



## STRIDE to Afternoon Schools: No More Shattered Dreams

**The world has been grappling with the Out-Of-School Children (OOSC) problem for over two decades. As a developing nation with a growing population, Pakistan has owned this issue and is continuously fighting to bring OOSC back into the schooling system. Even though large strides have been made, approximately 5 million children in Punjab remain deprived of the nurturing environment of a school, a key reason being the unavailability of a school in the proximity—a problem of access. Over one-fourth of children enrolled in grade 5 drop out of school before completing grade 10 in Punjab.**

“I was very upset when I had to quit school after grade 5, not only because I was going to miss playing with my friends, but also because I wanted to learn. I loved Science; it always fascinated me, but with no middle school for miles, it felt like my dream would remain unfulfilled,” says Nadeem Hussain, a grade 6 student of Government Primary School, Basti Qadir Khan, Rajanpur. Nadeem ended up working the fields with his father and elder brother, as the nearest middle school was 30 kilometres away. “My brother, a year older than I, faced the same situation a year earlier,” he says.

The solution for Nadeem came in the form of Sustainable Transition and Retention in Delivering Education (STRIDE), an FCDO-funded programme, which was designed and implemented in four districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2017-19 by the Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS). The independent evaluation of STRIDE pointed towards significant access and learning gains for children in the intervention districts. Based on these results from the pilot, the government of Punjab scaled up the STRIDE intervention in additional 20 districts of the province in September 2018 using government funds and renamed the programme to Insaf Afternoon School Programme

(IASP). I-SAPS provided technical support for planning and designing the implementation in 20 districts. Under this programme, 7,008 primary schools across Punjab have been upgraded from primary to middle level by holding elementary classes in the same classrooms, using the same staff, during the afternoon. In the first six months, nearly 200,000 children have been brought back into the system and 15,000 plus teachers have benefitted from additional incentives. “The best thing about afternoon classes is that I can still help my father in the fields during morning hours. One day, I will become the first-ever doctor from my village and will treat everyone free of cost,” says a pensive Nadeem.

The conventional upgradation of schools from primary to middle costs about 500% in capital expenditure and approximately 800% in operational expenditure over the course of an academic lifecycle. Considering the response to the intervention, IASP is expected to put a significant dent in OOSC numbers. The programme’s first phase was aimed at upgrading primary schools to middle, while the second will upgrade middle schools to high level by providing additional classrooms, as well as IT and Science labs. If sustained, IASP aims to bring 4 million children back into the schooling system by 2030—the deadline for SDG-4.

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