



SUCCESS STORY | Hareema Gets Back Her Smile and Her Independence

Bahaal Project | Emergency Relief And Early Recovery For The Flood Affectees Across Pakistan

In a remote village of District Dadu lives Hareema. She is a fifty year old widow with no children. Although illiterate and poor she is an independent woman surviving alone for almost 20 years now. Her husband was a farmer who owned 2.5 acres of land and both of them used to work on this land. It was their only source of income and they were living happily despite poverty and having no children. Hareema felt the loss of children occasionally but she was content with whatever she had. However, she felt this loss more acutely after her husband was taken ill and died at a very early age, leaving her alone at the age of twenty. Despite all this, this headstrong woman never begged people for money or for food. She cultivated her husband's land herself and managed all the produce. She was an independent woman living in one of the most isolated areas of Pakistan. The floods of 2010, however, wreaked havoc in her life and she lost her independence. This however is not a story of how this disaster destroyed her life but of courageous woman who never lost hope, and regained her individuality and freedom.

In the first week of September 2010, Hareema was sitting in her modest house in the village Mohammad Salih Panhwar of Union Council Buttra when warnings of the floods were issued. She, along with her village, refused to believe the warnings simply due to the reason that 'it has never happened before'. However they soon began regretting their decision when their neighboring villages were flooded and the water was visibly heading their way. With the clock ticking, the poor villagers evacuated the village and moved to the nearest city of Sita. They were able to save their lives but their livestock, blooming rice fields, houses and other prized possessions were all left at the mercy of water.



Happy Hareema tells the story of how she received aid from USAID Bahaal because of which she is an independent woman now.

“I would have eaten the rice but now there is nothing left for me to eat”, said Hareema.

Hareema describes this as the worst period in her life. She lived in Sita, a town nearby for 3 months and survived on meager amounts of food and almost no shelter. However, her biggest fear was for her fields. When she left the village, her fields were flourishing with rice and she had planned on selling the produce, and buying food and agricultural inputs for the next farming season. She wanted to run back to her village and save her fields but the water was standing there. Finally, when the water receded, Hareema along with other villagers moved back to whatever was left of their homes. Hareema's worst fears were confirmed when she saw the devastation caused by flood water. But she did not lose her courage. Although she did not have enough money to buy food, let alone think about getting inputs for the coming planting season, she regardless started cleaning her land, including the arduous task of pulling out all the rotten rice plants with her bare hands.

Keeping in view the devastations of 2010 floods that ravaged Pakistan, USAID initiated 'Bahaal', a project aimed at providing emergency relief and early recovery to the flood affectees in 16 districts across Pakistan. The Bahaal Project team was the first to approach this village in December 2010 and after assessing her case, registered her for agricultural inputs. Hareema received one bag of DAP and wheat seed and two bags of urea along with a cash grant of Rs. 2000 (about US \$24). She hired a couple of young boys from her village to plough her land and plant the wheat on one acre. According to Hareema, she does not know what she would have done without USAID Bahaal Project's support. In her words 'it was a source of happiness for me'. In four months time, Hareema's wheat crop will be ready and she will be able to sell the wheat for approximately Rs. 40,000 (US \$470). Hareema is particularly happy that she has not become indebted to anyone due to USAID Bahaal Project's support. Now she plans to use all her income to meet her food needs and plant the next rice crop. The support of the American people is helping Hareema to move towards a sustainable life while regaining her pride and independence.

After the floods, Hareema picked the dried out rotten rice and cleaned her land with bare hands, keeping the hope still alive in her heart that she will be able to grow wheat in her field.

Pointing towards the social mobilize, Hareema said: "This man and his agency gave me a new life. Now I can live in this village without overburdening anyone and, God willing, if my crop is good, I will help my villagers too".

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