**Handout 2**

The teachers in Majidee were frustrated. There was hardly any interaction they had with parents, especially the mothers, who were often not permitted to step outside the house. The lack of literacy skills amongst mothers was another added challenge. Frequent absenteeism, especially by the girls, who were asked to stay back to complete household chores, added to poor learning outcomes. Finding little support from the community, teacher motivation had fallen low. Added to it was the fact that they were poorly paid and worked under challenging conditions. Many schools had leaky roofs, through which rain trickled in during the monsoons and the summer months were unbearable. Thus, many factors were impacting the learning outcomes.

At their meeting in Dhaka, Sheikh and Hussain discussed the educational challenges of Majidee. As a follow up, a two-day meeting held in Dhaka on March 28, 2009 brought together top literacy experts and community organizers. Led by Sheikh and Hussain, the meeting helped craft a strategy for Majidee and designed a unique campaign, centered around community participation, called “Empower the Community to Educate each Child” (ECEC) campaign. Hussain agreed to come to Majidee later to talk with the teachers.

In Majidee, women worked from their homes to supplement their families’ income. Most women were engaged in creating “Batik” prints for dresses. The nature of the work required women to work in groups. Caste and class barriers were put aside as they came together for this work. In April 2009, Sheikh moved back to Majidee and started working with a group of women. She had enjoyed making Batik designs when she was in school. Now, she decided to work alongside, giving women helpful tips on designs and colors. Soon, she was a trusted part of the community. By June 30, 2009, she had formed a group of ten women, who were willing to take leadership on setting up a community center that supported the literacy program. A month later, the Board gave infrastucture support for a community center to be set up.

However, as the teams developed, resistance started to come in from the teachers group and adult male members of society. The teachers, although interested in improved outcomes, were not accustomed to being held accountable. With women playing an active role at the community literacy center, mothers had started to take more interest in their children’s learning and would demand answers if they learnt that the teacher was absent or a lesson was not completed in school. Ideally, the teachers and the mothers needed to work in a partnership. Teachers needed to participate in community activities at the literacy center.

In October 2009, Hussain came to Majidee with a team of teachers from Noakhali town, who had successfully partnered with the community in making a change in learning outcomes. Hussain’s presence in the small town provided a big boost to teacher morale. The accompanying group of teachers shared their stories and motivated the teachers at Majidee to participate in the process change. This was the single biggest turnaround in the campaign. By November 2009, five teachers opted to contribute an hour of their time in the evening at the literacy center. But by January 2010, there was not a single teacher who was not participating actively. Younger men of the community took on the responsibility of engaging older men in the community, who wanted to restrict women from leaving their homes.

The achievements reflected not just in better outcomes but also in the community’s ownership of the program. By December 2010, the literacy center had become a place of many activities, organized by the children and the community. A library had been set up, where both children and adults would come to read. Children were organizing puppet shows based on the stories that they had learned in school. Many households had allowed women to come out and read at the center. As had happened in Noakhali town, families participated by bringing hot snacks for children, which helped create a sense of a cohesive community.

In January 2012, many of the youth volunteers graduated and moved to Dhaka for further education. The commitment that they these youth had shown was missing in the next generation. The community had not set up a system of training new leaders. Also, many people did not want to let go of the authority they had come to acquire and allow new leadership to come in. This created a leadership vacuum at several levels. Sheikh realized a leadership component needed to be built into the program if it had to be sustainable over the long term. She knew a village youth, who through sustained hard work, had found admission to Harvard Kennedy School, and was studying leadership. He was only too keen to come back to his village and work on building leadership.

**(This report has been written solely for the purpose of teaching. It bears no resemblance to any place, people or events. Author: Kalpana Jain)**