



CASE STUDY HYGIENE AWARENESS SESSION

WASIF IS TOO YOUNG FOR SCHOOL, BUT NOT TOO YOUNG TO LEARN

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On 15th May 2012, I conducted a Hygiene Awareness Session in the Government Primary Boys School Gurmani. I made the students sit in a proper order, so they could see all me and could learn what I am telling them. When the session was complete, I asked them to come up and show me how to properly wash and dry their hands. They raised their hands and I chose students to come to the front to practice the activity with soap and water. They all did it very nicely.

When I asked for the last time if anybody was left for hand washing, I noticed one small boy sitting among the students. His *kameez* was torn and he had no shoes. He was too young to be a student, so I assumed he had come to school out of his own interest. Though I had not observed him during the session, I could not ignore him now.



I thought he would be unable to remember the long process of washing and drying his hands, but surprisingly, he stood up with confidence. His eyes were shining and he came to the front, shook his right hand with mine and told me his name was Wasif. He wanted try the hand washing, so I gave him soap and water. He wet his hands, then he used the soap as I directed in my session. He cleaned his fingers from inside and outside, then he washed his hands and dried them in the air too. He repeated the whole process as I did in the session.

I was so happy with his actions that I wanted to give him a reward, so I gave him a packet of soap. As soon as he received the soap packet, he said he wanted to go home. However, he ran as fast as he could and went to a poor person in the corridor and proudly showed him the soap packet. I then realized that this was Wasif's father and he had been hiding behind the pillar of the corridor during the session, watching his son.



Wasif demonstrates what he has learned about proper hand washing techniques. He wets his hands and uses soap to clean the front and back of his hands and fingers, making sure to check his fingernails. Then he rinses his hands and lets them dry in the air.



He was so happy that his eyes were shining at the performance of his son. He said, "Look, I told you to come school on regular basis. Today they have awarded you a soap, tomorrow maybe they will give you tractor keys. If you are a regular student and will keep on studying, you will be awarded continuously."

After the session ended, Wasif was standing outside on the gate and though I did not see him, he put forward his right hand to say good bye. I noticed that he no longer had the soap in his hand, but an ice cream cone from his father. When I met his father, I realized that he sells ice cream cones on bicycle on the gate of that school. He told me that he gave an ice cream to Wasif and took the soap from him for safe keeping. He said Wasif has promised to wash his hands with soap at home as he had learned.

Later, when I inquired about his family from one of FIDA's activists, I learned that Wasif is three years old and belongs to a poor local family. His father, Dilber, had two brothers who were killed in a car accident, leaving behind their wives and children and Dilber must now provide for them, his own family and his aged mother and father-in-law as well. He sells ice cream cones in the summer and works as a waiter in the winter. To make things worse, the home they are living in was damaged in the floods of 2010 and they are unable to repair it.

It is true that poverty is by chance and not by choice, but it is also true that intelligence and genius of mind is by luck. Wasif is unfortunate to be born into poverty, but he is lucky to have an intellectual mind, an inquisitive spirit and a family that wants him to learn.



Wasif with his new bar of soap.



Wasif's father, Dilber, waiting outside the school.