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## A Medal for Peace

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*“Eight years ago, disappointed with my future I returned from Karachi to my village Khuram China. Gathering all my strength I started to look for work. One day I met staff of the LPH who were interested to introduce themselves to the villagers. Listening to their program I invited them over to my hujra and invited villagers to meet them. Looking at our keen interest the LPH helped us organize as ‘Taraqiati Jirga’. <sup>1</sup>They trained us on ‘community management skills’ and later in ‘leadership management skills’ through which we learnt to ‘prioritise’ what and how we wanted to develop our village. Thereon we learnt about livestock, flood prevention and first aid. We talked with people, shared experiences and raised awareness on how to promote peace. Along the way I got selected as the President of a Peace committee for the whole Mohmand Agency and one fine day I was awarded with a gold medal by PAIMAN Organization!.”*

**Liaqat Khan, President of Taraqiati Jirga, Mohmand Agency**

“Did you see a small fortress on the top of the hill when you entered Khuram cheena<sup>2</sup>? You can see such construction on many hills in Mohmand Agency. This was because of hostilities and rivalries among people that they had to make dwellings on an elevation. People live in large joint families so

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<sup>1</sup> Literal translation being ‘A Mediation for Development’

<sup>2</sup> Khuram Cheena is a village in the valley Gandao of Mohmand Agency in FATA

that they don't become a soft target for the rivals. Our forefathers also had rivalries and they lived in



this fortress. My grandfather Zulam Khan was born here. At that time, rivalry among two individuals meant rivalry among families and then among people of the entire village taking stances on either of the conflicting parties ultimately spreading its roots deeper into other villages also.

My father and we all grew under the shadow of such animosities, rivalries and guns. Seeking education was out of the question. My father was a

farmer and a middleman dealing in livestock. We were eight brothers. As we grew older our father wanted us to go to school, apparently he was fed up with this atmosphere of insecurity, bloodshed and animosity. When I was ten years old, there were only two people in the village who had Masters Degrees. My elder brother and I got admission in the school; we studied in the same class till primary and then middle school. But then in middle class, my brother failed the exam and disheartened with education left the school forever. I continued and finished my matriculation in 1994. Afterwards I continued and completed my Diploma in Commerce (D.COM).

Suddenly my family's financial condition deteriorated when my father became severely ill and couldn't work. At times we did not even have money to buy wheat flour. I was in a fix what to do for survival. On an empty stomach I went to a class fellow of mine who ran a grocery shop and explained the



situation my family was going through. I hesitantly asked if he could give me flour on credit. He felt sad for me and gave me an 80 Kg wheat flour bag but I did not have money to arrange for transport so he also gave me PKR 20 to take it home. Then I went to the vegetable seller, I inquired about the rates of the vegetables and I remember at that time the price of tomato was PKR 5 per Kg. The

seller was aware of my financial condition so he was kind enough to give me vegetables worth PKR 90 on credit. The food items lasted only a few days. During all this time, I was unsuccessful in searching a job for myself. I continued to take loans to make the family survive. Mentally stressed, I realised I had to do something more for my family. I was looking at the left over loan in my hand and knew it was not going to last long. My brothers and I decided to sell a little piece of land of about an acre at a nominal price of PKR 125,000. With this money we received medical treatment for my father, paid back my loans, bought grocery for my family to last long enough and with the left over money I

decided to go to Karachi which is the biggest port city of Pakistan to seek some work. Yet, I did not feel relieved. Selling off a precious piece of family land had made me feel homeless and even today it hurts.

While in Karachi, I searched for work for days. Finally I found work at Shahpur Industry. The manager noticed my performance and my education and promoted me as a supervisor. In 1999 the factory got shut down due to losses. My search started once again, this time being unsuccessful at finding work at a factory, I had to start working as a daily wager. I returned to my village in 2006. For the first 3-4 months I was uneasy, jittery and unstable. I could not decide about where to go and what to do. How to start life from scratch? There was an old tree in my house, I used to sit under the shade for hours wondering, looking at the sky. One day, gathering all my strength I started searching for work in the village outskirts. One day as I came out of the house to search for work, I met with some representatives of the LPH project. After greetings I asked about their visit. They told me that they want to meet with the people of the village because they wanted to start development in the area. I invited them to my hujra and at the same time I invited also other men from the village, there were about 20 – 25 people in my Hujra. In a friendly discussion the people from the LPH explained the program and we liked it. I somehow felt personally motivated and the activity appeared to me very meaningful for future of the village. After assessment of the village, they suggested formation of the 'Taraqati Jirga' with the mandate to work for the development of the village. I motivated the villagers to organize. So the Jirga was formed with the willingness of the people and with this started the new era of development in our village.

When we started working, we had no information about the government departments and how they work. The project organised a 'community management skills' training for us to understand the working of the organisation and responsibilities of the executive body and then later on we were trained in leadership management skills as well. We also went on an exposure visit to a Local Support Organization (LSO) in Nowshera. That was very good, as we observed practically how these organisations function. During the assessment of the village, different issues were identified and prioritised. The first priority was to construct a protection wall around the village to protect us from floods.

During the rainy season, most of the times, some of our villages would submerge. The flood water damaged the houses and also the crops. So we decided to control the flood water. The first development project was implemented with the assistance of the LPH project. The safety of our village as well as the other three were ensured, saving us from potential damages. Meanwhile we established contacts with other organisations working in the area. The Norwegian Refugee Council gave us trainings on Human Rights and local laws. There was another project named Hujra by World Food Programme in which we worked on the concept of 'work for food'. In another World Bank funded project we got 20 honey bee boxes to start working for the bees and their honey. We were also provided with the training on honey bee keeping in Peshawar. For three years it worked well and I had contacted a honey bee dealer in Peshawar for the sale of honey. Another project constructed a road to our village leading in from the main road whose construction we got to monitor. We managed to register our Taraqati Jirga as Village Development Committee (VDC) with the Forest Department. We planted 21,150 plants in our village.

The LPH also trained 15-20 locals on livestock management. Since then, the vaccination of the village's livestock has been conducted twice. The LPH also trained 4-5 members (including me) from our village in First Aid. Owing to this training, I handled burn emergency twice in my household. I was also trained by PAIMAN organisation in "gender and peace". In 2013-14 I was selected as the President of Peace Committee for the whole agency. We delivered sessions in 17 villages, sharing the experiences and raising awareness among people on how to promote peace. We also trained them on how to stay safe in an area full of landmines and what to do in case of a bomb blast. In recognition of my services for peace promotion I was honoured with a gold medal.

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<sup>3</sup> A room dedicated to the company of men's gatherings, in villages. A term used for a drawing room.

The NFE School was established by the government but was closed since long as there was no teacher. I contacted the government department time and again to make the school functional and then they asked me that you are also educated, why don't you start teaching the children as you are a resident as well. I wanted the children of my village to receive education, so I thought it as a blessing from God, and accepted their offer. Since October 1, 2015 I am serving as the teacher in the school. At present there are 21 children enrolled, my son and daughter are also studying in kindergarten and grade 1 respectively.



We have developed a Society for Rural Development (SRD) which is a network representing all the Taraqiyati Jirgas (TJs) in the area. At present there are 14 active TJs that will be the part of this network. We are in the process of registering this network with the political administration. I am also farming on my land, I cultivate wheat on 8-10 acres and also grow coriander, onion and tomatoes. But this year due to power breakdowns I could not grow more vegetables as it requires water. There is enough ground water but I do not have enough money to install a pump or tube well along with the transformer to tap groundwater as it costs around PKR 800,000 to install the whole system. I am planning to contact the Communication and Works Department (C&W) and some other organizations who work in the same. Besides farming I have a wheat flour shop in partnership with my brother. In this way I manage to earn a good amount of income which is sufficient for my family.

Tribals have realized the value of peace. Once this realisation dawned in, facilities have started pouring into our village due to our linkages. My Hujra has become a meeting point for discussing development issues and mediate disputes. It is a source of satisfaction that now instead of promoting rivalries and animosities the people encourage healthy discussion and avoid confrontations. Personally, my financial and social status has improved. I have a reason to live and contribute to people's livelihoods. Once I had nothing to eat and now I have made all facilities available to my children. Most importantly my children attend school, these are countless blessings of Allah inferred upon me and I express my gratitude for all these and more by being honest, truthful and thankful.