

school

landlord. There is nothing we can do", the DEO replied matter-of-factly.

There were probably a lot of things that could have been done. It's just that no one was prepared to do it. I returned to the village the next day. The High School was shut. Madame Principal had not shown up after that. The rooms remained locked. The primary school teachers were too scared to talk. No one in the village was prepared to divulge the lady's whereabouts. Our local partner NGO was not willing to take up the matter with the wadera without adequate backing of someone influential. The district staff were too scared of losing their jobs. The matter ended there.

There are numerous such stories that one can recount not just in Sindh, but all over the country. This particular incident however, has remained with me since it occurred a few years ago. It is in fact, a stark reminder of what we are faced with when trying to battle against the odds of not just a failing system, but of a failing society as well. In some ways, the lack of willingness by the authorities and indeed by our own selves to address the issue was understandable, given the might of an existing feudal system and the social and political limitations of district staff. But what is most frustrating, is that the solution to these issues is not simply a matter of resources or policies, as everyone harps about. There are enough of those.

It is a question of changing an entire way of thinking that has moulded social structures both in rural and urban areas. The "might is right" principal (pun intended) that reigns in our society, is one that donors, governments and NGOs need to study and ultimately break down. It is not then just an issue of taking on an entire state system, it is having to take on an entire social system. Any takers? ■