been exploited by the males and at times by the dominance of females. Education not only helped her in reading and writing but also played a major role in making her assertive and raised our self-esteem. She learnt that she could move ahead while being in her social cultural limits. She sees no end to learning and according to her, education is a long-term investment.

Work speaks louder than words...

Nisar Khursheed, 42, a resident of Khushab, is a confident and content person. He has a wife and three kids. His father was a labourer and the sole breadwinner in the family. Like many children in his community, he had never been to school because of the financial conditions and family environment.

He went to work early so that he could lighten the financial burden off his father’s shoulders but he always thought education would open him up to greater opportunities. When he was 12, he joined a literacy centre offering free courses for young children. As he had never been in school before, he found it difficult to catch up with the reading and writing but the literacy teacher encouraged him to attend regularly and soon he found it easier with
Initially his family was unaware of his activities as he continued working and bringing an income home but later on he told them and convinced them to send his siblings to schools and learning institutes.

Nasir passed the primary school exam. After completing, he was admitted to a government school for grade six. Due to his hard work, he completed secondary school and is now a teacher dedicated to delivering knowledge to other children. According to him, this is the start of a long but rewarding journey.

Dreams - Motivation to Success...

Alipur Frash is a small town in District Rawalpindi. It was a slum area where people were unaware of the importance of education.

Izat bibi was one of the residents of Alipur Frash. Married with four children, her community did not allow her to make decisions about her life that went against the wishes of any males in her family. When Izat Bibi got married at the age of 18, she could neither read nor write and she led the life of other married women in her community.

She wanted her children to get educated and fulfill her dreams, which she couldn’t achieve. When her younger...
child began to go school he often asked her to assist him in his studies but she was unable to and said, ‘you can never imagine how I felt in front of my child when I could not help him.’

Eventually she heard about a Literacy centre that had been established. She asked her husband’s permission and when he gave it, she visited the literacy centre the next day. The teacher of literacy centre welcomed her warmly. Izat Bibi began to learn with keen interest and successfully completed her courses. Now she is able to assist her children with their studies. Although she knows she still has a long way to go, she plans to continue studying with her children.

When dreams come true….

“I am lucky enough to get a life partner who gave me the most precious gift – Education” says Alishba - a 31 years old Christian lady. She resides in Rawalpindi with her husband and three kids. “I was always fond of learning,” she further told. Her husband is a taxi driver while her sons and daughter attend school. As in so many other cases in Pakistan, she could not get an opportunity to get education because of financial problem. Her parents decided to marry her off at an early age to ease their financial burden.

She always wished she could assist her husband in some way but felt because she was illiterate and had no skills, she could not do so.
One day her husband came to her and told her about the possibilities of improving her life. A literacy centre had been opened for women in their locality and he encouraged her to join it. Initially, she was reluctant because she felt that, at the age of 30, she was too old, but her husband insisted and even went with her since he knew how much she had long desired to have an education. Alishba took a year’s course where she learnt basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills. She proved to be the best student in her class.

After completing the course, she could read and write. She also learnt appropriate life skills, which help her to bring up her children in a healthy way.

Light the candles from torch…

A young girl of 14 years who had just completed her primary level education, thought about doing something for the women of her village. She shared this idea with her teacher who told her to start a vocational centre for the community women that provide some kind of economic support to their families. She collected the embroidery frames, needles, thread and other material from the village women and asked them to join that centre for their vocational work.
Within a few days that centre became a gathering point for the community women, and most of the women became members. That little girl became an administrative manager of the centre. One day when the women in the centre were sharing their experiences, a 60 year old lady expressed her view stating that she felt like a blind person because whenever she saw newspapers or any written text, she was unable to read. The rest of the women concurred because they too were unable to read. That discussion gave the girl who was running the centre another idea. With the consent of the women, she decided to start a literacy class.

Having no resources she had to arrange the reading writing material for those poor women. She went to the village school and organizations for help. With the help of community and students of local primary school, she managed to arrange a classroom. Daily, she delivers lessons to the women.

Of the girl who is teaching them to read the 60 year old woman said, “due to this girl we feel the beauty of world around us, it seems that words speak to us and we can hear them and can comprehend them”.

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PERSON A’S STORY

I went to school – it was nice.

I am not sure how old I was but my brother had been at school about two years when I arrived.

I attended school for three years and then my father made me stay at home because I had two younger family members. One was another brother and the other was a baby sister. She was not a happy baby. She cried all the time and I had to stop her crying. My father was very hard on me. I wanted to cry also because he hit me a lot. Being at school was good; although I had to walk a long way, and the teacher was strict. It was nice to do different things than looking after my baby sister and brother. We eventually got a TV and I just somehow knew that there was more in the world than my family and the village.

Now I am married and I came to this town. My husband is educated to matriculation level. I have my own children and they wanted to go to school. In spite of my husband having had an education he wanted to stop my two daughters from going to school. We fought badly over this. He hit me, but eventually he relented.

Because I could not read or write, and my husband was away working, my children had to write letters for me. I did not even understand what any of the gas and telephone bills were saying. I could not read the newspaper.

It was difficult because we all speak Pashto and the printed things are all in Urdu. But it was good going to the school. It made my head hurt, all the learning. My husband still does not really understand what the point of all this was. But I am pleased.
Person B’s story

I never went to school although my brothers all did. I was the middle of seven children – the others were all boys. I can remember asking to go to school. My father said there was no point as I would soon be promised in marriage and this meant that I had to learn how to be a good mother and wife. I felt I already knew all this as I was already helping out my mother.

I suppose I didn’t really know that I was, at that time, missing anything. It is only now that I know what I missed.

One day I heard one of my children saying that there was no point in telling their mother something, “she does not read or write”. I felt very sad. I had heard about this Taleem –e – Balgha in my street so I asked to meet the teacher. I have been coming for nearly three years now. I don’t feel sad anymore.

The teacher was very patient with us and we slowly, slowly managed to read, speak and write the Urdu. It is just enough for me to read the headlines on the TV news and a bit of the newspaper.

Some people thought we were silly but we did not give up, even when the school closed we have carried on with her.

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