

# "Seekho Sikhao Saathi 2023" Girls Leading Learning

سیکھو سیکھاؤ ساٹی





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# About Us

Cities for Children works to support the learning and well-being of children living in urban poverty. Our main goal is to protect the “right to childhood” – right to read, to play, and to safety. We see, count and care about vulnerable children that few others currently serve, including those from refugee and migrant communities who settle on the margins of cities. Many of these children are ‘on’ or ‘of’ the streets and are forced to choose between going to work or school.

Our vision is of a world where all children have access to safe spaces where they can learn, play, grow and achieve their potential. We believe in the agency of children in determining their needs and best interests and like to take them on board in processes that affect them.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to recognise the support and positive encouragement of Mr. Waseem Ajmal, Secretary of Education at the Ministry for Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), whose belief in the programme was crucial at the outset. Additional champions were Sana Malalai Isa at the MoFEPT; Dr. Nasreen Bano; Ms. Riffat Jabeen at the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE); Mr. Nadeem Ahmad at FDE and the Assistant Education Officers in Nilore and Bara Kahu sectors.

From the Malala Fund, we were given the space and resources to explore how best to deliver the programme and achieve the most impact for our girl leaders of learning. Thanks to Mr. Javed Malik and Ms. Anam Akram in Pakistan and Anisha Chaudhri from the Girl Programme for their support.

Our Programme Officers, Shayan Mujeeb and Syeda Ansa, dedicated to building relationships with staff and students alike, brought their thoughtful insights to all aspects of the programme. They were supported at every step by Pakistan Programme Manager, Duaa Mujeeb.

From the commitment of principals and teachers across schools, we saw that so much more is possible. Lastly - and most importantly - we want to celebrate the girls who came forward and brought all of themselves to the sessions, as leaders of learning. We hope this is just the first step in transforming spaces of learning across the country into spaces of joy, where children thrive.



**Madeeha Ansari**  
Founder/CEO  
Cities for Children





# Background and Rationale

Pakistan has **26.2 million out-of-school children** and has been facing challenges in ensuring school admissions, retention, and quality learning. The level of **school dropout** is particularly alarming - according to UNICEF, “nearly 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled at the primary level, this drops to 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls at the lower secondary level<sup>1</sup>.”

**Early childhood education (ECE)** is particularly crucial for children as it lays the groundwork for a child’s future, building cognitive, social and emotional skills critical for school success. Globally, 43%<sup>2</sup> of children under the age of 5 are at risk of sub-optimal development due to accumulated adverse experiences including poverty, food insecurity, neglect, and violence. For most children in Pakistan’s under-resourced communities and schools, there is little or no pre-schooling experience prior to them entering education. This means that when already disadvantaged pupils enter schools, they often experience “learning poverty” as they are not ready to learn and thrive through their academic journey. Due to a lack of foundational skills, children in Grade 5 have trouble with doing Grade 3 level work<sup>3</sup>.

**Providing a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment to build foundational skills is essential for breaking the intergenerational cycles of poverty and ultimately reducing inequities.**

To date, there’s been limited emphasis on intentional and structured socioemotional learning (SEL) for children, especially girls at risk of dropout, within schools. Yet, holistic education approaches have shown significant benefits across various domains, including academic, health, income, and societal well-being. **SEL programmes are essential for enhancing academic performance and retention for several reasons including nurturing emotional regulation, social skills, resilience, and behaviour management.** They cultivate a positive classroom climate by fostering a sense of belonging, respect, and inclusivity among students, promoting empathy and relationship skills essential for understanding diverse perspectives and building meaningful connections. **Socioemotional skills such as leadership, self-confidence and a sense of agency can particularly matter for girls, have a strong impact on their academic and professional lives.**



<sup>1</sup>See: INEE page on early childhood development, accessed 29 March 2024: <https://inee.org/collections/early-childhood-development>

<sup>2</sup>See: Porticus and the Lego Foundation (2023), “Challenging the False Dichotomy, an Evidence Synthesis

<sup>3</sup>Bari, F. (2024), “Inequities in Access and Learning”. 10. Annual State of Education Report (ASER) 2023.



Anumba  
Ali







## SEEKHO SIKHAO SAATHI – PARTNERS IN LEARNING

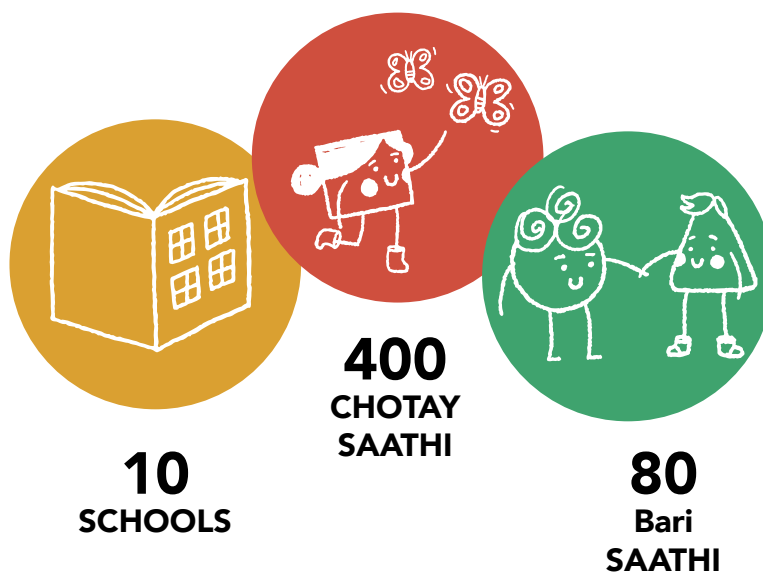
Seekho Sikhao Saathi (Partners in Learning) is one of our signature programme, based on a Child to Child model in which we train older children (Bari Saathi/Big Partners), tapping their agency to become education champions delivering playful early learning sessions to groups of younger children (Chotay Saathi/Little Partners).

Seekho Sikhao Saathi (SSS) began as a response to school closures in COVID-19 and was first delivered in open-air spaces in informal settlements to preserve children's connection with learning. To date, it has reached over 4,000 Chotay and Bari Saathi in diverse contexts.

With the support of the Malala Fund Girl Programme, Cities for Children was able to expand the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme and partner with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) to conduct 12 playful-learning based sessions in 10 public schools in Islamabad Capital Territory.

The programme aimed to have impact at two main levels to address the dual challenges of children's retention and performance:

- **Building foundational and early learning skills at an important stage of their brain development, so children enter primary school ready to learn;**
- **Building socioemotional learning (SEL) and life skills for girls to thrive in secondary school.**



The older girls were mostly from 6th grade (one school chose to enlist 7th grade students instead due to logistic issues), and were trained to deliver creative literacy, numeracy and science based sessions to younger children from the lowest grade level present in each school - Prep/Kindergarten to 1st grade.

This particular iteration was tailored to offer targeted support to the older girls, aiming to intentionally develop their socioemotional skills. The goal was for them to emerge as confident, empathetic leaders, motivated to continue learning and to create positive impact as agents of change in their communities.

In government schools, students often face socio-economic disparities and limited access to resources, which can hinder their socio-emotional growth and confidence. By targeting these areas, we aimed to empower students with essential skills to navigate challenges, foster positive relationships, and advocate for themselves effectively. By emphasising these skills, our aim was to equip government school children with the essential tools needed for personal, academic and social development.

The second innovative element we incorporated into the model was playful or joyful learning. Learning through play is an active method that encourages interaction with people and materials, enabling children to question, experiment, practice, and discover. Access to playful learning not only supports children's psychological well-being but also fosters inclusion and a sense of belonging. Through play, children develop critical skills necessary for thriving both now and in the future.

**Our playful learning approach is based on our mantra that happy memories build resilience – and happy, well-adjusted children learn better.**

**“On session days, Chotay Saathi attendance is full. Otherwise there can be 10-12 absences”.**

- Feedback from IMSG Jabba Taili during programme



Figure 1: Chotay Saathi playdough creations when talking about their families



Figure 2: Bari Saathi making a colourful, creative “City for Children” during our Universal Children’s Day activity

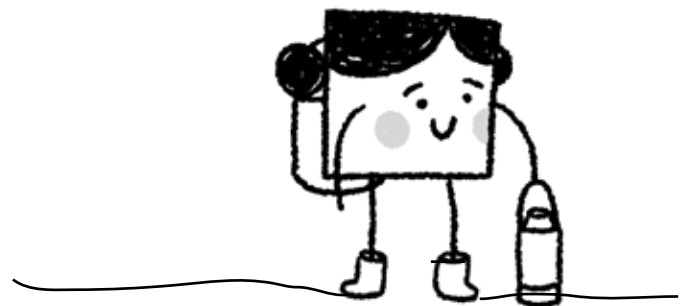








The SSS programme draws upon an evidence-based Child to Child school readiness model in combination with Montessori principles, our playful learning approach, and culturally responsive adaptation.



## PROGRAMME ROLL-OUT

**1. School selection:** In collaboration with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), 10 girls' government schools were identified that could benefit from the programme, with both primary and secondary sections on site (see Annex 1 for Schools List).

**2. Training:** A pre-programme orientation and training was conducted with 3 teachers from each school - 1 from the Bari Saathi class and 2 from Chotay Saathi classes. It was an opportunity to build crucial buy-in and motivation, and hear and address any concerns from the teachers. Training content included an introduction to:

- i) the principles behind the programme, including the importance of children's participation and playful learning
- ii) our Maar Nahi Pyaar (anti-corporal punishment) approach to creating safe and nurturing spaces
- iii) child safeguarding policy and
- iv) a detailed explanation of how they could support the programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation function.



Figure 3: Watching our "Maar Nahi Pyaar" short animation



Figure 4: Principals and teachers creating sample "ground rules"

**3. Bari Saathi Enrollment:** After the training, the programme team visited the schools to build some excitement around the upcoming project. The team spoke to 6th grade students, telling them about the programme and encouraging them to sign up as Bari Saathis.

The criteria for selection of Bari Saathi was the same across all schools; girls who were in the 6th grade, could read the manual with no issues, were not already participating in any other extracurriculars, and had room to develop critical skills like confidence, strong communication skills and an interest in academics.

6-12 Bari Saathi were selected by the teachers in each school. The selection criteria aimed to form a diverse group of students, with a particular emphasis on those who could benefit from participation.

**4. Seekho Sikhao Sessions:** The sessions began soon after selection of Bari Saathis by their teachers. Implementation varied slightly across schools - some sessions were conducted in the Chotay Saathi classrooms and some in school grounds. Each school brought unique additions to the sessions, which they came up with during their prep and demonstration sessions conducted each Monday.





Figure 5: This Bari Saathi created her own version of a picture story for her group

Sessions were a mix of simple literacy (with particular emphasis on oracy and story-telling); numeracy (particularly shapes); science (including discussions around life cycles and living things) and always had some room for innovation from the children. Bari Saathis came to sessions prepared with models, stories, poems, songs, drawings and even short plays to ensure that the Chotay Saathis not only learned the session content well, but also enjoyed the process of learning. After each session, the Chotay Saathis left with new experiences, learning a new song, crafting beaded bracelets or creating portraits of their families using play dough.



Figure 6: This little learner decided to make "legs" from playdough

**5. Debriefs:** After each session, the Bari Saathis engaged in a debriefing session with the visiting Programme Officer. During these conversations, the Bari Saathi shared their reflections on the session and discussed any challenges they faced, and what worked for them. This space fostered collaborative problem-solving, ensuring that the Bari Saathis felt supported and empowered.

**6. Goal-Setting Exercise:** At the six-week mark, the discussion changed gears and turned inwards to support Bari Saathi's personal growth and development. These tailored discussions allowed the girls to introspect and share their dreams, hopes, fears, and plans. Towards the end of the programme, each Bari Saathi filled out a "journey map", where they listed their future goals, the steps to achieve them, any anticipated challenges, and how to overcome those challenges. These discussions served to reinforce the impact goals in Bari Saathis, and helped them feel more confident about their future.

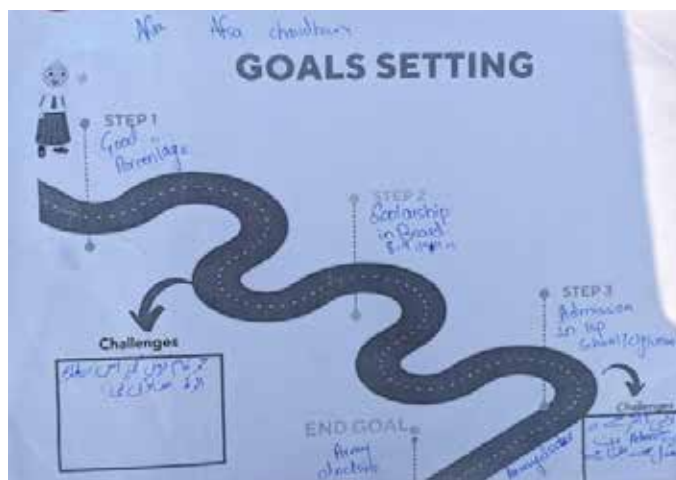


Figure 7: Sample goal setting activity

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After these discussions, more than 95% of Bari Saathis claimed that they now have a better understanding of their future goals.

**7. Evaluation Exercises:** As the sessions came to an end, Endline surveys of both Bari and Chotay Saathis were conducted, as well as focus group discussions with teachers and Bari Saathis. The findings from these exercises are shared in the evaluation and impact section.

**8. Show and Tell events:** At the end of the programme, each school organised a Show and Tell event to celebrate the progress made by the Bari and Chotay Saathis during the programme. **Schools had invited Bari Saathi and Chotay Saathi parents** and students from other classes to celebrate with them. During the event, the Bari and Chotay Saathis showcased their newly acquired skills through vibrant and colourful performances, including demo sessions, plays, poems, speeches and songs.

Schools where parents were invited to these events also proved to be a great data point for feedback related to changes in the participating students' day to day lives. For example, one father shared that his daughter, who had been a Bari Saathi, was now performing better academically and appeared more motivated to come to school. Another shared that he appreciated the inclusion of the plants session, as it taught children how to take care of living things.





Figure 8: Bari Saathi at IMSG Sanjalian performing a welcome song during closing ceremony.



Figure 9: Bari Saathi from IMSG Kot Hathial during the gift distribution ceremony.





# EVALUATION AND IMPACT

For Chotay Saathis, the objectives was to enhance school readiness through improved literacy, numeracy, motor and socio-emotional skills as well as 'knowledge and understanding of the world' through science content. To test these skills, baseline and endline surveys were conducted at the beginning and end of the programme respectively and results compared. Weekly observations by Programme Officers also gauged overall engagement in the session, excitement for session and participation levels for Chotay Saathis.

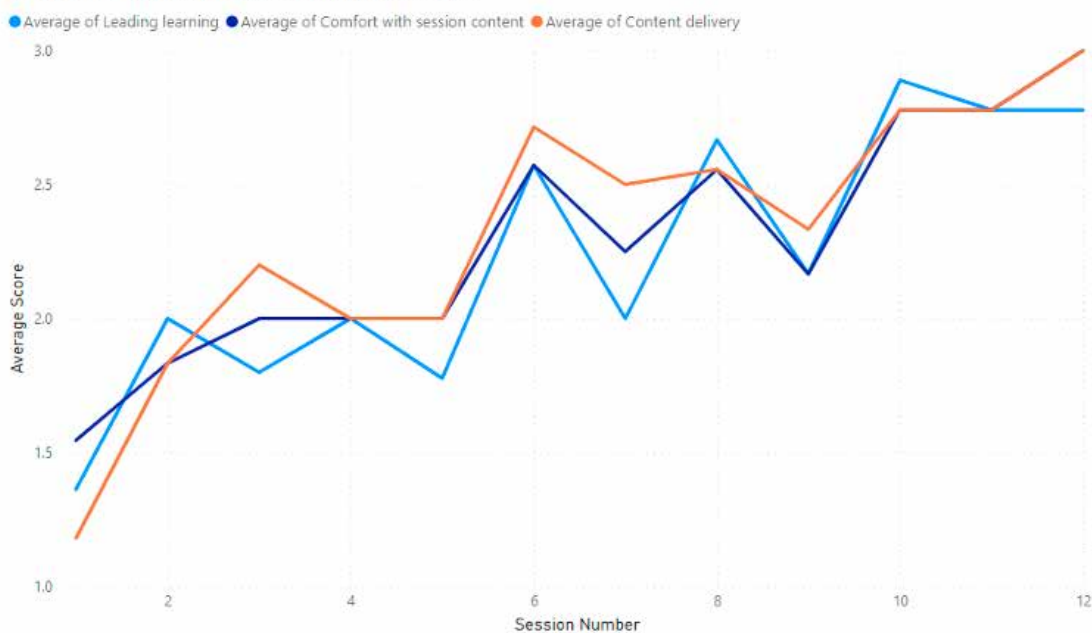
For our Bari Saathis, the focus was on improving socio-emotional skills, with particular emphasis on positive self-perception, confidence (especially in communication), empathy, agency and sense of responsibility and motivation to learn.

### Adjustment in real-time

The Bari Saathis recorded **weekly reflections** after each session. In which they shared their perspective on how the sessions went, any new activities that they introduced, and any new learnings they acquired. We used insights from these reflections to inform our weekly debrief discussions and provide specific and targeted feedback and support to both teachers and students.

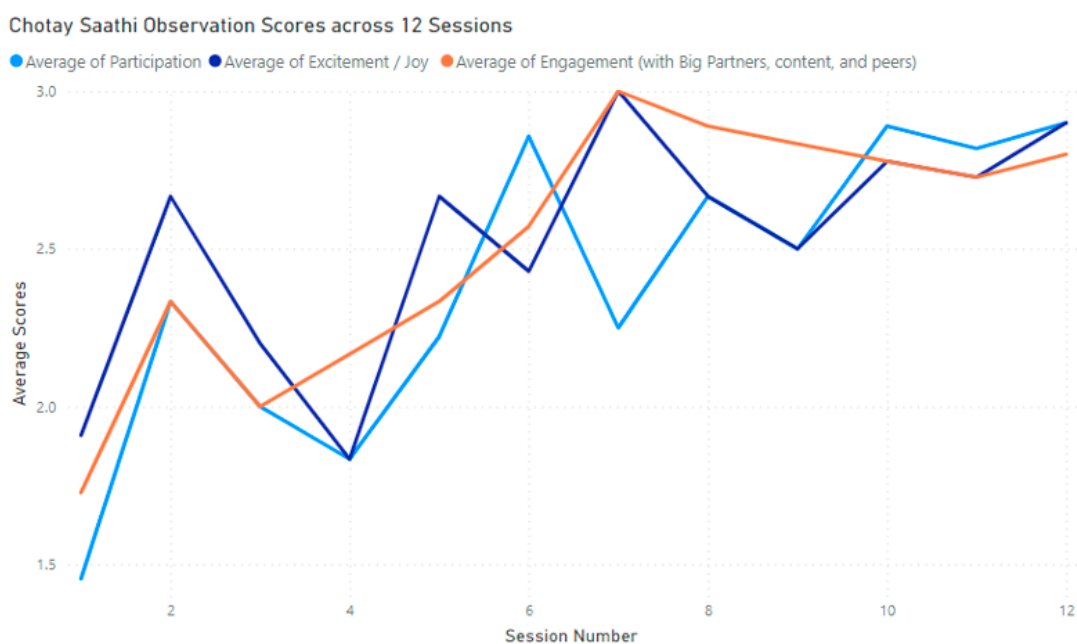
There were also **weekly session observations conducted by the programme team** which measured preparation for sessions, content delivery and understanding of central ideas as outcomes for Bari Saathis. Data from these observations was used to track the progress and growth of Bari Saathis in each domain. It provided valuable insights into each individual session as well as the overall upward trajectory throughout sessions.

Baray Saathi Observation Scores across 12 Sessions





During weekly visits, the Bari Saathis were collectively observed across various domains including leadership in learning, familiarity with session content, and content delivery, receiving scores from 1 to 3. Overall, there was a consistent increase in scores across all domains in all schools over time. This trend indicated that as the sessions progressed, the Bari Saathis grew more comfortable within their groups and more confident in their capabilities. Any declines in scores could be attributed to initial school-level factors, and a break in momentum around the ninth session due to winter holidays. However, by the end of the programme, Bari Saathis in all schools achieved the highest score (3) in both comfort with session content and delivery.



According to our team’s observations, engagement and participation of Chotay Saathi followed an upward trend as they formed bonds with Bari Saathis. Additionally, the popularity of session content also influenced fluctuations in excitement - certain sessions resonated more with the participants than others.

### Endline activities

While the weekly reflections and observations were used to monitor progress throughout the programme, we also conducted endline surveys, focus group discussions with staff and children and a body mapping exercise with the Bari Saathis to get a fuller picture of where each Bari Saathi stood in terms of impact. The Bari Saathis also contributed essays and personal testimonies, sharing their reflections on their participation in the programme and the insights they gained.

### Notes on inclusion from weekly implementation debriefs:

“Bari Saathi did really well with inclusion this week. One Choti Saathi had turned her face away and wasn’t interacting. Teacher shared that she had lost her father in the last three or four weeks, so let her be. The Bari Saathi did not push but tried to include her very gently, beautifully, with love.”

“In Malpur, there were two Chotay Saathi who couldn’t walk. The Bari Saathis would help with carrying them if they needed to be mobile. If asked questions, they would speak to the Bari Saathi and respond to them rather than to me (the Programme Officer.)”





Figure 10: Chota Saathi happily presenting his work



# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SCHOOL - CHOTAY SAATHI IMPACT



Chotay Saathi impact was measured through comparison of baseline and endline scores, across the domains of

- **Literacy (particularly oracy or storytelling)**
- **Numeracy**
- **Socioemotional**
- **Motor skills**
- **Knowledge and Understanding of the World (related to science sessions)**

This comparison of baseline and endline scores revealed a marked increase in children obtaining the highest proficiency level (level 3) across all domains, and the number of children at the lowest proficiency level (level 1) going down below 5% across all domains.

One concern at the outset had been that the session content may be too simple for the learning levels of the younger children. However, we found considerable variation in learning levels across schools, and all children in the end benefitted from participation. While regular school continued and we cannot exclusively lay claim to improved results, we were able to see improvement in all our target areas.

Our targets for Chotay Saathi outcomes according to prioritised skills were that by the end of the programme, children would be BETTER able to

- **Sort and name shapes**
- **Talk about a picture story**
- **Able to share what plants need to grow**
- **Correctly sequence a butterfly life cycle**
- **Share materials/ taking turns**
- **Present work to a group**

**“There was one girl in my group who didn’t know how to do anything, I had to help her with every single thing. Then one day during the planting seeds activity, I was surprised to see that her work was the best out of all the group.”**

*– Bari Saathi during FGDs*

## LITERACY SKILLS

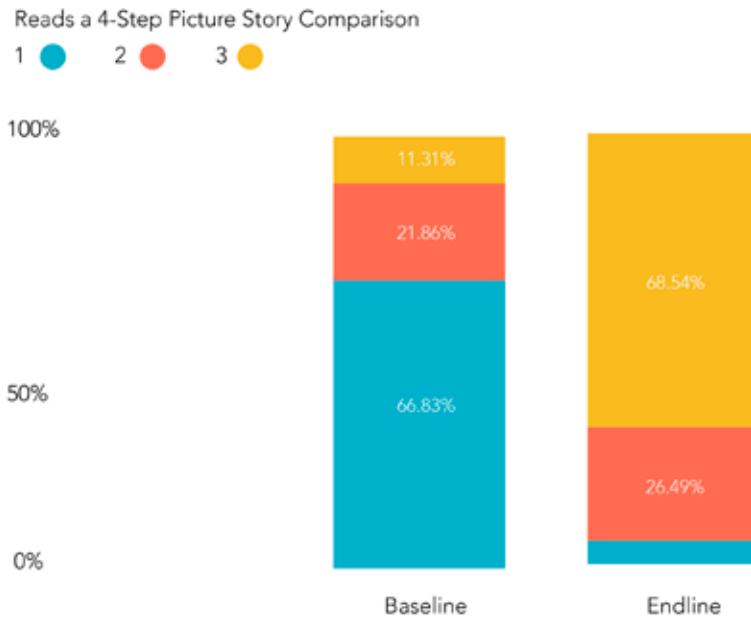
### Comparison of Literacy Scores in Baseline vs Endline

Baseline of Endline responses?	Average Reads of a 4-step picture story	Average of Expressed ideas through drawing	Average of Talks about a story
<b>Baseline</b>	1.50	1.54	1.81
<b>Endline</b>	2.75	2.68	2.61

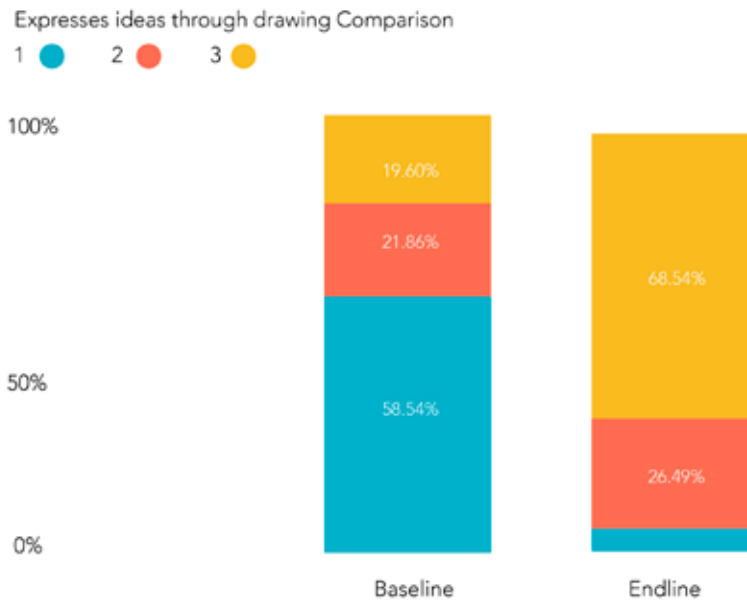
Average scores rose across all subdomains of literacy skills. There was a marked increase in “reads a picture story” which measured students’ ability to be able to simply narrate what is happening in a 4 step picture story as well as “talks about a story” in which we focused on the ability to add small details to a story to bring it to life.



The percentage of students who could read a picture story “well” (level 3) rose from 11% to 68.5%.



The percentage of students who could express ideas through drawing at level 3 more than tripled, going from 19.6% to 68.2%.

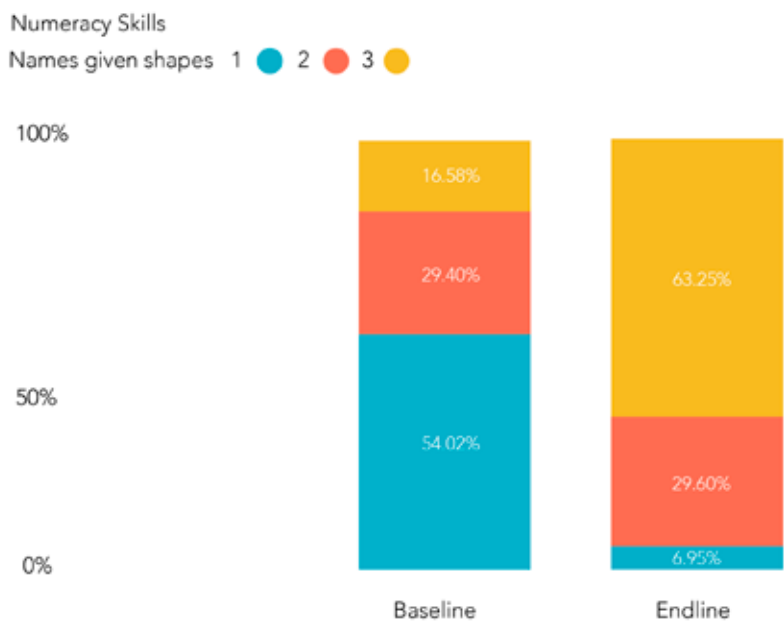


## NUMERACY SKILLS

### Comparison of Numeracy Skills in Baseline vs Endline

Baseline of Endline responses?	Average Reads of Names given shapes	Average of Sorts objects by shape	Average of Sorts objects by size
Baseline	1.82	1.67	2.11
Endline	2.82	2.73	2.86

For numeracy skills, we measured scores for ability to name basic shapes (circle, square, triangle), sorting objects by shape and sorting by size. These skills serve as foundation for strong geometry skills and during the sessions, these skills were imparted through specific sessions on shape recognition as well as one on identifying patterns around us.



- The number of students who could name all basic shapes more than tripled after the shapes recognition session, going from 16% to more than 60%.
- There was 62% and 70% increase in the average scores in the baseline and endline comparison for naming and sorting shapes respectively



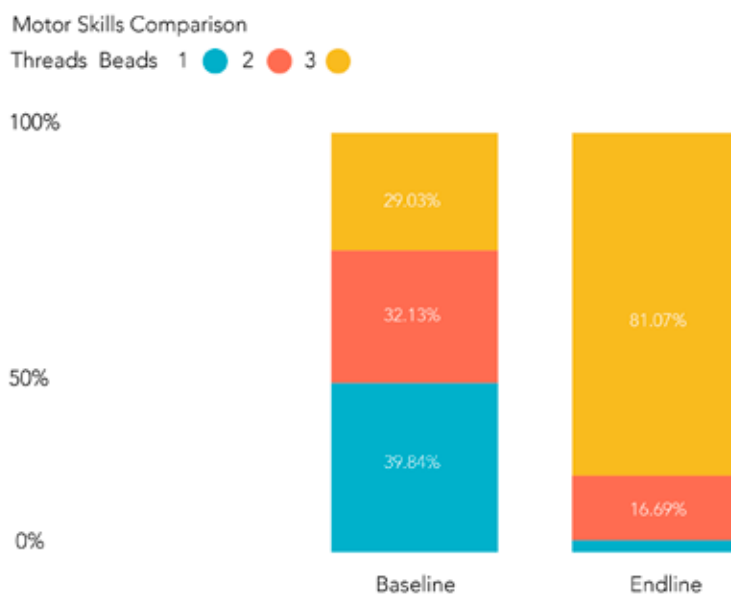
Figure 11: Chotay Saathi making patters from shapes.

## MOTOR SKILLS

**Comparison of Motor Skills in Baseline vs Endline**

Baseline of Endline responses?	Average of Cuts and Pastes with confidence	Average of Draws a straight line	Average of Threads beads
<b>Baseline</b>	1.71	1.94	1.63
<b>Endline</b>	2.73	2.71	2.88

The domain of motor skills was measured through the ability to draw a straight line, cutting and pasting, and threading beads. There was a session specifically focused on threading beads, and other motor skills were practised throughout the programme in various sessions.



Average scores for all skills in the domain of motor skills rose by one level each. For threading beads specifically, nearly 40% of Chotay Saathi stood at level 1, with only 28% at level 3. By the endline, the percentage of Chotay Saathi at level 3 had risen to more than 80%.

## SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

**Comparison of Socio-economical Skills in Baseline vs Endline**

Baseline of Endline responses?	Average Reads of Shows confidence	Average of Takes turns and shares materials	Average of Presents work to a group	Average of Understands others' feelings
<b>Baseline</b>	1.63	1.75	1.61	1.78
<b>Endline</b>	2.58	2.69	2.60	2.67

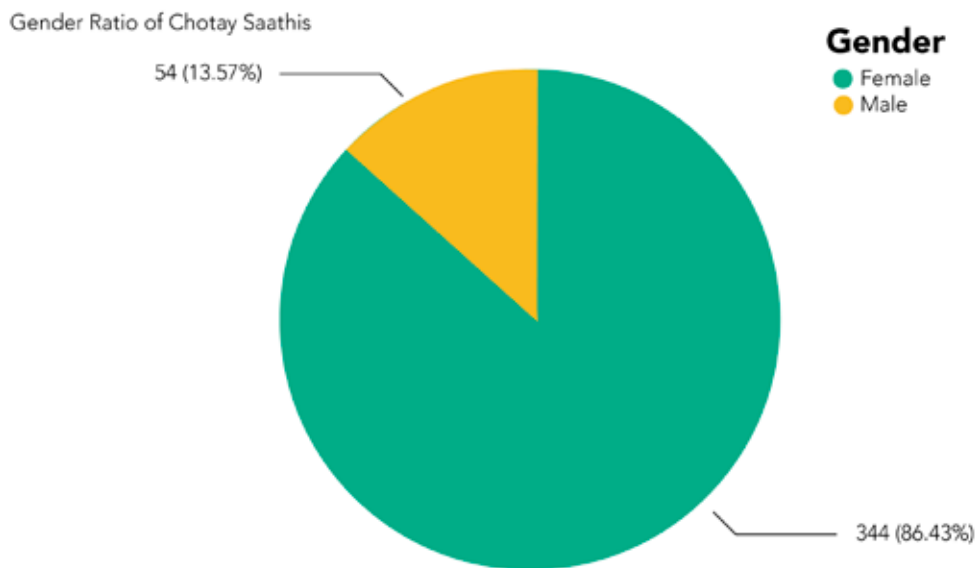
For socio-emotional skills, there was a session specifically to teach Chotay Saathis how to identify and name emotions such as happiness, anger and sadness. There was also a focus on developing socio-emotional skills throughout the programme, by giving Chotay Saathis opportunities to share their work in front of the classroom, learning to take turns and share session materials like colour pencils, as well as receiving support from their Bari Saathis during any fights to learn to resolve conflict amicably.

Average scores showed a significant increase in the endline for all subcategories. "Shows confidence" and "presents work to a group" were skills that had the lowest average scores during baseline, 1.63 and 1.61 respectively. In the endline, they rose to averages of 2.58 and 2.6, growth by one level for each domain.

## GENDER-BASED COMPARISON

At the lowest grade levels, some schools did include boys although there was a much higher number of girls engaged in the programme, including a total 344 girls and 54 boys.

While comparing baseline and endline results in the 3 schools that had both male and female Chotay Saathi, it was found that across most domains there was a negligible difference in the levels of male or female students. The only domain in which there was some notable difference by gender was socio-emotional skills - Female students appear to be scoring slightly higher than their male peers across subdomains of understanding feelings and presentation skills. However, even here the difference was quite minor.



## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

For the domain of scientific knowledge, there were three science related sessions: bubbles, the life cycle of a butterfly and what plants need to grow. In the butterfly session, Chotay Saathis learned about the lifecycle through diagrams and colourful models made by our Bari Saathis.

**After this session, the percentage of Chotay Saathi who could tell the correct sequence of the phases of a butterfly's life cycle well level 3 rose from 25% to 71%.**

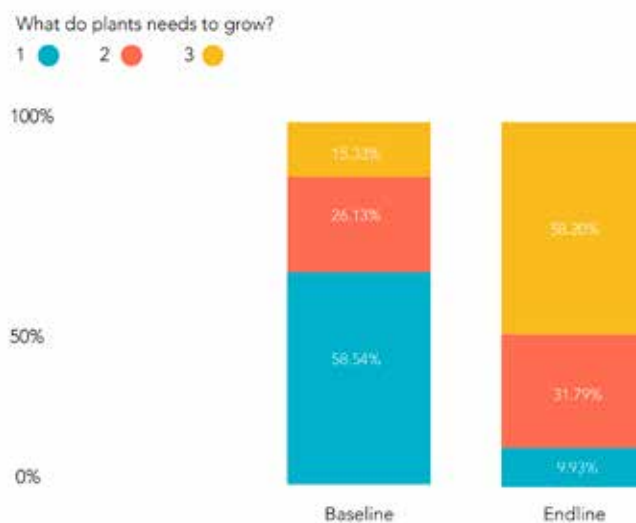




Figure 12: Making Butterfly Masks



Figure 13 Chotay Saathi planted beans in plastic cups:

In the plants session, Chotay Saathis planted beans in plastic cups, and took care of them over the following days until they sprouted.

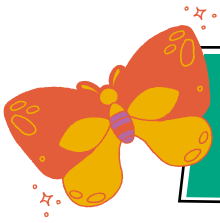
**The percentage of students at level 3 in knowledge of plants went from 15% to nearly 60%, while students at level 1 went down from 58% to less than 10%.**





Figure 12: Bari Saathi demonstrating making bubbles with different shapes





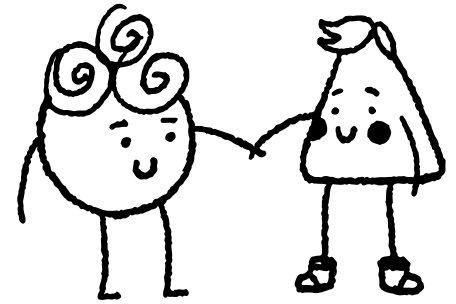
# GIRLS LEADING LEARNING - BARI SAATHI IMPACT

For our Bari Saathis in particular, we looked at the impact across various domains of socio-emotional learning, most significant being:

- **Increase in confidence and sense of self-worth**
- **Increase in relationship skills**
- **Increased motivation to learn**
- **Increased sense of agency**
- **Positive self-perception**

The sources of data for Bari Saathis included:

- » Weekly Reflection Records
- » Reflective essays and written testimonies ( week 10 and 11)
- » Endline activities
- » Body-mapping activities
- » Endline surveys
- » Focus group discussions (with both Bari Saathi and Teachers)



## BODY MAPS

### 1. Body Map by Haleema Zahra

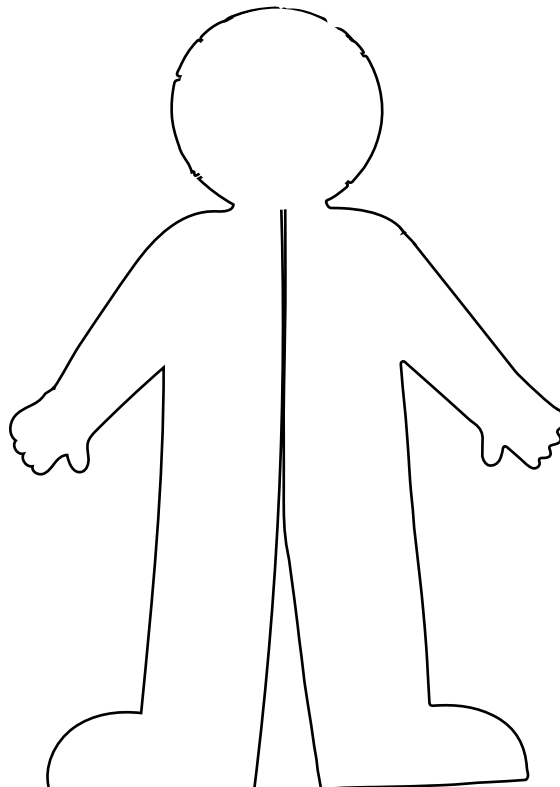
#### Before Programme

**HEAD:** I used to think people around me are bad

**MOUTH:** I didn't have the Confidence to talk to anyone before the programme

**HANDS:** I used to hit kids with my hand

**FEET:** I didn't know where am i going before the programme



#### After Programme

**HEAD:** Now i know there are good people out there, i think good about people

**MOUTH:** Now i can talk to anyone with confidence

**HANDS:** Now i treat kids with love and kindness

**FEET:** Now i know about my goals and vision



## 1. Body Map by Huraira Imtiaz

### Before Programme

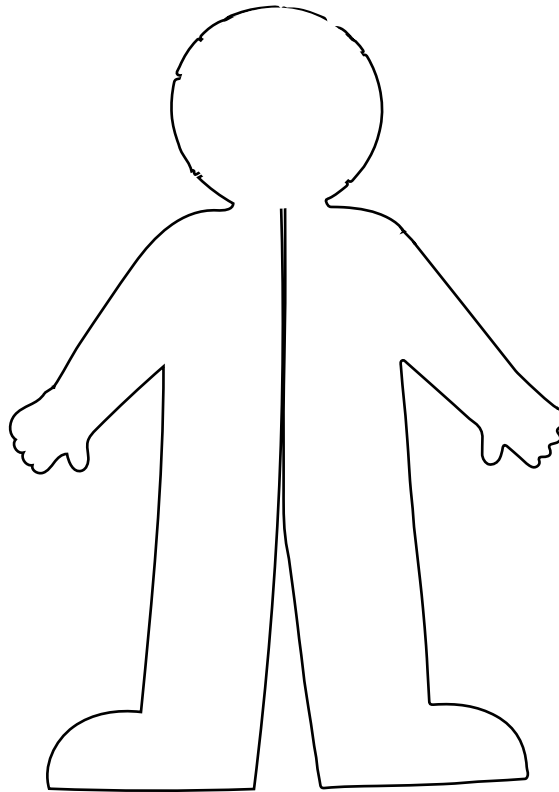
HEAD: I was confused about my goals and vision

MOUTH: I used to be strict with kids

HANDS: I used my hands to hit kids

HEART: I used to get irritated by the presence of kids around me

FEET: I didn't know where I was going before the programme



### After Programme

HEAD: I got clarity

MOUTH: Now I am kind to them

HANDS: Now I use my hands to love kids

HEART: I love kids now and treat them with kindness

FEET: Now I know about my goals and vision

The concept of body maps was introduced with the Bari Saathi, who were tasked with highlighting their personal progress since joining the sessions. This involved writing down their progress on the right side of the body map, associating them with specific body parts, while their pre-session experiences were indicated on the left side of the map.

## OUTCOME AREA 1: CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNICATION

In open-ended questioning during the body maps, 85% of Bari Saathi reported that they feel more confident while communicating.

- "I didn't have the confidence to talk, now I can explain explain everything."
- "I used to be hesitant while talking to people, now I am confident enough to talk to anyone."
- "I used to get scared while talking I am not scared anymore, I explain things now."
- "I didn't get the opportunity to talk, now I am able to talk to kids and teachers with confidence."

During debriefs and focus group discussions, one of the things that Bari Saathi were most proud of was the development of their confidence and communication skills. It was an area that we placed particular emphasis on, and one of the selection criteria was to include girls who hesitated when participating in class or extracurricular activities. When they joined session activities with Chotay Saathi, they had to lead the session and guide groups of Chotay Saathi by becoming their friends and mentors. Initially, it was challenging for some of them, but as they participated and received individual attention from teachers and our Programme Officers, we began to see a change.

## 84% BARI SAATHI

responded that they were nervous going into the first session and 85% said they were not nervous by the last session

**"I was not able to present in my class. I used to get scared before going to the stage but now I have started giving presentations as well. Yesterday I gave my presentation for the first time. I used to have stage fright and never presented my work but now I am so confident that I didn't hesitate at all."** -Bari Saathi from Sohan (FGD)

**"A few days ago, I went to the principal 's office for the first time and I started thinking how confident I have become that I could come here and talk to the principal. I have never done that before."** -Bari Saathi From Sohan (FGD)

**"This programme gave me the confidence to be able to speak to anyone without feeling shy. Now I can participate in more things in the future."** -A Bari Saathi from Rawal Town



Figure 15: Bari Saathi engaging with Chotay Saathi during Sessions.

## CASE STUDY 1: JAVERIA



Figure 16: Bari Saathi Javeria helping Chotay saathi during "Let's grow plants" session.

Javeria is a 7th grade student at IMCG Sohan. She is a brilliant student who always excelled academically, but she struggled with participating in extracurricular activities. In her reflective journey story, she writes: **"I joined this program to improve my communication skills and overcome my fear of interacting with others. I used to feel scared of speaking to people and participating in school activities."**

It was a difficult start, as she shared, **"During the first session, I didn't know how to introduce myself to the Chotay Saathi. My heart was pounding heavily and my hands were shivering, because it was the first time for me."**

As she became more involved in the programme, helping Chotay Saathi with various activities, she gained confidence and found joy in helping others. She became determined to work on her personal growth and wrote, **"I took these sessions as a challenge for myself to develop my confidence, and make friends. And through this experience I realised no matter how big our problems are, we can only move ahead in our life if we have the courage to face them."**

Through her perseverance and dedication, Javeria transformed from a shy and hesitant student to a confident and proactive participant. As a Bari Saathi (Big Partner) participant in the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme, Javeria actively contributed to various sessions with the Chotay Saathi. She assisted them in activities such as colouring, creating bubbles, providing guidance on using pencils and drawing lines, and explaining the life cycle of butterflies.

The more she became involved with Chotay Saathi, the more she blossomed. As she says, **“Whenever I used to talk to Chotay Saathi, they listened to me very carefully, they were very kind and loving, I felt like I was reliving my childhood with them.”**

Class teacher Ms. Erum Naz expressed pride in Javeria’s progress, noting her transformation. **“Javeria was a very hardworking and bright student but was struggling with confidence, she was very shy and hesitated a lot in answering questions or speaking up in class but now she has become so confident that she has started volunteering for different activities. Yesterday for the first time, she participated in a Science Fair and presented her project in front of a big audience. I am so proud of her.”**

By leading learning for her Chotay Saathi, Javeria has discovered the joy of helping others while nurturing her own confidence, resilience and leadership skills. As she continues to embrace new opportunities and challenges, her journey stands as a testament to the importance of creating environments where all students can thrive and reach their full potential.

## **OUTCOME AREA 2: POSITIVE SELF-PERCEPTION:**

Another objective for Bari Saathi was to have a positive self perception which means to recognize their strengths, be confident in their abilities, and feel good about who they are. Having a positive self perception would help Bari Saathi to believe in their ability to succeed academically and personally. We were looking in particular for “I can” statements, pointing to a stronger sense of what the girls personally believed they could achieve.

We wanted at least 75% girls to feel that they can make a positive contribution to their communities.

Apart from the fact that the programme was set up in a way that encouraged positive self-reflection after the mid-way point we also provided support for girls to set personal goals for themselves, the challenges they would face along the path and how to overcome them.

**In response to open-ended questioning, more than half of Bari Saathi shared responses that pointed towards improved self-perception following the program through statements like the following:**

**“Before becoming a part of this programme, I had no idea about my goals and vision but now I have gotten clarity about my direction in life.”**

**“I had never made anything with my hands before, now I know I can make things that I am proud of.”**

Others shared:

**“I was scared I won’t be able to become a doctor, this programme made me believe that I can become doctor if I work hard.”**

**“I think I can take part in a speech competition now.”**

**“These activities were very beneficial because it gets difficult for most of the students to prove themselves when they are sitting in a class of more than 50 students, they don’t get the individual attention they need. This programme helped them to showcase their skills which helped them a lot to see their potential of doing anything.” - Teacher, IMSG New Shakrial**

## CASE STUDY 2: NOOR

One of the girls from a conservative family came forward to share that her dream was to become a basketball player. She knew there would be obstacles in her path, but was able to articulate the steps she would take to make sure she got to her goal. These included practicing every day and studying sport at university. Noor put her goal-setting exercise up on her cupboard door for motivation. In an interview she recorded for us, she ended with the glowing words: “Be yourself.”

## OUTCOME AREA 3: RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The endline surveys revealed that

**98.5% BARI SAATHI**

self-reported that they now feel much more comfortable in managing groups of children.

Another objective for Bari Saathi was to have a positive self perception which means to recognize The bond between older and younger children is the cornerstone of the programme.

**We were sure to emphasise that learning was both ways - that the older and younger children were partners in learning.**

Over time, Bari Saathis began to see Chotay Saathi as their friends and younger siblings, while Chotay Saathi started to look up to Bari Saathi and seek their help when needed. Bari Saathi made sure that Chotay Saathi felt safe and comfortable, allowing them to express themselves freely and have fun while learning together. There also developed a sense of camaraderie and kinship in the groups of older girls, due to their shared experience.

Below are some of the stories shared by Bari Saathi during focus group discussions about their relationship building with Chotay Saathi.

**“Before this programme, I didn’t even have a single friend, I used to get scared while talking to my class fellows and teachers, after becoming a part of this programme, I have made a lot of friends and developed confidence as well.”**

**“I am new to this school and I didn’t have any friends to play with but during the bubbles session I became friends with the rest of the Bari Saathi so I will always remember that.”**

**“In the beginning they used to be really shy but gradually they started talking to us. They used to think we would scold them but when we talked to them with love, they started talking and sharing with us like they do with their own older siblings.”**

**“I used to be not very nice, now I have a bond with everyone and I learned to stay quiet too in some situations.”**

**“They have been treating us like a friend and sometimes like a sister too. As a dedicated teacher. They used to call me Aapi all the time. Whenever they saw us, they used to come running to us.”**





Figure 17: Chotay Saathi laughing and learning together

## OUTCOME AREA 4: KINDNESS AND EMPATHY

**"I used to hit kids now I treat them with love."**

According to body map analysis,  
**65% BARI SAATHIS**  
shared statements corresponding to an  
increase in sense of empathy and kindness.



Figure 18: Bari Saathi talking about emotions with her little partner

During session activities, Bari Saathi understood the importance of treating Chotay Saathi with kindness and empathy. Coming from communities where physical punishment was common for disciplining children, Some of the Bari Saathi initially struggled with their approach. To address this, we included sessions on "Maar Nahi Pyaar" (Anti-corporal punishment strategies) during Bari Saathi orientations and training, aiming to raise awareness about the importance of treating children with kindness and compassion. This training proved instrumental in helping Bari Saathi grasp the significance of kindness and empathy in interactions with children. As they engaged more deeply in the program and interacted directly with Chotay Saathi, Bari Saathi began to realise that gentle support led to better outcomes. They observed that Chotay Saathi responded more positively and willingly followed their guidance when treated with care and understanding.

Some of the statements given by Bari Saathi during focus group discussions are given below:

**"We understand the feelings of kids, we understand that they feel pain, they have emotions, and they are very fragile. We should treat them with love."**

**"I have seen a lot of adults around me who used to punish children and we thought that's how kids learn but after this programme I learned that children learn with love and kindness."**

**"We learned that children need love to understand, they don't understand when you are angry at them."**

Here are some statements from the body maps that point towards the Bari Saathis feeling more kindness and empathy for those around them:

**"I used to hit my brother I don't hit him anymore."**

**"I used to think of hitting kids, now I now kids listen to us more if we make them our friends."**

**"I didn't use hands to help kids, now I use my hands to help my Chotay Saathi with cutting and pasting."**

**"I used to get angry while talking, now I talk with care and kindness."**



Figure 19: Students helping each other during the session activities.

## OUTCOME AREA 5: AGENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The whole premise of the programme is based on older girls leading learning, taking responsibility for preparing and supporting their groups and becoming agents of positive change in their schools. **We wanted to create an atmosphere in which they had space for creativity and felt empowered to bring in their own ideas to the sessions - which we used as a marker for agency.**

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In the endline survey,

**76.8% BARI SAATHIS**

shared that they brought in their own ideas to the session.

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Some brought new poems or stories, while others used playdough and crafts to show their creativity. In terms of taking responsibility for the groups, we found evidence of this in the focus group discussions.

**"I used to not take responsibility for anything. My mother used to call me careless, but when we had to read and prepare and create things for these sessions beforehand, that taught me responsibility."**



Figure 20: Bari Saathi in IMSG Sanjalian used Clay to create these butterfly life cycles to make learning easier for chotay saathi.

## OUTCOME AREA 6: MOTIVATION TO LEARN

In the endline survey

# 97% BARI SAATHIS

agreed that they are "much more motivated to listen to their teachers and learn."

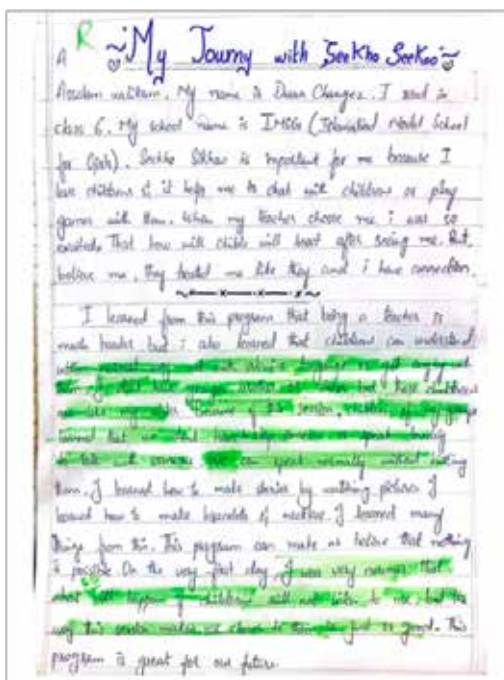
97% of Bari Saathis agreed with the statement "I now understand how difficult it can be for teachers to manage the classroom."

Many Bari Saathis mentioned that they started waiting for the session days, arriving at school with excitement. Engaging in session activities with Chotay Saathi deepened their appreciation for the effort teachers invest in classroom management and the challenges they faced. This newfound empathy encouraged them to actively support their teachers, pay more attention in class and participate in nurturing a positive learning environment.

Some examples of statements from our focus group discussions that show an increased motivation to learn are given below:

**"The goal setting discussion helped me develop my aim to get a sports scholarship in university. I had not known about this before. I am more interested in my studies now."**

**"Whenever we had a test of any subject, we worked harder and put in double effort to perform well because we thought if we didn't perform well, the teacher might not let us do the session, so we became better in our studies as well."**



The following statements came out of the body maps:

**"I used to not want to come to school, now I come to school happily."**

**"I wasn't interested in this project, now I come running to do activities."**

## CASE STUDY 2: TANZILA

When her teacher called out Tanzila's name for selection as a "Bari Saathi," her first thought was that she was going to be reprimanded, certain that she had failed last week's maths test.

Tanzila is a 16 year old 6th grade student at IMCG Malpur. Due to various personal reasons, she had been struggling academically and had been held back in the 6th grade for the third time. Her teacher said that the school had tried everything to get her grades to improve and finally given up. When asked to select girls who could benefit from participation in the Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme, Ms. Arooj picked Tanzila as a last-resort effort.

As a Bari Saathi, Tanzila went into the first session still sceptical and ready to quit. In her own words, **"I wasn't confident. I didn't want to do the activities. I saw that kids in my group also did not want to work before. They used to not speak at all."** These words encapsulate the barriers Tanzila faced—self-doubt, limited exposure, and a group of preschool children who seemed hard to engage.

Over the course of the programme, there was a noticeable difference in Tanzila's attitude. She began to bond with her Chotay Saathis, and became like a big sister to them. This bond meant she began to immerse herself in the programme, not just because she was chosen by her teacher. She looked out for her Chotay Saathis responsibly; collecting resources for them, getting the box with the best crayons for them, keeping their worksheets in order in the files. In return, her Chotay Saathis also started to feel more comfortable with her.

**There were several times during the programme where when faced with some issue, the Chotay Saathis reached out to Tanzila for support before even consulting their teachers. This sense of responsibility came very unexpectedly for Tanzila. Suddenly she had 5 young children hanging onto her every word, copying the way she talked, asking her for advice. This proved to be a turning point for Tanzila. This included paying more attention to her own studies, and focusing more on her presence in school.**



According to Ms. Arooj, Tanzila has shown a growing interest in academics. She is putting in more effort towards her studies, showing up better prepared for tests and being more present and attentive in classes. When this feedback was shared with Tanzila and she was asked the reason for this change, she simply stated: **“I feel more responsible because my Chotay Saathis look up to me and I want to be a good role model for them.”** In Tanzila’s own words about the end of the programme, “Now I have confidence that I can do anything. I realised I was wrong [about not wanting to participate] and now I really enjoy doing activities. I see that the kids work really well. Now kids speak to me and also listen to me.”

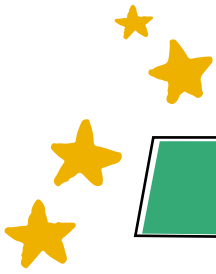
yellow and trees  
more leaves

Summer is hot  
The sun helps  
buds to grow into  
fruits and flowers

is dry  
turns yellow  
large. Then fall  
ground

Winter is Cold  
It snows in some  
places





## LESSONS FOR SUCCESS

### Support from Teachers Matters

Baray Saathis' readiness for sessions and comfort with leading were largely dependent on the demo sessions conducted by the Baray Saathi teacher in each school. In schools where session prep was done regularly and with teacher support, scores remained high throughout, while Baray Saathis in schools with little or no prep struggled until they started preparing on their own.

### Support for Teachers Matters

In the focus groups with teachers and principals, they shared how much difference it made to have regular contact with the Programme Team, and to have all the programme resources made available to them.

### Regularity of Sessions and Debriefs

Schools where sessions were conducted regularly each week at the same time showed more growth in both Baray Saathi and Chotay Saathi skills than schools where session timings were disrupted or changed. There was a less noticeable difference in the personal growth of Baray Saathis in these schools which can be attributed to missing the support from the weekly debrief sessions with our Programme team, in which they were given a chance to reflect on their learning.

### Impact of Counselling and Goal Setting Exercise

Supporting girls to articulate their goals and dreams, and map out ways of getting to them as well as dealing with personal challenges, enhances their clarity of purpose and overall engagement. With a few counselling sessions the girls were encouraged to explore their individual skills that had spillover effects on their classroom and school participation as well. Some girls had greater stressors in their lives, including loss of loved ones, that they had dealt with and not completely processed – for this, it would have been preferable to have some system of referral for support within the school or beyond.

### Importance of Self-Reflection

Incorporating reflective practices into sessions maximised learning outcomes by empowering girls to take ownership of their learning journey, cultivating metacognitive skills and fostering continuous improvement.

### Corporal Punishment Affects Motivation

In two schools where there were instances of corporal punishment from teachers against the Bari or Chotay Saathis, participation and enthusiasm remained low for sessions immediately after the incidents. On a broader level, there is a need for teacher capacity building on alternatives to corporal punishment, and strengthening of response systems.

### School Environment Matters

In schools where sessions were conducted outdoors in school grounds, other teachers and students also participated in the sessions and the school staff showed greater ownership of the programme. In IMSG Sanjalien where all sessions took place in the ground, several teachers not directly involved with the programme would bring their students to watch the activities being performed. During bubbles session and plants session, students from other classrooms also performed the activities with our Chotay Saathis.

### Time for Co-curricular Activities

The logistics of scheduling session timings at each school proved to be a challenging process, requiring considerable coordination and communication. Since there are no designated periods for co-curricular activities, every session's timing had to be negotiated within existing academic schedules. Some teachers were understandably concerned about their students missing class, but this was addressed by scheduling the sessions in ways that the girls did not miss key subjects, and in some cases during their break times.

### Playful and Hands-on Learning Matters

There had initially been concerns from the FDE regarding the simplicity of session content, and whether it would be fit for purpose for Grade 1 children. However, we found not only improvement in learning levels after just 12 sessions, but teachers and head staff reported a rise in attendance and change in motivation to learn. The playful ethos and hands-on activity-based learning helped transform the school atmosphere during the sessions, and staff shared that they would be continuing to use these principles in their future practice.

### Community Engagement

In most schools, teachers shared photographs from the sessions with the parents, and the students themselves were also sharing their experiences at home. At closing events, many parents shared their excitement at being involved in their children's school activities. They were also able to share anecdotes about positive changes they had noticed in their children's personalities. Involving parents and community members in educational initiatives enriches the learning environment for children, and there is a need for greater efforts to engage them as important stakeholders.



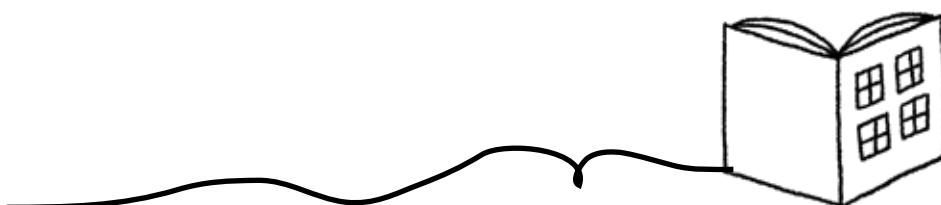
# Conclusion

The Seekho Sikhao Saathi programme with FDE schools in Bara kahu and Nilore was an incredible example of what girls can achieve, given the opportunities. It was led most successfully by the young champions of learning, supported by their teachers who in turn had the support of their administration. The innovative nature of the programme helped create the idea that learning can be fun, for both younger and older children. Learning was not one way; they all gained from each other, becoming partners – Saathi – in learning.

Through hands-on, playful activities, Chotay Saathi gained important foundational skills that will be the building blocks for future confidence in language and mathematics, as well as curiosity about science and the world around them. They also learnt how to interact positively with peers, particularly given their older role models.

For Bari Saathis, the experience of being trusted as leaders, with the space for creativity and agency, helped transform their own ideas of their role in the world and what they could do. The space and support for socioemotional learning is as important as academic learning – in fact, they go hand in hand. The confidence they gained found its way into their classrooms and lessons, and the goals they have set for themselves will help inform their future trajectories.

There are lessons for policy in this – beyond exam preparation, investing in the holistic development of children enables them to better navigate education as well as life. Even time-bound programmes like this, with both academic and co-curricular aspects, can have a lasting impact on individuals as well as on school culture, and can enrich the experience of education for children.



# Annex 1 – Schools List

The following schools are in the peri-urban Barakahu and Nilore sectors:

Schools	Sectors	Bari Saathis Class	Chotay Saathis Class
IMSG Kot Hathial	Bhara Kahu	6	Prep
IMCG Rawal Town	Bhara Kahu	6	Prep
IMSG Sanjalian	Bhara Kahu	6	Playgroup/KG
IMSG Lakhwal	Bhara Kahu	6	Playgroup/KG
IMCG Malpur	Bhara Kahu	6	Prep
IMCG Margalla Town	Bhara Kahu	6	Prep
IMCG Khanna Dak	Nilore	6	Prep
IMSG New Shakrial	Nilore	6	Prep
IMSG Jaba Tali	Nilore	6	1
IMSG Sohan	Nilore	7	1







