



# Sabawoon

Inspiring Stories

# Sabawoon Inspiring Stories

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# INTRODUCTION

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Sabawoon (dawn) is a flagship radio intervention of the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). It is aired from Peshawar for the entire Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region. The shows are broadcast from private radio channels FM 101 Peshawar, AM 1260 Peshawar, FM 93 Dera Ismail Khan.

Sabawoon has been designed to inculcate respect for human rights (especially female rights), underscore the need for good governance, create greater awareness for democratic and governance reforms, and to create avenues for the public to participate in policymaking either through formal institutions or informal consultations. The programs are meant to promote a democratic discourse, trigger critical thinking, and create social space for a counter-radicalization narrative in the militancy-stricken and religious extremism prone areas.

Through this endeavor, the CRSS is also creating mechanisms for the inclusion of multiple

social groups in the decision-making processes, such as youth and students, female members of society, and local government representatives. The radio programs have helped encourage civil society and local communities to formulate and express their positions on issues that affect them. All segments of Sabawoon radio programs emphasize that rule of law is an indispensable element for peaceful coexistence.

Sabawoon has aired over 3,000 shows under its banner. The following are some of the inspiring stories collected from the field, in-studio, and via caller feedback. They showcase how these individuals have contributed to building a peaceful and democratic society. These are stories of resilience and perseverance. These are stories of heartbreak and heart-mend. These are stories of ordinary Pakistanis, in extenuating circumstances, doing extraordinary things.

# SUCCESS STORIES

## Neelam Ibrar Chattan

The restive valley of Swat witnessed an upsurge in militancy beginning in the summer of 2007, resulting in tens of thousands of people fleeing to safer locales. The area saw stark violence and even public executions by the Taliban. Finally the government and the military cracked down in May 2009, but it led to a mass exodus from the region.

The majority of the people returned within a span of two years following the stabilization of the valley. However, some families decided to stay back and amongst them was the family of an 18 year old girl, Neelam Ibrar Chattan. Hailing from Saidu Sharif, the center of Taliban brutality, Neelam was a college student, deeply affected by the situation at home. Her circumstances hardened her to fight for justice and peace and not to become a victim of militants who justified every atrocity in the name of religion. This led to her joining a humanitarian organization working for peace. "It has been my top priority to push the younger generation



towards peace and harmony and prevent them from indulging in terrorism and other unlawful activities," she says.

During the Sabawoon interview she stated that after joining the organization she has personally trained dozens of girls along with more than 200 mothers on how to lead and promote peaceful living. The barbarism witnessed first-hand by her and others further strengthened the community's resolve to eradicate religious extremism from their midst, as it is in dire contrast with the principles of Islam.

Neelam commented on the role

of women in a conservative place like Swat: “The position of women is aggravated by the traditional, cultural and social taboos which not only restrict their freedom, but forces them to adopt male-dictated roles. The acceptance of professions other than a teacher or nurse/doctor is severely discouraged and resented. Islam encourages freedom; hence one can work in any field.” Neelam strongly

promotes patriotism and feels that the nation should work collectively for the betterment of Pakistan, or the next generation will hold us accountable.

Neelam got several awards from a variety of organizations for her untiring and selfless services for peace and social justice. The European Union and Paiman Trust have both acknowledged her endeavours.



## Jamshed Khan

The tide of militancy and extremism has impacted the tribal areas of Pakistan to such a marked extent that millions of people have been forced to leave their hometowns and migrate to safer places. The story of Mr. Jamshed Khan is one among thousands.

His family resided in the Nawagai area of Bajaur Agency. During a period of unrest and military operations, his family home was completely destroyed and his sister lost her sight. The conflict also adversely impacted their business, to the extent that they were left with no source of income.

Being the eldest son of the family, Jamshed felt responsible and worked hard to improve their condition. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, he learned tailoring from a non-government organization (NGO) and started working. With the facilitation of an NGO, he acquired a number of sewing machines and set up his own shop. During Eid he stitched around 250 to 300 dresses.

During the interview he stated: "The skill training that I received from the NGO gave me a new

lease on life and helped me stand on my own two feet. With the grace of God and hard work I have managed to pay back all the loans we had accumulated during the hard times and have even repaired our home, thanks to the guidance and blessings of Allah Almighty."

He has become a role model in his community instead of being a victim, by sheer grit and hard work he has attained what he set out to achieve. Today, he has become a symbol of courage for his peers and friends. Being a true patriot, he firmly believes that the spirit of perseverance will bring about the needed change.

## Kamran

Kamran is a son of a labourer in Charsadda district. Unlike most other in a similar situation, he went on to secure admission in the prestigious Khyber Medical College, through sheer will and determination.

“I am not a product of a private school, but had the grit and stamina to excel in studies. The love and respect of my teachers and my family’s economic hardships strengthened my resolve.” Kamran is a living example of what can be achieved with determination and focus. While studying, he also worked as a child labourer to help support his father, but it did not deter or impede his performance. He received a scholarship for obtaining the top position in the Peshawar Board examinations.

One of his teachers, Mr. Syed Khalil Shah from Government High School, Charsadda commented, “In intermediate examinations of 2012, two students from our district, Musa and Kamran, took first and second positions respectively across the province, which is an honour for all of us. Despite belonging to poor families, they qualified for medical college.

I wish them good luck in their future endeavours and pray that they serve humanity with the same dedication instead of just focusing on worldly gains.”

## Irshad Shinwari

Mr. Irshad Shinwari, a resident of Landi Kotal, Khyber Agency is a polio victim. To aid the rehabilitation of other disabled people, he established an organization called Speed. During the Sabawoon interview he stated: “The purpose of my organization is to preserve and protect the rights of handicapped people living across FATA and to highlight their plight to the authorities.”

Irshad has also conducted research on the difficulties faced by individuals who have been maimed in terror attacks across Pakistan. He received backing by the Australian Development Scholarship (ADS), and trained in Australia for two years. The ADS is granted to people belonging to remote regions, working on public welfare activities.

“During my stay in Australia, I engaged in development studies and conducted research on people who became disabled in the war on terror.” He further said that Australians have a more positive attitude towards the disabled, whereas in Pakistan, they are considered fit only for charity and beggary.

Irshad reflected on the struggles



he encountered in school as a polio victim. He said that being shunned from society is a matter of grave concern due to its prevalence in the tribal regions and KP. His simple and clear message to the disabled is to never give up, and to pursue education at any cost.

## Liaquat Ali Khan

Liaquat Ali Khan is a prominent artist in Pakistan, born in 1949 to a poor family in Kohat. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Peshawar University. While in school he started painting landscapes and made portraits of national heroes and famous personalities but it stayed a hobby. Poverty was a major obstacle in pursuing further education. He emigrated to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in search of a decent living. He worked tirelessly for almost 30 years, drawing famous people. His now-famous 2,220 square feet portrait of Sheikh Zaid got his name in the Guinness Book of World Records.

During the Sabawoon interview, Ali recalled that from 1980 to 2006, he made 1,060 portraits of Sheikh Zaid. After seeing his massive painting, the monarch invited him to his palace in Abu Dhabi. He regretted being ignored by the government and the people of Pakistan. He said that he made an 8,000 square feet portrait of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in a period of seven months costing 40,000 dirhams, but unfortunately it is collecting dust in a government warehouse.



His message for the people was to continue working hard, endlessly, as it will always pay off in the end.

It is a sad and bitter reality that during their life, great artists are hardly ever recognized and their worth is only realized once they are gone.

## Sultana Afridi

In order for the society to function smoothly, men and women have to be aligned and balanced. Unfortunately, women are not given their due status and respect in the Pukhtoon culture and their achievements are often not fully acknowledged. Sultana Afridi has dedicated her life to combat this injustice. She is associated with the Mohmand Model School since the past 17 years and no amount of militancy has deterred her.

During the Sabawoon interview, she stated: "I belong to Badhber, near Peshawar. Due to the deteriorating security situation, the majority of educational institutions were closed and the teachers were forced to leave. Bombardments and random acts of terror became the norm. My children and I were constantly receiving threats of getting kidnapped or killed."

It did not help that Sultana was a woman in an ultra-conservative society. However, with time and persistence she managed to change the perception of the locals. She continued her mission, successfully running a co-educational system in a region held back by tradition

and conservative values. The opposition she faced only strengthened her resolve and commitment. For her efforts, she has been awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz (star of excellence), one of the highest civilian honours.

Her message to the new generation is to serve with dedication and honour, to work towards a better tomorrow. She said the assistance, protection, and recognition by the government in these endeavours is of paramount importance.

## Abdul Aziz

Abdul Aziz, a young man from Peshawar, launched the Motivated Youth Organization in 2012, which aims to work towards the welfare of young people, while promoting tourism in the region. It became so successful that it was chosen for the World Summit Youth Award in 2013.

During the Sabawoon interview Abdul said: “The primary purpose of this program is to promote tourism, education and sports, especially through the involvement of young people. We are developing awareness about our program through social media. The beauty of KP would enhance the economy of the country via tourism. Additionally, by reviving this sector we can create employment in the region.”



## Fazal-e-Hadi

On December 31, 2009, an IED (improvised explosive device) blast forever changed the lives of a single family from Bajaur Agency, one of the seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The explosion killed two, and injured another two, all four brothers from the same family. The fifth brother, Fazal-e-Hadi had limited options to support his traumatized parents and siblings. They had a small shop to provide for the entire household, which consisted of seventeen individuals.

Fazal-e-Hadi worked tirelessly over the next several years, getting facilitated in the evenings by CSOs and NGOs to gain a variety of skills and technical trainings, and fought tooth and nail to support his family. During his Sabawoon interview, he stated: “Due to the blessings of Allah I managed to stand on my own feet. Otherwise my family would not have survived the wave of terrorism in the region. After numerous trainings, I am also providing consumer services in the area such as payment of utility bills, verification of national ID cards and internet services to the customers.”

Fazal-e-Hadi is a story of real hard work and persistence. Despite going through a harrowing ordeal as a family, he did not lose hope, and worked tirelessly and honestly. His message to the youth is to never give up, and never veer from the righteous path. He says it would have been easy for him to take up arms, or to succumb to the pressures of the Taliban in the region. But he decided to forge his own fate, and work relentlessly to protect and provide for his family. Fazal-e-Hadi is one of the thousands of stories of brave Pakistanis, who despite being victims of terror, marched on, and overcame obstacles through sheer determination.

## Ijaz Hussain

The story of Ijaz Hussain illustrates that hard work, devotion and commitment are needed to achieve one's goals. Ijaz belongs to a poor family in Charsadda, who could not pursue education due to limited resources, despite being academically gifted. As a young boy, he worked as a hawker to supplement the income of his family. During his Sabawoon interview, he said: "I dreamt of studying in Islamia College (Peshawar) and to make ends meet I began selling newspapers to pay for my tuition fee. Despite getting admission and seeing my name on the varied merit lists I could not get in the institutions due to my inability to pay the fee. Against all odds I managed to complete my degree in Journalism from the University of Peshawar."

He is extremely grateful to two of his professors - for guiding him every step of the way - and to his parents and friends. His story is a classic example of how proper and consistent mentoring from role models, such as teachers, can propel an individual despite every obstacle in their path.



## Hassan Ali

At the time of the Sabawoon interview, Hassan Ali, who belongs to Charsadda district, was 10 years old and studied in the fourth grade of a government school.

His father and three of his brothers were born blind. They are the primary motivation for him to pursue medical studies. He is of the belief that he can treat them after completing his education. Hassan attends school during the day, works part time in the evenings, and studies at night.

His teachers, neighbours and family are all very proud of him. Children, Hassan's age, should have the luxury of playing and enjoying the formative years of their youth. Hassan is engrossed in his studies and works hard to feed the family.

Hassan offers another example of how hard work and dedication can prevent a person from following down the dark path of radicalization or pursue a criminal path. Hassan is a true inspiration to his peers.

## Mian Umar Khattak

Mian Umar Khattak, Sub-Inspector Police, belongs to Dag Ismail Khel, Nowshera district. He joined the police force in 1988. During his Sabawoon interview he said: “I am of the opinion that in order to lead a peaceful, happy and fulfilled life, it is our duty to work towards the welfare and betterment of humanity. Compassion for others, irrespective of their faith and belief, is imperative. Our religion also preaches this.”

Khattak’s words reflect his knowledge of some of the fundamental rights enshrined in Pakistan’s constitution about minorities and respect for diversity.

What merits mention here is that the KP police has been at the forefront of the war against terror. Militants routinely target and murder law enforcement individuals; hence a policeman’s life is particularly in danger. Khattak has no qualms about being a member of police and believes it is his duty to safeguard the interests of citizens. This case also reflects the values’ education that has become part of the KP police’s training.

Khattak is also well-known for



his honesty and sincerity. He was discovered by the Sabawoon team because he recovered a bag full of cash, estimated in the millions, which dropped out of an armoured truck that was carrying bank cash. Khattak returned it to the bank manager. This also helped repair the tarnished image of the police force in the KP province. Khattak continues to perform his duty with humility, and insists that he is no hero, but just a police officer doing his duty. An inspiration indeed for others.

## Sajida Rehman

Ms Sajida Rehman hails from Khyber Agency but currently resides in Peshawar. She is a widowed mother of seven. This made her situation particularly difficult in a traditional tribal society. In order to support her children she took up a job which required frequent traveling. As such, the traditions and taboos of the community became her greatest hindrance, limiting her opportunities to fend for herself and her children. Instead of providing her support and protection against the vicious behaviour of people, she was shunned. She works as a consultant at an insurance company and, in the evenings, provides school tuitions at home. Despite the many hardships of life, she has not lost hope, nor has ever considered giving up her responsibilities.

Sajida's story is both heartening and inspiring as a tale of courage, fortitude and determination. In Sajida's words: "I have never relied on anybody, as when hard times come, one has to face them with resolve. Despite the criticism and social hurdles I faced, I have enabled my children to stand on their own feet and told them that people have no

right to criticize me if they do not have the decency to step forward and help me." Sajida believes many in the society practice double-standards when judging others. "Naysayers would always speak of my 'loose morals', but wouldn't offer any help when I needed it most," she recalled.

Women empowerment has dramatically changed the dynamics in KP. Sajida is of the opinion that parents should accord the same importance to female education as they do to their male offspring. No doubt at all that an educated workforce is the key to economic development.

## Hadiqa Bashir

Child marriage can perhaps be dubbed as a big social scourge in the Pakhtoon society. In many instances, underage female brides are given away by parents in return for monetary gains, thereby condemning them to a life of near servitude at an age when they should be in schools. This archaic custom - mostly practiced out of poverty - has considerably declined in recent years, yet it does occur in certain rural areas.

The situation for such teenage bride is often extremely cumbersome because in rural areas in particular, females are supposed to serve the entire family beside the husband.

Ms.Hadiqa Bashir's life and work also relates to early marriages. She comes from Saidu Sharif, Swat. As a precocious teenager, the 13-year-old started campaigning against the early marriages, when her friend became a victim of this custom.

"My friend became a victim of this abuse and faced domestic violence along with all the hard work that she was forced to do in the household. I would have faced the same fate had my parents not stood by me," Ms.



Bashir said during her Sabawoon interview.

Hadiqa received the Muhammad Ali International Humanitarian Award at a very young age for raising her voice against this barbaric and vicious act. Her struggle and her courage is a testament to the girls of Swat, and their enduring perseverance that has become a symbol.

## Shehzad Khan

Shehzad Khan spent a year in the United States of America under a youth exchange and study scholarship program. During this period, he closely observed the education system in the US. This experience strongly impacted him and made him realize that in order to achieve success, education is the key. Upon his return in 2013, he decided to open a tuition centre, along with a library, to facilitate the children of his village with free education. In this endeavour, he was supported by many philanthropists of the area.

One of the local influential elders allowed him to use his property as a library and learning centre. Shehzad started off by visiting different parts of the province in order to collect syllabus and other general books for the students. He started with 8 students, which has since grown to well over 100.

He strongly believes that volunteerism can bring about development and prosperity in the country. His learning centre caters to basic education along with computer literacy and English language classes. The

centre ensures that the students are taught the global social values to turn them into productive citizens. They are also taught about the environment and the importance of tree plantation.

Shehzad Khan said during his Sabawoon interview, “Witnessing the performance and progress of the students gives me an immense sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. It is a matter of pride to be working as a volunteer in the area.”

## Yasmeen Akhtar

Yasmeen Akhtar belongs to an isolated area of the Bannu district, where working women are looked down upon. Men usually resent when women step out of their home for work. In a male-dominated, conservative environment, women remain vulnerable to suspicion, allegations and mistrust - that can resonate in private male conversations. Yet, there are women who defy all these social odds to do whatever they want.

Yasmeen Akhtar is one such brave woman. She works for an NGO, called Khwendo Kor, as a regional manager and is the sole breadwinner of her family. She is very focused and committed to improve the status of working women in Bannu. Her children are pursuing higher education and she is completely devoted towards the education and grooming of her daughter. Her commitment to women's rights and clarity of mind came through clearly during her Sabawoon interview:

“A society cannot progress unless both men and women are treated equally. More than 50% of our population consists of females. Imagine how much they could

contribute to the economy, if they were given footing equal to men in our society. That is my fight. That is what I fight for on a daily basis.”

This underscores Yasmeen's passionate struggle for equal opportunities for women and their recognition as equal members of the society.

## Waqar-ul-Mulk

Professor Waqar-ul-Mulk is a renowned poet-turned journalist and teacher. After his graduation, he joined the newly opened journalism department at the Peshawar University. That turned out to be a turning point in his life; there, he rediscovered his love for his homeland and native Pashto language. He was inspired by his tutors and professors and their support encouraged him to secure a degree in English and in journalism. He now teaches English at the Post-Graduate College in Karak, a southern district of KP.

Waqar-ul-Mulk is known for his humanitarian activities. He launched an awareness campaign on some pressing social ills in the Karak society. One of them is the tendency of cheating during examinations. Through constant counselling, he convinced students that undue temporary gains through cheating carried long term disadvantages such as inability to face future challenges. This advocacy went down well with many and made him immensely popular.

The professor believes



that irrespective of the circumstances, one should not compromise on one's ethical principles. "Striving to improve your ownself and working for the collective good should be everybody's guiding principle," he said.







# About CRSS

## CRSS Background

The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) is a think tank/advocacy center founded in September, 2007. Founded by noted security analyst Imtiaz Gul, it committed to the cause of independent research and nonpartisan analysis, and help people outside Pakistan understand this nation of 212 million people.

As an advocacy center, CRSS is dedicated to trigger critical thinking through discourse anchored in global democratic values such as socio-political diversity, rule of law, equal citizenry, and acceptance of diversity, fundamental human rights, all at the intersection of empirical research in security studies.

## CRSS Core Values

CRSS believes in embedding the national conversation in constitutionalism, and rationalizing it over extremism and sectarianism. CRSS believes the path to peace is through strict adherence to rule of law, and stringent implementation of rules, educating the public on civic issues, especially fundamental human rights, providing training and opportunities to youth to veer them away from the path of radicalization, and promoting women's rights as universal rights.

The core values above are reflected in every CRSS endeavor, personally and professionally. CRSS believes that these values, along with time-tested methodologies in strategic communications, impactful message development, research and advocacy can result in a more tolerant, secure and cohesive Pakistan.

## CRSS Publications

CRSS produces several publications annually. Our flagship publications are the NAP Tracker, an annual audit of the National Action Plan (NAP) by the Pakistan government to eliminate extremism from the country, and the Annual Security Report, a measure of the state of security in Pakistan by gauging the number of violence-related casualties across the country. In addition, two of our recent publications include the Role of Madrassas, in which we interview 550+ families across Pakistan with children in seminaries, to answer why parents continue to send their children to madrassas. CRSS also regularly publishes research papers by our research fellows from around the world. ([www.crss.pk/publications](http://www.crss.pk/publications)).

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