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On "lives of quite desperation," Dr Maarij Syed introspects.

Dear friends,

I grew up in Pakistan during the 80's and like a lot of my fellow citizens shared a collective sense of amnesia regarding the events that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Over the years, I have tried to fill in these gaps in my understanding of the bitter history that culminated in the blood soaked events that preceded the creation of Bangladesh. During this time, I also found out about the plight of stranded Pakistanis (commonly referred to as Biharis) but assumed that over time the issue had been resolved. Little did I know that four decades later, nearly three hundred thousand people still live lives of quiet desperation in camps that were largely meant to be temporary holding stations for people that were seen as undesirables by the new country that they found themselves in. Despite some early efforts, the process of repatriation stopped within a few years and the people stuck in these camps started living a legal and social nightmare that continues to this day.

After moving to Indianapolis, I found out about OBAT Helpers; this organization represented an opportunity to do something constructive about the suffering

of the stranded Pakistanis. I have mainly participated in its education related activities since the two years that I have been a part of it. While it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the multifaceted needs of these camp residents, it is heartening to see that committed organizations like OBAT Helpers are making a positive difference in the lives of many people through education, health care and microfinance initiatives. I am grateful that our organization has found many sustaining partners whose help and guidance allows us to carry out our mission of helping these folks. However, as we expand the scope of our activities and try to reach more camp residents through a bigger and better network of services, our need to rely on our friends and supporters grows as well. While there is much to be done, our will and determination is strengthened by the knowledge that we can count on the support of our friends and our partners. I hope that we can all do our part in making this world a better place for the many Biharis/stranded Pakistanis in the camps, who find life a burden too heavy for their frail shoulders.

Sincerely,
Maarij Syed (Director at OBAT Helpers; Associate Professor Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology)

OBAT launches "Non-Formal Education and Adult Literacy" Project.

On January 11th, 2012, OBAT launched the "Non-formal education and adult literacy project" in the city of Saidpur. The objective of the three year project is to educate 900 women and 900 children living in destitute conditions in the camps of Saidpur. During the term of the project, the 900 children will be provided with coaching, enabling them to enter the mainstream education system. The women will acquire basic math, accounting and banking skills essential for their development. This will train them to engage in businesses of their own and hence work toward their financial betterment. At present, the women only have the ability to sign their loan applications.

The adult literacy activities also include education in primary health care (PHC) service delivery system, personal hygiene practices and sanitation, human and child rights, dangers of drug use, HIV/AIDS, and safe child birth practices among other areas. The project provides adult literacy in 10 camps. Each batch or class consists of thirty women. The classes are two hours long and occur in the afternoon, when women are relatively free of house work. At present, **805 women and 460 children** have been enrolled in the program.

Most of the enrolled children were born in the camps and have been living in abject poverty and despicable living conditions. Contrary to the Bangladesh population, the camp residents have no access to outside resources as they are isolated from the mainstream society. The average enrollment of children in primary schools in **Bangladesh is over 80% while only around 10% in the camps**. The literacy rate for women is **49% in Bangladesh and in the camps it is close to 5%**. Survey results and focus group discussions showed that there were no primary schools close to the Saidpur camps and no other organizations were running any types of education programs. The non-formal project will thus fill a big void and address an area in need of much attention.



Front view of the
Non-formal education center.

Reaching for the stars.... The power of education



Shabera with her parents

Twenty year old Shabera lives in Geneva camp in Dhaka with her parents and two brothers. Her father drives a rickshaw for a living while her mother is a home-maker. Shabera's older brother is a drug addict and only adds to the family's mounting

financial problems. The younger brother could only study up to grade four as the family could not afford to send him to school. Shabera tried to seek help from AWARD, a social welfare organization, to enable her to take her high school exams but was refused. The family dredged up some money which enabled her to sit for the exam. AWARD helped Shabera gain admission into college once the organization saw her great high school grades. Once her initial two years in college were over, Shabera wanted to pursue her education toward a professional degree. Common to the cultural set up of a poor, conservative family in that part of the world, her family did not want her to continue studying; they could not afford to educate her further.

Shabera was introduced to OBAT who supported her further education and she is now enrolled in the BBA program (Bachelors

in Business Administration) at the University of Bangladesh. In her own words, "I didn't ever think that I could be a student in a university. It is because of OBAT Helpers that I was able to continue my education. If they had not helped me, I could not have worked towards a graduate degree. It is because of Mr. Murtaza (Mr. Murtaza is the Finance Director at OBAT's office in Bangladesh) that I found out about OBAT. He came to my

house one day and told us about the organization. He made my family understand the importance of education and gave us hope. Really, all the staff of OBAT has helped me, for which I will always be grateful to them."

As is the case in all families, there are a lot of ups and downs in Shabera's household as well. Shabera handles them with confidence and by working harder than before. She contributes to

her father's income by tutoring children. She also volunteers for OBAT and teaches math at OBAT's tutoring center. Shabera is very proud to be a part of OBAT and her family is really happy about the support they are receiving. According to her mother, "We are really grateful to OBAT Helpers. Without their help, my daughter could not have studied further. I hope that the organization is able to help other children who want to study, just the way they helped Shabera."



Shabera tutoring kids to supplement her family's income.

"I didn't ever think that I could be a student in a university. It is because of OBAT Helpers that I was able to continue my education. If they had not helped me, I could not have worked towards a graduate degree." -Shabera.

Blurbs from Bangladesh...

On February, 21st, OBAT's schools at Rangpur and SB Nagar celebrated the international language day by organizing a student's rally and a Letters' exhibition (Known in Bangla as, Barna Mala Mela)

Students made English and Bangla alphabets using mud, paper, bamboo, wood and other materials. The drawings also represented the monument of Shaheed Minar (Dhaka, Bangladesh), which was built in memory of martyrs who were killed during the language movement. The exhibitions were attended by the general public and concluded with prizes given to the best drawings.

On 28th February, a day long teacher's training workshop was organized for all the education centers of OBAT in Chittagong. The curriculum of the workshop instructed teachers in the methods of teaching the English language. It was designed by Sohail Khan, OBAT's Education Coordinator.



OBAT SB Nagar School: Students pose in front of the exhibition table on Intl. Language day.



A teacher undergoes training at the teacher's workshop.

"OBAT Helpers is the reason I am proud to be a Hoosier,"

Professor John Clark, Indiana University, SPEA.

"OBAT Helpers is the reason I am proud to be a Hoosier," these were the words Professor John Clark, a visiting professor at Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs used to introduce OBAT at the Humanitarian Speed Dating event held by the SPEA program of Indiana University on January 25th, at the Athenaeum. Professor Clark, who has been hailed as "the foremost public intellectual in Indiana," by the Indianapolis Star, brought 15 non-profits together under the roof of the German-American landmark, the historical Athenaeum.

The quirkily named event was indeed a race against time for the participants as a representative from each organization took the podium for four minutes to describe their group, the importance of their work as well as how the audience could help them to thrive. Rania Hattab, OBAT's Director of Operations, captured the audience's interest by describing the emotive story of how Anwar Khan, OBAT's president, visited the camps in Bangladesh with just the intention to adopt a family and after witnessing the magnitude of suffering, formed OBAT to address the issues on a larger scale.

A networking session followed the speeches. Some of the groups had set up tables displaying their organization's literature. The groups mingled with each other and exchanged valuable info.

Thank you, Professor Clark and SPEA for letting us be a part of a wonderful event.



Rania Hattab, Director Operations, OBAT, speaking at the Humanitarian speed dating event.



Help bring precious smiles to the faces of the camps' children

*In order to meet the partial expenses
of our current projects, our immediate need is to raise*

\$60,000 (sixty thousand dollars)

by the end of April, 2012.

*Please help us raise these funds so we can continue our mission to empower
the forgotten people.*

May God bless you for your continuous support.

We are now accepting online donations and apologize for the brief period of website construction during which the feature was disabled.

Donations can now be made online at www.obathelpers.org via credit cards and PayPal. Thank you for your support.

H2O– Helpers to OBAT!

We are so excited to have a formal group of volunteers who will now be helping OBAT with wherever help is needed. More specifically, their mission is:

"Bring change, awareness, and growth to OBAT Helpers by establishing connections with local groups and corporations."

Please welcome our dynamic, young and energetic group: Arishaa K, Eracleo V, Fatima H, Hiba S, Mariyam K, and Valarie F.

Aptly named, the group intends to be the H2O that OBAT needs to thrive. They did a wonderful job representing OBAT at the recent Indiana University conference, "Changing the world through Social entrepreneurship" and volunteered at a local food pantry, Second Helpings. Thank you, H2O!

Meet our board:

Anwar Khan– President

Dr Talha Siddiqui– Vice President

Charlie Wiles– Secretary

Sue Deaton– Treasurer

Directors:

Afshan Khan

Dr Ayaz Malik

Dr. Maarij Syed

Shariq Siddiqui

Tabassum Ahmed

Tipu Ahmed

Help educate 425 impoverished preschool children in the forgotten Bangladesh camps

OBAT's Preschool project is listed on the website of Global Giving (www.globalgiving.org) for a fundraising campaign that will run during the month of April. Global Giving is a site that connects donors around the world with charities consisting of different parts of the world and causes.

We will be participating in the open challenge from **April 1st to April 30th**. Our goal is to raise **at least \$4000** during this month from **50 individual donors**. The emphasis is on 50 people donating toward the \$4000 amount. Once this goal is reached, OBAT can be a regular part of the Global Giving Community and continue to list its projects on this site, thus giving OBAT permanent access to countless donors worldwide.

Our preschool project is listed on the site www.globalgiving.org now. Donations can **ONLY** be made on this website; Global Giving retains 15% of the donated amount as its fee so donors are encouraged to cover that amount in their contributions. We encourage you to share this with your friends and families and help us attain this goal.



Here's how your donations can change these young lives...

- \$20** will provide notebooks for writing for 14 children
- \$50** will provide text books for 10 children
- \$100** will cover the expenses for chalk, teaching materials etc. for 50 children
- \$150** will provide chairs and mats for 300 kids to sit on.
- \$200** will provide training workshops for ten teachers. They will train them to teach preschool children according to standard methods of teaching.
- \$310** will provide annual salary of one administrative personnel (accountant or program supervisor)
- \$325** will pay for the rent of one preschool center
- \$450** will pay the annual salary of one teacher

Are you ready to take on the challenge? Let's bring smiles to the faces of 425 preschool children.

Please go to www.globalgiving.org to participate in OBAT's April challenge to raise at least \$4,000 to educate 425 preschool children. Find OBAT's project by clicking on "Find a project," and typing OBAT Helpers in the search box. Your donation will change the lives of several hundred children. **Thank you!**

The Promise of Preschools

OBAT Helpers is dedicated to ensuring that underprivileged kids living in camps in Bangladesh combat illiteracy and inequality with education. With seven elementary schools already up and running, OBAT is now giving the younger population of the camps a chance to attend school like all other children their age. OBAT Helpers' preschools prepare 4-6 year old children to pass the 1st grade entrance exam for government schools. These Bihari kids live in extreme poverty in slum like camps where there's no concept of literacy. Their parents are illiterate and earn a meager income. Continuing illiteracy will perpetuate their cycle of poverty and confine their children to earning minimum wages through back breaking labor. These children stay home with older siblings as their parents cannot afford to send them to school. In some families, older siblings work to supplement their family's income. The kids are among the 300,000 destitute Biharis, forever marred by poverty and illiteracy. OBAT recognizes that education is the only tool that will serve as a barrier between them and a dismal future.

The Bihari's were denied state education by the Government till the year 2000. Thus, over 95% of 300,000 Bihari's are illiterate and only about 10% of their kids are in elementary schools. Due to ethnic discrimination, they cannot find jobs or be assimilated into mainstream society unless they receive an education. The preschools enables the kids to get education that ensures their admission into mainstream elementary schools; hence ultimately empowering them to move out of the desolate living conditions of the camps and live free of poverty and with dignity, like the rest of the Bangladeshi citizens.

OBAT runs twenty preschool centers that are in need of funding to continue their operations. They have been opened in the following cities: Eight in Chittagong; six centers at Rangpur and six in Khulna. In collaboration with Humanity in Distress (HID), a local nonprofit in Bangladesh, a teachers training program was organized to train the teachers of the preschools. The total number of students enrolled in the program is **425**. The preschools are a one-year program during which 4-6 year olds acquire basic literacy skills which enable them to clear the test for admission into an elementary school. They are provided all essential supplies, textbooks and notebooks.

Instead of spending their days playing with marbles, close to open sewers, these little ones now get to hold books in their hands. This will open new doors for them to gain an education and establish positive relationships at an early age. Although these children sit on mats on the floor to study, they are happy to learn from the books that have been specially printed for them by OBAT. The preschools are a promise that could not be fulfilled for them by the society. Through these schools, OBAT is not only teaching the children basic hygiene and discipline; it is also laying the groundwork for making them champions of their own futures.