



LSO Initiatives

LSO Bagh Rural Development Organisation

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.

The LSO

District: Bagh, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)
Union Council: Bagh
Total Households in Union Council: 3,156
Organised Households: 1,375
Coverage: 44%
Number of Village Organisations (VOs): 9 female VOs
Number of Community Organisations (COs): 55 women's COs
Number of General Body Members: 55 women
Number of Executive Body Members: 17 women

The Initiatives

ESTABLISHMENT OF VOCATIONAL CENTRE

The LSO has established a vocational centre for its members, in which they are taught sewing and stitching, something which had been demanded by all of its COs (See Picture Above). The vocational centre has 20 sewing machines on which an average of 15 students per batch learn how to sew. The LSO charges a nominal fee but waives the fee in the cases of the poorest girls. In addition to this, the LSO has also created an IT centre, which consists of five computers.

AWARENESS-RAISING REGARDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN RIGHTS FORUM

The LSO specialises in delivering awareness-raising sessions on women's rights, where the entire LSO Executive Body delivers the training in their own areas and COs. Two organisations have trained the LSO activists in this area, namely Save the Future, and Women and Children's Voice. Both are local NGOs but funded by Action Aid and Oxfam respectively. As a result of these sessions, several women have started to earn a living for themselves by joining the workforce as teachers, development workers and nurses.

One such example can be seen in the case of Salma Fatima, 25. Salma has five children, the eldest being eight years old while the youngest nearly two. Following the devastating earthquake of 2005, which hit at the heart of AJ&K, Salma was compelled to work for an NGO because her husband had experienced a mental breakdown due to the natural disaster and the personal loss associated with it. Salma recalls how she was ridiculed by her relatives and neighbours for working in an NGO and coming back home late in the evenings.

That changed however when the LSO started providing awareness sessions to the communities. Salma states that now even the neighbours' daughters work without any judgement. "I can see a clear positive change now, not only in my own home but also in the people around me".



Salma – Free from judgment

In addition to the awareness-raising sessions, the LSO is a part of a forum called "Aurat Ki Awaz" or Women's Voice. This forum consists of members from other local organisations as well, all coming together with the purpose of ensuring that no woman suffers injustice. The LSO has ensured that telephone numbers of the forum members are provided to all COs' members who may want to call the forum, should they be suffering any injustice. The forum has saved numerous women from various situations, such as young women being forced to marry elderly men, crimes against women such as throwing acid, snatching children from women, etc. In these cases, the forum stepped in by ensuring that the police are involved in the protection of the victim and in ensuring that justice is provided.

For example, in the case of the young woman who was forced to marry a very elderly man, the woman managed to escape on the second day of her marriage and call the forum. Immediately, forum members came to her assistance and took her in police protection. They then went to the local courts and managed to get an immediate annulment of her marriage. Now the community members, and especially her family, know that if they try to carry out a similar injustice on her again, there will be a group of people who are willing and able to intervene to stop such an activity.



An LSO meeting in progress

"I can see a clear positive change now, not only in my own home but also in the people around me".