

AGE: A MERE NUMBER TO SET FORTH A JOURNEY

Abida Bibi (Chakwal)

The Beginning

The dwellers of Bullay Bala, a small village in Chakwal district, are committed to eliminate the culture of open defecation. Abida Bibi, 50, mother of two daughters and a son, has proven to be a role-model and exemplar within her village. Few years after her marriage, she was left to shoulder the double burden of childcare and full-time work because of the chronic disease that made her husband unable to drive a truck. She now runs a kiosk where she sells everyday household items.

“Being the sole breadwinner of the family, I have learnt many survival tools and ways to remain strong and positive to get through the challenging times.” says Abida Bibi.

Village Sanitation Committee (VSC) claims that last few years were critical for the village. More than half of the population was living without basic sanitation system and practicing defecating outside was common amongst all. Due to open defecation, all villagers, regardless of their age, were prone to ill health.

A Step Closer

“Many people are reluctant to change, thus, it was essential to come up with the strategies for immense behavior change. Abida Bibi has an influential personality and offering her membership of VSC under Scaling up Pakistan Approach to Total Sanitation (PATs) project was a wise decision. The strategy underlies community mobilizers as a key component to persuade people to construct and use toilets instead of defecating in open areas.” says one of the members of VSC.

“It has never been an easy task to shift the mindsets of people to focus their urge for and triggering them to construct an improved toilet within their houses. I remember the time when we desperately lacked access to sanitation facilities and had no alternative but to defecate in open. There was a need of collective behaviour change rather than mobilizing individual households.” Abida Bibi further explained that, *“Open defecation led to so many problems in terms of health and raising awareness on sanitation triggered women of the village to convince their husbands to build toilets in houses.”* Nusrat, a young woman states, *“Reaching a safe place to defecate was difficult more than ever since I was expecting my second child. Sometimes, I had to wait till dusk and leave my daughter at home unattended. The meetings with Abida Bibi enticed me to set up a toilet in my*

house. Now, I feel much secure to go for defecating without leaving the confinements of my home.”

Abida Bibi worked hard to ensure that the villagers understand the utmost peril of lacking a sanitation system. The sanitary items are purchased from Chakwal city, 13 kilometers from the village, and displayed at her kiosk. She even facilitates the poorest family by providing them the necessary sanitary structures on installments.

Her sanitation mart has benefitted 76 households with low cost sanitation products. She has become an active change agent for Scaling up PATS in Punjab Project supported by DFAT and supports her community with her regular attendance in VSC meetings as well Abida Bibi expresses her sentiments and says, *“I am personally grateful to Plan International Pakistan and staff of Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) for their lasting support and encouragement throughout the time. I believe in bringing further development in my village and building a better future for next generations”.*



Abida Bibi sells low cost sanitation products along with other basic necessities at her kiosk.