



## SUCCESSSTORY | Habib: Battered but not broken

### Bahaal Project | Emergency Relief And Early Recovery For The Flood Affectees Across Pakistan

Life is strange. One moment you seem to have a firm grip on it and the next it sweeps you off your feet as if you were standing on thin ice. But what makes it even more baffling is the fact that just when you think all is lost and hope becomes at best illusory, life picks you up and propels you forward. This is the cycle of life. Life is not about how you go down but about how you get up once you are written off for all money. This is I think the best way I can summarize the life of Habib, a 74 year old veteran of the village Moza Mandozwala located on the left bank of River Indus in the Union Council of Jhakar Imam Shah. This area in the north of the DG Khan district embattled against the extreme might of the floods; sadly the embankments along the Indus that stood as a fortress guarding the local community against one of nature's most destructive weapons were breached at many points. The result: 6 feet of water standing for more than a month in an area of over 6 square kilometers along both banks of River Indus.

"I still remember that fateful day when giant waves of flood water crashed into the houses of our village and reduced them to rubble in a matter of minutes. In a couple of days, a 6 feet high lake was formed in the area and there was no sight of land for miles. I am 74, but never in my life before have I seen a flood having such devastating power. Nor have I seen such cold fear in the eyes of my people. They were rattled if not shattered. They were battered if not broken. In a matter of a few hours they had lost their homes, livestock and all their possessions. I was no different," narrates Habib, who lives with his son-in-law and 6 grand children who are dependent on his care given the fact that their mother passed away a year back and their father is mostly out looking for work.

His story gets much worse once he started talking about the one month that he and his family had to spend on the Kacha (non-



Habib sitting with his youngest grandson.

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metalled) road that runs through the UC of Jhakar Imam Shah. With a wrinkled face and sore eyes, he continued talking about his ordeal saying, “the road was the only strip of land in the area that was not covered in water. We were provided with some tents by local and foreign NGOs in which we had to stay for a month till the water receded. Of my 4 cows and 3 goats only 2 cows were left. The rest became victims of the wrath of the floods. We could not even bring the remaining two cows with us to the road. They were left at a higher ground near our house and to feed them we everyday had to take a 5 hour long journey through the huge unforgiving lake using tyre tubes, taking with us minimal animal supplies. These resources barely kept the cows alive. My family was fed fairly well by the NGOs providing relief in the area. Seeing them alive is what kept me and my son-in-law’s heart beating.”

After a month, the recession of the water meant easy access to his livestock. However, this only served as a consolation for Habib’s family as their cows were on the brink of expiring and they had ran out of animal feed. These cows were the only asset they owned now. But like I said earlier, just when you think the tunnel you are walking in has a dead-end, the light of hope at the end of it appears from nowhere. For Habib and his family this light came in the form of a USAID funded Bahaal project team that promised him what he needed most. 2 bags of animal feed supplement and that too in the next 3 days. I could so clearly see how just the thought of this illuminated his face. He described the feeling by saying, “it felt like pure fresh air entering my lungs after being nearly choked to death.”

He said that he doesn’t remember a time when he had been more at peace in his life than he was for those three days. “It’s an exceptional feeling to have to know that you are in desperate need of help and you’ll be getting it just at the right time. After three 3 days the Bahaal team came back with the animal feed supplement and handed them out to the deserving people in our area. I couldn’t sleep the night before the distribution was to take place. I simply could not stop thanking God and His source (USAID) through which He bailed my family out of this tight corner. The following day I was looking forward to the animal food supplement just as a child is looking forward to eidi (money given to children by elders on the Muslim festival of Eid) on the day of Eid.” Habib recounted with a sense of childhood exuberance in his voice.



Habib standing next to one of his cows.

Habib told me that his cattle would not have survived for more than a week had he not been blessed with the Vanda (animal food supplement) provided by the Bahaal project. The Vanda he said not only brought the cattle back to their pre-flood shape but made them even healthier. The quality of Vanda given to him was the best he had ever used. He further said that the cows’ milk has become thicker and its quantity has also increased. Finally, even though he wished that he was given Vanda in greater quantity but still he was more than satisfied with the assistance provided to him through Bahaal. With a sigh of relief and a smile reminiscent of childhood innocence he concluded saying, “I have felt younger since I was given those two bags of Vanda.”