

Jacqueline's Journal

Pakistan

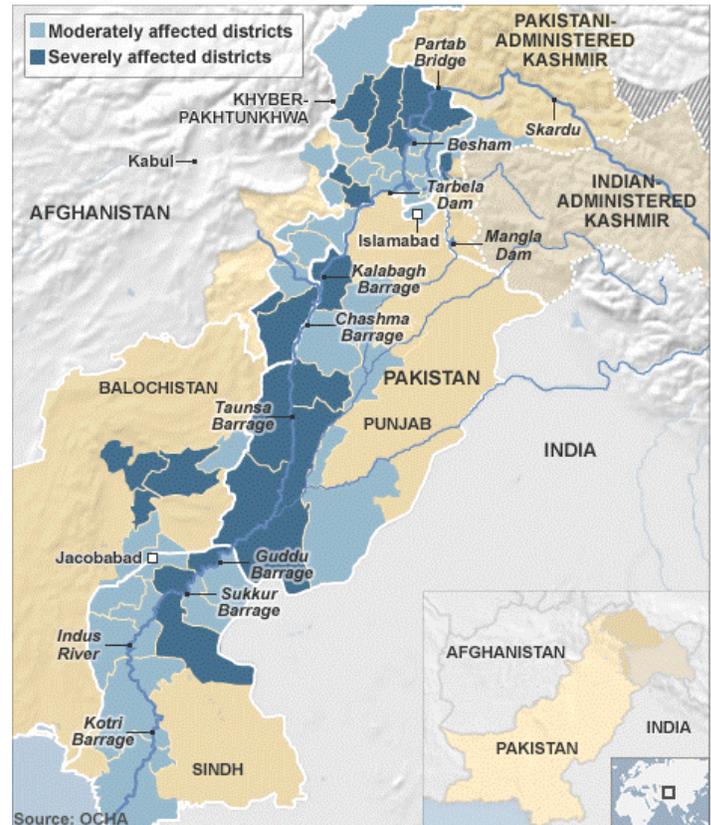
August 30 - September 5, 2010

PROLOGUE

I just spent five days in Pakistan with my husband, Chris Anderson, invited by Acumen's community to see for ourselves what is happening on the ground regarding the floods that have displaced 20 million individuals and destroyed 1.2 million (and damaged 4-5 million) homes. Over 5,000 miles of roads have been washed away, and some 7,000 schools and 400 health facilities have been destroyed. The loss of one-fifth of irrigation systems, livestock and crops is estimated to cost the country between \$5-6 billion. And cases of malaria are growing across the flood zones. It is impossible to articulate the full scope of the devastation. By any measure, the floods in Pakistan account for the worst natural disaster of the decade.

To say this is only a natural disaster, however, lets the human community off the hook. Most theories of what caused the floods point a finger at climate change, which dumped unusual amounts of rain this year and melted glaciers that sent more waters to the valleys. Illegal logging on the slopes of the Himalayas stripped the ground of natural water absorption protection. Population growth has pushed large numbers of people (mostly among the lowest-income) dangerously close to the river Indus. These factors – and more – helped create the perfect storm. Efforts to reconstruct a better, stronger Pakistan must address these issues, especially as many scientists predict that the country is currently in a four year “wet cycle.”

Chris and I spent time visiting camps and areas in southern Punjab and Sindh. Our hosts included Acumen global board member, Ali Siddiqui; investees Dr. Sono Khangarani of Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), and Dr. Rashid Bajwa of National Rural Support Program (NRSP); and Acumen friends Adnan Asdar (Karachi Relief Trust) and Nargis Rahman (Pakistan Women's Foundation for Peace). These individuals and their organizations underscore what is most hopeful about the situation: civil society is rising in powerful, visible ways across the country. Through the Mahvash and Jahangir Siddiqui Foundation, Ali is leading a private effort to support camps that feed and shelter 10,000 individuals. NRSP accounts for 400,000 people, and SRSO, 60,000. Aman



Foundation, another private effort driven by Arif Naqvi, has converted a fleet of ambulances to mobile health units that are serving flood victims around the clock. Never have I felt prouder to be part of the Acumen community.

While there, I kept a journal to record what we experienced each day. It is long and unstructured, a diary of sorts, filled with as many questions as insights. Indeed, the situation in Pakistan is complex. However, we ended the week with a deeper understanding of the situation on a structural as well as human level, and return more committed than ever to calling for smarter, focused action on supporting Pakistan today and into the future.

Pakistan's future hangs in the balance. The massive devastation has created unprecedented social, physical and economic dislocation. More than a million people are currently living in schools that are necessarily no longer providing education. The country is experiencing a significant wave of flood victims moving into cities; Karachi alone counts more than 60,000 refugees, and

many expect the number to rise to 200,000 in the near future – this to a city stressed by a lack of basic services, reeling from already high levels of joblessness, and wincing from growing levels of ethnic violence. Most of these individuals do not want to return to the rural areas, and are looking to government to assist them. Anger is rising in many of the camps. Ensuring visible signs of reconstruction – and job creation – is critical to a peaceful reconstruction.

The good news is in the growing strength of civil society.

As I wrote above, we experienced incredible efforts being undertaken by the private sector, NGOs and individual citizens who are stepping up to this enormous challenge. The best work collaboratively with the military and government, providing a new model for how a country can respond and rebuild more effectively than we've seen in the past.

We had a personal experience with this. Chris identified a TEDster, Michael Pritchard, founder and inventor of the LifeSaver filter technology, a 20 liter jerry can that can render the dirtiest flood waters completely safe to drink. We purchased 500 units and Ali Siddiqui worked with Air Blue to deliver them within several days from Manchester, England to Karachi. The jerry cans cleared customs quickly, Michael flew into Pakistan to provide initial training, and within 24 hours of arrival, Ali's foundation was deploying them successfully in camps. A number were given to Aman Foundation for ambulances, and others were supplied to the UN in partnership with Ali's work. This international, ad hoc collaboration created on the basis of trust enabled this small group of private players to bring a useful technology to a people in need at minimal cost. We need more such collaborations.

New and Better Models for Aid. International assistance can play an important role in identifying and supporting effective efforts, not only during the relief phase but also during reconstruction. Among just the Acumen community, we identified individuals and private organizations willing to give more than \$130 million, accompanied by their skills and networks to build lasting organizations and institutions on the ground to serve displaced communities into the future. A number are focused specifically on creating a network of health and education facilities. International organizations should bring matching funds to these efforts and support efforts to bring talented individuals (including a call to action to Pakistanis in the diaspora) to the country for this next, most critical phase.

Also of utmost importance, Pakistan and the international community need to bridge a significant trust deficit -- this is especially pertinent when it comes to the United States. We have a

major opportunity today to redeploy aid funding to reconstruction in a way that builds partnership, creates results and serves as a model for the values on which an interconnected world must stand – dignity, accountability, shared responsibility, mutual respect and learning. Acumen can support these efforts in various ways, and it is important that we represent first and foremost those affected by the floods who rarely have voice in the conversations that most affect their lives.

A Call to Action for All of Us. Though I've focused on macro issues and policy recommendations, there is a need for everyone of us to contribute. There is much to be done.

First, get informed via the website www.ontheground.pk – the site is a terrific reference for what is happening and how you can get involved. Post photographs and stories and be a part of this growing community that stands with Pakistan.

Second, give generously. Following is a list of recommended organizations.

- + **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** (<http://www.theirc.org>)
- + **Karachi Relief Trust (KRT)** (<http://www.karachirelief.org/donation.php#donate>)
- + **Kashf Foundation** (<http://www.kashf.org/>) To make a donation, contact CEO Roshaneh Zafar via her assistant Fatima Raja: fatima.raja@kashf.org
- + **Rural Support Program Network (RSPN)** (<http://www.rspn.org/>)
- + **The Citizens Foundation (TCF)** (<http://www.thecitizensfoundation.org/>) To give to TCF in the US, go to <http://www.tcfusa.org/>
- + **The Mahvash and Jahangir Siddiqui Foundation** (<http://www.mjsf.net/floodrelief.php>)

Third, spread the word. We've put together a short video of my photographs to underscore our shared humanity with the flood victims (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNgG-NTlYRA>). Send it to those you care about and those who should know about the situation.

Again, Pakistan needs all of us. And the world needs Pakistan, whose greatest treasures lie within each of its citizens.

Jacqueline Novogratz
New York
September 11, 2010

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FLYING FROM NEW YORK TO KARACHI VIA ABU DHABI

You learn a lot about relationships in times of crisis. September 11th reunited broken couples and caused seemingly united pairs to split. People came face to face with what was truly important to them and made decisions from the deepest part of themselves. It was a moment for truth. And action.

I believe that people have relationships with places too. And in a funny way, the spectrum of how we love and how deeply we feel applies to these places. As with all love, the more and longer you work at it, the more profound it becomes, regardless of how imperfect the object of your affection.

I've been watching the floods in Pakistan through the media with complex emotions: grief at the devastation, anger at the relatively paltry coverage of this massive tragedy, and at so many comments filled with hatred toward Pakistanis and Muslims in general, and a sense of helplessness around what I myself might be able to do.

We want to deepen our understanding of what is happening on the ground in Pakistan, and hopefully to bring back stories of hope, stories of what we might do better to bring positive change.

Last week, my husband Chris and I had a dinner party with guests who work mostly in the media and international development. Our conversation touched on the Islamic center in New York City and why the media has been so lame on the floods in Pakistan ("There were 80,000 deaths in Haiti and only 1,500 in Pakistan," was the bottom-line answer). I found a growing discontent inside me, a frustration that I was talking and not doing more.



The crisis in Pakistan is an opportunity for a global humanitarian effort, a new way of thinking about relief efforts.

For me, the demons often come out at 3 a.m., harsher versions of thoughts that pass through me when the sun is out. I woke my husband, telling him how far away I felt from friends and colleagues working hard on the ground. Twenty million people are displaced from their homes, and yet the world is doing too little. I spoke of my strong sense of connection and responsibility. Chris, too, has a deep connection: he was born in Pakistan and spent part of his childhood in Sindh. He understood the feelings, promised we would do something, and didn't forget about it the next day.

A week later, we're on an Etihad flight to Karachi via Abu Dhabi. Chris also explored a new water filtration technology developed by a TEDster, Michael Pritchard, and we helped bring a load to Pakistan. We're eager to see how the filters work, to learn about the specific difficulties of distribution and utilization in this disaster situation. Mostly, we want to deepen our understanding of what has been happening on the ground in Pakistan, to meet with members of the Acumen community and others who are doing so much to help, and hopefully to bring back stories of hope, stories of what we might do better to bring positive change. We wouldn't be here without the support of so many, including Acumen's board member, Ali Siddiqui, our country director, Aun Rahman, my assistant Katharine Boies, and Chris' assistant Yesenia Martinez. To them, we're already deeply grateful.

As we leave the Abu Dhabi airport to board the bus to the flight to Karachi, we are hit by the hot, humid air of this Middle Eastern country. It seems like only minutes before that we were boarding in New York on a gorgeous day in the last week of summertime. We look at each other and smile, ready for this adventure, and probably more humbled than anything else.

August 31, 2010

KARACHI-ROJHAN-SINDH

Our flight arrives at 2:15 in the morning. The first person I see as we walk through the exit doors is, of course, Aun Rahman, our country director, who gives a warm, generous greeting despite clearly being tired. We are at the airport hotel by 3:15 and try to get to sleep quickly, knowing our pickup is at 6:30 this morning. Alas, I don't sleep a wink, though I find a certain peace listening to the early morning birdsong and the call to prayer. It is the month of Ramadan, and I imagine everyone fasting across the country, including those who have lost nearly everything. There is such grace in the discipline of the fast, never more so than in these difficult days.

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In the early morning light at the airport, we're greeted by Saira Siddiqui, Ali Siddiqui's beautiful wife. She is long and slender with straight brown hair and soft eyes and wears a light blue shalwar kameez. She is accompanied by six others, mostly colleagues of Ali's and her brother (also named Ali) who has just arrived from London. We are ushered through security and embark on a flight on JS airlines, a company owned by Ali's family. He's been so effective in working with the UN in large part because he's been so generous using the distribution capacities of the family's companies.

Saira hands us each a map and an itinerary for the day. We fly north for an hour and half over endless grey lakes that were once fields of green to Rojhan in the Punjab province, right on the border with Sindh. The area has been hard hit: Punjab has seen 8 million people displaced, and more than a half million houses badly damaged. Even now, I can't imagine the short- and longer-term implications of this. Much of the country's canal system – one of the most extensive on the planet, and a key lifeline for agriculture – is severely damaged or destroyed. Replacing the washed-away infrastructure will require tens of billions of



Ali Siddiqui and his family are helping thousands of flood victims.

dollars. A huge majority of farmers have lost their crops, and many won't see another harvest till late next year. How will they survive between now and then? The waters are still rushing, staving off disease for now. But what will happen when the floods begin to recede and the water stands still, enabling diseases like cholera and typhoid and malaria to breed relentlessly?

Ali meets us at the tiny airport. He has grown a beard and lost weight during the past few weeks. He's been spending five days a week on the ground, running camp operations serving 10,000 people in collaboration with the Pakistani police, the military and the United Nations. Despite the heat and the fact that it is so hot, he also has been fasting daily for the month of Ramadan. I'm proud to know him.

We pile in cars to drive to Mithankot Camp, a place of refuge for 2,500 individuals displaced by the floods. It was started by the military and then given to Ali's conglomerate, the JS group, to run. The JS Bank has branches in 50 cities and the backroom support there runs most of the relief logistics.

The road to the camp crosses sandy earth – not what I expect in a flood zone. We pass several groups of camels, their backs and haunches caked with mud, walking down the road. Along the roadside are scattered tents in groupings of four or five housing people who've lost everything. Cars fly within feet of these temporary homes that sit within feet of the water's edge on their other sides.

Suddenly, the monochromatic palette shifts, and the land becomes green. This is Punjab, the harvest belt of Pakistan; the state begins to live up to its name. Fields of rice paddy and wheat are pushing through the ground – life perpetuating itself. Every now and then we see a pond with buffaloes or children swimming. At first glance, it doesn't look like an affected area.

Thirty minutes later, we reach the camp. Nearly 200 tents stand beside one another. Some have been donated from Iran; some, from USAID, and I smile at the sight of the two branded tents standing side by side. The U.S. version initially seems to make little sense in this hot region. Actually, it isn't a tent at all, but a tarpaulin hanging over bamboo poles, though flood survivors complain that the heat can be unbearable beneath the rubbery tarpaulins. They are also exposed to swarms of flies and mosquitos; and malaria has begun to make an appearance.

In truth, the ubiquitous USAID tarpaulins provide shelter and at least some sense of personal space. The plastic sheeting can be used later by families to cover their roofs when they are finally able to rebuild. While it is important not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good, the world also has a chance to consider designing processes to determine which inputs work best for given situations.

Even more intriguing are integrating local, cost-effective solutions. Tariq, a reknowned architect, tells us about a kit he's developed to enable refugees to build their own semi-permanent shelters made of bamboo and thatch. It costs the same as a tent but gives people ownership over building their own shelter and can be produced with available materials in Pakistan. Moreover, once the crisis is over, individuals can carry them back to their villages for temporary shelter while they are building permanent houses.

We need more such innovations – and stories of how they work (and how they don't). What I like about Tariq's innovation is that it uses local materials, local labor and has a second life as well. This is also not the only answer: tarpaulins are needed as well in a crisis of this scale. Designing better processes for rapid analysis and deployment of appropriate technology solutions, however, should be part of any well-coordinated national or regional relief effort.



Providing appropriate shelter is just one of many challenges for the camps.



Many families have lost their livestock, their most valuable possession.

We stop and talk to a man named Humayan who stands drenched in sweat beneath a tarpaulin with 16 family members. He is a tractor driver who tells us he earned good money before the floods. Now, his tractor is under water. He and his family only arrived at the camps yesterday – they had been living at the railway station for three weeks when they heard about the camp's existence. Humayan says he's happy to be here – he appreciates the shelter, the water, the food. He knows the family might be there a while. In the morning, he tells us, he went back to check on his house. He swam across the river only to discover it had disappeared entirely. As he speaks, tears fill his eyes. His wife adds tearfully that they have nothing but the clothes on their backs and haven't a clue how to restart now that both house and tractor have vanished.

I look at the family of proud people, this man with the pained expression, his brood of scruffy-haired children smiling shyly, his anxious wife. Could I ever be as patient? Could I sit quietly in a hot tent waiting?

I notice a little boy named Imran. He is dressed in a tan shalwar kameez. His eyes are piercing, hot and angry. He stands with fists on hips, lips pursed, a tiny pipsqueak who has seen too much sadness and felt too much fear in his young life. I want to hold the child, to make him laugh somehow, to give him joy. I give him the blue cap that Ali had just gifted me. When Ali and his brother-in-law had given their caps, the children squealed with delight. Imran, by contrast, just continues glaring. Ali teases him, calling him Imran Khan – no response.

Maybe this little man is the most honest person here. His anger is raw and he doesn't hide it. I bet he'd fight if he could, and imagine a rage rising from knowing how little control he has in a world that ignores him.



Young Imran has every reason to be angry.

People in the camp represent diverse ethnicities and tribal families. This is the first time most have lived in a “mixed community.” Consequently, many do not wander far from their tents, and the site had to ensure that at least five feet of distance between tents. At the same time, the diversity is a great opportunity, though a constant leadership presence is needed to encourage interaction. A community area or place where films or games could be played might help.

A group of men tell us they feel like “lame horses.” The men cannot go home to solve their problems there, and have no work or source of income in the camps. In spite of clear tensions among groups, they say they would gladly work together for they are “like brothers.” I do believe that work rebuilding and strengthening infrastructure and communities could indeed be a powerful unifying force.

We visit a newly erected school, constructed of fabric hanging over bamboo poles. Fifty or sixty youngsters sit on the ground while being taught English and

Urdu. It isn't clear what kind of curriculum the teacher is following, but the idea of using this time as one to educate children is a powerful one. What the children learn, however, matters, as does which children in the camps are given the chance to study. Camps are just starting to think about how to bring schools to the children, and if done right, could open minds that might not otherwise have had the chance to attend school.

At the second camp, we meet Lt. Col. Tahir, a fit soldier with jet black hair, light grey eyes and a prominent moustache, wearing a khaki t-shirt and camouflage pants. He stands in front of a large map of Pakistan with a silver-tipped wooden pointer. The area is devastated, he tells us. “It was caught between the waters rushing down from the hills in the west and from the overflowing Indus River in the east. Many people were engulfed before they knew what was happening. These are the people who lost everything and were lucky to remain with their lives.”

Lt. Col. Tahir recites the too-familiar statistics: 18,000 houses damaged, 10,500 completely destroyed, thirty percent

of crops lost in this area alone. His men have been responsible for coordinating and ensuring that people are safe and gaining access to life-saving services like shelter, food and water. He's also hoping a government subsidy program of 20,000 rupees (about \$250) comes through for each family. “I've seen so many families get their cooking oil from USAID and then turn around and sell it immediately on the market, not because they don't need it. They do it out of desperation to buy seeds and fertilizer, for this is their future.”

The army creates an impressive presence and seems to be the real game in town, despite its mixed reputation. We see little sign of civilian government involvement in the camps, on the roads, anywhere we travel. We hear tales of corruption: many are losing faith in the civilian government. At the same time, if government can prove that it can serve the people now, as someone says during the day, “They will be able to stay for a very long time.”

In the late afternoon sun, we visit a camp called Kandhkot in Sindh, organized and run fully by the Mahvash and Jahangir Siddiqui Foundation. Fields of green sprawl



Some camps are erecting schools for children.

in the distance, but the 100 tents and 820 individuals inhabit a patch of dry dirt. The tents stand one after another, each family sitting together beneath their tarpaulins to avoid the sun's heat, harsh even at this point of the day. It must still be over 100 degrees and near 100 percent humidity. Rivulets of sweat run down my face – and I arrived at this place in an air-conditioned car.

A young woman named Mairani lies with a tiny child on a rope bed beneath a plastic tarpaulin. She gave birth six days prior, but only today did she name her new son Wahid Ali. Her face, framed with a chartreuse scarf, is exhausted, spent. Flies walk across her face and dance in circles on her arms and legs, but it takes too much energy in the heat to shoo them away. She, her husband and mother had to flee their home which has since washed away. Their sudden exodus made it impossible to bring any belongings. Both mother and daughter have only the clothes they were wearing three weeks ago. Indeed, Mairani wears the same shalwar kameez in which she gave birth.

The young mother can't talk about her son's future, not yet, not while he is so vulnerable, not while her world is so fragile. The little boy, tucked under a makeshift canopy held up by a bamboo stick is sick with fever. Mairani's mother sheds tears as she asks for help, her hands folded in prayer. "Please bring to us mosquito repellent, for the insects are strong here, and we have this infant child." Mairani's husband is somewhere in the camp but his mother-in-law makes clear that he does little for the family. What is the future of her tiny child?

The feeling of this camp is markedly different from the ones in Punjab. Northern Sindh is one of the poorest parts of the country, with the largest feudal lands and highest number of sharecroppers. This area is also known for honor killings and the second class status of women. The education level is abysmal, and you can feel a sense of helplessness almost internalized in the people, from the youngest to the oldest.

Children gather to greet us but are quickly shooed away by uniformed policemen. They move quickly back to their tents. An enormous challenge – and opportunity – is to move victims from perceiving themselves not as passive recipients of charity but, instead, as empowered individuals changing their lives. There is a real opportunity to build a stronger Pakistan now. So many people – literally, millions – are now experiencing things they've never before seen or possibly imagined. They are mixing with new people – and are organized in such a way that ideas and education can circulate easily. The ground is fertile for change.

Something as simple as toys to engage children matter. The children here have been traumatized and need a sense of hope and fun. They – and their parents – also need clothes and pots and pans



Mairani worries about the future of her newborn son.



Tents offer little relief from the heat and little sense of security.

and everything else you can imagine. Think of your family suddenly stranded and living beneath a tent – all of you under one – with nothing but the clothes on your backs for a month. Then, try to imagine that everything you once had is gone. You have little or no education and five or six mouths to feed. Importantly, you have no connections to people with power to make things happen. What do you do? Where do you go when everything you've known is under water? So the people sit. I think that's most painful of all.

As the sun sets, the whole world looks more beautiful; it is the magic hour. Light reflects on water and rice paddies. Boys walk alongside their cows, slender shadows sparkling in the distance.

I can't get the difference between this camp in Sindh and the other in Punjab out of my mind. The people here have more of their material goods – many of the colorful Sindhi quilts and fabrics are stored inside the tents, and one woman showed us stacks of pots and pans. But the attitude is one of dispassionate acceptance, a sort of endless waiting with vague expectations for no one to come.



Whole families must start over.

The listlessness may have something to do with the fact that the heat is intense – it must be over 100 even after sundown. But that can't explain it all. Who we are and what we believe we can be has everything to do with what we become.

We drive to the Indus Highway to see where a breach upstream has flooded the highway and sent rushing waters throughout southern Sindh, submerging large parts of the land, rendering hundreds of thousands homeless. Some say a government minister ordered the breach to protect his own lands, but a colonel assures us he witnessed the breach and claimed it was “a fully natural phenomenon.” Later, Dr. Sono corroborates this story.

We hope to take boats to visit villages that are fully cut off due to flooded roads. We reach the end of the highway, and the sight makes me suck in my breath – water submerging the road for at least fifty kilometers. I've seen the Indus nearly dried up in times past, just a sliver of water through large tracts of arid land. Today it looks more like a giant lake or bay, rising midway up the trees, hiding nearly everything else beneath its whirling surface.

We hear that a brigadier general is arriving in his helicopter and might take a boat himself to see the work of his troops. The news slows us considerably: we can't move until he arrives. Soon after the military helicopter lands, we're told we need to wait until the general has left.

It is unbelievably hot, strangely hotter than it has been all day. We take advantage of the general's arrival to get a briefing from Colonel Sheheryar, an impressive officer in charge of executing the military's relief strategy in the district. He reminds us of the effectiveness of the military as well as the police, not through his words, but through his organized approach. He doesn't even seem to notice the flies congregating on our ankles and arms as sweat drips down our backs.

After waiting an hour or so, Ali shares the news that it's too late to make it to the airport before dark, and the tiny airstrip has no lights at night. We decide to make the four hour drive to Sukkur by road to see more of what is happening in Sindh and to meet with Acumen investee Dr. Sono. Before embarking on the full journey, we stop to break the fast at the military guesthouse where Ali generally stays.

The road to Sukkur is known for bandits, especially at night. We drive in a convoy of six cars., talking about life and dreams the entire way. I watch the silhouettes of trees and oxen and oversized trucks as they appear and then disappear as if in a dreamlike dance in our vehicle's headlights.

We drop off Ali, Saira, Ali and friends at the small airport and greet Dr. Sono, one of Pakistan's great social entrepreneurs. Dr. Sono was born a dalit (lowest caste) in the Thar desert and has given his life to building community and empowering individuals in Sindh. We've worked with him for years now as he's tried to bring affordable drip irrigation products to Pakistan's poorest farmers. His spirit is indomitable. He should be getting any rest he can, for he's been working around the clock throughout the crisis. Instead, Dr. Sono insists on taking us to our guest house and then waits while we have a vegetarian feast at one in the morning. There is something about Pakistani generosity that never ceases to humble.

**Now is the time to bring education,
encourage inter-tribal activities, help
individuals actually become part of the
development process.**

Thursday, September 2, 2010

SUKKUR, SINDH PROVINCE

Another sleepless night – 90 minutes of slumber. Dr. Sono joins us for breakfast at the guest house. His thick silver hair is longer than usual and he looks more tired, but his eyes still dance and he's characteristically optimistic, even in the midst of these tragic floods. “Everything is changing,” he says, “so there is chance to ‘Build Back Better,’ to change existing systems and give people greater freedom so that they don't return to serfdom but instead take control over their lives. Everything is new for the flood survivors. For many it is their first time in cities, using toilets, meeting new kind of people. Many will see they can't go back to the way they were before. I see the chance to create new cities, better cities with good infrastructure – schools, roads, opportunities for people to find jobs and start to dream about the future. We can't lose this chance, for we may not get one like it for a long, long time.”

His nonprofit organization, Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) is one of the largest providers of relief in the province. Already, he has received more than \$5 million from government to serve over half the districts. Regarding corruption, he says, “I don’t see it. You see, I have refused to play the game for many years. After showing up repeatedly and waiting patiently without paying, people have learned not to ask me anymore.” We’ve seen this same pattern with many of our investees.

Dr. Sono’s community knowledge and connections enabled him to respond immediately to the crisis. He himself witnessed the devastating breach of the Indus, and recognized that thousands would die downstream if his organization didn’t respond within hours. His team hired 40 trucks on the spot and rented five warehouses. They rented cars and made their resources available to the UN, the army, everyone. SRSO ultimately provided logistical support and coordinated the majority of NGO activities.

SRSO is now feeding 40,000 people twice a day in the many camps started by the army and others that they support with food and supplies. Each day, the organization brings cooked rice, chapattis and lentils, all financed by the government. They deliver dried food supplied through the World Food Programme, and build latrines with support of UNICEF. SRSO also delivers clean water through tankers and hand pumps. Their local status, combined with good relationships with the UN and others, enable this effective, widespread execution.

But what really distinguishes Sono and the SRSO team is that they listen and involve communities in decision making. To respond to how much people value their livestock, SRSO provides fodder and areas for cattle and goats to graze. They’ve purchased fabrics in bulk and hired village girls to do the stitching over 10,000 garments to respond to women’s

In the SRSO office, a basic structure with bookshelves along the walls and two fans overhead, sit about 20 women and 25 men. They’ve been working around the clock to help villagers in Sukkur and Shikarpur. We ask for inspiring stories. Dr. Sono’s executive tells us that the team itself is gathering personal money to buy clothing for children to give on the feast day of Eid. “The children have no clothes, and we want to give at least 20,000 of them a gift,” he says.

“Some people left their parents with their houses to guard their properties when the floods came,” says a second man, dressed in a pale blue shalwar kameez. “Some of those old people were swept away, and some are dying due to illness or starvation.” This isn’t the inspiration we are looking for.

A third shares a story about a woman who is living in an abandoned school, caring for her children and working as a tailor to earn



SRSO is coordinating relief efforts, distributing food and supplies to survivors.

additional income. “We never expect that among women,” he says. Most people are just waiting for others to help them.

In this tragedy, most survivors have lost at least a season of their crops, and many have lost livestock, their only other wealth. The men seem especially helpless. Sono worries about how to transition families from a state of total dependence to self-sustainability, given that so many are starting all over again.

And tonight, two more cities are expected to flood.

A mile or so outside the center of Shikarpur, the highway breaks where the river now runs across it. The breach at Thari near the Guddu Barrage in northern Sindh diverted the river, and a raging rush of water ran from the north of the state to the south. At this point, the highway is submerged for 50 kilometers. Across the river, the railway tracks have collapsed as well.

The sight of so much destruction is surreal; it feels more like a movie than real life. But this is life for millions now – stranded, on their own, carrying their worldly possessions on their backs. At the water’s edge, to my right and left, hundreds of people sit huddled on the banks, their meager belongings around them. A string of 60 or 70 people walk slowly through water that rises well above their waists at points – and if they are very young, to their chests or necks. A father carrying a load of belongings wrapped in white cloth on his head, holds tightly onto his little boy’s arm. They are both dressed in blue. Some men hold enormous burdens, supplies for their families in bulky bags, their backs hunched with the weight, their feet steadying their bodies against the current. The oldest people walk slowly, their faces sagging with hollow resignation.

A few wooden boats painted in bright blues and yellows ferry people back and forth. They look built to hold four to six, but I’ve counted more than 20 in some, never less than 18, so the boats

ride low in the water. We've only eight in ours and a huge rush of people try to jump in with us. I feel ashamed that we're here only to witness, wondering how we'll give back.

I tell Dr. Sono we don't want to take precious space, and certainly are not here for "disaster tourism." He insists we continue: "I want you to understand, and it is almost impossible unless you see it for yourself."

We drive to a 100-foot break in the road where the bridge washed away. A few boys stand at one end, looking across the divide. "It might be years till this is all repaired," Dr. Sono says, "but we need this infrastructure now. We needed it yesterday." He pauses, then looks across the water. "Look at that railway line – gone." The mangled railroad track slopes upward, its jagged ends pointing to the sky. The tracks don't start again for at least 100 feet, maybe more. "How long till we have a proper railroad again?" Dr. Sono asks.

I feel a more human understanding of the disaster than I did yesterday. Now, I see the people trying to get home, not knowing where home is anymore. Now, I see the indignity of sweating daily in this relentless, wet heat with only a single thing to wear. At least men can remove their shirts and let them dry in the sun. It is harder for women, and more important that they change clothes.

I think of the fear and despair that knock at every mother's door as they sit among flies and strangers, waiting for food rations and water. I also am more aware of the seething anger beneath the veneer of calm – it is evident in so many exhausted faces and backs bent with sorrow. Times will get more difficult before they get better.

A family sits on the water's edge. Among them is an old man holding a cloth umbrella, squatting on the ground. Children wave



Families wait at water's edge.



SRSO delivers food twice daily to the camp in Shikarpur, which serves 500 refugees.

at family members as they walk across the water. Two women, obviously sisters, share secrets, their hands cupped around one another's ears. Multiply this by 3 million families...

A thirty-minute drive through the center of Shikarpur to visit camps supplied by SRSO. Shikarpur, once a literary center, is crowded and poor. The city center's narrow streets wind in every direction. Auto-rickshaws press into one another, skirting around fruit stands and pushcarts full of flowers and spices. Two guys with mirrored, aviator-framed glasses move slowly on their motorcycles, and police sirens scream from every direction. On the other side, we come upon rice fields and pastoral scenes. Within a few minutes, we arrive at the camp.

Situated in a state college, the camp serves 500. The government shut down a number of schools to make way for flood victims. Now it wants to move the people out to tented camps, but most want to remain in the schools. I don't blame them. This place is far better than the camps we've seen. The insulated concrete walls provide real shelter from the heat, unlike the plastic tarpaulins that exacerbate it. People can have some privacy, though two or three families must share a single room (often totaling 20 or 25 people in a 10'x15' enclosure). The common areas are cool and open, and it is the first time we've seen a camp where people from different tribes mingle with one another.

SRSO delivers two shipments of food daily to 60,000 individuals. Big plastic bags of freshly made chapattis sit on the floor. A worker dressed in pink and green kneels beside them making packages of chapattis, lentils and rice for individual families. Hungry men and women wait patiently in line, wrapping their rations in cloths before carrying them to their families.

A mix of men and women receive the food. Some of the women wear tribal dresses, beautifully embroidered in bright color combinations – orange and brown, purple and red. The place is

relatively clean and feels lighter than any we've yet visited. Dr. Sono's team has worked hard to build a culture of contributing inside the camps: we see a number of women cleaning the hallways. Not all of the camps have been successful, but this one is on its way.

The majority of children suffer skin diseases. A woman tells me that diarrhea is common. The former is occurring, in part because everyone has only one set of clothing to wear. During these hot and humid days, people sweat and then the clothes dry only to get wet with sweat again. Most kids have prickly heat, but many also have what look like boils on their chests and necks. There are many with shaved heads, and still, they are kids. They want to ham for the camera and shake my hand. When all is said and done – whether about disease, education, insecurity or a sense of isolation, this emergency is a children's emergency.

SABIHA AND ASMA

We're back at the SRSO office and meet with Sabiha Bhutto and Asma Soomro whom Dr. Sono introduces as his "commandants." Both women carry serious expressions that give them gravitas and weight. Asma wears a black shalwar kameez and an olive-and-rust tropical-print shawl over her head. Sabiha wears red-and-white narrow-striped cotton. These two women led others to mobilize 80,000 people during the flood emergency.

I ask what they learned from the experience. Asma responds, "We learned to really go to their level, speak their language, feel what they would feel and build trust." This is classic social organizing language. "During these three weeks, I met a 90-year old woman. She wanted to see how other people were coping in the disaster because she herself had gone through crises and was herself prepared for what might come. This inspired me a lot."

Sabiha speaks as much with her eyes as her hands. She remembers the sense of panic among people in Shikarpur who were understandably terrified by the threat of floods. "I spread calm to the people, and promised that Shikarpur would make it through the floods. I urged them to help those who were really in need." When local residents wanted to cross the river, she stopped them. She could see what others could not – buffalos flying through the churning rapids, most of them drowning. Her neighbors trusted her, and lives were saved. I ask what she had learned. "I realize what it means to be brave," she answers.

Neither Sabiha nor Asma consider being a woman a hindrance, even in conservative parts of Pakistan. "People know that we are here for them," says Sabiha. "We've earned their trust." Between them, they've delivered sixteen women to the hospital to enable them to give birth during the crisis period.



Sabiha Bhutto and Asma Soomro helped thousands escape the flooding.

Dr. Sono jumps in, "Last week, I received a phone call from a nearby village. The caller said people were drowning. And you know, I love that village." His eyes twinkle so that you can feel that love. I adore Dr. Sono for being so exquisitely alive and caring. He continues, "I called Sabiha and Asma and told them to go to the village and help people escape before the flood waters came. It was 10:30 at night, and still they went. This is a dangerous area, and women especially can be killed going out at night. But they went. And by midnight, the village was empty and there was not a single drowning."

The conversation turns to Pakistan's future, and what can be done about corruption. "Corruption is a big problem here. But we are seeing changes. We have minimized corruption at the district level, and now we have to translate that to the top level. We also have to focus on educating people at the grassroots, too, so that they begin to question government. This way, we can start to end corruption." This way, the world can change.

As I listen to Dr. Sono and these two extraordinary women, I'm reminded of the true power of Pakistan, the power in its people and in the rise of civil society. It might not be immediately apparent but you can see it everywhere. Dr. Sono speaks the language of collaboration, courage, self-sacrifice, determination and inclusion. He dreams a Pakistan where all people can access services. Sabiha and Asma show no insecurities about being women. They risked their lives going to those villages at night, but they saved their fellow citizens.

It has been a gift to work with Dr. Sono through Acumen over the years. He is a teacher and a mentor, and I'm one of his biggest fans. Over lunch, I learn that it is his birthday today, and I tease him about spending it in camps for the internally displaced. "What better thing could I be doing?" he asks with a smile.

Indeed.

KARACHI RELIEF TRUST CAMP

In the center of Shikarpur is a camp built in an old building whose elegance of days gone by still shines through in a beautiful old courtyard. I think it may have been a school – thousands have been requisitioned across the country to serve as camps for refugees in urban settings. The loss, of course, is that now not only do flood victims continue to suffer, but students stop learning and benefiting from the discipline of daily classes.

Inside the building is what used to be, I imagine, a gorgeous open space around which is a floor lined with wooden balconies above. The ceiling is made of pressed tin painted white, though years of neglect have allowed dirt and dust to accumulate. Though conditions seem better here than at the tented camps we've visited, people look equally unhappy, some of them displaying a growing rage.

I point my camera at the second story balcony. Some of the children smile weakly, but most just stare, exhaustion on their faces. As people learn we're there with Dr. Sono, they begin to come out of the small rooms into the central space. Women grab my arm and tell me they are miserable and need more money, more clothes, more support. An old woman with hennaed hair puts her face close into mine and

implores me for something, though I don't understand her. I apologize and look to Dr. Sono to translate, but he's been pulled into a bigger conversation with the men.

He stands surrounded by a growing group of men who want to know what is happening next. They've heard the government is giving a stipend of 20,000 rupees (around \$250) to every family, though no one in their camp has received anything. When is it coming? They want to know. "How will we build our lives when we have nothing?" they ask.

Dr. Sono listens and encourages. I am moved by his gentleness despite the heat and crush of men. A frail, elderly blind man, wearing a white tank top and tribal cap with a walking stick, totters slowly toward Dr. Sono. He wants to know when they will get out of the camp and what the government will do to help. Dr. Sono holds the man's arm gently, leaning in so that he can hear.

More people push into the crowded room: the energy is heavy. There is no space now, and it is hard to hear what anyone is saying. Our security guys are visibly nervous. They push toward us, urging us to move quickly. Dr. Sono nods affirmatively, and we walk slowly outside into the light.

There, too, a crowd is waiting to share their grievances. Several women tell Dr. Sono that the latrines need cleaning and people

need more food. Dr. Sono listens. "People are angry," he tells us later. "They need jobs. They want to know where they can go in the world. Now, they feel too powerless."

Outside, scores of individuals stand in the courtyard. The mood is somber. There is another camp in this same compound; each holds 500 survivors who have lost everything but the clothes on their backs. Tribal women approach and ask me to photograph them. We're crowded by individuals asking questions about their futures. We hear a pattern that repeats itself in the camps of people who want to know what help is coming. As the crowd thickens, the tension grows.

We leave quickly. Once in the car, we say nothing for a few minutes. The individuals we just met, like the thousands we saw yesterday, are trapped and frightened. Whatever tiny amount of possessions they had is lost, and after three weeks, no visible prospects for better days have appeared.

Chris mentions that the world is transfixed by 30 Chilean miners who have been trapped in a dark mine. Here, he says, tens of millions are trapped in darkness. If the miners survive and are freed, he continues, they will be welcomed as heroes. The Pakistani flood survivors are instead already viewed as a potential threat to society and a growing burden.



Scores of people share their grievances and frustration with Dr. Sono, who exemplifies what it means to listen.



The camp in Sukkur is in a requisitioned schoolhouse.

SUKKUR

We drive about 25 miles to Sukkur, the narrowest point of the lower Indus. This is where the English made their first barrage in 1932, which resulted eventually in the longest irrigation system in the world (38,000 miles of irrigation canals, known as the Indus Food System), distributing water to all parts of Sindh province. Ironically, recent droughts have significantly reduced the area's agricultural productivity, but Dr. Sono reminds us again of the alluvial soil that should bring a bumper crop. It is crucial that farmers gain access to seeds and fertilizers before November when the wheat must be sown.

We arrive at the historic part of the city near the end of the day, so the place feels quiet and calm. Sunlight dances playfully on a pale blue wall as we walk beneath an arch and downstairs to the street where this next camp, also built in a requisitioned school sits.

The school holds around 300 and is built on two floors, again, around a courtyard. It is hot. Our faces are all drenched in sweat, and the heat makes the stench more potent. The calm of the outside world disappears. I look down to see diarrhea on the front steps, likely from a sick child. Flies are everywhere.

In the first room downstairs, about a dozen women and children sit on mats on the floor. Clothing and blankets are strewn on otherwise empty wooden shelves against the wall. The women and children don't say anything; they just stare as we stop for a moment to say hello. I wonder how many people they've seen like us in the past few weeks. I can imagine how tired of it they are.

The second room is more crowded – about 25 people from three families live there. They say they have nothing with them, but you can see clothes and blankets against the back wall – not much, but likely most of what they had apart from their house and animals.

One man tells us they've left several brothers to try to protect the animals, though no one knows what has happened to them or the livestock.

Everyone is sweating and most children suffer from prickly heat. On one little boy's head, I count thirteen flies. Several boxes of medicines are kept on the mats where the women sit. There are no windows here, though light comes in through the door facing the courtyard. Given ten hours of load shedding daily, it is likely that night falls like a blanket when the sun goes down.

We go upstairs and it feels like we are in another world, in part simply because there are windows, which mean families gain from light and air. This makes all the difference. You can see much more clearly here that this is a school: there is a blackboard against one of the walls and butcher paper with synopses of poems: *Beautiful Hands*, *Speak Gently*, *A Nation's Strength*.

I am taken with the first few words on the last of these:

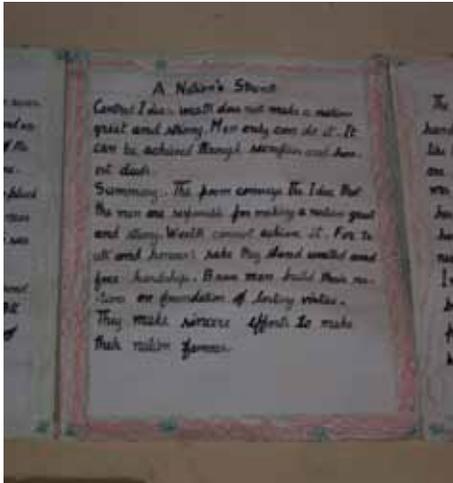
*Wealth does not make a nation great and strong. Men only can do it.
It can be achieved through sacrifices and good deeds.*

It has been an extraordinarily difficult year for Pakistan. The country has, in a single month, had to deal with the floods, at last three major suicide bombings, ethnic violence in Karachi, and the cheating debacle of the cricketers' scam in England has been a devastating blow.

This is a country that has had the wind knocked out of it, and yet individuals and civil society organizations are rising up to help where they can. There seems opportunity to see the country through a different lens, one based on the potential of Pakistan's people who want a different, better future and are willing to contribute to make it happen, if given the opportunity.



Multiple families and their meager possessions crowd the rooms of the shelter.



Emerson's "A Nation's Strength."

Later, I look up the poem and am struck by the words:

"A Nation's Strength"

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

*What makes a nation's pillars high
And its foundations strong?
What makes it mighty to defy
The foes that round it throng?*

*It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand
Go down in battle shock;
Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,
Not on abiding rock.*

*Is it the sword? Ask the red dust
Of empires passed away;
The blood has turned their stones to rust,
Their glory to decay.*

*And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown
Has seemed to nations sweet;
But God has struck its luster down
In ashes at his feet.*

*Not gold but only men can make
A people great and strong;
Men who for truth and honor's sake
Stand fast and suffer long.*

*Brave men who work while others sleep,
Who dare while others fly...
They build a nation's pillars deep
And lift them to the sky.*

What if government took the development approach of Geoffrey Canada in Harlem? Too overwhelmed by all of that neighborhood's problems in the 1990s, Mr. Canada decided to tackle one city block at a time. Could different local governments, along with corporations and citizens' groups and NGOs, be made responsible for cleaning up one section of a city, for instance? Any solutions must be both top-down and bottom-up. Could this be done by the private sector? Chris mentions the economist Paul Romer's idea of charter cities: creating a zone with special rules, taxes, security, etc. to invite entrepreneurs and people willing to abide by rules of law to create a model of the possible.

Pakistan has tried new economic zones before, to poor results. What if, instead, different corporations took on smaller sections of cities or even neighborhoods, at least for the reconstruction phase? The people we know in the Acumen community – Ali Siddiqui, Adnan Asdar, Zubyr Soomro, Arif Naqvi, Ahsan Jamil, Dr. Sono, Dr. Bajwa, so many others – are doing so much. Surely, there are others. This is a powerful point of leverage for a stronger, more united country.

*Men who for truth and honor's sake/ Stand
fast and suffer long/Brave men who work while
others sleep,/Who dare while others fly...*

In a third room, three families of 26 people stand. A large, near-toothless woman with a wandering eye, wearing a china blue shalwar kameez, holding her hand over her heart, tells us that her family of ten children left behind a fairly good life – they owned a bit of land, animals and a house and the children attended school. "We tried renting a space in the city," she says, "but nothing is available. We have no choice but to stay here. We don't know how long this will last but we want to go home."

The next room is larger, lighter, and shelters 30 individuals. People are dressed in better

clothing – the upstairs seems filled with individuals of more means than those living downstairs. I see a pile of beautiful blankets on the floor and ask if any of the women are sewing or doing needlework. Two girls bring out their embroidery work. Each is making a dress and the handwork is beautiful.

A third young woman carries out a completed table cloth, her own creation. It is white with flower pots embroidered in fluorescent colors. Though it isn't something we would normally want, I ask how much she would sell it for. "Twenty dollars," says a man who seems to be the leader of the family. "No, I think that was wholesale," says a younger man. "It must be twenty-five." "But the father isn't here," says a third, and so he might not agree to that price. I think it is thirty." Chris and I look at one another.

"Thirty dollars it is," we say. We take pictures with the young woman, and everyone smiles and laughs. Just making a single transaction like this shifts the dynamics from us as observers to participants. The interaction feels healthier. Finding work – and income – is of the utmost need to a people in danger of being further marginalized in a trap not just of physical isolation but of dependence on charity for too long as well.



The buyer and creator of the embroidered tablecloth.

Friday, September 3, 2010

KARACHI TO THATTA AND SUJAWAL

Chris and I meet Dr. Rashid Bajwa in the hotel lobby. He is wearing a white polo shirt and khakis and a navy baseball cap. Dr. Bajwa, a thoughtful man in his mid-fifties with salt and pepper hair, a mustache and intelligent eyes, trained as a medical doctor. In 1992, he became the first CEO of the National Rural Support Program (NRSP) to bring services to the poor across the country. Less than 20 years later, this non-profit organization is among the largest and most respected in the country. NRSP employs 5,000 professionals, manages a \$200 million budget and serves four million individuals. This is a man who has followed his heart and is living his dream. It is a privilege to spend the day with him.

We drive north along the old highway from Karachi to Lahore. The road is uneven. We share it with enormous colorful trucks, overstuffed with sugar cane or wheat or even rocks to such a degree that they look unreal. This belt is an industrial swath of Pakistan. We drive nearly an hour and a half before reaching Thatta, a town hit by floods just five days ago. When the Indus was breached in northern Sindh, it began rolling furiously toward the sea, overtaking everything in its path. After reaching Thatta, it submerged two other cities. The waters will shortly reach the sea, however; that's when the real work of reconstruction will begin.

Dr. Bajwa's main concern is to ensure that farmers have a chance to plant their crops as soon as possible.

Dr. Bajwa explains why some of the affected areas of Sindh seem so much worse off than those we saw in Punjab. "People historically have lived in the active flood plains and would expect to evacuate their homes during floods," he says "But there is also an old plain where "kachas" – or informal settlements – sprang up. The people living in the kachas are poor, with few assets and less political voice; this is where 95% of the people around Thatta live."

Those plains hadn't flooded in a decade – and the inhabitants banked on it not happening again. They typically live in thatched huts, own very little – a few pots and pans, some blankets, maybe a tin chest of clothes – and many ignored the flood warnings. When they finally fled, it was often too late to save anything but themselves; and still, many left an able-bodied man nearby to protect what was left of the house and to try to save the livestock.

Dr. Bajwa's main concern beyond providing immediate relief to the camps is to ensure that farmers have a chance to plant their crops as soon as possible, so that they can harvest a quick crop before the wheat needs to be sown on November 15. His team has researched different fruit and vegetable crops that could be turned around quickly and provide needed income, but the farmers need seed and fertilizers as soon as humanly possible.

In the meantime, NRSP is supporting the needs of nearly 400,000 households with tents, as well as rations of wheat, oil, and sugar. They also are partnering with UNICEF, WaterAid and many others to bring clean water (in general through hand pumps in the northern areas and tankers here in Sindh where the water is brackish and needs to be filtered), latrines, and healthcare.

The organization owns twelve trucks but rents sometimes 250 more a day to move thousands of tons around the country and reach people desperately in need. Logistics and matching finances (donors too often give what they think is needed rather than what actually is) are critical to their success. For instance, currently, 3,500 tents are stuck in the Beijing airport because NRSP doesn't have cash on hand specifically to transport the tents.

We pass ragged communities of people living in makeshift tents along the roads. That there is any organization at all is extraordinary: in the past four days, 650,000 individuals have left their homes, and 100,000 houses have been lost. Here, people were given a day's warning to evacuate so most people were able to hold onto their belongings. I'm struck repeatedly by how little people have even in good times – a charpoy (roped bed), a few blankets, some pots and pans, a few items of clothing. Now those precious possessions make these people better off than their neighbors in Sukkur and Shikarpur, where all was lost.



NRSP is distributing tents as well as food, water and other critical supplies.

We turn down a side road to arrive at a community of 100 tents situated in a circle. I'd been prepared for the kinds of camps we've seen previously: hundreds of tarpaulins in rows with people sitting in their own abodes, rarely mingling. This community, in contrast, has been created on a human scale. The air feels fresh, and there is room for people to feel a greater sense of freedom. The tents, made by Shelter Box (and donated by Rotary Club), are made of nylon, dome-shaped with double layers for insulation and zippered windows and doors. Rotary pays a high price for each – about \$250 each – but the privacy, coolness and safety from the poisonous snakes that have come out in force communicate a sense of dignity.

The tents provide more protection from the elements (rain, dust, snakes) than the mud and thatched-roof homes that were flooded. This plus the distribution of free food and clean water, and the security of the community make some nervous that people will not want to go home. "We need to help transition people to a more self-sufficient, not less self sufficient state," says one of the men with us. Moreover, the size of the community is also linked to practical matters; there is a growing fear that mob violence might break out, and groups feel that 100 tents and 600-700 people is more manageable for a single "community."

The circle formation of the tents seems to promote interaction among these temporary residents. Nearly everyone is outside, cooking, playing or sitting and watching the world. Most families were able to save their livestock and bring it with them. They've constructed shelters for their cattle, goats and chickens behind the tents. Perhaps this feeling of security from their possessions combined with their being in camps just four days are the main drivers for the different feeling in the air.

We meet a slender woman dressed in tans and pinks, squatting on a piece of cardboard beside her stove built over three big rocks,



Cooking offers some sense of normalcy.

cooking chapattis among pots and metal dishes. She rolls the dough into balls, flattens them into a large circle, and cooks them with just the right amount of oil so that they are golden brown. It is the first time in the past few days that I've seen a woman cooking for her own family: again, dignity. Although her mud and thatched house is underwater, she's now safe with the total of her meager belongings, all six of her children, the family's animals and some sense of normalcy.

A few doors down, we meet Nazreen, an older, bright-eyed tribal woman with flecks of grey in her hair. She has made a broom of twigs and is sweeping the area outside her tent. Her black-and-white dress is beautifully embroidered and she exudes a sense of confidence and strength that would make her stand out anywhere, but especially among a traumatized community. "Why are you cleaning?" we ask. "What else should I do?" she says with gentle defiance. "This is our home for now, and I will do what is needed."

"What does your husband do?" I ask, and she says she's a widow. Her family owns a bit of land, and her eldest two children, a daughter and son, grow sugar cane and sell it for income. I ask what she needs now, and she answers, "Light." Did she have light in the village before the floods? I asked. "No" is her honest answer.

I ask whether things might end up better than before after all of this misery, thinking if anyone could feel optimism, it would be this salt-of-the-earth woman. It is as if a cloud descends. "For what can I hope?" she answers quietly. "We have lost everything. What good can come now?"

More images: Two newborn goats tied beneath a shelter behind the tents. An old man with a dark green cap cares for his cow. A young twig of a boy with a big stick holds a poisonous snake he's just killed – children gather around him with fear and fascination. An elderly imam sits quietly outside his tent on a small prayer rug.

The little girls are beautiful. Here is a slender child in a turquoise shalwar kameez with a red scarf on her head, carrying her little brother. There is a ten year-old beauty with a blue shalwar kameez – she uses her purple scarf to hide her shy laughter when I tease her with my camera. Here is a tiny girl with a pierced nose and a tribal shawl, fringed with brightly colored tassels.

I want to know what they dream about, these children of God who share a sense of grace and joy despite having lost their homes and at least part of their childhoods. Rather, I want to know what they would dream about if they had a sense of the infinite possibilities available in our world but so elusive, so unfairly elusive to most of us who share this tiny planet.

What is it to dream and to know?



Nazreen

The irrepressible Adnan Asdar arrives. I first met Adnan during the earthquake, when he'd taken a full year off his work to give back to Pakistan. His eyes shine with light and he's always on the move. Now, again, he is giving all of himself to do what he can in the crisis.

He's come to the camp because he has heard we're in the area – this is the way of Adnan. He's got to fly to the Swat Valley tonight, but no matter to him, he drives two hours each way to say hello to us. Later, he will show us the camp he has been overseeing.

For now, he has brought a bag of sports equipment: a soccer ball, several cans of tennis balls and a cricket bat. Chris, Dr. Bajwa and I all cheer, but the children seem not to know what to make of it. They look on shyly and no one makes a move to take the ball Bajwa offers.

Adnan finally chooses an older boy to bowl the tennis ball while he stands at bat. The boy can't bowl, and Adnan tells me it is a crime for a Pakistani not to know how to play cricket, but these kids are so isolated



Cricket offers a chance for some fun.

they may never have seen a game. Dr. Bajwa is talented: he can hit whatever balls come his way, and now the other children in the camp start to gather around. Chris gives a quick lesson to the bowler, and we are laugh and cheer. The camp is transformed, at least momentarily.

As we leave, the men return from the fields with a long line of cows. The imam continues to sit with a peaceful gaze. The women cook. The camp leader gathers the bag of sporting equipment to put it away for awhile though Dr. Bajwa promises to check that he's organizing the kids at least twice daily.

There are definitely better ways to design a camp and this is one of them. Indeed, I'd be interested in a paper or talk on "The Best Design Practices for Relief Camps." Instead, you can't help but get the sense that there is little sharing of lessons and enormously divergent approaches based on what donors give and not always on what people most need.

Traumatized communities – all of us, really – deserve better than that.

KARACHI RELIEF TRUST CAMP

We drive about ten minutes to a camp run by Karachi Relief Trust (KRT) under the coordination of Adnan. Here, too, there are about 100 tents and 1000 people. The shelters here are tarpaulins and not tents. Adnan laughs at the many colors of the tents – brown, green, white. "I take them from whoever will give them," he says. "I can't be choosy and you know, people like to give small things, so we gratefully accept their generosity, even if it is a single tarpaulin."

His team of volunteers built 18 latrines in a 30-hour period – a dozen for the women and 6 for the men. They man a station to filter water as well – through LifeStraw filters, \$20 devices that filter about 10 liters per hour, and have a life of 18,000 liters. Ultimately, Adnan wants to figure out how to get one device to each family as it will filter their water for three years.

I'm intrigued with the volunteers. One young man is studying engineering in Karachi. He and his mates drive to the camp each day at 9 am and stay until midnight. "I love the work," he says, "it reminds me of how much we have, and how much we can do for others."

We need to do a better job of celebrating these ordinary heroes who are stepping up to this disaster. We are certainly going to need a lot more of them – and it has to start with each of us. As my friend Lisa Sullivan used to say, "We are the ones we've been waiting for."

In one area, a group of workers prepare huge vats of food – curried chickpeas, lentils, rice, chapatti. Adnan's group felt too many people were taking the dried foods and re-selling it rather than eating it, so decided to provide two hot meals a day for the camp dwellers. He works with The Citizens Foundation and others to provide 20,000 people two meals a day.

“OK,” he says at the end of a whirlwind tour around the tent village. “Gotta keep moving. Have to fly to Swat tonight to be sure our camp there is on target with plans. People there have been in the camps for three weeks and they’re tired.” Northern Sindh, Southern Sindh, Swat – these represent only a part of the territory that Adnan, as a citizen and nothing more, has taken on as his responsibility. He is fearless, tireless and effective.

As quickly as he came to say hello (and I will always appreciate that he made the trip here – this sense of loyalty and going out of one’s way to honor friends always humbles me in Pakistan), he says good-bye – on to another adventure with kits of sports equipment in hand, a gaggle of young recruits, and all the spirit and goodwill in the world.

SUJAWAL

Dr. Bajwa asks if we’d like to visit the town and areas that were recently flooded, the places from which the flood victims in the Thatta camps came. We agree, having no idea of the true impact of what we are about to see. Indeed, I feel completely inadequate even attempting to describe not only what we witness but how it makes me feel. The words that first come to mind feel trite: overwhelming, humbled, empty, surreal.

The most honest word for me is yearning.

Change is possible and yet elusive in Pakistan, unless leaders from all corners stand up and step in. Pakistan needs large-scale systemic reform. Twenty million displaced is, by definition, an opportunity for such reform. Bold steps are needed – by government, society, the media, all of us.

When the Indus was roiling its way toward Thatta, at one point local government had to decide whether and how to create a breach to shift the direction of the river. Thatta city sits on one side of the river’s banks, and on the other is a town called Sujawal. Thatta is an industrial town, center to sugar mills and other industries, generally run by feudals in the area. Sujawal is more agricultural, the place where much of the sugar is grown. The decision was made to divert the river toward Sujawal – better to lose crops than destroy needed, expensive factories.

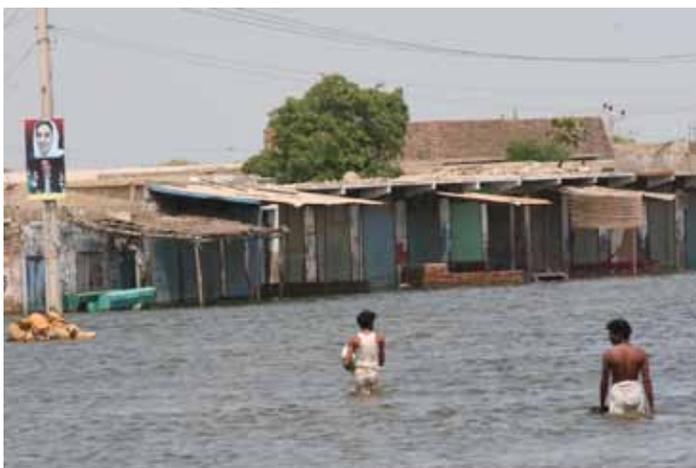
On the Thatta side, people continue to work, and the land is largely dry. Sugar cane grows as far as the eye can see. As we drive toward Sujawal, we see the waters encroaching on the land. To our left and right, we can see only the tops of thatched houses peeking above an ocean of water. I imagine the fields of sugar cane and grazing cattle beneath where men are now fishing.

On the road itself, we see four dead dogs and a few dead cows. The stench is horrible, the feeling of loss, heavy.

Suddenly, the road is completely submerged, and we must make a decision. There are no boats around, but we’re traveling with NRSP employees who have a pickup truck. We go for the truck – Chris, Dr. Bajwa and me in the open back – and we drive slowly through the water for miles. All along on either side, the world feels like it is floating away. Two men walk in water up to their chests holding automatic rifles high over their heads. A few of the houses hold clothing and metal boxes and pots and pans – some families have left too late to take their things, and are counting on finding them when they come back. The houses, mostly made of mud and thatch, will have to be rebuilt from the ground up.

As we get closer to town, I see a satellite dish atop the roof of a submerged house. Water floats over an advertisement for Telenor, the cell phone company, printed on the side of a concrete building. Several posters of Benazir Bhutto and the current president Zardari hang above the town.

Commerce and politics – so loaded always, especially in a situation like this with so much money and lives and the entire status quo at stake...



Businesses and farmland – people’s livelihoods – are under water.

I feel myself disconnecting, analyzing, distancing from this experience. It is so big I cannot hold it, cannot process it. I put down my camera and focus on the details. Men walk along the road up to their thighs in water. I assume they are going back to their homes – or as close as possible to them – so that they can see for themselves some evidence that it is still there. Just having a connection to place must provide some small relief. I hear that a few days ago, the crowd became a mob at different points – desperate people were fighting for scarce resources. But today, the air has the feeling of solidarity. A young man shouts a flirtatious comment at me, and his friends laugh and wave. This is not the Pakistan of terrorists and corruption we see in the news. This is the Pakistan of human beings who have lost everything and yet still find the resilience to laugh.

Perhaps it is this view of what it means to be human that touches my emotions most deeply. I feel sadness, profound sadness. I can now imagine better what the people in camps are missing. It is one thing to say that people have lost everything. It is another to see what they have lost. And then to see that “everything” would nearly fit into our two suitcases, humbles further. This is injustice layered upon injustice – could it be the starting point for the greatest humanitarian movement of our global generation or will it be the crucible for societal meltdown?

Shakespeare wrote, “What a piece of work is man.” The phrase runs continually through my head. Here in Thatta you have the courageous and beautiful, the cowardly and dangerous, the fragile and tiny. There is a chance right now to imagine a different future for Pakistan, one that is better and more beautiful than people have allowed themselves to dream for far too long. The country just fell down hard on its back. Now, it must find the resolve not simply to stand up and walk, but to run the marathon, and then some.

On the way back to Karachi, we pass a man holding a number of tiny birds in a net. “What is he doing?” I ask Dr. Bajwa. “He’s selling their freedom,” he said. It is a tradition that you pay the guy a bit and he will set a bird free. Doing so will give you blessings. During Ramadan, the cost is higher, about 100 rupees (\$1.25).”

Those vulnerable birds yearn for freedom. Even when we fear it – and it is understandable that so many do – it is our own deepest yearning. Rousseau wrote “Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains.” In these tent villages, we have had the chance to meet, if just for a short while, our brothers and sisters who are just like us except that they’ve just lost everything. And except that they lack the wealth, education and connections to rebuild without assistance. Now is the time to invest in human beings so that, unlike the little birds that depend on the charity of random passers-by, they can set themselves free.

Saturday, September 5, 2010

KARACHI, PAKISTAN

In the morning, we drive to the house of Aun’s mother and father, Nargis and Anis Rahman. I’ve known them for years, and they are like family. I love Nargis. Elegant and beautiful inside and out, she can also be fierce and dedicated when it comes to inequality in Pakistan. After working informally with a women’s group for 15 years, three years ago, she founded the Pakistan Women’s Foundation for Peace, where she currently serves as president. These thirty elite women go into the slums of Karachi regularly to do what they can to bring comfort to the poor while advocating for peace and change in the country. They remind me of Jane Addams and Hull House, one of the first to focus on making the poor full citizens of Chicago, a group of women serving the poor and increasingly fighting for their rights.

We climb into the car with Nargis. At first, she tells Chris to sit in front and then changes her mind. “You sit in back,” she tells him, “and Jacqueline, you wear your headscarf. Times are tense these days in Karachi.” Just by being with her, we are putting Nargis at risk, yet she couldn’t be more gracious.

Could this be the starting point for the greatest humanitarian movement of our global generation?

Karachi is indeed tense these days. More than 160 people have been killed in ethnic violence in the month of August. Since the floods, more than 60,000 victims have arrived, mostly from Sindh and Balochistan. The arrival of these groups will change the ethnic composition of the city – or at least that is how this rush is perceived. Moreover, this city of 18 million lacked services and infrastructure to care for its people even before the floods. Times ahead will most certainly get rougher before they get better.

Nargis explains that their group approached the government about three weeks ago when the rush of internal refugees to Karachi was beginning. They said they could “adopt” 100 families, and were given responsibility for a school in Musharraf colony, a new suburb about 20 kilometers from Karachi’s center, a fairly isolated place near a large military compound, not served by public transport. As we leave the center of Karachi and move through its industrial area, the drab grays of the buildings match the dreary sky. I ask Nargis what they manufacture in this area. “Everything,” she says. We see signs for textiles, cars, trucks, electronics. Laundry is hung on

rooftops. Trucks mix with stuffed buses, camels and donkeys toting carts filled with bags of wheat, grasses, tires, barrels.

We cross Lyari, one of the city's most notorious and highly politicized areas, and finally turn left on a road filled with crushed cars and vans. Ironically, on the other side of the street is a large graveyard. Suddenly, the road becomes smooth and garbage-free; we've entered the military area, a significant tract of land although I'm not sure of its exact use. Finally, the car turns right and, after navigating a road riddled with potholes, we pull into the school that Nargis and friends support.

"The government provides all the food," she tells us. "And then we give clothing and bed linens, blankets to cover the floor, games for the children, healthcare, clean water and milk, and we've given them brooms and cleaning supplies so that the people can look after themselves. For Eid, we're organizing donations to make packages for each woman – a new shalwar kameez for her, bangles and a little bit of henna so that she can celebrate the holy day. It is small, but it is something."

Our first stop is a small clinic next to the main school. A competent female doctor sits behind the desk talking to a woman with a striking young daughter with beautiful brown eyes and large boils on her face. Standing in line is a grandmother dressed in bright pink and blue, holding a one-year-old boy with a high fever. His mother has died after the floods and the grandmother now cares for him and his four siblings. She puts on a brave face, but looks near tears.

Sitting with Chris by the chalkboard is a bespectacled young man from UNICEF. He shows Chris his vaccination records – all 650 people in the camp have now been vaccinated for tetanus, hepatitis B, tuberculosis and other childhood diseases. He beams, saying that most people had lacked these vaccines but now the people are organized here, and they can give them protection.

The interior of the school/camp is light and airy. This seems the most habitable of all. The rooms are large, and though you still see 25 or more people in each, the clean blankets on the floor and overall cleanliness of the place feel remarkable, especially considering that most people have been here for three weeks already. Most of the people tell us they come from Sindh – mostly Jacobabad or Shikarpur – though a few hail from Balochistan. They say they've lost everything, and a few men tell us they had to sell their wives' gold jewelry just to bribe government drivers to allow them onto their trucks for transport to Karachi.

These individuals – at least the ones with whom we spoke – don't want to return to the rural areas once the crisis is over. "What is left there for us?" says one of the men, dashing handsome with flashing eyes and enormous charisma despite being without a real sense of future. "We have lost our homes. We have lost our animals.



The doctor at the clinic supported by Pakistan Women's Foundation for Peace.

We have nothing except debt to the moneylenders. Why would we go back? We want to stay here." He continues, "I myself have seven years of education. I can do many things. I just want a job. I want Karachi to be my home."

I ask the men who are now standing around – there are nearly a dozen – if they agree. "Yes, yes," they all nod vociferously. "Does anyone disagree?" I ask. Not a single man volunteered to go back. Dr. Sono predicts there will be massive urbanization as a result of these floods. Given the attitudes of the men – and women – in this camp, there is no arguing against him.

"We want jobs," other men chime in. "Where is the government now? Why can't they give us work and pay us? Our country has regressed twenty years, and still, we have to make a life. We need to earn enough to send our children to school. We just need jobs and we can do many things."

We meet the "teacher" for the children in this camp. Her name is Farzana and she's 26 years old. Though she attended school herself, she has never taught before. You can see the determination in her eyes to learn how to teach and to give herself a way out as well. She is wide-eyed with thick eyebrows and full lips. Suffering has given her young face a wise, tired look.

"My first husband was killed due to violence in Shikarpur," she tells us. "He left me with four children, and I had to work as a laborer to make ends meet. Then I married a second husband and now I have his six-month-old child. He also worked as a laborer but now he has nothing."

"Does your current husband help you care for the first four children?" I asked. "No," she says softly, her eyes turned downward. "That is why I must work hard to make a living. I need to care for all of these five children. I can teach. I am disciplined. These children here need me, and I will do a good job if someone gives me a chance."

A sixteen-year-old girl walks up with a baby on her hip. Her husband was electrocuted and died during the floods. She doesn't know how she'll survive once the camps are closed. "Please," she says, "can't you give me help?"

I snap pictures of the children and women, and soon, everyone in the camp wants a photo taken. Their faces are full of life and light. Families ask for portraits. They sit formally at first, and I tease them to move closer together. Before I know it, they are hugging one another, smiling and laughing. They remind me of photos taken by American families on beaches in summertime or for holiday portraits. You wouldn't know that these individuals have lost everything they own and are sharing a room with 25 individuals. Their simplicity, gratitude and closeness with one another are humbling. Sitting in front of a single woman with four children, looking at her smile and tenderness toward her children. I put down the camera and hold back a sob.

It is our last night in Pakistan. This week has flown by and yet a part of me feels we've been here for a long time. We have dinner with advisors and friends. One tells us how scared he is for Pakistan's future. "My office is just across the street from the railway tracks," he tells us. "Already, 200 refugees are living there in tents. Every day I walk by them and feel their stares. It frightens me to think of what will come. Today we have 60,000 new people in the city. They say we'll soon have 200,000 or more. We have no services and these people are angry. They feel let down and they are scared for their futures too. If something isn't done quickly, there will be growing violence in all the cities of this nation."

Dinner conversation turns to what USAID and other international donors might do differently. One advisor says passionately, "We

need to fill the trust gap. We need trusted individuals who know the real players on the ground, the people who are building institutions. We need to measure success in terms of outcomes and not just in terms of money spent. We need management support to build human capacity and strong institutions. We are in extraordinary times and it requires extraordinary measures."

There is no better way to end our time here than at dinner with this incredible group of individuals who are doing so much for the country without asking for thanks in return. I do feel a home, and I do feel love. This is why we are here, and we are taking so much back to New York.

How did this group of people come together from across the world and create such a bond, such a shared commitment to service?

Of course, in Pakistan, there always seems room in the day for another meeting. We learn that Michael Pritchard, inventor of the LifeSaver jerry cans has arrived in Karachi with 500 jerry cans, thanks to the help of Ali Siddiqui. We agree to meet after dinner, which means starting the meeting at 11:30 p.m.

Though this is his first time in the developing world, Michael is intrepid, full of energy and excitement to see his jerry cans in action. Ali and he plan to go to Thatta tomorrow to deploy the first ones. By working with local players, Ali was able to help Michael get the jerry cans from Manchester, England to Karachi in a matter of days and through customs in a matter of minutes. This is the kind of collaboration we need to see for people to regain trust and for things to get done.

We hope also to see a jerry can placed in each of Aman Foundation's ambulances. Ahsan Jamil and Arif Naqvi have worked to turn each of the yellow ambulances into mobile health clinics to serve the flood victims. Maintaining purified water in each vehicle could be a real boon to their operations. We all agree that we should experiment with a number of approaches to see what kind of contribution this filter can make, recognizing that different approaches are needed for different circumstances and environments.

At one point, Ali and I look at one another with the same thought. How did this group of people come together from across the world and create such a bond, such a shared commitment to service?



Portrait of a family.



There is such deep trust and respect among us, and working on common problems – for the problems of Pakistan are the problems of the world – has only made us feel closer.

For Ali, it comes from his faith. “There are no coincidences,” he says. I tend to agree with him. It is this same faith in human beings, in goodness, in the power of what we can do together if we think big and move forward without fear, that makes me believe we can contribute to building a stronger, better Pakistan. But we need examples of real success. We need a different kind of story. We need the best and the brightest to come back to this country and give what they can. Ultimately, we need all of us to speak the truth, to push for systemic change while acting locally, to build real partnerships based on accountability and trust and to keep our eyes firmly fixed on those in need.

Ultimately, we need to look at the misery squarely in the face, and then realize what an incredible opportunity the world has to build a different path right in our midst.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline".

Jacqueline Novogratz