Learning from People: IDSP Experience*

Institute of Development Studies and Practices

T HE INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AND PRACTICES in Pakistan (IDSP Pakistan) was founded in 1998 by Dr Quratulain Bakhteari after she experimented in two parallel development studies courses in Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan and Lahore, the capital city of Punjab. After earning her B.A. degree, she helped in providing access to basic health care and education of new refugees coming from Bangladesh. Dr Bakhteari worked as a volunteer, organizer, and researcher in the informal settlements in and around Karachi. She made major contributions both to public health and sanitation during this time, providing toilets to 5,000 households through community actions, effectively changing the sanitation and hygiene practices for more than 35,000 people from 1979 to 1987. She helped new refugees coming from Bangladesh by providing them with access to basic health care and education. After earning a master's degree and a Ph.D., she established with the assistance of the Provincial Government of Balochistan and rural communities 2,200 government primary schools for girls in rural Balochistan, resulting in the enrollment of 200,000 girls — a record in Pakistan's history.

Frustrated with a lack of efficacy in internationally sponsored development projects, she wrote a concept paper that became the blueprint for Institute for Development Studies and Practices (IDSP), and was subsequently funded by The Asia Foundation for three years. She formulated the curriculum, recruited and trained faculty in advance of the formal launch of IDSP in 1998.

Since then, she focused her attention towards safe spaces for young people in Pakistan, while IDSP set a major strategic goal of establishing a university in the field of community development in order to work with

marginalized youth for a greater social, political and economic change in so-
cieties. Currently, IDSP is designing its university curriculum and faculty de-
velopment training in conjunction with the campus construction in Quetta.
Dr Bakhteari is an Ashoka Fellow, Skoll Foundation 2006 awardee and has
spoken at prestigious conferences, including the Global Philanthropy Forum
and TEDX.

Province of Balochistan

The province of Balochistan was the epicenter of development agencies,
organizations and donors but it lacked professionally trained local human
resources. Since its establishment, IDSP has continued conducting develop-
ment studies courses, and mainstreaming gender in development studies
courses, leadership courses and faculty development courses. IDSP basically
functions as an open learning space for the young majority population to
empower them for generating and regenerating responses to the existing
challenges. It engages youths in courses on critical thinking and leadership,
as well as professional development to shape a meaningful career path for
them.

IDSP decided to establish the University of Community Development
(UCD) in 2020 as a result of the outcomes of its overall Development Studies
Course.

I. Development Studies Course

Development Studies Course is a permanent learning program of IDSP. It
is a theory and practice-based course, in which excluded and marginalized
but motivated youths are provided with opportunities and spaces of learn-
ing, sharing, reflecting and realizing their dreams and ideas of social change
under the mentoring of experienced faculty and resource persons. They are
equipped with analytical and professional skills to prepare them for practi-
cal initiatives towards their dreams and ideas.

The course titled "Development Studies Course: Learning from People
and Communities" continues the IDSP courses but designed and executed
with a different approach, aimed at re-setting IDSP's future direction in the
face of changing national, regional and global socioeconomic and political
circumstances. The design of the Course was based on Dr Bakhteari's 2018

proposals. She argued that with the rise of China as a regional and global political and economic power, Western rights-based liberal economic model would be replaced by the Chinese model of production, control and conformity. Civil society and development organizations will be subjected to strict control and restrictions, which have already started happening in the form of newly introduced regulations by the Government of Pakistan.

The Course was designed through a series of meetings and discussions in collaboration with IDSP's senior management and the faculty including Ms Farkhanda Aslam, Associate Director, Mr Saeed Shah, Associate Director, Mr Safdar Hussain, Co-director and Dr Bakhteari the Founding Director of IDSP. In the discussions, different options were discussed.

In order to have a Course that is compatible with the local realities of Balochistan, the idea of "Learning from People and Communities" was proposed. This idea is aligned with IDSP's principles, values and focus on marginalized and excluded people and communities. Insights from Dr Bakhteari's concept note on "Learning from People and Communities" (2006) were considered. In that concept note, she argued that mainstream educational, political and economic systems were fundamentally meant to protect the interest of a tiny elite class. The majority of the people, on the other hand, exist, live and even thrive outside these systems. She saw a huge potential of learning from the wisdom, knowledge, and practices of these people. She proposed to effectively engage these people in the process of community development and social change. Hence, the method of learning from the people was adopted to find out today's realities and challenges through discourse with people in the communities.

a. Aims and Objectives

The Course aims at creating a group of young community leaders who are capable of critically understanding, analyzing and effectively approaching developmental challenges while applying holistic strategies and leadership skills. The participants will be engaged in the critical inquiry and observation of diverse socio-political and economic contexts to generate community-based discussions and discourses. The results and insights of the Course will be utilized to reset IDSP's direction as well as inform and evolve inclusive, bottom-up and participatory development approaches, frameworks and institutions. Last but not the least, the participants will

become conscious of cultural and historical pluralities and recognize and appreciate them as mutually enriching forces.

b. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the Course are as follows:

- To explore bottom-up and community-based people's meanings, preferences, practices, and processes of development to be incorporated in future UCD curriculum, pedagogy and practice frameworks;
- To generate research-based discussions and discourses to inform developmental policies, processes and practices at the local, national and global levels;
- To revise themes, contents and practice frameworks of Development Studies Course of UCD;
- To identify like-minded organizations as potential partners of UCD and potential visiting faculty and resource persons for UCD courses;
- To identify and engage renowned intellectual practitioners for the formation of UCD's Council of Intellectual Activists; and
- To launch UCD based on the results, insights, and recommendations of the Course.

c. Expected Outcomes

In the planning phase, it was expected that the following outcomes would be achieved:

- A group of twenty young people has been professionally trained on the theories and practices of development and successfully designed and implemented their Ideas of Social Change in their communities;
- Research-based discussions and discourses have been generated to inform development policies and develop participatory processes, approaches, practices, and institutions;
- Community-based and people-centered meanings, preferences, practices, and processes have been explored to navigate IDSP's direction and vision;

- List of like-mind civil society organizations that can partner with UCD and potential visiting resource persons who can teach in UCD's Development Studies Course has been finalized; and
- UCD has been formally launched.

II. Course Phases and Learning Tools and Methods

The "Development Studies Course: Learning from People and Communities" was offered in 2019. The faculty and Founding Director of IDSP undertook rigorous discussions around learning methods and tools for the Course. It was decided that, in addition to traditional methods, IDSP's courses would have readings, movie showings, presentations, learning papers, diaries, reflections, family history writing, story-sharing/telling as the main methods of learning from people. In addition, it was decided that participants and the faculty would go and live in participants' communities and listen to people's stories and understand their narratives and views of development. These learning tools and methods were applied during the different phases of the Course including (1) Knowing Each Other, (2) Documenting Family History, (3) Visits to Participants' Communities in Balochistan, (4) Reconnecting with the Family, (5) Visits to Participants' Communities in Sindh, and (6) Synthesis Process—Analytical Discussions and Learning Conference.

The Founding Director of IDSP, Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari, with the participants and course coordinator.

Phase One: Knowing Each Other

The first phase of the Course was held in February 2019. All participants were required to stay at the campus throughout the duration of this phase. All the participants were first oriented about IDSP, its history and the Course in which they were enrolled. Then they were asked to share their life stories. IDSP graduates, faculty members and resource persons were invited to share their life stories too. This was one of the most important phases

Faiz Kakar, an experienced development professional sharing his story.

IDSP graduate Ms. Kamal Jan sharing her story.

Founding Director, Dr. Bakhteari, sharing her story with participants.

IDSP Co-director Farkhandan Aslam during a session.

of the Course since life story sharing was adopted as its main approach to learning. There was no strict or structured format for story sharing. They could adopt a method that best suited them. They were asked to discuss family background, social contexts, school and college experiences, professional history, achievements and challenges.

Phase Two: Documenting Family History

IDSP believes that people's history with focus on their ways and means of resistance against exploitation and oppression is a very important theme to be explored. For this purpose, there is a complete theme namely "History, Regions and Resistance," in which participants are engaged in studying literature on histories of resistance in different regions. In addition, every participant is required to document a hundred-year history of his or her family. This activity helps participants to explore their family's historical roots, realize the importance of history from below and reconnect with families in a meaningful way.

After exploring and writing family history, participants reported the following learning outcomes:

– They came to know about the historical roots of their families;
– They enjoyed interacting with their family elders and helped them learn new things about family and tribes;

–   They realized that their families were resilient and had endured lots of challenges; and
–   They realized that people's histories were also important.

It was observed that though this method has been a very important tool for learning, IDSP did not have any structured method of documenting family histories. There was no analytical framework on engaging participants more deeply and analytically while re-connecting more effectively and purposefully with their families.

Phase Three: Visit to Participants' Communities in Balochistan

In the third phase, participants and the faculty went and stayed in participants' communities in District Khuzdar, District Kalat, Quetta, and Qila Saifullah across Balochistan. The participants spent three to four days in each community where they met community members—both individually and collectively, listened to their stories and had discussions with them about their community—its history, community norms and institutions, cultures, development and challenges being faced. They were specifically asked about their views on development and how they could have their hopes intact considering the existing challenges.

It was a great experience living, interacting, playing and even working with people in their communities. In villages, people were hospitable, generous and caring. They provided food and accommodation for free. Their views on development and their challenges greatly varied from community to community.

Phase Four: Reconnecting with the Family

In the month of Holy Ramadan, the participants were asked to live with their families and reconnect with them. This activity aimed to allow participants to practice the values they had learned at IDSP. For example, generally male members in the family do not wash dishes, cook food and do not wash clothes in Pakistan. But at IDSP, they did all these chores themselves. Reflecting on their experience, they said that they realized the significance of these responsibilities mostly conferred on the women of the residence. Before that, they assumed that only money-earning jobs fell in the male domain and were very important. In return, the participants said that they had a very different experience of interaction with the family members. Their
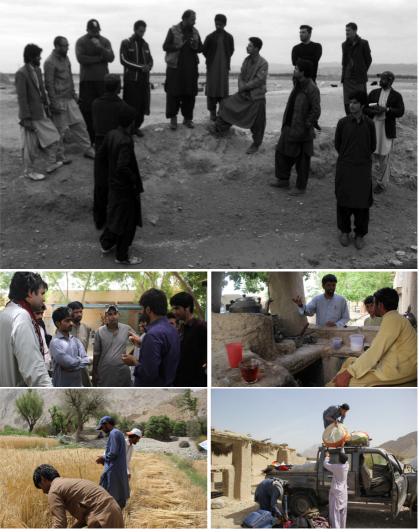
mothers and sisters were astonished at their changed behavior and their keen interest in domestic work. More importantly, helping family members in kitchens and homes helped them understand the hard work, commitment, and hardships of female family members. They had realized that the distribution of work was not a natural but cultural phenomenon and it plays a key role in determining the social power of both men and women. They challenged the concept of masculinity based on these gendered roles. They also pledged that they would try to empower the women in their family and treat them equally in all spheres of life.

Phase Five: Visits to Participants' Communities in Sindh and Northern Areas

In this phase, the participants and course coordinator stayed in communities in Sindh. They lived in the communities of some participants in Tando Allahyar. They visited private and public institutions, met with writers and social activists and visited some other communities. Sindh is much different from Balochistan in terms of language, culture and history. This phase turned out to be one of the most insightful phases. It helped the participants to debunk cultural stereotypes, see the plight of Hindu minority, understand the feudal system and experience interaction with people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Participants during interaction with community members in different communities across Balochistan and Sindh.

Participants during interaction with community members in different communities across Balochistan and Sindh.

Participants during visits to different institutes and centers in Sindh and Balochistan.

After visiting the participants' communities in Sindh, they went to the Northern Areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to visit the Lake of Saif-ul Maluk, a famous tourist area in Naran District Mansehra. They interacted with tourists and local people and learned that most of the properties and businesses in Naran District Mansehra were owned by non-locals. The majority of the local people worked at restaurants and hotels and underpaid. The local people felt dispossessed and had antagonistic feelings toward tourists and outsiders.

**Final Phase: Synthesis—Analytical Discussions
and Learning Conference**

In this final phase, the participants and faculty undertook a rigorous process of analyzing course learning methods and learning outcomes. First, the faculty and participants conducted analytical discussions around each phase, learning methods and learning outcomes. These discussions were considerably enriched by the insights of the Founding Director, Dr Bakhteari.

In the last week, a two-day Learning Conference was organized in which IDSP graduates and board members were invited to analyze course impacts on participants and helped create guiding principles and indicators for future courses. At the end of the Learning Conference, the participants were formally awarded with course completion certificates.

During these phases, the participants were engaged through different learning tools such as daily reflection, supervised readings and presentations, thematic movie showings, dinner talks, experiential learning in communities, observation walks, reading books *(Pedagogy of Oppressed, Education for Critical Consciousness* by Paulo Freire, *The Art of Loving* by Erich Fromm, *The Shock Doctrine* by Noami Klein and many more) and analytical papers, diary writing, learning seminars, yoga and exercise and so forth. The participants had never been engaged in a learning process with these tools, with such diverse individuals and groups in diverse contexts and spaces.

In brainstorming sessions, the participants expressed interest in people from almost all walks of life including development professionals, students, political workers, business people, teachers, writers, social activists, farmers, community elders, women, bureaucrats, artists and so on. They appreciated the interactions in different spaces including institutes, organizations,

cities, bazaars, homes, communities, towns, seminars, schools, academies, museums, parks and so on.

III. Analysis of Course Learning Outcomes

Course learning methods and outcomes were analyzed in two ways. In the first part, rigorous analytical discussions were conducted by the course co-

ordinator, the faculty and participants. In the second part, a learning conference was conducted in which participants, graduates, faculty and board members participated to analyze course learning outcomes.

Part One: Analytical Discussions

In the analytical discussions, the course coordinator, Mr Faiz Ullah, and IDSP's Founding Director, Dr. Bakhteari, engaged the participants in a rigorous process of discussing and analyzing course learning methods and outcomes. During these discussions, Mr Faiz Ullah and participants referred to their daily diaries, learning papers, notes and videos and documentaries of the Course.

Analysis of Learning Outcomes from Story Sharing
- Emotional Catharsis:

We live in a culture in which youths are not encouraged to openly discuss and share what they feel, think and like to do. In mainstream schooling systems, the learning processes are largely based on memorization of unquestionable facts. Critical thinking and creativity are considerably discouraged. When a young man or woman spends most of his or her early life in such a repressive culture of silent learning, they are quite likely to develop characteristics of an introvert, fearful, and hesitant person. Furthermore, self-repression of thoughts and ideas and absence of encouraging culture for sharing can lead young men and women to feel dejected, helpless and diffident.

But at IDSP the participants were provided with an enabling environment to openly share and discuss their ideas, opinions and raise questions. Participants felt encouraged to share their personal stories, which helped them relieve the burden of their hearts and minds, as one of the participants said,

> Sharing my story with fellow participants and faculty emotionally touched me as I had never shared [before] my personal story with others.

Another participant added,

> I felt the burden of my heart and mind relieved after I shared my story.

Yet another participant said,

> It was very hard to share personal secrets but once I started sharing my story, I felt confident and … light-hearted...

To sum up, the sharing of life stories helped participants to express themselves openly, which in turn helped them to relieve themselves emotionally.

Analysis of Learning Outcomes from Story Sharing
- Mutual Trust and Care:

Trust works as glue in human relations and it leads to developing a sense of mutual care. Sometimes trust-building can be an awful process when people of diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds start living together, especially in an era when society has been considerably polarized as a result of distorted histories and abuse of social and mainstream media. In this Course, the participation, trust-building and mutual caring for each other by the participants from three different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds were essential in creating a friendly and enabling learning environment. Again, life story sharing was the most useful method in this regard. The participants told that once they shared their stories and listened to each other, they were able to trust and care for each other. One of the participants said,

> The moment I listened to the stories of fellow participants, it helped me much to understand them. And I started taking care of them as a family member.

Another participant said that story sharing sensitized him to his fellow participants' strengths and weaknesses, as he said.

> I became sensitive toward their weaknesses and tried to help them.

Story sharing also helped them to develop feelings of friendship and mutual care, as one of them said,

> We became best friends like brothers and cared for each other regardless of the little time we have known each other and cultural differences.

To conclude, story sharing can help participants to develop mutual trust which in turn leads to developing a sense of mutual care and feelings of friendship.

Stopped Worrying about the Past:

The participants in this Course came from humble and poor social backgrounds, they considered themselves as failures. Their self-esteem was very low. Each of them initially thought that they were left behind only because of their inabilities and lack of effort. But after listening to the stories, their perception about self-development and personal successes in life radically changed. They stopped blaming themselves for failures, unlearned certain fears and got encouraged to move ahead.

One of the participants said:

> I thought my life was full of problems and challenges but when I listened to the stories of participants, I realized that everybody had a challenging life. Hence, I thought we were all in the same boat. What all one needs is to unlearn one's fears, stop worrying about past failure and start acting for self-growth.

Another participant told,

> I was always worried about my past failures and mistakes but when I shared my story and listened to the stories of fellows, I realized that I must move ahead because I could not change my past. My frustration was released after I came to know that I was not alone in facing frustrations and tensions.

Increased Self-confidence and Self-worth:

In an educational system in which questions are discouraged as a sin and silence is appreciated as a virtue and in a culture in which failures are personalized, it is most likely that most of the youth will suffer from the problem of low self-confidence and low self-worth. This is what was ob-

served in the participants of the Course. Participants were reluctant to express themselves freely and discuss their ideas. In their opinion what they thought, believed and wanted was insignificant. They believed that their learning and experience were worthless. But after this Course, their perception of self-worth changed and they developed considerable confidence in themselves. One of the participants told:

> After sharing the story, I felt confident and encouraged. I was very hesitant to speak about myself because I did not trust my skills and potential. I thought they [participants and faculty] would laugh at me. But after sharing the story I got motivated that I could also do something meaningful for myself and my family. Moreover, I thought my story was as important as that of others. And like others, I could also resolve the problems I am facing.

A participant added that listening to the stories of fellow participants encouraged him to share his own story without any hesitation and fear, as he said,

> It was a great feeling that there were people who were listening to my life story with great interest.

Another participant told that he liked the friendly and enabling environment and felt encouraged to share his story, as he told,

> I was never encouraged to open up my heart in such an enabling environment.

Self-Motivation:

As discussed above, before the start of the Course, participants were not confident enough about their potential. Their level of self-confidence and self-worth was very low. But after listening to the stories of faculty members, resource persons and graduates, their level of self-confidence improved and they felt motivated, as one of the participants remarked,

> One can achieve any goal in life no matter what challenges one faces, provided that one is dedicated and consistent in one's efforts.

Before the Course, most of the participants believed that systems were too inimical to common people. But after the Course, they realized that practicing honesty and following values of justice can result in positive outcomes. Drawing on one faculty member's life story, a participant remarked,

> If one is honest, one can get his work done without any bribes and favors. What all one needs is to stick to principles and values of honesty and justice.

Last but not least, participants learned that life was not easy. Challenges are part of life and one can cope with challenges if one works hard. Drawing on the life stories of the Founding Director of IDSP, one of the participants categorically said, "Life is hard but hard work makes every challenge easy to handle."

Critical Thinking:

Critical thinking is necessary for youth to not only understand but also question and challenge social, political and economic realities. Before the Course, most of the participants were never encouraged to critically analyze or question existing social orders, political systems or cultural values and beliefs. In the Course, when they were exposed to diverse ideas, analytical discussions on development, education and politics through readings, discussions, life stories of different people, they realized that they were indoctrinated to remain silent as one of them said,

> I never questioned systems, social norms and justice systems [that cause] injustices because I thought these were the normal and perhaps the only logical ways of doing things in society.

Another participant added that he never thought about power structures, the beneficiaries of these structures and the ways these structures were sustained.

However, this Course helped participants raise questions and analyze every issue logically and analytically. For example, one of the participants shared that the Course helped him understand the role of invisible power such as the power of ideology, religion, myths, distorted history, that is em-

ployed to mystify education, development, and systems to control people. He told,

> I was silent and remained depressed and terrified because of cultural beliefs, but now I realized how I was chained by those cultural myths so that I could not think freely.

Critical thinking helped them think about their rights and justice in the society, as one of the participants said,

> Critical thinking has helped me to think about my rights as well as the rights of people. I not only think about what is right and wrong but also the cause and effect and the consequences for society.

Agreeing with his fellow participants, another learner emphasized that while analyzing social phenomena we must think about gender, class, and ethnicity because these categorizations also morph our understanding of social realities. He concluded:

> Being blinded by gender, ethnic and religious biases people often lose their sense of empathy.

Sense of Empathy and Responsibility:

In a heartless world based on the rules and values of zero-sum game of the market economy, coupled with overwhelming information by corporate media to manipulate and mystify realities through sensational news and reporting, the sense of empathy is becoming a rare quality, as everybody feels the pressure of survival, success, and power on the individual level. The individual sense of responsibility towards family, community, and society seems to be of a secondary significance for most individuals. After watching constant news of war, terrorism, bloodshed, and poverty, people seem to have been immunized from feeling sorry for fellow humans. Mainstream education systems also do not have human values on their primary agendas. As a result, masses, especially the youth feel lost, fearful, greedy and ambitious and ignorant of community interests and collective wellbeing.

On the contrary, the Course had a very positive impact on the participants' sense of empathy and responsibility. With critical thinking coupled with sensitization about gender and human rights, participants said that they have developed a strong sense of empathy. They said that when they understood the game of privilege, the mystification of power and economic exploitation, ethnic and religious sectarianism, they realized how important it was to empathize with marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Drawing on his experience of helping family women at home, one of the participants said,

> When I cooked food, I realized how difficult this job was.

A participant, drawing on reading from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* added,

> Even the oppressors are themselves pitiable because they are themselves dehumanized for stealing the humanity of the oppressed.

Another participant was of the opinion that the best way to practice empathy was to engage people as active agents of change. He reiterated,

> We need to work with people rather than for people.

To conclude, this is a strong realization and learning for the participants, for they will engage communities with a strong sense of empathy and responsibility towards their families and communities and create a participatory process of learning and actions, instead of mistakenly taking themselves as leaders and experts of development to fix problems of the communities.

Accountability Starts from Self:

We live in a country where corruption and accountability have become buzz words. These words are repeated soundlessly on daily basis on mainstream and social media that Pakistan is poor and underdeveloped because of corruption and lack of accountability of political leaders. There is no doubt that corruption and lack of accountability are major problems of the

country but this discourse is often employed as a tactic to blame political opponents. Instances of serious and honest accountability have never been witnessed. As a result, a culture of blame game has emerged and everybody blames somebody else for the ills and problems of the society and the country.

During interaction with people, especially youth, we observed that they were also blaming systems and political leaders. When they were asked what they had done according to their potential and available resources, they did not have a proper reply. Participants also suffered from this dilemma before the Course but they realized that if true accountability at all levels was to be practiced, it must start from self. Nobody can blame others unless they undergo a process of self-accountability first.

One of the participants remarked,

> I often blamed my family for my failures but now I think I am also responsible for what I am today.

Drawing on life story of the Founding Director of IDSP, another participant said, he has become very cautious of blaming others, as he emphasized,

> I signify what I have done, instead of what others have not done.

To conclude, the sense of self-accountability is essential for a community leader to not only gain the trust of the community but also help replace the culture of blame game with the culture of self-accountability.

Balancing Duties and Rights:

During this Course, the participants were engaged in reading and discussion around fundamental human rights. Participants told that they had never studied about their fundamental rights and duties during their formal education. But readings and discussions in the Course helped them to know about their fundamental human rights. Furthermore, they were also sensitized that there were no rights without performing duties. One must know that every right corresponds to a duty, i.e., every person's rights involve the obligations (which are called duties) on the part of other humans, to respect those rights. For example, if you have the right to life, it is the duty of all fel-

low human beings not to take your life. Similarly, everyone has the right to life and it is your duty not to take that life.

Furthermore, participants were told that they have certain rights and duties vis-a-vis the state. In other words, citizens' rights are the duties of a state and state's rights are duties of the citizens. These rights and duties are correlative and inseparable. The understanding and balancing of rights and duties are essential for not only ensuring justice and equality but also debunking popular myths and narrative that some specific ideologies are superior and true while others are false, the state is more sacred than humans, and the majority is always right and it has the authority to do whatever it pleases.

This awareness and balancing of rights and duties can save the majority from becoming tyrannical (majoritarianism) and the state from becoming a machine of oppression and repression (authoritarianism or fascism). The majority is authorized only to the extent of what is right. Minority's fundamental rights must be protected. Likewise, the state has power over citizens within the legal ambit of fundamental rights, and citizens must be protected from political and legal oppression and repression. Similarly, citizens are also bound to undertake their duties according to the state's constitution and laws. This arrangement of mutual obligations and rights is essential for a stable, peaceful and prosperous society.

Every Individual is Unique:
Every individual has distinct personal qualities and different potentials and talents to be utilized in different fields of life. Correctly termed as the "Banking System of Education" by Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire in his famous book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* mainstream education systems kill ruthlessly diverse human talents in the students and obliterate cultural potentials in society. Most of the students just follow popular disciplines such as medical science, engineering, business administration, and information technology. These disciplines are portrayed as the best fields for secure and lucrative jobs. The hype and race around these popular disciplines of study and work do not allow students and parents to think freely and beyond these popular fields, based on realistic and objective criteria of students' passion, interests, and likes.

Every student who does not end up in one of these popular disciplines, considers himself a failure. The same was the case with the participants of

this Course, who thought they were incapable of doing anything meaningful for themselves, their families and communities. But their exposure to diverse ideas and fields from diverse disciplines helped them realize that a beautiful life outside these disciplines was possible. In fact, beauty lies in diversity because everybody has a different talent. Participants felt relieved from the burden of thinking themselves as failures. One of the participants said,

> I thought I was a lifetime failure but now I think I can do something meaningful for myself and my community.

Another participant told,

> In the past, whenever I saw a success story, I wanted to become that person. But for the first time in my life, I just took inspiration from people's stories and I understand that their destiny is not my destiny.

The Power of One:

Individualism is the most dominant characteristic of the modern world and it is critiqued for being selfish and neglecting common interests. However, IDSP's focus on the individual is different. It believes in the individual as the starting point of development. During this Course, it was learned that investing in developing individuals who are professionally and personally strong is important and useful. In her story, one of IDSP's graduates told that her family and community did not allow girls to work with NGOs. When she started doing the course with IDSP, she was bitterly opposed by her family, especially her father-in-law who was a religious scholar. When she resisted, she was kicked out of their home and socially disowned. She still resisted all the pressure and moved out of the community and got settled in Quetta city. The community did not accept her unless she proved that even an individual can save the whole community from a disaster.

According to her story, her community had a conflict with the adjacent community over some land and the conflict escalated and all the male members had to stay in bunkers on nearby mountains to defend the community from attacks of the enemies. Male members could not go to the city because

of life threats from enemies. Their women were also unable to help them because they had never stepped out of their homes and communities.

When community members especially children and women were on the verge of starving, only then I went to help them, she said. "I went to the bazaar to buy food and then delivered the food to the community and even climbed the mountains to supply food to male family members, '' she added, that after this incident, her family members realized their mistake and their attitude drastically changed as they started supporting me in my cause. As a result, she was able to convince not only family members but also community members to send their daughters and sisters to school and colleges.

This story in particular and many other stories of IDSP graduates generally show that the individual is an important unit to start with. When individuals are empowered, they can change the fate of their families and communities.

Fear Can Be Unlearned:

Fear is an effective tool for social control. In the Course, it was learned that our culture employs fear from a very early age to socially condition and control children. Furthermore, it was learned that even though fear becomes part of one's psyche, it is possible to unlearn it. Reflecting on the society and religious beliefs, one of the participants said:

> When I learned that lots of religious beliefs were tools for social control and power, I went through shocks and I was unable to make sense about what was happening to me. I was unable to understand whether I had liberated myself or I put myself in some new troubles because I was terrified by people's opinion about me. But now I am feeling internally liberated.

Another participant also agreed that fear that was injected in us when we were children is very hard to unlearn but after listening to the stories of the resource persons, he was compelled to reflect on their belief systems, stereotypes, and traditions and try to unlearn those things that impede their growth. He told,

> We should not care about what people say but we should care about what is the right thing to do.

The participants and faculty agreed that since our early childhood education and development in our culture was based on using fear as an important tool of behavioral and social control, therefore, there is a need for conscious and consistent effort to change this culture through different initiatives including change in curriculum, sensitized parenting, and courses on fear and early childhood development. They concluded that fear developed during childhood is hard to unlearn and, in most cases, it stays until death. Thus, one should never use fear as a tool for controlling children.

Some Challenges in Learning from the Stories of the Resource Persons, Graduates and Faculty Members
In the analytical discussions, participants said that they faced the following challenges during story sharing sessions:

- » Sometimes I did not understand what they were talking about;
- » I did not understand the context they were talking about;
- » Some stories were not interesting;
- » They used difficult terminologies;
- » I could not relate their stories with my context;
- » Sometimes I could not focus on the story because of noise especially in a busy place such as market;
- » Sometimes we were too tired in the field;
- » I observed that not everyone in the group was attentive to the stories;
- » Stories were lengthy and became boring;
- » Sometimes I was reluctant to ask questions;
- » I was hesitant to face and ask questions from female resource persons.

Keeping in mind the challenges, story sharing methods need to be designed in more interesting and interacting manners.

IV. Different Perspectives on Development

a. Conversation with Local People in the Community
During the discussion with local people in communities and with resource persons and the faculty of IDSP, the course coordinator and participants kept asking questions concerning development. The following perspectives were noted in those discussions.

1. Views on Development:

To explore different perspectives on development, especially the views of ordinary people, was one of the main objectives of this Course. Development remained a constant theme in the conversation with common people on the street, in bazaars and in our discussions with resource persons, faculty and IDSP graduates. There were some very eye-opening insights about development that were gained in the Course.

First of all, most common people did not articulate their problems in terms of development. It can be argued that development is an alien word and concept in the narratives of common people, who did not know much about development organizations or government in terms of development, except resource persons who emphasized the needs and role of education, health systems, infrastructure, agriculture, industry and job opportunities. Common people, on the contrary, articulated their problems in terms of social needs and social values, for example, lack of peace, lack of unity among people, greed and lust for power, weakening social ties among relatives and neighbors. In other words, it can be argued that for them, it was a question of the whole social system which they believed was declining.

Second, we observed that development was a contextual phenomenon. There is no single definition or understanding of development. Instead, there are many, diverse and contextual understandings and definitions of development. People see development in light of their social realities and challenges. For instance, for the Hazara community in Quetta, which has been the victim of the bloody sectarian violence, the attainment of security and safety is tantamount to development. One of the community members standing on the grave of his father remarked,

> What is the importance of development when you don't know when and where they will kill you?

Similarly, the social activists said that the right to life was the most important development for her community, as she said,

> We want nothing but just the right to life. Everything comes after the right to life.

Khuzdar is another city in Balochistan which has remained as one the most disturbed districts of the province in terms of law and order because

of ethnic violence. People in that city desired peace the most. One of the community veterans said,

> What we all want the most is peace. If there is peace, everything will be OK.

In the rural areas across Balochistan where people lived in joint family systems, relationships and cooperation were the most important aspects of development. People emphasized that material development is useless without social and spiritual development. "[So what] if you have wealth but lacks respect in society and restless in soul," remarked an old man in one of the communities.

For extremely poor people who struggled for food on a daily basis and who lived in rented and shabby houses, food and shelter were the most important developmental needs. One of the poor vendors in the refugee community told,

> When you don't have food to eat and a roof to live under, schools and roads are useless for you.

For the urban population, especially so-called youths from middle income backgrounds, infrastructure, nonetheless, was an important sign of development. They believed that development of schools and hospitals were the most important requirements of people. Furthermore, the discussions with youth were particularly interesting as we observed that they were passionate about doing something about their communities but they had no clue on what and how to do it. They thought if they got jobs, they would be able to serve their families and communities. But they expressed their concern that they might never be able to get any jobs because the system did not recruit people based on merit but nepotism, references and political affiliations.

In the community of Afghan refugees, some people had nostalgic feelings about their homeland. Here they felt extremely discriminated, disrespected and even tyrannized. A community member told,

> The police can come and enter your home anytime whenever they wish. They can arrest and call you a terrorist without any

proof. Then they allow us [free] after we give them some money. We have nobody and nowhere to go for any help.

He added,

We have no identity, no documents, no respect, no access to most jobs and professions. We are not considered humans. You see these shabby homes; these overflowing drainage systems; those children picking up garbage there and the hunger in their eyes.

Finally, we observed that people's views of development were heavily influenced by the popular narrative of modernity and media. When participants from Sindh visited villages in Balochistan, upon seeing mud houses, one of them said,

The people of Balochistan are very poor and backward. The people of Sindh are comparatively more developed.

When he was asked about his criteria of development and backwardness, he said mud houses are a sign of backwardness whereas cemented houses are a sign of development. Similarly, when participants visited Islamabad, they believed it to be the most developed place they had ever visited. When they were asked about their indicators of development, they said that Islamabad has the best roads, skyscrapers and beautiful markets. They did not signify the intangible aspects of development including social inclusion, people's wellbeing and happiness.

However, as a result of this Course, participants' views of development drastically changed. They evolved a more holistic view of development. They started believing that development is not something that can be imposed from above or it can be delivered with the help of a toolkit. Development is contextual based on people's experiences and their social and material needs. Infrastructure is important for economic growth and provision of social services but people's level of happiness, contentment, gender sensitization, environmental awareness, etc. are other important factors which are necessary for stable social and political orders.

Taking development at face value is misleading. A backward social context may be rich in beautiful values of hospitality, care, and respect of aged

people, valuing social relations, contentment within minimum resources and cooperation. For example, one of the participants told that,

> I always believed that we were poor and backward because we did not have better schools, roads and hospitals. I never thought about our values, i.e., how people cared for each other.

Similarly, a seemingly developed place may be replete with conflicting values of individualism, competition, mad race for money at the cost of family and social relations. As another participant said,

> I was never content because I believed I was poor and my life was worthless and joyless. But now I believe that even though money is important, it is not everything. I might never spend a lavish life for lack of money but I can spend a meaningful and active life by contributing to the wellbeing of society through my writing, activism and other services.

To conclude, a good development professional is one who engages people and comes up with solutions based on contextual realities—i.e., social needs, available resources, people's strengths, their history, their views and understanding, knowledge, and experience, and so forth.

2. Development as Happiness:

Happiness emerged and remained as one of the most dominant themes throughout the Course. Many people said that happiness was the most important thing for them in life. Participants also began to believe that development should increase people's happiness. However, nowhere in the discussion was it clear what people meant by happiness. Like development, it had many versions in participants as well as people's narratives. For some, the attainment of good health, food, and shelter was happiness. For others, peace was happiness. Yet for others, contentment and lack of greed was a source of happiness. One of the villagers said that with dwindling unity and weakening ties among people, happiness is vanishing from people's lives.

Hence these diverse definitions pose a great challenge of defining happiness and devising strategies to achieve happiness. In addition, it requires different strategies and resources to achieve happiness at individual and

collective levels. Sometimes happiness at individual level may not lead to happiness at collective level and vice versa. A community leader must be conscious of both individual rights as well as collective interests. In a traditional society, community interests are more important than individual happiness whereas in modern societies they are predominantly based on individualism—individual rights and happiness. In the traditional societies of Balochistan and Sindh, some people still think that honor killing and cruel Jirga decisions such as punishing a family for individual crimes, are forgivable crimes because they are essential for stable communal orders. These practices might help save communities from internal conflicts but they can inflict unbelievable pains and torture on individuals or families.

The participants and faculty agreed that development ought to increase happiness both at individual and collective levels. IDSP courses should include happiness as an important theme in the future with clarity on defining happiness and devising balanced strategies to achieve happiness at individual and community levels.

b. Resource Person's View: Development as an Opportunity for Conflict Resolution

Balochistan has remained the most affected province in terms of political instability, law and order situation and terrorism, because of which it has never been able to harness its human and natural potentials for development. During this Course, it was learned that development can be effectively used for conflict resolution. One of the resource persons, a bureaucrat, argued that development was an opportunity to approach people and resolve conflicts. Drawing on development experience in one of the disturbed areas of Balochistan that was hit by a destructive earthquake, he told,

> It was a great challenge to work in that area and everyone was afraid to work there. I saw an opportunity there. Since people had lost their homes and they were jobless, I thought it was the right time to restore their trust in the system. I decided to train local men and empower them economically. So instead of giving them funds, we decided to construct their homes with the help of local laborers. We introduced an earthquake-proofed architectural design and techniques and trained local human resources to engage in the reconstruction of buildings. As a result, lots of armed men laid down their guns and became peaceful

citizens. When you have something meaningful to do, you don't have to pick up guns and fight.

It is true that inclusive development can lead to building more harmonious and peaceful communities. During community visits, we observed that in the areas where there was more deprivation, exploitation, negligence and exclusion, people were more hostile toward state institutions, more cynic, more asymmetric and more pessimistic toward life there. Nearly in all contexts, youths complained about their exclusion from development processes, the apathy of politicians and national leaders and the futility of state institutions. One of the community members in Khuzdar told,

> We do not support armed struggle, but we don't think that those who are fighting are wrong. When you have nothing to do and you are dispossessed, you have no options but to fight.

To conclude, inclusive development can be used as an effective opportunity to restore people's trust and resolve a conflict. On the other hand, exclusion leads to bitter feelings and resistance against systems.

c. Resource Person's View: Importance of Development Practice

Theoretical understanding of development alone is not enough. Community leaders must practice their newly gained knowledge and ideas for the wellbeing of their families and communities. Paulo Freire is right in asserting that theory without practice is mere intellectualism whereas practice without intellect is mere activism. It is one of IDSP's core principles too, that every idea must be put to a practical test to prove its worth. In the Course, the stories of faculty, development professionals, artists and change activists show that only those individuals who had practiced their ideas were able to succeed.

IDSP's Founding Director, Dr. Bakhteari told participants that no idea is worth calling an idea unless it is practiced. She argued,

> If there is no practice, then an idea cannot be differentiated from chatter, [no matter] how philosophical it might sound.

Besides, she emphasized that whoever critiques an initiative, institution, or action of others, must make a practical contribution to the refor-

mative or alternative efforts. Otherwise, it becomes a mere criticism that leads to a counterproductive environment in which blame-game becomes a dominant rule and in which nobody is concerned with what they ought to do but with what others ought not to do.

After these rich and insightful discussions, participants reiterated that this Course helped them to become conscious of their actions and contributions. One of the participants remarked,

> In the past, I often criticized others for not doing enough. Now I think about what I can do.

Another told that since he has learned that self-accountability starts from one's self, he has considerably overcome his bitterness and anger towards others. "I spend most of my time improving myself, rather than preaching others to improve themselves", he concluded.

To conclude, the stories of resource persons, faculty and IDSP graduates helped participants to understand the importance of practice and they pledged to practice their freshly gained knowledge and ideas in the family and in the community. For a successful development practice, the community leaders need to take risk, have strong character and positive mindset, and make consistent efforts as these characteristics were evident in the stories of different resource persons and IDSP Faculty.

Part Two: Learning Conference

At the end of the Synthesis Process, a two-day Learning Conference was organized with the following objectives:

* To collectively analyze the findings of the Course regarding impacts on the individual life of the participants and faculty and conceptual, practical and institutional lessons for IDSP;
* To create guiding principles and indicators for IDSP's future direction based on findings of the Course and the learning history of IDSP;
* To award certificates to the graduating participants of the Course (Graduation Ceremony).

Course participants, faculty members, members of the IDSP governing body and IDSP graduates since 1998, who belonged to different professional, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and resource persons attended the conference.

The University of Community Development was properly launched on 25 December 2020 on mutual consent of all faculty, executive and general bodies.

Working for the Future

The more than two decades of IDSP program implementation have created an impact on participants, their families and communities.

As of 2020, the number of graduates of IDSP courses has exceeded six thousand whereas the number of people it has directly impacted at community level has surpassed 200,000.[1] Course participants are being equipped with knowledge and skills necessary to promote human rights, political participation, gender equality, and global citizenship—aimed at improving safety and development in Pakistan. It is observed that the standard of participants' living and harmony within family units improved, resulting in lower domestic violence rates, a decrease in early child marriages, shared decision-making, and better social and financial support for all family members. Communities of participants tend to practice conflict resolution, promote youth civic engagement, expand the infrastructure and advance technologies of sustainable energy services, protect children from child labor and exploitation, and adopt sustainable agriculture techniques to improve their local economies. Local governments show willingness to better support progressive policies on public health, community development, and education. Civil society organizations become active and take on actions to safeguard people's fundamental rights, and pro-people and pro-community initiatives.

IDSP's UCD is preparing to become a proper university. UCD will design courses on the basis of detailed researches to be undertaken by its research centers. These researches will probe on the progress of the communities and their evolutions. What are their natures? What kind of cultures and traditions do they have? Has the behavior of their members undergone significant changes? What are the consequences of those changes? What is the literacy rate in these communities?

Courses designed strictly based on research results would help UCD to promote the core essences of societies.

Every society has its own specific, evolved journey that needs to be understood. Employing concepts molded for other regions would neither help nor provide beneficial results to the community that UCD would like to work with. Each community should be treated according to its own evolution, essence and origins.

The development of the perspective, vision and mission of UCD will be done by a core research team composed of Dr. Nazia Bano, Faiz Ullah Khan, Arbab Taimoor Khan and Seema Malook.

References

Institute of Development Studies and Practices in Pakistan (IDSP Pakistan), www.idsp.org.pk.

Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari, "Learning from People," 2005, unpublished concept note

Faiz Ullah, "Development studies course: learning from people and communities," 2018 - course concept note.

Endnote

1 See IDSP website for more information, http://idsp.org.pk.