

BiB gives me a purpose

Sadia, aged 25, is a resident of Basti Chak 22DNB of Union Council Chak 22DNB, district Bahawalpur. Sadia's husband is a policeman who earns just enough to bear the family expenses. Sadia has been a housewife and never stepped out of the home to work for income generation.



The Village Health Committee (VHC), fostered under the Population Services International/Rural Support Programmes Network (PSI/RSPN) Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing (PRHSSM) project, had nominated Sadia as the Community Resource Person (CRP) who is, first, responsible to register all Married Women of Reproductive Age (MWRA) in her neighborhood, and second, to carry out monthly household visits in the neighborhood. The purpose of the visits is to raise awareness about mother and child healthcare, reproductive health (RH) and birth spacing to answer any questions and/or misgivings that women may have about contraceptives, create demand for birth spacing contraceptives, to provide short-term contraceptives, and refer women who want longer term contraceptives to the Lady Health Visitor (LHV) camp that is organized under the PRHSSM project.

For the project duration, CRP is given a monthly honorarium. However, in order to devise a strategy for the post project sustainability the concept of 'Business in a Box' (BiB) was developed whereby willing CRPs were provided with BiB. A BiB is a small bag which contains short-term contraceptive methods such as condoms and pills as well as items of basic hygiene such as shampoo, soap, tooth brush, sanitary napkins, pampers, etc., and medicines such as aspirin, multivitamins and ORS. During her visits to households in the neighborhood, CRP would continue to raise awareness about RH issues and also sell these items. It is expected that there would be sufficient monthly income to act as an incentive for the CRP. Further, it is expected that when the project ends, CRPs would carry on providing this service to the households in the neighborhood. In this respect, BiB is a 'micro social enterprise' that while meeting the community need also provides an incentive for the CRP to continue to provide the service.

Sadia was given the appropriate training by the team of National Rural Support Programme, implementing partner of PSI/RSPN PRHSSM project, on how to sell items at the doorsteps of the community members. Furthermore the VHC assisted Sadia in her responsibilities as a CRP and to carry out her BiB activities. Each month, Sadia earned a small amount of profit.

Instead of consuming her profit, Sadia re-invested the profit and expanded her BiB. She brought innovation in her BiB by including items of popular demand such as mehndi (henna) cones, fairness creams, medicines such as Flagyl and Buscopan. She would purchase these items from the market with the help of her brother or husband. As a result, she started earning a profit of Rs. 600 – 700 per month. The women of her neighborhood are satisfied with the functioning of BiB in the area, as they are more comfortable in purchasing items from Sadia than going into the shops nearby.

According to Sadia, “The profit motivates me to keep working and developing my business. I have realized that I have something of my own which is a great feeling to have. It has given me a purpose in life, before becoming CRP and having BiB, I had nothing to do. BiB has also really helped the women of the village, now they have easy access to these products and they don’t need to go into town. The women realize that it will cost them more to go into the market and buy them; therefore they prefer buying from me, especially when it comes to buying RH services and sanitary napkins, as they are more comfortable in having them delivered by a woman to their home.” The VHC is also happy with Sadia’s work, as it has made life easier for the villagers. One of the VHC members said, “It is much better for the women as before they had to wait for their husbands to take time to visit the market, now they can just buy necessities from Sadia at their own homes.”

Given the importance of her role as CRP and BiB vendor, Sadia is confident that she will continue her work after the completion of the project. She is very satisfied with the project and is grateful to the community for selecting her as CRP and to the project for supporting her with BiB.