

**Program:** Making a Place for the Displaced

**Speaker:** Saima Hassan, Director, Development & Communications, OBAT Helpers Inc.

**Attendance:** 66

**Guests:** Charlie Wiles, Patricia Jacob

**Scribe:** Tom Lauer

**Editor:** Bonnie Carter

Saima Hassan completed her MBA as a gold medallist with a major in marketing from the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi, Pakistan. After moving to the US, she received a masters degree in Professional Accountancy from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University and, later, a certificate in Information Technology from the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology. Saima started her career in logistics planning with Philips Pakistan. Since moving here, but before joining OBAT, she has been a national tax analyst for Ernst & Young, a graduate research assistant at IU, and a senior research analyst at Sign Code, Inc. She also found time to marry and raise two children.

Saima is the Director of Development and Communications at OBAT Helpers. She has been at Helpers since 2011, helping OBAT to achieve new levels of success in fundraising, events, program development, marketing and more. Saima hopes to further the mission of OBAT Helpers through her commitment to ensure that the voices of the forgotten are heard. When time permits, the Hassan family likes to volunteer with the food pantry at the Carmel United Methodist Church. Saima is also certified as a Personal Fitness Trainer from the American College of Sports Medicine.

## Background

West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) fought a civil war and separated in 1971. The aftermath of war saw people living in Bangladesh in poor conditions without adequate food, water or shelter. Many wanted to go back to Pakistan, but were unable. Diseases were common in the camps and conditions haven't changed in over 40 years.

OBAT Helpers is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization committed to providing aid, support, education and economic empowerment to the displaced, unfortunate and forgotten population residing in camps in Bangladesh. Commonly known as stranded Pakistanis, Biharis or Urdu-speaking people, they have been suffering silently in the countless slums or makeshift camps scattered across Bangladesh for the past 46 years. Their displaced status and dire living conditions were a consequence of the civil war between both parts of Pakistan and the unresolved political conflict between them. Altogether, there are about 300,000 people languishing in one hundred and sixteen makeshift camps in extremely poor conditions; they live in abject poverty with no access to basic amenities of living. At present, to address the crises facing the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, OBAT is extending humanitarian services to this group of displaced people as well.

Anwar Khan, President of OBAT, saw disease and death in refugee camps, "temporary" homes, and wanted to help children and women. He founded the organization 17 years ago by raising \$20,000 from his family and friends. The 2004 budget was \$9,000 and had grown to \$489,925 in 2016.

OBAT works in four main areas: education, health, women empowerment and family assistance, and infrastructure development and relief. These areas encompass 14 cities, 79 camps, and 32,460 families in the program.

Education: At all aspects, OBAT is trying to help the people get out of the camps. In 2016, 4,576 students were enrolled in all of OBAT's programs and 1075 students received scholarships. There are eight schools, eight tutoring centers, 34 pre-schools, middle school to college.

Health: in 2016, 9888 individuals were treated at OBAT health clinics and one mobile unit; 2,408 people received health counseling.

Relief and family assistance: 73,000 recipients of assistance. Empowerment initiatives: in 2016, 202 females graduated from OBAT vocational centers. These individuals were provided with help to start businesses and obtain small loans, getting people to be self-sufficient, as well as having an increase in job employment potential. Overall, there have been loans to 1600 families to start businesses and two service training centers created.

Infrastructure and Development: 85,000 individuals were given access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

Portions of a documentary showed living conditions and squalid conditions in the camp, including several personal stories of how OBAT was helping the people living in the camp,

[www.obathelpers.org](http://www.obathelpers.org) gives more of the story



Saima Hassan