

## Accountability Raises “Response-ability”

*A Community-based Information System that Ensures Healthcare in Remote Rural Areas of Sindh*



*Caption: The village health committee during their monthly meeting where they discuss issues faced by the community in accessing healthcare*

**“Our region has been long-neglected due to its remoteness and topography, but now we feel that we can create accountability by drawing attention to the gaps in service delivery and raising our voices for improvement,”** - the members of union council Bhakuo’s health committee in Tharparkar, Sindh, discussing their efforts to ensure better health service delivery at the union council level. Public health facilities in Pakistan are vital to providing services to isolated rural communities. However, these facilities are seriously underutilized due to the public’s lack of confidence in the quality of care, lack of trust in staff due to their frequent turnover, inadequate services and equipment, and unavailability of medicines.

When Gulab, a resident of a small village in the union council of Bhakuo, took his 18-month old daughter to a Basic Health Unit to be treated for a fever, he was told that there was no medicine there to help her. Gulab was directed to a nearby pharmacy with a prescription to buy medicine for his daughter, which should have been provided free of cost by the Basic Health Unit.

Gulab reported the non-availability of medicine to his village health committee, which is part of the wider, union council level health committee, representing 39 villages in the union council. These committees comprise of men and women from the community, and serve as a mechanism for tracking the quality and availability of healthcare services to establish accountability in the healthcare sector. The

matter was subsequently raised in a monthly meeting of the union council health committee, after which the committee president took up the issue with the Medical Officer of the Basic Health Unit. As a result of the committee president's action, medicines were promptly made available at the Basic Health Unit.

Village and union council health committees have been set up in 23 union councils across Sindh. Remote, underdeveloped union councils such as Bhakuo have little access to healthcare, discouraging health-seeking behavior and increasing the incidence of disease. These committees provide people the opportunity to raise the issues they face in seeking healthcare, and ensure that each issue reaches the concerned health official who can take action to resolve them.

**“For the first time, we have a platform where we can discuss our health related issues and hold the government's service providers accountable. The people feel that these committees have given them the opportunity to make a difference.”** – Sikandar-e-Azam, Bhakuo's union council health committee president.