



Awareness Campaigns

Iqbal Badruddin

Pakistan

When he was 5 years old Iqbal Badruddin's family moved from their home in Karachi to Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, so he could get a good education in the country's best schools. Many Pakistanis aren't as lucky as him. Iqbal was determined to use his education to help his others learn about climate change, to protect the earth for future generations.

In 2016 he graduated from Iqra University with a degree in international relations. And in 2017 he heard His Highness, Prince Kareem Aga Kahn say, "Climate change is a major threat to much of the developing world, and it needs to be looked at with great care." Iqbal was determined to not only look closely but see what he could do about it.

For a few years he worked for environmental organizations like Water Aid Pakistan, where as a research associate, he learned how badly inadequate sanitation facilities were impacting the city's groundwater. There, when he worked with the local government to spread awareness about water-saving habits, Iqbal enjoyed talking directly with the people. He then worked at LEAD Pakistan as Young Professional Officer Climate Change Inspiring Leaders for a Sustainable World. In 2017 he joined forces with some like-minded friends and designed a plan for how to educate his people to be more aware of climate change. They called it the Awareness Campaigns. "Instead of working in an air-conditioned office, I resigned," Iqbal says, so he could dedicate himself 100%.

The activism that he practices now, as founder of Fridays For Future Pakistan, is aimed at the roots of his country's primary climate-change problems—educating the people and protecting their water. To some, the odds seem overwhelming. But Iqbal has accepted the challenge, and like a modern-day Pied Piper he's convinced more than 1,000 college students to join him. His goal is to reach 10 million people. "I'm a nature lover," he explains, and adds "Without water we cannot survive."

In terms of the effects of climate change, Pakistan is one of the world's most vulnerable countries. It is also the most dramatically inclined country, with the second highest peak in the world—K2 in the Himalayas—down to the lowest point of elevation. At the Gwadar seaport, toxic waste from Pakistan's neighbors, India and China-- the two largest polluters in the world--is collected. This is especially unfair, since Pakistan emits less than 1 percent of the total GHG emissions. Waste goes untreated into Pakistan's rivers, flowing into the Arabian Sea polluting it's marine life.

Iqbal is determined to do something to correct this situation; and to protect his people and equip them to respond to the effects of climate change.

With Pakistan's high poverty rate, and poor education it's a tough job. "Uneducated, illiterate people are more vulnerable," Iqbal says. "More vulnerable to climate change, to the 'religious card,' to corruption, and to wars," The effect of wars has had a profound effect on his country. "Starting from the Afghan War 1979 the 'religious card' has been used to gain the people's support," he explains. Then, as a result of the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks, "Our economy lost \$127 billion, and 70,000 lives," Iqbal says, shaking his head sadly. Furthermore, Pakistan's defense budget has had to increase to address India's threat of stopping Kashmir's flow of water, the life blood of the country's economy. "Had this money been invested in education, things would be very different in my country," he says.

Since 2018 Iqbal has roamed around Islamabad talking with ordinary people. Islamabad is a planned city, and a very green one. Tourists come to visit its lush Margalla Park. According to his own research, Iqbal says, "70 percent of the

people don't understand what's going on. Changing weather patterns are affecting our water reservoirs and our food. It's already happening." But some of the people he talked to remembered that in 2014-2016, they had to ration water.

New developments are also threatening Islamabad's future. "They are cutting down our trees to expand - horizontally," Iqbal says. "The impact is devastating: the land's ability to absorb water is gone." But he has an idea for how to save the trees. "Why don't we expand vertically?" he asks. "Why shouldn't we build tall buildings instead of single-story homes?" His idea is well aligned with the government's campaign of planting 10 billion trees in five years. "They are even asking people living in the slums, trying to get them to plant trees too," he says.

Pakistan's agrarian economy depends on its high mountain glaciers. With increasingly unpredictable and unprecedented rains, floods often devastate local farms. "We need to build dams so we can more effectively manage our water," Iqbal says, and adds, "It's going to cost billions of dollars. And with the high cost of IMF loans, our people are defenseless to prepare themselves for these increasing threats."

Reflecting on what he'd learned from his studies, his jobs, and most importantly what he'd learned from ordinary people. Iqbal prepared a presentation to share with college students at his alma mater and invited everyone to join him in the fight. He was touched by the positive response he got - everyone wanted to help. "It's so hot now!" they said. "In the summer it's really hard to even go outside. It didn't used to be like this."

Iqbal asked them to be ambassadors and help spread awareness of climate change to young people. "We're focusing on 12-14-year-olds," he says. For him it seems a very natural thing to do. "Environmental stewardship is something that is imbued in every human being when we are born," he says.

In just one-year Iqbal's Awareness Campaign had spread to 17 universities across Islamabad. Now, every Friday, more than 1,000 students join the Awareness sessions with #FridaysForOurFuture. Iqbal's software engineer friends told him, "We don't know much about climate change, but we want to do something to help." They offered to use their skills to build a website and use social media to spread help spread awareness of the problem—and urge people to join in doing something about it.

Emboldened by the energy of their fellow ambassadors, Iqbal and his friends next reached out to remote areas, where they created Awareness Camps. Some are for just a few hours, some last a few days. They organize "eco-activities" and talk directly with youth about the importance of nature in our lives. "We give them a chance to come up and talk to us about issues they see happening in their communities," he explains.

Slowly they build awareness, while exploring some key questions with participants: How can we adjust to this new climate reality? How can we prepare ourselves? How can we use our scarce water resources more efficiently? What kinds of irrigation systems will help farmers? How can we all reduce food waste, to reduce the demand on farmers? And how can we create early warning, and disaster risk reduction, systems?

Then they work with the youth to organize small projects to help their communities. "Take one issue, learn a skill, develop it; then start working on making things better," Iqbal tells them. At the end of each Awareness Camp, he asks them to report back biweekly on their progress, so they won't give up or get discouraged.

Iqbal remembers one long trip they took, a 24-hour journey along the dangerous mountainous road to northern Gilgit-Baltistan. When they arrived, he was thrilled to see how many people were there, full of energy and eager to learn. In the Yasin Valley, kids asked him why the weather in their communities was changing. "We helped them to see that they are sitting on a 'hot tipping point'" he says.

That trip was in stark contrast to the one they took to the remote Sindh province in southern Pakistan. "There they are more inclined towards religion and less willing to listen to scientific facts," he says. He pauses for a moment, then adds, "I believe that God knows everything, yes. But this global warming, this climate change is man-made." When he talks with people who are very religious, he quotes the Koran and finds clever ways to subtly challenge the traditional orthodox mindset of *Inshallah*, everything will be fine.' "When we come into this world, we are taught that we have a responsibility to leave the environment in a better condition," he reminds them.

It's an uphill battle. The climate change clock is ticking. It can be a discouraging effort. "The team is my backbone," Iqbal says. "They are the linchpin of the Awareness Campaign." He is eager to get everyone involved, from social scientists to electrical engineers, and entrepreneurs with ideas for green businesses. "We are trying to encourage those who actually can come up with ideas for ways that we can have clean and cheap energy," he explains. "If enough people were encouraged to become entrepreneurs, we could create solutions to the enormous issues we are facing today."

Wherever he goes, Iqbal promotes sustainable solutions that enable communities to take responsibility for their own future development. Technology has opened up so much information. "We know everything," Iqbal says. "And the youth *really* know everything!"

He impresses upon them the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, like SDG 12, which focuses on responsible consumption and production. "In our cities, the consumption and waste are really alarming. People have so much stuff, like 3-4 cars: that emits a lot of greenhouse gas." He challenges people to be more environmentally responsible by using bikes, or public transport. "Stop relying on the government," he tells them. "Take responsibility for yourselves and make a long-term commitment to where you are living. We need to strengthen our civil society."

"The elder generations have had pretty good lives; they haven't had to deal with these issues we have now," he says. "It's our collective responsibility to do something. It's time to work with our youth. Build trust. Find common ground. Help them build communities. We need to work together for our future. Youth are the ones who will have to live with the consequences of what we do—or don't do—today."

For the Global Strike Day in 2019, there were climate marches in 34 cities in Pakistan. "I was expecting hundreds...but thousands came to the march and I'm so excited at the response," he said. "Now we have to reach out to rural areas and make our movement bigger." It was great to have Zartaj Gul, The Minister of State for Climate Change march with us and promise to take their demands to the Government."

In 2020, Iqbal was honored that Fridays For Future Pakistan was invited to co-host a Special Talk on Sustainable Development and Climate Change sponsored by the UN. And he was touched when UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, "*Everyone who is fighting against climate change is Greta.*"

Iqbal challenges us all: "We all have to pitch in. It's the only way to secure our future."

*The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil,
but by those who watch them without doing anything.*

Albert Einstein

Call to Action: Create awareness of climate change in your community. Take Action.

Support Iqbal's Awareness Campaign: [Fridaysforfuture Pakistan](#) • Fridaysforfuturepk@gmail.com

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