



Trees planted during the plantation campaign



High value agricultural crop

### What are LSOs?

LSOs or Local Support Organisations are central to the 'Social Mobilisation' approach of the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs). In a bid to reduce poverty and empower marginalised people (especially women), the RSPs mobilise rural communities into a three-tiered structure, which consists of Community Organisations (COs)- neighbourhood level community groups, Village Organisations (VOs) - village level federations of COs, and LSOs - union council level federations of VOs. LSOs are able to carry out community-led development at a much greater level due to the advantage they gain from numbers. As the tertiary tier, LSOs are also uniquely able to develop linkages with government and non-government organisations, donors agencies and the private sector.

# LSO Initiatives

## LSO Dabsi

District:	Kotli
Union Council:	Dabsi
Date of Formation:	12 January, 2007
Total Households in Union Council:	1,920
Organised Households:	1,680
Coverage:	88%
No of Community Organisations (COs):	113 (22 women's)
No of Village Organisations (VOs):	6 (All mixed)
No of General Body Members:	125 (53 women)
No of Executive Committee Members:	25 (6 women)

### Afforestation

An important economic and ecological element, forests are one of the most valued natural resources of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), providing people with fuel and timber wood, grazing land for their livestock, and the cultivation of non-timber forest products such as medicinal herbs and mushrooms. However, over the past forty years, there has been a sharp decrease in forest coverage, owing to the unlicensed, indiscriminate chopping of trees by locals. In addition to depleting this natural resource, deforestation has also increased the number of landslides in the area.

A major reason for the decline in forest cover over the past decades was that no new trees were being planted in place of chopped trees. The LSO therefore arranged a series of plantation campaigns and motivated members of its COs to plant trees on a large scale to improve the forest cover. The LSO obtained 25,000 rooted plants from the government

and private nurseries at subsidised rates and supplied them to interested farmers and also contacted the Watershed Management Programme, a government initiative for forest management which supplies rooted plants of pine, popular, eucalyptus etc to the local people. So far, the LSO has planted over 350,000 plants over an area of 400 acres. These plantation campaigns are expected to reverse the environmental degradation trends of the area which have resulted from deforestation.

## Management of Local Natural Resources

Varieties of olive, fig and pomegranate trees are common on mountain slopes and on the boundaries of farm fields. However the fruit that they bear are wild and therefore unfit for human or animal consumption. Research in the neighbouring areas proved that if these trees were to be grafted with improved varieties, they could become a rich source of precious fruits both for household consumption and marketing.



A grafted tree

The LSO leaders decided to introduce the grafting initiative in their area, beginning with a pilot program in the village Upper Kot, which was centrally located and easily accessible from other villages of the union council. The LSO signed an agreement with VO Upper Kot which required the LSO to

provide the services of an expert from the government's agriculture department as well as grafting materials. Having done so, the expert grafted 500 wild olive trees and also trained the villagers in grafting. During the next grafting season, these local experts will graft wild figs and bari. The LSO plans to expand the grafting campaign across eight union councils of Tehsil Fatehpur Thakyalala in collaboration with their LSO Network, and is optimistic that it will bring about a major improvement in the livelihoods of the local communities. If adopted by other areas, the grafting program has the potential to improve the socio-economic conditions of thousands of people across AJK.

## Introduction of High Value Agricultural Crops

Although traditionally the people of AJK have always cultivated wheat and maize, this is no longer economically efficient due to the high costs of fertilizer, seeds and labour. Horticulture, especially of garlic, ginger, fennel seeds and turmeric has been proven to be a profitable alternative by which farmers can earn three times more than their earnings from cultivating wheat and maize.



A lack of technical knowledge on horticulture has held many people back. The LSO therefore decided to establish demonstration plots with the view to scale up garlic cultivation in the area. The LSO signed an agreement with two progressive farmers in Upper Kot, to whom they provided seed and fertilizer from the government's agriculture department; free of cost. The LSO is planning to carry out a cost benefit analysis of garlic cultivation and to disseminate the results to other farmers through its VOs and COs in order to motivate them toward garlic cultivation. If adopted widely within its union council, the LSO will scale up the cultivation of garlic and other such high value products across their Tehsil with the help of their LSO Network.