[**Not all is doom and gloom**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631750/not-all-is-doom-and-gloom)

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The writer is a former editor of Dawn.

IT has been more than two weeks since the news broke that a Pakistan Railways official posted in Sukkur had warned his bosses multiple times before the Ghotki rail tragedy that there were serious issues with the tracks in the area, but nobody paid any attention.

At least 65 passengers lost their lives in the tragic accident and more than 100 were injured, some gravely. And was there even a perfunctory apology from the minister concerned or an offer to resign? No. In fact, he disavowed all responsibility, saying that the day-to-day running of the railways was not his job.

Against this backdrop, I feel even more grateful for the presence in society of individuals who have committed themselves to the betterment of their fellow humans and made service to humanity so central to their lives.

Let’s travel westwards from Ghotki to Shahdadpur and on to Larkana and Qambar-Shahdadkot. In this upper Sindh belt (and Jacobabad-Kandhkot-Kashmore above it), are some of the roughest and poorest parts of the province known more for gangs of robbers and tribal feuds than anything else.

And yet one individual’s dedication is making a dent in the abysmal poverty that entraps large swathes of people in Shikarpur, Larkana and Qambar-Shahdadkot districts. I have known Naween Mangi since she was in school with my nephew. She was always exceptionally bright and driven.

Communities are assisted in building infrastructure they think they need.

After getting her first degree in economics from the London School of Economics and a Master’s in business journalism from New York University, she worked in London and New York as a journalist and trained in Tokyo, Singapore and Delhi.

Having established herself as a business-economy writer of excellence with her work appearing in Pakistani and foreign publications of repute, she was head-hunted by Bloomberg and appointed as the Pakistan bureau chief while still in her 20s.

While travelling in her native Sindh on assignment, she saw abject poverty and want. This moved her to a point that she gave up her silver-lined career path and committed herself to helping those who had nothing to improve their lives with or to dream of a better future for their children.

Thus was born the Ali Hasan Mangi Memorial Trust, named after her maternal grandfather whose rags-to-riches story is for another time but whose commitment to the public good both as a teacher first and then as legislator and entrepreneur-philanthropist of considerable standing was what inspired Naween.

Starting in 2008 with the slogan ‘one village at a time’ in the Larkana village of Khairo Dero, the trust has now expanded its integrated development model to some 90 villages in the three districts. Naween Mangi tells me the details of some of their activities.

The trust helps families build/instal essential facilities they need at home; clean water through hand-pumps, toilets, cooking gas, solar-powered fans and lights, kitchens and rooms to live in. Hundreds of families in dozens of villages have been helped in getting access to these vital services through a combination of materials the trust provides and labour they put in.

Families put in between 15 and 40 per cent of the cost of projects which is vital for development (as opposed to charity) and thereby for their dignity and ownership. The ideas for all of the trust projects come from the communities themselves.

That’s why nothing’s been built that is fancy, that looks great, costs a lot and is never used.

Communities are assisted in building infrastructure they think they need. Many have put in applications for village boundary walls for security against livestock theft.

Some others have asked for a network of sewerage drains for the entire village and others have wanted culverts so that women and children aren’t falling into water courses while getting into and out of their villages. In all these projects, Naween says, the trust has partnered with communities to provide materials while they put in the labour and coordinate the effort.

In village Khairo Dero, where it is based, the trust procured and donated land as well as funded the costs of building a school with The Citizens Foundation that now has almost 800 children from nursery to Matric.

A community centre has been built that includes a public park and children’s playground, a public library, skills training classes, a children’s activity and game room and a public art hall that offers free arts and crafts classes.

Outside the premises, there is a public water stand that offers a cool shady place to rest and ice-cold drinking water to schoolchildren, labourers, farmers and passers-by throughout the eight summer months when temperatures exceed 50 degrees Celsius.

The trust runs a ‘Public Pukaar Office’ in Khairo Dero where members of the public can come to apply for various facilities they need help with. There is a free clinic at that location that provides consultation and medicine to about 800 patients a month.

A medical and disability assistance programme is also up and running that funds specialist care and surgery, in particular complex heart surgery for children with congenital heart disease, at the Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi. The organisation also has a scholarship programme for girls.

Social activist Naeem Sadiq has just reported on Facebook that Naween Mangi has “single-handedly helped construct 1,500 toilets in Sindh villages each at a miniscule cost of Rs 11,125”. This is unimaginably cheap.

Individuals such as Naween Mangi can show governments the right way to do things but cannot impact large swathes of the population; that is solely in a government’s gift with its vast resources. Naween’s trust runs on donations from friends and family and other funders.

Hence, her resources remain meagre. Having abandoned New York and London for Khairo Dero and Karachi, the wide smile on Naween’s face as she interacts with bright young students and budding artists in the village tells you she has no regrets. I wish I had the means to support her cause.

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