

Milestones achieved! 2021

our testimonials



Sindh Education Foundation
Government of Sindh

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I know each of my students' parents personally



Shah Abdul Latif Fellowship High School Khairpur is situated adjacent to a date palm field right next to the main Highway. The two story building, which I'm told has been extended to accommodate all the students, serves children aged 4-17 from the neighboring village. With 332 boys and 290 girls enrolled in the school from grades Nursery to 10th, the school is supported by Sindh Education Foundation. The classrooms are spacious and airy, the premises is clean and there are separate toilets for boys and girls. The school also has a backup generator.

Tuba Gul Baloch, the Head Teacher at Shah Abdul Latif Fellowship High School started out as a teacher in the same school some five years ago. Seeing her dedication to the children and her skillful handling of both staff at the school and parents from the community, she was promoted to Head Teacher in 2018.

"I know each of my students' parents personally," she claims confidently, "They are like family! I was intrigued as to how this was possible, considering her responsibilities at the school. Tuba Gul had explained her administrative responsibilities, along with her dedication towards improving the quality of learning and resultant improvement in student learning outcomes (SLO) in her school.

"The Teaching Support Associate (TSA), Nuzhat Channa is my

pillar of support,” she continued. “My responsibilities are now shared with Nuzhat and she does a great job of working with the teachers,” says Tuba.

Ongoing Teacher Training

TsAs were introduced to SEF supported schools in order to provide much needed support to the faculty on a continuous basis. Having undergone rigorous training in both pedagogy and content knowledge, these TsAs work as supportive faculty in the school. After teaching their own classes, the TSA observes other teachers in the classroom, identifies areas for improvement, provide feedback and then also deliver trainings to the teachers. Regular training for teachers from far flung rural areas is a time consuming and administratively cumbersome process. Moreover, training needs can differ from school to school, and catering to specific training requirements is not feasible. The TsAs were selected and positioned in each school where SLOs were not satisfactory or SEF was receiving multiple requests for teacher training.

Tuba and Nuzhat struck a friendship on their first day together which has positively impacted their collective efforts towards whole school improvement. Whereas Tuba was earlier struggling to maintain a balance between dealing with the administrative and functional challenges of the school and ensuring the teachers were delivering quality education in the classroom, Nuzhat’s participation has reduced the burden on her to a great extent. Tuba and Nuzhat work together while giving feedback to the teachers and arranging for in-school trainings. Tuba supports Nuzhat in all her efforts, while she now also benefits from a confidante and advisor who helps in introducing new initiatives in the school.

Increasing girls’ participation in education

While living in the vicinity are enrolled in the school, attendance is an entirely different story in Shah Abdul Latif Fellowship High School. Villagers have a laid back attitude towards education, parents not mostly educated themselves. Poverty is an additional issue which affects students’, especially girls’, attendance.

“The women in our village are the main breadwinners,” says Tuba. While the men do work as daily wage workers, plumbers, car mechanics drivers and skilled laborers, it is the women’s skill at making the traditional Sindhi patchwork and cutwork quilts called Rillis which is the main source of income for nearly all the households. Girls as young as 11 can work the sewing machine and make 3-4 rillis a week. Earning anywhere between Rs. 200-300 (\$1.25-1.9) on each rilli, the girls contribute to their household income, along with having money for themselves.

This means the girls regularly miss school so they can complete their orders. Additionally, the girls weren’t even putting in significant efforts to complete their homework or study at home. Having the TSA around meant that Tuba had additional time to engage with the girls’ parents. She would visit them at home personally, asking them to send their girls to school, along with talking to them about the importance of education for girls. The general attitude towards girls’ education ranges from indifference to considering it an inconvenience for the family. Tuba tries to make them understand that educating their girls will not only enable them to read and write, but also benefit future

generations, as an educated mother will ensure her children are educated too.

The Head teacher and TSA have come up with new ways of increasing girls’ participation and interest. Each class now holds a competition where the best performing student bags a prize every month. The prize consists of stationery and books. This one initiative has worked wonders in the school. The girls not only started taking interest in the classroom, they also ensured they did well in tests and participated in class discussions.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Upon hearing first reports of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for hand washing to stay safe, the Head Teacher-TSA duo came up with an idea to promote hand washing. Using the schools’ resources, they purchased individual soaps for all the kids and held a “Hand washing day” in school. The children observed a demonstration by the TSA how to wash their hands for 20 seconds and then washed their hands too. The teachers spoke about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was affecting people across the world, impressing upon the kids the need for social distancing and personal hygiene.

Schools closed down the following week, making the abstract concept of the pandemic a reality. However, very little changed in terms of everyday life for the residents of rural areas. There was widespread rejection of the concept of the pandemic altogether and life continued as normal. “At least we managed to create some conversation around Covid-19 with the children before schools closed down. We just kept hoping they would incorporate our discussion in their lives and stay safe,” says Nuzhat.

Committed to girls' education:

How leadership development changed attitudes

I go to pick my girls up myself every day, I can't have them miss school.



Shameem Akhtar Pathan's day starts at 5 am. After her morning prayers, she gets ready for her day at Jawad model high school in Simak channa town near Khairpur city. "I go to pick my girls up myself every day," she says, "I can't have them miss school."

Established in 2015, Jawad Model High School is supported by the Sindh Education Foundation. Running from grades 6-9. It has an enrollment of 265 students of which an overwhelming three fourths are girls.

Shameem joined the school in 2016 as Head Teacher. She had been working in her neighborhood school as a teacher for the past 5 years and was deeply invested in her students. Along with her regular responsibilities of planning her classes and checking homework, Shameem also created strong bonds with her students. When they missed school, she would land up at their homes to speak to their parents. Both enrollment and attendance in her classes improved due to her consistent efforts. She was recognized by parents and educationalists for her dedication and perseverance. Shameem was offered a job as Head Teacher at Jawad Model High School, which she accepted happily.

Fighting antiquated beliefs

As Head Teacher Shameem's responsibilities multiplied. And so did her worries. Most of the girls in the neighboring villages did not go to school due to archaic customs and gossiping neighbors. The school's co-education policy made the parents uncomfortable as it was not customary for unrelated boys and girls of the same age to mingle in villages. Shameem put the parents' mind at rest, going door to door and assuring each one of them that she would be personally responsible for each child in the school.

Cognizant of the challenges of

teaching in a classroom, Shameem has come up with a system whereby the Implementing partner/school owner, Teaching Support Associate, teachers, and herself work together to maximize their school's potential. "I want the teachers to be free to concentrate on classroom activities and build strong bonds with the students. This age is especially challenging for both girls and boys as they navigate new feelings and external challenges. Girls cannot talk to their fathers or brothers and need additional support and encouragement."

Shameem discovered that one of the major reasons for girls' low attendance and high dropout rates was the absence of transport facilities. The School Operator was supportive when she voiced her concerns and arranged for free transport for the girls. Initially it was one auto-rickshaw Shameem would use to pick and drop the girls. Now she has two mini-buses. Seeing her passion, dedication and enthusiasm, reticent parents are now vociferous supporters of both the school and girls' education. They introduce her to girls who want to go to school and help win over other parents to the cause of girls' education.

Girls' education changing the status of women in society

It was her personal struggles that made her resilient and a firm believer in girls' education. Shameem was only 15 when her mother died. "I had to take care of my siblings and four buffaloes. I had no idea how I was going to do it," she says tearfully. Her father remarrying added to her problems. Shameem was promptly married off to a man ten years her senior. She soon found out he was also suffering from Tuberculosis. Instead of pulling her down, her resolve strengthened amidst these misfortunes. She took care of her family, and continued her education. As it was, her husband became her biggest supporter, taking care of the kids when she had to study and encouraging her to follow her dreams. "Now I am the Queen of my home," she says. "If a woman is educated, the man will also respect her and heed her advice. Otherwise she'll be relegated to the position of a housekeeper only. This is the change I want for my girls in this school."

Training for leadership skills

Head Teacher trainings arranged by SEF helped strengthen Shameem's administrative skills. She has attended two trainings where she learnt about community participation, discussed ideas pertaining to increasing attendance in school, and was informed about child psychology and how to use it when dealing with children and adolescents. These activity based trainings emboldened her, widening her horizons and helping her to see challenges from a new perspective.

Shameem is an inspiration to the entire school staff. Seeing her coming in to school every morning with the girls gives them an added sense of responsibility and ownership. The teachers agree that with Shameem at the helm, they feel a sense of protection and guidance. There is not one task which she feels is beneath her; she will just as merrily take over a class, or go out in the community to distribute homework and inquire about the wellbeing of her students.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020, resulting in nationwide school closures, bringing with it a sense of uncertainty and confusion, Shameem rolled up her sleeves once again. She refused to put her teachers in harm's way, insisting she would be

able to handle students' testing by herself. Masked and armed with her bottle of sanitizer, she set out collecting students in small groups and administering tests sent out by SEF. "I kept talking about how we should all be careful about hygiene and wash our hands with soap. There is very little knowledge about the spread of disease in these areas, so I felt it was my responsibility to engage in discussion to spread awareness, wherever possible."

Unsurprisingly, all of Shameem's students, including the girls, returned to school once it reopened in September 2020. She had kept in touch with all of them over the telephone during the school closures, encouraging them to read something, anything. "It was reading that brought me where I am today. When my mother died and I was taking care of my siblings alone, I would stay up the entire night with the lights on and read to distract me from my fear. And I am the richer for it today!"

With the second lockdown having started towards the end of November 2020, Shameem is still hopeful. She laments the fact that her students have had to face severe learning losses, but she is not about to give up. Once she receives homework from SEF to be distributed to the students, she asks her teachers to prepare additional assignments based on the areas of study they believe the students would find more challenging. She goes door to door herself to distribute the homework and to keep reminding the parents how important it is for them to continue their education.

"Learning must never stop," Shameem smiles, "I am still learning something new every day and I will not cease my mission until I know that all my students are well established on this path as well!"

Raniya

Dared to dream

She was told, "Don't dream so big Raniya!"



tutoring students after her own school shift was over. In addition to this, she also managed to squeeze in time for attending a coaching center to help her prepare for her matriculation (tenth grade) examinations. ‘

Don't dream so big!

To say that her family was not supportive of her continuing her education would be an understatement. Her elder sisters had barely completed school and she would be the first one who wanted to study further. When she expressed the desire to pursue medicine, her family members cautioned her against it. Not only was it inappropriate for a girl to study in their family, a medical degree would be unfitting to their social status, she was told. "Don't dream so big Raniya!"

But she did dream. And she dreamt big. And she pursued her dreams with a passion which could not be shaken by any discouragement.

Finding success in defeat

Raniya wanted to join the Pakistan Navy and heard about the entry test in her first year of college. She had enrolled in a small college close to her residence as is the norm for most girls as parents prefer to send their daughters to educational institutions close to their homes. She had also joined a tuition center to help her prepare for her intermediate (grades eleven and twelve) examinations. Preparations for

Tameer e Millat Fellowship School in Malir was Raniya's first school as a five year old who had just moved to Karachi. The youngest of four siblings, Raniya's father was a taxi driver, who had made the move to a new city in search of a better future for his children. She was her father's darling, the apple of his eye! He loved hearing about her day and everything she had learnt in school, applauding her as she recited the alphabet or showed him she had learnt multiplication.

Her world came crashing around her when her father died of TB aged only thirty-six. Seven year old Raniya found solace in her studies, vowing to make her father proud. Her teacher, Miss Mariam took on the mantle of mentor, both encouraging her and giving sage advice, which grew less playful and more serious as Raniya grew older.

First steps to independence

Her mother being the sole supporter of the family, and an older brother in his mid-teens, Raniya understood that finances were tight in the family. Essentials such as stationery and school supplies were a luxury for her and she watched tearfully as she saw her mother stay up nights stitching clothes for a living. Seeing her distress, Miss Mariam suggested Raniya start giving tuitions to younger children from her neighborhood. And so began her journey of independence and self-sufficiency at the tender age of 12.

In ninth grade Raniya decided to enroll for the afternoon shift of her school. Being a stellar student at her school, she received awards and certificates of achievement in every class and extra-curricular activity. Her teachers vouched for her and Raniya managed to obtain employment as a teacher in the neighborhood school, along with

When she expressed the desire to pursue medicine, her family members cautioned her against it.

the admission test to the Naval academy took up eight months and she sailed through all the tests with flying colors. She had to face a massive set-back when she failed the physical exam due to her weak eyesight. Unperturbed, Raniya turned her attention towards preparing for her first year examinations with the help of her tuition teachers. When she managed to score an overall 70% on her exams, everyone sat up and took notice. Her teachers encouraged her to study harder, "If you can get 70% after two months of studying, imagine what you can do if you work hard the entire year," said her teacher.

She put in all her efforts towards her studies. Her family's opposition to her studies just strengthened her resolve to do even better. Raniya managed to score a whopping 94% in her second year examinations. She could now see herself closer to her goal of becoming a medical doctor.

Finances, or the lack of it, were the only thing that stopped Raniya from applying to Dow Medical College. She always knew she wanted to go there. In her mind she could see herself walking with the teachers, examining patients, learning how to cut, suture and bandage and diagnose and prescribe medicines. Taking a year off from her studies was her only choice at this point. She put all her efforts into earning enough money to be able to pay for her entrance fees.

Her extended family came to her aid unexpectedly, nothing short of angels of mercy. They had seen her accomplishments in all these years and when they discovered the reason behind her not joining a medical college, they pitched in to help. Raniya cleared the MDCAT (medical college admission test) and gained admission into Dow Medical College: the college of her dreams!

Even at this point, she faced criticism from her family. Her frail old mother dared not support her. And that is Raniya's only grievance amidst all the hardship she had to bear. "I had no one close to me who would applaud me and celebrate my successes. I could come home with the highest accolades and at best receive stony silence, if not outright resentment. I just wanted to make my family happy and I wouldn't stop trying till I got their approval."

School of her dreams

Surrounded by students coming from privileged backgrounds and elite schools did not faze Raniya. It only strengthened her resolve to outdo her past achievements. Understanding that she would not be able to manage holding down multiple jobs along with her studies, she had to cut back on all her personal expenses. It was worth it.

Raniya managed to score the highest grade in Dow Medical College, a 4.0 GPA! Her life became easier after that as she got a scholarship. Yet she continued to push herself to do more, to be a better version of herself, every day.

Along with her studies, she would also participate in medical camps, and volunteered her services at various hospitals and charity organizations. Slowly but surely, she was building a network of people who were impressed with her work and would not hesitate to put in a good word for her at every opportunity. When the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) offered a training, Raniya was recommended by the charity wing of the famous television program, Sar e Aam, whom she had volunteered with previously. Seeing her performance at the training, Raniya was offered the position of lead trainer at the PDMA.

Don't forget your Roots !

"My chance to give back to my school, Tameer e Millat came during the pandemic. Their students needed to be tested for Covid-19 and I helped process their tests at the AKU with the help of my contacts" says Raniya. "I was happy I could do something for the school that had given me such a brilliant start and set me on the path to success. The Sindh Education Foundation is ensuring so many other children like me get an opportunity to improve their lives through education by supporting schools like Tameer e Millat."

Raniya's journey to more successes is still ongoing. Her story has taken a positive turn, finally. Her family has finally come around, impressed with her achievements and appreciative of her efforts. "I was told not to dream big. Today all those people are cheering me on for persevering on my path to success. I am their pride," she beams a smile as bright as her future.

“Our teachers were the happiest when we gained admission in A.Q. Khan School.”

SEF scholarships **Inspiring new dreams**



Azadar Husain, Vishnu Mal and Wazir Ali are all 9th grade students at Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan School System in Islamabad. The three friends used to attend Tahira Public school, one of Foundation Assisted Schools, in their village of Zawarabad Keerio. Three years ago, they prepared and appeared for a test, passing which, they gained admission to Dr. A.Q. Khan School System through the (SSESP) Sindh School Education Scholarship Programme.

Sindh School Education Scholarship Program

Sindh Education Foundation's Scholarship program was initiated in 2017 with the aim of connecting meritorious students with quality institutions to pursue their post-primary education up to higher secondary level.

The main eligibility criteria for this program include the applicant to be a student for three years at a SEF/SELD run school, possessing the domicile of Sindh and having passed the school entry test.

The foundation bears all student expenses including boarding and lodging fees, tuition and admission fees, transportation costs, uniforms, shoes, books and other necessary articles for students. Students are also paid a monthly stipend for their personal expenses.

Change is growth

The three friends recall the time when their teachers started preparing them for the AQ Khan School entrance test. Tahira Public School, where they had started their educational journey, has consistently performed well on student learning outcomes, even receiving accolades from SEF. “We have great teachers in this school,” says Vishnu. The entire class would stay back after school for extra classes in order to be able to perform well on the entrance test. “Our teachers were the happiest when we gained admission in AQ Khan School. It was through their dedication that so many of us managed to obtain scholarships from SEF which has changed our lives,” adds Azadar.

Families hailing from a remote village deep inside rural Sindh were hesitant to send their young children alone to another city at first. Out of sheer excitement, the students and school teachers managed to convince their parents, impressing upon them the importance



of exposure along with quality education at such an esteemed institution.

The initial excitement of going to another city, travelling by train with their friends, receiving their books and uniforms, and settling into their dorms was replaced by homesickness. “We missed our parents greatly in the first few days. Wazir would even cry during meal times,” chuckles Azadar motioning towards his friend. Eventually they settled down into a routine of regular studies, physical activities and games, and pre-defined meal and bedtimes, which were unheard of in the village. “In the village, we do as we please, playing with our friends and cousins with no concept of routines. The fixed timings for studies and games helped us focus on our studies and our overall personalities improved,” adds Wazir, “even the mediocre students started doing exceptionally well once we were at the new school, thanks to our teachers and house masters who were very helpful.”

A special bond grew between the scholarship students while away from home. The Dr. AQ Khan school system houses students from all over Pakistan, but the bond of familiarity developed into a deep friendship despite their differences. Children of landowners, teachers, government servants, daily wage workers, laborers and drivers ate and studied together, removing all concepts of social and economic class and creed. “Although times are changing and the wadera (land owner) system is slowly phasing out, social distances are still prevalent in our village. Living together with students from all over Pakistan has made us more aware, accepting and tolerant of our differences,” says Azadar thoughtfully.

The students have acclaimed somewhat of a celebrity status in the village. Parents present the scholarship students as good examples, urging their children to emulate them in their good behavior and academic achievements. “People can see that we

are different from the other boys in our village. Our teachers have helped us refine our presentation and behavior. This change has helped us grow into better contributors to our society,” says Wazir Ali, “we urge our friends to not waste their time playing games on their phones and concentrate on their studies instead.”

The desire for continuous growth

Covid related school closures have resulted in the students having to come back to their village and a disruption to their learning. The past year has been tumultuous and confusing for these students. At the same time, they claim the people in their village remain largely unaffected by the pandemic. “No one pays any heed to constant warnings of hygiene and safe distancing in our village. This is because the level of education is so low here that people cannot comprehend the magnitude of this problem which has brought the world to a standstill,” says Vishnu. The students talk to their friends, family members and village people about regular hand washing and social distancing. “People listen to us when we talk now. They say these boys have come from a good school and are very smart,” adds Vishnu.

Online classes on Zoom and Google Classroom helped students retain some links with their school, however, they miss the environment and regular routines. Studying a couple of hours every day after classes and completing their assignments does not measure up to the studies during in person classes. However, the boys are hopeful. “We plan on completing our intermediate degrees from the school and then going on to higher education. SEF’s Scholarship has ensured that there is a desire for more growth within our hearts,” ends Azadar.

Stayed connected to schools and students

During Pandemic

Teachers were instructed to make online learning fun using the Maslow before Blooms educational theory.



Zakia was packing her bags for her field visit to Sukkur the next day when the phone rang at 10 pm on 17th of March, 2020. 'Who's calling at this time,' she wondered picking up her phone. It was her colleague Priyanka, who would be accompanying her for an extended field visit to observe assessments in SEF supported schools across the province. "Schools have been closed indefinitely because of the Covid-19 pandemic," said Priyanka, "there will be no field visits. Even the teams in the field have been called back." Zakia was flabbergasted. Over 150,000 students between grades 3 to 8 had been preparing for their exams in SEF supported schools. Customized examination booklets had been printed for grades 6-8 bearing a unique bar code to track individual students supported by SEF. Sukkur IBA was the third party contracted to conduct the assessments while SEF field teams from the Assessment department observed the proceedings to ensure all protocols were being followed.

The Covid-19 Pandemic and ensuing challenges

Temporary school closures were observed in over 180 countries around the world following the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, leaving 1.6 billion children and youth out of school. 85% of children worldwide were affected (The World Bank, 2020).

The Foundation Assisted Schools supports 2,673 schools in Sindh, providing quality education to over 7,23,000 children across the province. School closures meant that all these children would be out of school experiencing learning losses in already strained situations, resulting in devastating and far-reaching consequences. A global study found that if learning in grade three is reduced by one-third, roughly the amount of time many children were initially estimated to be out of school, learning levels in grade 10 would be a full year lower than would have been the case in the absence of COVID-19 (Lemieux, 2020). An emergency response was required!

SEF responded by pivoting its examination/assessment resources into a continued learning resource and distributing it as homework for kids to use while at home. Teachers would then collect and check the booklets and return to the students

in the next month. However, this was a Band-Aid on a gaping wound and SEF regrouped to come up with an ideal solution where the maximum number of students could be engaged in learning while schools remained closed.

Revolutionizing teaching and learning through technology

SEF had set out on a journey to revolutionize teaching and learning in schools supported by the Foundation in 2018. 300 schools had been selected for the INSTAL project, whereby blended learning through tablets was introduced to children hailing from urban slums to remote locations in rural areas. Continuing on this trajectory, SEF was in dialogue with Microsoft to digitize offices and schools for improved communication and coordination. A major round of teacher training for the use of the application was also in the works when the pandemic struck. Microsoft provided the A1 package plan for educational institutions to SEF to promote the use of Microsoft 365 and Teams. Distinct IDs for students, teachers, SEF supported schools and SEF employees were created enabling them to converge on a single platform to connect and share information and data.

Along with school closures, the first lockdown saw all economic and business activity come to a standstill as offices, markets and factories were closed. Intercity transport came to a standstill and flights both local and international were cancelled. At this time, Microsoft teams connected all SEF employees enabling them to continue working from home. Microsoft conducted a training for Master Trainers, who were to cascade their learnings to the regions and then schools. Over 10,000 teachers and 5,000 students are registered users on the Microsoft teams app. Microsoft Teams is now used to conduct online classes, as a resource for teacher refresher trainings, a repository for learning materials, and interactive medium for communication and learning.

Continuity of learning in remote locations

Considering the rural location of most SEF schools, it was envisioned that using technology for learning was not an option as most children would be left out of any online programs due to lack of access to devices and online connectivity. When the second round of school closures came about, as expected, SEF was prepared. A fresh round of homework worksheets were prepared which were to be printed by the school and distributed to students. Teachers were also encouraged to create their own worksheets with a focus on each child's problem areas ensuring a reinforcement of old concepts learnt in school, along with exploring and expressing their individual realities. At the same time, online classes were introduced to all regions. Children imbued with the love of learning came up with pragmatic solutions to their lack of access. Families would share devices, children would converge in homes with smart phones and internet connectivity, and friends would work on projects together. Teachers were surprised when children from remote locations would exhibit their proficiency in using the Teams application. The biggest surprise came when the Education Minister participated in an online class, seeing first-hand how excited and participative the children were.

Teachers were instructed to make online learning fun using the Maslow before Blooms educational theory. Children's socio-emotional needs are to be responded to before insisting upon learning new concepts in the online classrooms. Microsoft provided free access to its very popular online game "Minecraft" for SEF students. Children and teachers can access videos based on the National Curriculum in Urdu and Sindhi through the app. At the same time, teachers are participating in online trainings and accessing classroom resources through the app to use with their students.

Looking forward

SEF has also ensured that all schools are ready to receive students once schools reopen. Informative posters have been put up around the school, and teachers educated in how to help children settle into the new normal. Schools are to open six days a week with students attending classes on alternative days to ensure social distancing protocols are being followed. Masks and hand washing are mandatory and teachers check students' temperature prior to attendance. Group activities such as assembly and break time have been rescinded.

Studies have shown that girls and older boys are at a risk for dropping out due to extended school closures. Girls are likely to be married off while older boys join the workforce to augment their family income. SEF's continuity of learning programs have ensured that children and their parents remain connected to their schools and teachers by way of physical worksheets and online classes. It is foreseen that most children will be returning to their classrooms once schools reopen. SEF will then be working towards ensuring that learning losses are minimized and children are well settled in the classrooms, on their way to a brighter future.





House#21A, Block 7/8, Overseas Cooperative
Housing Society, Ameer Khusro Road, Karachi.
Ph: 021-99333244-6, 99333248-9
Email: info@sef.org.pk



Sindh Education Foundation
Government of Sindh

www.sef.org.pk