



BAHAAL (Relief and Recovery) story

Mohammad Nawaz: The Harfan-Maula (Master of all trades) of Shikarpur

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

If Abdul Sattar Edhi, the well-renowned Pakistani philanthropist, can be the face of hope, benevolence, resilience, determination, dedication and inspiration for Pakistan, then Mohammad Nawaz can certainly be the same figure for at least his village Garhi Dakho, if not more. On a cruel summer afternoon in Sindh, when temperatures regularly strike the 45 degrees Celsius mark, when sunflowers snub the sun and face away, when the birds simply refuse to litter the sky, the sight of a smiling white-bearded relatively diminutive man threshing his recently harvested wheat is one that can easily serve as a life-long motivation.



*Nawaz:
Threshing his
yield*



The floods came in July 2010; they brought with them unprecedented devastation and brought a populace of more than 20 million people already plagued by evils of load-shedding, corruption, inflation and the like, down to their very knees. With thousands of villages annihilated and their residents displaced, hundreds of thousands of livestock dead and thousands of acres of cultivable land rendered useless, the floods came with unimaginable audacity. The flood was like an Achillean menace that not many in the country had an answer for. It felt as if Mother Nature was unleashing its wrath that no one could escape from. But if it is Mother Nature than how can it have such abomination for its own creation? For me, or for any optimistic pragmatist, nature always has a good side to it. It can be acrimonious but not vengeful. It can be intimidating but not cunning.

Although the alluvian on the face of it came only with one purpose, obliteration; but in actuality there is much more than what meets the eye. Where there are agrarian lands that have seen their demise, there are those that have reached levels of productivity never seen before; where there are millions displaced, there thousand of those who for first time in their life know how it feels to live in a brick house of their own; where thousands have suffered from unavailability of drinking water, there are thousands of those who previously used to walk for miles to fetch water and now have water right outside their doorstep.



Shikarpur: Village Garhi Dakho a couple of months after the July 2010 floods

There were not many who saw the glass half full except for the likes of individuals like Mohammad Nawaz who generally have a very optimistic view towards life. The vast majority of the populace felt it was on the receiving end of an astronomical catastrophe; a catastrophe they will never be able to recover from. But within a year since the floods accursed the breathtaking valleys, the lush green plains and the sand laden lands and ambulating through them now one can sense an aura of normalization. Lands that gave the look of boundary-less lakes are blossoming with record levels of agricultural produce; villages that were razed to the ground have strong houses standing on the same grounds; lives that seemed to be written off for all money, are once again back in the mix, fighting it out not only for their survival but a better life.

Leading the resurgence are individuals like Mohammad Nawaz for whom the worst flood in the history of the country is not enough to rob his face of its smile. Mohammad Nawaz has been living in the village Garhi Dakho since his childhood and over the years has seen it evolve and progress. Albeit in the most modest of manners, progress, at best, occurred at a snail's pace. In relative terms, compared to the people of his village and the village itself, Nawaz's progress was swift and purposeful. Although he could not get any form of formal education, he through his sheer willingness and inclination towards learning was able to get hold of most of the trades that were being practiced in the area. His acuminous approach, his alacritous attitude and most importantly his wide childish smile even in the face of adversity have been the hallmarks of his life.



Mohammad Nawaz in the white turban, smiling childishly in time of adversity

The purpose of USAID funded Bahaal project was to provide early relief and recovery to the people of the flood affected areas of Pakistan but in essence it is an avenue for finding people like Mohammad Nawaz who see life as much more than just a survival game; who not only themselves want to stand back on their own feet but also help others in doing that. All they require sometimes is a little impetus to get started, and for him like many others the source was a likely one; the USAID funded Bahaal Project. However, reviving hundreds of thousands of lives through the Bahaal Project would not have been possible without the contribution of selfless altruism of personalities like Nawaz.

Mohammad Nawaz, in his early 50's seems to be a man possessed. His villagers call him the man with the golden arm. His children think he is the best father on show and his wife rates him above all others. He is strong at heart, versatile at mind, humble in character and a gem to look at when he is smiling. He is the undisputed Harfan Maula of his village and even acclaimed in the nearby villages of Shikarpur. From ploughing to seeding, from harvesting to threshing, from driving to masonry, from business to philanthropy, from making people smile to winning their hearts, Mohammad Nawaz is capable of accomplishing every feat. He is the village's man of the moment, the distant past and the near future. The part that is the most astonishing of all is not that he can and has done all of this, but it's the easiness with which he can carry out all of these tasks. You see him performing any of the aforementioned deeds and you'll never feel that he is trying. His adroitness at these tasks is as natural as a swimmer's ability to swim or a carpenter's ability to carve. For me, the biggest reason behind this is the fact that he is a gem at heart. Always willing to learn, always willing to improve, always willing to help and always willing to serve; these are the attributes of a person one looks up to in times of need and this is exactly why the people of Village Garhi Dakho think so highly of him.

Mohammad was an agri-input beneficiary of the Bahaal Project and has also been given a transitional shelter based on his family's dire needs. In a case study I wrote about him earlier I mentioned in detail the hardships he and his family had to face because of the devastating floods, and how they coped with them. Also I mentioned the intervention made by the Bahaal project in his life and how was it able to cater to his immediate needs, at a time when all seemed lost.



Nawaz being interviewed as an agri-input beneficiary



Nawaz standing in his field after sowing the wheat seed provided by Bahaal

Now almost a year has passed since the floods ravaged Mohammad's village of Garhi Dakho and the outlook of the village is one that has never been witnessed in the area before. It feels the village and its people have turned a corner. The worst has passed and future has better things in store for the villagers. This time when I entered the village on May the 3rd 2011, I was welcomed with an air of expectation. On the outskirts of the village there was acreage of productive agricultural land that where wheat had recently been harvested and was waiting to be prepared again. There were stacks of wheat produce piled up anticipating to be threshed. There was dust all around caused by a mechanical thresher that was roaring like a wild beast. As I made my way through the heaps of stacked up wheat, I was greeted by even a better sight. Tens of Bahaal brick houses were under construction with some of them close to their completion, giving the whole village a distinctly developed look. Not any new person visiting this village could make out the fact that it was obliterated by floods 10 months back. Bricks for the shelters were being manufactured within the village using the water from the hand pumps installed in different locations in the village.

Witnessing all this activity with my own eyes made me realize what wonders a steely resolve and support can do to a battered populace.



Left: Wheat stacked up about to be threshed



Right: Threshing in progress



Nawaz standing in his field after harvestation



Garhi Dakho after Bahaal intervention



Garhi Dakho: Women and her daughter taking water from a hand pump

All of these, from the wheat seed to fertilizers, from hand pumps to shelters, were provided to the village by the USAID Bahaal project. This was exactly the kind of support the village needed to see light at the end of the tunnel again. However, there was one more factor that was instrumental in the revival of this village and it undoubtedly was Nawaz. Since the start of this project he was in the thick of things. He not only prepared and cultivated his own lands with the USAID Bahaal provided agricultural inputs but also assisted the villagers in this regard. Then during the harvesting and threshing phase he was again the prime suspect in the assistance provision department. Furthermore, when the same village was assessed for the provision of transitional shelters his masonry and construction experience came to the benefit of the entire village. Because of his

experience the village had to pay minimum bills for skilled and unskilled labor that minimized the beneficiaries' own contribution reducing their burden considerably. And this was not all. He installed all the hand pumps in the village and constructed their platforms which also reduced the load on the pockets of the villagers to a minimum.



Nawaz standing on the right next to the hand pump he installed in Garhi Dakho

As far as his own life is concerned, Nawaz is delighted with the kind of assistance he has been provided with by USAID and is grateful for how it has helped his family in getting back on the road that leads to a better life. His crop yield is substantial this time around thanks to the timely intervention of USAID Bahaal project and the increased fertility of his land due to the floods. He said that he will use the profit from this yield to buy seeds and for paying expenses of land preparation machinery. He is ecstatic with the transitional shelter that has been given to him and wishes to improve it with time. With a glance towards the heavens and a huge million dollar smile he said that one day with Allah's help he will make this shelter into a proper house where each of his kids will have a separate room for themselves. He further said that the worst is over and he is not one of those who dwell in the past. He feels like he has begun a new life and this support from USAID will take him, his family and his village a long way. Without USAID's timely support things could have been very different.

Therefore, as they say that you cannot clap with one hand, and it takes two to reach the desired result. In the same vein the effort of either only the USAID Bahaal team, or Nawaz on his own would most likely not had been enough to deal with the disaster. It is about finding the winning combination to accomplish any feat and in case of the revival of Village Garhi Dakho that combination was found in strong cooperation of USAID and Nawaz.

