

BiB paved the way for me

Sharifa resides in Basti Mochiyan in Union Council Mari Sheikh Shujra of District Bahawalpur. She is 23 years of age, unmarried and is currently teaching and finishing her BA in Education, Sociology and Computers from Allama Iqbal Open University. Sharifa's neighbourhood is very isolated from other settlements. The nearest medical centre and marketplace is at a distance of 20km.



Before the project, there was no Lady Health Worker (LHW) hence there was little awareness about and demand for acquiring reproductive health (RH) services. Under the Population Services International/Rural Support Programmes Network (PSI/RSPN) Provision of Reproductive Health Services through Social Marketing (PRHSSM) project a Village Health Committee (VHC) was formed, which nominated Sharifa as their Community Resource Person (CRP). Her task was to register all Married Women of Reproductive Age (MWRAs) in her neighbourhood, maintain their record and give them awareness and services through initial group meetings followed by monthly household visits.

Sharifa's work brought a huge change in the village, as many couples were completely unaware of family planning methods, which became readily available through Sharifa and through the project's Lady Health Visitor's (LHV) mobile camp. Sharifa was given a monthly honorarium for her efforts, which she would invest in her education. In order to ensure that she remains financially secure through her work even after the project ends, she was given a Business in a Box (BiB).

Sharifa's clients are very happy with her work; they say that BiB is very useful as there are no nearby stores to buy RH and other items of daily use. Before BiB, women used to travel for an hour to the nearest market. "Previously it would cost me Rs. 40 to go to the market, now I can just drop by Sharifa's store and buy the things I need. Also I feel more comfortable buying female items like sanitary pads and undergarments from Sharifa than from a male shopkeeper," says one of the clients. Sharifa sells her items slightly above market price but the women are satisfied with her prices, as they know it is more expensive to go to the market. They want Sharifa to expand her business and include more items such as fizzy drinks, biscuits etc.

Sharifa is also very pleased with her work, as it has empowered her financially and socially. She has become financially independent and wants to continue working for the benefit of her community. "BiB helped me in making my own way, I can now finance my own education and expenses, I don't need to depend on anyone and most of all I am doing something for the benefit of the people which is my biggest motivation", says Sharifa.