

Giving The Community A Voice



On a swelteringly hot afternoon in the off-grid village Basti Allah Dittah, men and women dragged *charpais* - woven beds - along the yard of a small house. Curious goats tied to a post in the yard looked on, as did the tiny children playing with them. Once the *charpais* were set in place in the shade of the sole tree in the yard, the men and women got seated.

This was the community's Village Health Committee, a group of locals who mobilized themselves so they could discuss various health problems in their community. The leader, Muhammad Shafi, stood up and welcomed everyone present. "Salam to my brothers and sisters, and thank you for attending today's meeting. As you are all aware, we have been campaigning on the benefits of birth spacing for our community for almost a year now. Family planning methods have long been considered to be against Islamic teachings by those who are aware of their existence, which in our community has been a small minority. Our work has been focused on spreading a positive message on the benefits of birth spacing", he said.

At this point, Shafi sat back down onto the *charpai*, and the focus shifted to a young woman wearing a purple head cloth. "My name is Nadia Bibi, and I have been working as a CRP for about a year now. I have been trying to touch lives by helping women learn of their choices, but the message hasn't always been received very well by the other members of the family," she stressed. "And that is why your support is still needed. As you are aware, a short while ago I



stumbled across a household in which the wife had borne 10 children, and was miserable. The husband and the rest of the family would not even entertain the notion of her having a conversation with me. They told me my work was unIslamic, and to leave. When I appealed here, Shafi *Sahab* went with me on my next visit and after speaking to the husband, managed to get me a sit-down with the woman. And a referral! She should be coming to the next camp,” she said.

There were murmurs of approval at her pause, after which Nadia Bibi continued: “We still have a lot of work left to do, there are many households that we are still to convince.” Following this, she promptly sat back down onto her space on the *charpai*. Two women, Iqbal Bibi and Kausar Bibi, then collectively told the group they would accompany Nadia on her visits to help her garner support. The group nodded their heads in agreement, following which Shafi stood up and thanked everyone for coming, and their time. “I appreciate all your efforts to improve our community’s wellbeing. We will continue to focus on spreading a positive message on birth spacing citing Islamic examples. We can use our future meetings to raise other concerns on our agenda as well, such as the quality of water we are getting in some of our wells.”

