



## Foundational Learning During Emergencies- Learning is Not a Lost Cause in Pakistan

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A year on from the unprecedented floods of 2022 that affected 33<sup>1</sup> million people (50% children), a humanitarian crisis persists in Pakistan. Aid has been slow to reach, given competing challenges in an era of multiple crises. Sindh, with a population of 35 million, was hardest hit<sup>2</sup>. In addition to massive loss of housing, crops and livelihoods, there was extensive damage to education infrastructure. Almost 60% of schools in the region were affected<sup>3</sup>. Some generous funders rallied to provide support to the sector that has been well tracked, coordinated and documented by the Education Sector Working Group/Education in Emergencies ESWG/EIE with oversight of the respective governments and the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD). There is a major concern about education disruption in a province already suffering from low indicators of access, quality, and equity. 8 out of 10 children around the age of 10 suffer from learning poverty i.e., they are unable to read a simple text with comprehension<sup>4</sup> (WB 2022).

The emergency response has included: cleaning and reopening of schools; establishing temporary learning centers (TLCs); provision of teaching learning materials (TLMs), sports kits, health and hygiene support, and child protection.

Support to teachers in the form of training on psycho-social support during emergencies, child protection and use of learning kits was a key priority as was distribution of back-to-school kits for students.

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) collaborated with the School Education & Literacy Department (SELD) Government of Sindh with generous support from the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to address the learning emergency in Sindh. In a yearlong project, Recovery for Foundational Learning: Flood Response in Sindh, ITA proposed and implemented three interventions in Shikarpur & Ghotki districts in upper Sindh to ensure that no child is left behind in 391 affected schools.

The interventions proposed were both traditional and non-traditional. The project had three intervention arms with the complementary objectives of: i) recovering the learning gaps caused by disruption in learning; ii) enrolment of out-of-school children in flood-affected communities; and iii) mainstreaming of children upon completion of teaching camps.

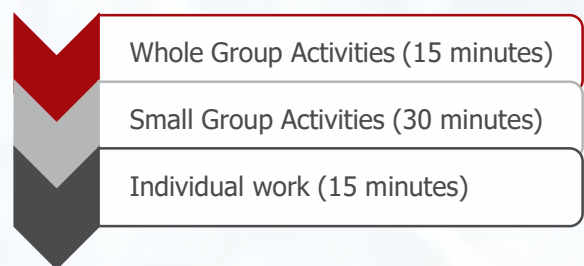
**Relief Phase - Intervention I** included Back to School kits for 65,000 school-going

students; 800 school stabilization kits for schools to conduct routine learning with teaching learning materials including ECE, Library and Sports Kits as well as 3000 Health and Hygiene Kits. Reusable menstrual hygiene pads or dignity kits were distributed to 10,000 adolescent girls and female. Altogether, reaching more than 210,000 beneficiaries in 800 affected schools of Sindh. Of these, 391 schools received intensive treatment combining back to school and MGM kits to 65,000 students (34% girls), of which 30,000 students were targeted for the Teaching at the Right Level (TARL) camps. ITA's aspiration to support a high number of girls in all interventions was a challenge given their low enrolment when collecting baseline data in target schools.

**Recovery Phase - Intervention II** involved setting up of 60-day Teaching at the Right Level (TARL) camps to address the severe learning poverty/losses for 30,000 target children at the primary level i.e., grades 3-5, in-school and out of school. These in-school children were at great risk of dropping out with more than 90% at beginner or nothing level in basic literacy and numeracy! Given the few months left prior to completing the academic year 2022-23 in May, the focus was primarily to target in-school at risk students (89%) and 11% Out of School Children (6-13 years of age). This was the only program during the floods emergency that focused on a systematic approach on learning recovery. Furthermore, for a system embedded intervention it was important that TARL or Chalo Parho Barho (Let's read and grow) program was fully approved by the provincial Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research (DCAR) in terms of its content, pedagogy, teacher guides and assessment. The approval was fast tracked by SELD through DCAR to ensure that in January 2023 the TARL Camps could begin in an uninterrupted manner to reach the target by end-September 2023.

The 60-day camps were established as 4 cohorts (2 groups in each cohort) from January to September 2023 including their continuity during the summer break with a formal permission from the SELD leadership. The essence of the camps was they were imparted the knowledge as per their existing learning levels (assessed through baseline assessment), the students were distributed in two groups based on their existing learning levels; nothing or beginner and next level viz. letter/word and two digits number recognition and provided accelerated learning opportunities under 3 core subject/competency areas, viz. Sindhi/Urdu, Arithmetic & English.

The other key attribute of the intervention was that the accelerated camps adopted interactive and play based learning interventions following strict hourly routines per subject. Learning skills are improved through **Combined Activities for Maximized learning (CAMaL)** approach. The Improvement in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and numeracy thru routine structured interactive activities. Using **TaRL methodology**, each lesson in a CPB camp is followed by **CAMaL activities** as given below:



For implementing the learning structure in the camps more than 500 teachers and cluster coordinators were provided a five-day training followed by on-site support in the learning camps. Followed by the learning level assessment thrice; at baseline, midline (after 4 weeks) and at endline (after the end of 60 days) for keeping track of learning improvements.

**Intervention III** was a micro intervention at the village level (one per district) receiving both treatment arms of back-to-school kits, school stabilization kits as well as the TARL learning camps. A household census was conducted to identify the state of foundational learning in the village among children of ages 5-16 years as well as their enrolment status. Based on the census findings, out of school children and those lagging behind were enrolled in TaRL camps organized within the villages.

The results of **Intervention II** of all four Cohorts (8 groups in all) covering 391 locations in Shikarpur and Ghotki are shared below. Para-teachers with education up to at least matriculate or intermediate level were hired from the local community and trained in TaRL methodology; those who performed well, were allowed to continue for a second 60-day camp enabling them to further improved their TARL/CPB pedagogies and skills in enabling each child to learn and move up according to her/his pace. Teachers over time became gained more confidence in the effectiveness of Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CAMAL) approach. CAMAL is a unique pedagogic mix; it comprises one hour per subject (warm up, teacher led, group led and individual mastery sessions), followed by periodic assessments. The teachers moved the child to the next level of learning when the child was ready and confident in her/his competencies that were pegged to the student learning outcomes and

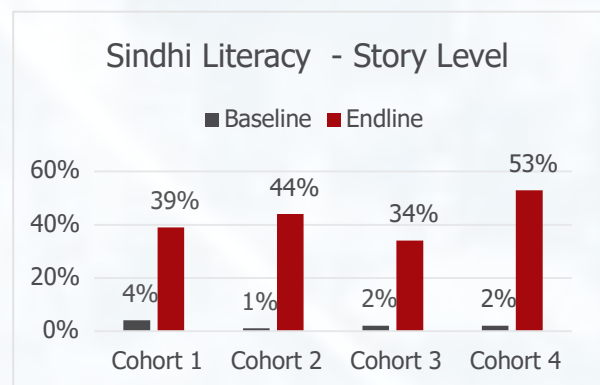
global proficiency levels in basic literacy and numeracy.

**Four Cohorts:** Baseline and Endline assessment results for Sindhi/Urdu, Arithmetic, and English (Jan-Sept, 2023) of 30,873 students

**Note: In-School = 89%; OOSC=11%; Girls 42.5%; Minorities = 12%; Disability = 0.7%**

### 1. Urdu/Sindhi Literacy – Story Level

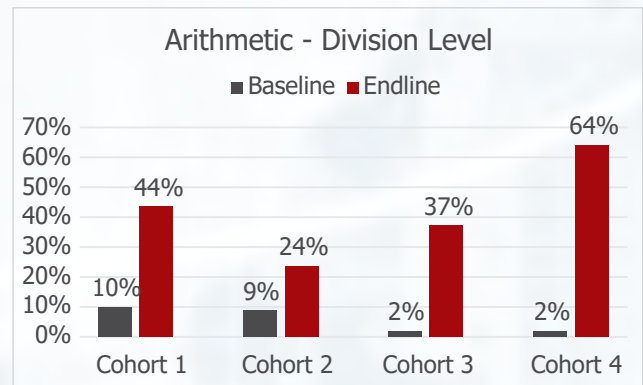
The learning assessment results indicate that a greater share of Cohort 4 children experienced improvement in Sindhi reading skills as compared to other cohorts. Whereas, the share of children that showed improvement in Sindhi reading was the lowest for Cohort 3. This is likely owing to the low attendance rate at the summer camps. Gender disaggregated data indicates that a greater share of boys showed improvement in Sindhi reading at endline as compared to girls across each of the successive CPB cohorts.



Sindh Literacy – Story Level						
Cohort	Overall		Girls		Boys	
	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
1	4%	39%	4%	36%	5%	43%
2	1%	44%	1%	38%	1%	49%
3	2%	34%	2%	29%	2%	37%
4	2%	53%	1%	52%	2%	55%

## 2. Arithmetic – Division Level

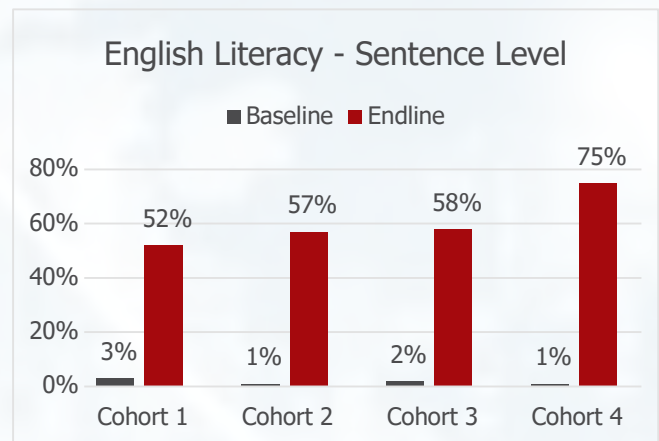
The assessment results indicate that the greatest share of children showed improvement in arithmetic skills in Cohort 4. Whereas the lowest percentage of children showed improvement in basic arithmetic skills in Cohort 2. The gender disaggregated data suggests that the improvement in arithmetic skills is more pronounced for boys than that of girls for Cohort 1, 2 and 3. Though, for Cohort 4 a similar share of boys and girls are able to perform a two-digit division at endline.



Cohort	Overall		Girls		Boys	
	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
1	10%	44%	10%	37%	11%	49%
2	9%	24%	7%	23%	10%	25%
3	2%	37%	1%	33%	2%	39%
4	2%	64%	4%	64%	2%	64%

## 3. English Literacy – Sentences Level

The highest rate of improvement in English reading was recorded for Cohort 4, while Cohort 1 children showed the lowest rate of improvement. A gender breakdown suggests that boys consistently show more improvement in English reading than girls, for each of the successive cohorts except for Cohort 2.



Cohort	Overall		Girls		Boys	
	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
1	3%	52%	2%	47%	4%	56%
2	1%	57%	4%	33%	3%	41%
3	2%	58%	2%	49%	2%	65%
4	1%	75%	1%	71%	1%	77%

The monitoring routines used digital tracking via unique IDs for each child and all results were uploaded on digital platforms (Kobo Toolbox & Microsoft office) for efficient reporting and feedback.

The intervention apart from the externality effect that showed an increase in enrollment due to the incentive to have the kits

distributed at Intervention I, the program also successfully mainstreamed 30,178 students with improved learning level who were either out of school or were at the risk of dropping out.

The intensive camps generated confidence in the field and research teams. During the fourth cohort, extensive disability

(WHO/CFM) and social emotional learning surveys were undertaken to better understand challenges facing support solutions. The SEL Survey tool was also adapted and devised for the target group as a combination of items from GRIT and MELQO instruments, both tested by ITA research teams for Schools 2030 (AKF 2022-23) and Early Learning Partnerships (ELP) for systems

(WB 2019-22). The results of this unique work during emergencies will be shared soon by the ITA research teams to highlight the art of the possible during emergencies.

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## Unique IDs

Unique IDs are an excellent way of tracking a child for resource distribution, research, and impact assessment. In resource distribution such IDs help track whether the child has received certain facilities. For research and impact assessment purposes such IDs can be used to create treatment & control groups and to specifically analyze how a certain child is impacted.

The Unique IDs were used throughout the 3 interventions employed during the TaRL camps. For Cohort 4, this process helped in linking the child-level assessment data to not only the Social Emotional learning (SEL) measurement survey data but also the disability assessment indicators. The data gives an edge to say that the kids with certain disability had shown this level of improvement in learning levels and social emotional learning levels as well.

### • Key Takeaways

- The performance of Cohort 4 is highest irrespective of the subject (Sindhi/Urdu, English, and Arithmetic); this was a stage when teachers had become most familiar with the methodology.
- Cohort 2 has performed better in literacy as compared to arithmetic. And the literacy gains of Cohort 2 are higher than that of Cohort 1 & Cohort 3
- Numeracy learning gains are most pronounced for cohort 1 and cohort 4
- Cohort 1 & Cohort 4 have an explicit advantage over the other two cohorts as they were not established during summer vacation, hence did not suffer from low attendance rates.
- Learning Camps in Summer Vacations can be efficiently implemented with similar learning gains if they are planned with an outreach component and early mobilization within communities. Unfortunately, this proved to be a challenge for several reasons including the emergency context, harsh weather conditions during summers in interior Sindh, and early morning timings clashing with madrassa/Quran class timings.
- Overall, the learning levels of boys are better than the girls except for English in Cohort 2.
- Though girls have shown tremendous improvement, their learning gains lag those of boys; in the case of Cohorts 2 & 3 during summer vacations girls tended to be more involved in domestic chores.
- There is tremendous potential for improvement in learning given the scale of

learning poverty, the traditional low learning levels in Sindh (ASER 2010-2022; IBA/SAT assessments for SELD).

- ESWG/EIE teams were receptive to including 'learning intervention and indicators' on the emergency dashboard underscoring the urgency to include learning improvement during emergencies as an outcome-based, measurable intervention.
- Girls can be supported through second chance remedial programs through TARL/CPB learning camps as has been done in South Punjab under 'ITAs Siyani

Sahelian/Aasman Say Batein Programs (a HundrED innovation) and as is also being undertaken for refugees/host communities under the Multi-Year Resilience Program (MYRP) supported by Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and VSO in the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**So, what are we waiting for? Let's do it, measure it and replicate it widely.**

**Note:** The TARL/CPB Learning Camp Contents have been approved by all four provinces as a robust 60 days program for scaling up learning in Pakistan.

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## **About the Author**

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