

Kitab Dost (Friends of Books)



Call For Writers of Children's Books!

Over the years it has been observed that many of the storybooks used to improve children's reading proficiency in Pakistan poorly represent local and national cultures, heritages, and languages. We invite creative writers to write age-appropriate (for children aged 4-12) and culturally relevant short stories for out-of-school and marginalized children currently served in the Kitab Dost and Mobile Library programs (see below). The preferred languages of the stories are Pashto, Urdu, and English.

Detailed guidelines for submitting proposals are here: <https://abpawkp.com/poster>

Illustrators, painters, and publishers are also needed to keep children engaged and interested in reading the new books.



Stories with morals and about local heroes

Background

It is estimated that nearly sixty percent of third-graders in South Asia cannot read a simple story by age 10 ([Wilson Center, 2019](#)). For Pakistan, the average is a shocking 75 percent. Many studies underscore how improved reading proficiency strengthens cognitive development and analytical skills, promotes lifelong learning, and, in the aggregate, contributes to job growth and a more dynamic economy. Schools and communities, therefore, should embark on concerted efforts to provide all students, regardless of gender and social status, with opportunities to acquire good reading habits.

[Kitab Dost](#) is a volunteer initiative organized and run by women in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan, which addresses a major community challenge through social entrepreneurship. The program's main goal is to enable children from poor families who attend government primary schools in Peshawar (located in the KP province) to improve their reading skills and literacy practices as well as their school performance.

The Piloting and Expansion of Kitab Dost in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In September 2019 Kitab Dost was piloted in 22 primary schools (20 government schools and two low-cost private schools) in Peshawar. Orientation sessions were conducted to equip participants with storytelling skills. Various platforms (e.g., local reading clubs and associations, universities, and social media) were used to mobilize volunteers. Friends and family members donated dozens of storybooks.

The Reading Classes were conducted once a week, for one hour, by women volunteers in girls' schools and men volunteers in boys' schools. The program targeted more than 1,000 students in the selected schools. The pilot phase resulted in improved reading and writing skills, notably enhanced confidence, an increased demand for books by students, more time allocated for book reading, and improved overall behavior and participation in prosocial activities, as observed from volunteers' feedback.

After the pilot phase of Kitab Dost was completed in December 2019, the then Minister for Education directed that the initiative be implemented in other schools in District Peshawar as well as other districts in KP province.



Then Minister of Education at the concluding session of Kitab Dost pilot phase, with DEO-F, Director DAC, Executive Committee members of ABPAW and Kitab Dost volunteers

In 2020 Kitab Dost was rolled out in 45 primary schools (20 boys' and 20 girls' public schools and five low-cost private schools). During this year more than 3000 primary school age students were targeted.



Inauguration of the second phase – Director Peshawar Model Educational Institutes, CEO Khwendo Kor, CEO Parwan e Khanam with volunteers

Bringing Books to Poor Children in Mobile Libraries

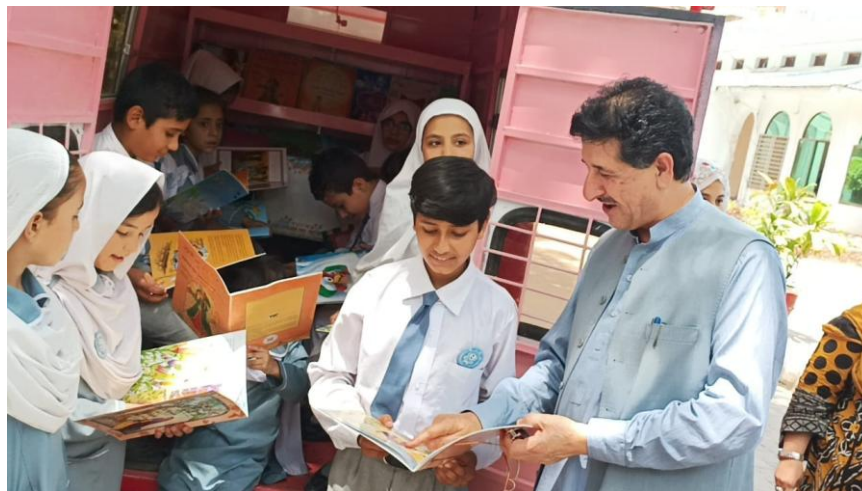
In a related initiative, a Mobile Library (ML) was established in Peshawar involving a fully customized and equipped vehicle loaded with books for young children. This new, colorful, and innovative concept took Peshawar kids by storm. As the pandemic forced schools to close, ML continued to operate in three communities. The criteria for selecting these communities included:

many out-of-school children; few, if any, public or private schools, and high poverty levels. Given the growing demand for Mobile Libraries, funds were raised to prepare a locally design ML and to acquire additional vehicles. Colorful cartoons were designed by young students from local universities and painted by a professional artist. Musical jingles in Urdu and Pashto were written by a



volunteer and composed by musicians. The melodious sounds of children billow across a neighborhood, attracting children to a world of books.

Funds from Oxfam Pakistan now enable two MLs to operate: one in Peshawar and the second in District Khyber, formerly the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan, where the overall [literacy rate](#) is under 50% and among women only 17%.



Inauguration of Mobile Library by the Director General Monitoring, Planning Commission, Islamabad

Post Pandemic Achievements

As pandemic restrictions were lifted and schools began reopening, the Kitab Dost programs were resumed. Agreements were signed with the Social Welfare Department at the University of Peshawar; the College of Home Economics; and the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) to engage volunteers for the weekly reading sessions. Orientation sessions were arranged to inform volunteers about the objectives of Kitab Dost, the importance of story reading, how to conduct sessions, storytelling techniques, photography techniques, and adherence to strict ethical protocols.

In 2022 the Kitab Dost program included 5,345 children (57% of which are girls) in government primary schools. 90% of books issued to children were read by them. Significant improvements in vocabulary were observed -- children acquired nearly 900 new words. Improvements in children's confidence were also observed -- for example, nearly seventy percent started raising their hands to ask questions or answer queries by the volunteers.

Today Kitab Dost and Mobile Library sessions are conducted in three districts (Peshawar, Khyber, and Mohmand) of KP province. The enthusiasm of volunteers and students in these programs is palpable. Meetings have been conducted with community elders, teachers, parents, Tribal leaders, and Imams to discuss the importance of education and encourage their support. Despite the low initial literacy rates among young girls attending these programs in Khyber and Mohmand, their participation and achievements are acknowledged and publicly celebrated.

Kitab Dost- Conditions for Future Success

1. Maintain the strong support of the Provincial KP Government.
2. Expand the reach of the programs: Kitab Dost has been launched in Rawalpindi/Islamabad by the ABPAW Rawalpindi branch; the Mobile Library is being replicated by the Pindi branch. Kitab Dost and ML have also been launched in former FATA schools and communities.
3. Establish and expand libraries in government schools, thalassemia centers, and orphanages in Peshawar.
4. Grow partnerships: with Millersville University (USA) to record stories; and with the NCHD, Social Welfare Department and College of Home Economics, University of Peshawar to mobilize student volunteers.
5. Develop online reading sessions with Pakistanis (and non-nationals) living abroad.
6. Publicize the achievements of Kitab Dost: the program has been [recognized](#) as one of the "Top Organizations" in Pakistan aiming at developing a strong book-reading culture.
7. Further, the South Asia Special Interest Group of the Comparative and International Education Society awarded Kitab Dost the 2022 Award for the Best Field Initiative at its annual meeting in Minneapolis Minnesota.

For more on the Kitab Dost (Friends of Books) initiative see:

1. A special Facebook page that shares the progress of story reading sessions: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/776025726184533>
2. Selected coverage in print and electronic media:
 - <https://www.independenturdu.com/node/92021>
 - https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1633846270341325&extid=WA-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&ref=sharing
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZCawVqtWqQ>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owXxK4Hxyo>
3. Fulbright Alumna explain the need to introduce Kitab Dostand the importance of book reading from the Association of Business, Professional & Agriculture Womenplatform. <https://youtu.be/FZCawVqtWqQ>.
4. Kitab Dost volunteers interviewed by a local TV channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3dSoHGDPQk>
5. Here is the feature report printed in the leading Urdu newspaper, Mashriq:

مشرق

اپنا قرض ادا کریں

ایم پی بی پیڈیشن پیر فائز افراد ہفتہ میں چند گھنٹہ سرکاری سکولوں کے بچوں کو پڑھانے میں مصروف کر کر قابل تقلید مثال پیش کر رہے ہیں

محمد منیر

دنیا بھر میں ہونے والے ایسے کاموں میں ایک ایسا کام ہے جو کسی ایسے شخص کو ملتا ہے جسے کوئی ایسا کام کرنے کی سہولت نہیں ہے۔ یہ ایسا کام ہے جو کسی ایسے شخص کو ملتا ہے جسے کوئی ایسا کام کرنے کی سہولت نہیں ہے۔ یہ ایسا کام ہے جو کسی ایسے شخص کو ملتا ہے جسے کوئی ایسا کام کرنے کی سہولت نہیں ہے۔

2019 اکتوبر 20 3