

Micro Social Enterprise (Business in a Box)

Small Business Up-lifted my Social Status

Naeem Akhter, wife of Haroon Shah, is residing in village Sheikh Chohar, Union Council Mochiwala district Jhang. Village Sheikh Chohar has a scattered population of about 2000 and located at Chiniot Road, about 27 kilometer from Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) district office Jhang. The population is a mix of Syeds (50%), Arain (20%), Sial (20%) and others (10%). The village lacks basic facilities like safe drinking water, sanitation, health and education facilities. There is no Basic Health Unit (BHU) facility available in her village and the distance to the nearest BHU is approximately 08-10kms from her area. The poverty is widely prevalent in the village.



Naeem Akhter is a housewife having her own house in the village and she is a mother of two school going children. She has Matriculation degree. Her husband is 8 grades graduate and is a farmer who earns five to six thousand rupees per month. In 2014, Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) under **“Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing”** identified the village as uncovered by public sector. PRSP as per their plan visited village Sheikh Chohar and conducted an open dialogue with the community to introduce the project and asked for the formation of Village Health Committee (VHC).

In response, community structured themselves into VHC by involving men and women equally. VHC in its 1st meeting selected Naeem Akhtar as Community Resource Person (CRP) for the implementation of the project activities. PRSP team oriented her about the project and her roles and responsibilities as a CRP and assigned her the duty to register married women of reproductive age (MWRAs) in the population of 1000 of her village. After completing the registration, she undertook six days training on community mobilization and birth spacing organized by PRSP. She performed very actively and within a timeframe of 06 months she mobilized communities through group meetings and household visits and as a result of her endeavor 93 potential clients were referred to service outlets. Out of which 87 has been turned into new users. Keeping in view her mobilization skills, commitment to her work, her behavior and close coordination with VHC members, she was selected for the new initiative - Business in a Box (BiB) Social Micro Enterprise in January 2015.

BiB is a Social Micro Enterprise, which was started by the project to sustain the services of CRPs beyond the project life. The BiB contains contraceptives (Condoms and Oral Pills), Reproductive Health

commodities and other routine items to be used in every household. Under the project a defined range of items were procured by PRSP first time and given to different CRPs including Naeem Akhtar. Once the BiB kit handed over to CRPs, they started selling the items in the communities at their doorsteps during their household visits and replenished it through VHC/UHC designated representatives by depositing actual cost with them.

Naeem Akhtar continued the practice for about six months and covered about 300 households while providing BiB services. She visited about 10-12 households per day and completed her round to each household on monthly basis. During her six months BiB phase, she included some additional items in the bag and excluded some extra items on community demand. Her efforts resulted in earning a profit of Rs. 500 per month in the initial months, and later it increased to Rs. 1,200, 1,450 per month. She said that this all happened due to regular contact with the community.



In response to a question, Naeem Akhtar said: “I and my husband have a very strong relationship with the VHC that is promoting my cause further. Due to BiB, women and children have more confidence in me and call me a real friend. The business has upgraded my social status in the community and I have learned a lot in terms of confidence, earning a profit and respect in the community. Most of the community women now discuss their health and social issues with me and listen to my advice. I use my profit in meeting my routine kitchen needs and as well as needs of my school going kids. Now I am contributing financially to my family.”

While stating her views on BiB, a beneficiary said, “Naeem Akhtar has made it easy for all of us to access the reproductive health commodities because earlier we had to go to the local market to buy these things.”

Naeem Akhtar said, “All this has happened because of the community organized the VHC, which in turn selected me and supported me in performing my duties as community resource person. The VHC is now promoting my business by disseminating the BiB messages, supporting in term of procurement and cooperating in accessing every household. She said organization of poor communities at grassroots level is the key to uplift the social status of the poor women which can contribute to bring about much change. BiB is my social micro enterprise, whereby I serve the community yet also make a small profit that leads to continuous provision of basic reproductive services to my community members.”